

THE LOVE OF LOOKING IS GENDERLESS

COLLIER SCHORR: JENS F.

By Amelia Ishmael

Collier Schorr's *Jens F.* was one of the nine inaugural exhibitions featured at the opening of the Museum of Contemporary Art Denver's new location in lower downtown. Exhibited in an early stage for the first time in the 2002 Whitney Biennial, the *Jens F.* series has played a pivotal role in Schorr's artistic career and helped to shape her reputation as a photographer working with gender stereotypes.

This first museum exhibition of the *Jens F.* series included framed photographs and collages along the gallery walls and a large collection of Schorr's visual diaries in the gallery center presented under

glass cases. Containing notes, contact sheets, and sketches, this collection offered an intimate view of the artist's thoughts throughout the formation of this series.

The anchor of this exhibition, and its namesake, was the photo and collage portraits of *Jens F.*, a young man from southern Germany whom Schorr dedicatedly photographed for more than six years. Inspired by an exhibition catalogue of Andrew Wyeth's passionate and private collection of drawing and paintings depicting Helga Testorf, Schorr invites her viewers to a state of scopophilia as she



ABOVE: COLLIER SCHORR, *SHADOW* (115–116), 2000, C-PRINT, 11 3/4 INCHES X 15 INCHES.

analyzes the art-historical female nude by posing Jens in Helga's image. Often working directly on the prints from Wyeth's book, Schorr adapted these reproductions as the foundation for her own images. In her appropriations, Jens is frequently depicted lying in positions of submissiveness and vulnerability, his body juxtaposed with Helga's, over and over again.

At times Jens appears almost lost in his role. His youthful and supple body appears, next to Helga's, nearly androgynous. With his eyes closed or lost in space, his thoughts seem to travel elsewhere, leaving his representation to become an object existing solely for our visual pleasure. Yet, Schorr also includes photographs in which Jens' reproduction of the pose is correct, but his outward gaze is toward the photographer, and us, declaring a self-awareness that seems to affirm his knowledge of how his sexuality is redefined through these familiar "female" poses. Throughout the series, Jens seems to adopt a transgendered identity, fulfilling both historical roles: of the female as a silent image to be looked upon and of the active male whose role is to look.

Schorr's inclination toward photographing boys and men in heightened emotional states has led critics, collectors, and curators throughout the arts community to assume that her work is intended for a homosexual male audience — a conclusion, by the way, that completely bypasses the possibility that female viewers could be capable of a similar type of visual objectification. Yet Schorr, a woman artist who began her career in New York City during the rise of the feminist movement, introduces more complex issues throughout this series and her work in whole. By including the subject of her work as a conscientious mirror of the gaze, Schorr actively penetrates the social constructions regarding the gender assumptions aligned with the act of looking.



ABOVE: COLLIER SCHORR, *DREAMER* (130–132), 2002, C-PRINT, 11 3/4 INCHES X 15 INCHES.