

HYPERALLERGIC

Talia Chetrit Treads the Line Between Style and Substance

Her photography presents a compelling statement about the fine line between self-investigation and self-objectification.

By Eugenie Dalland

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Talia Chetrit, "Roman on Denis" (2022) (all images courtesy the artist, kaufmann repetto, Sies and Hoke, and Hannah Hoffman)

HARTFORD, Conn. — Does photographing the intimate features of one's life inherently objectify them? This question permeates Talia Chetrit's exhibition *Matrix 193* at the Wadsworth Atheneum, the photographer's first solo museum show in the United States. Well known for her arresting self-portraiture, Chetrit's work spans genres and techniques, ranging from still lifes and portraits to fashion and archival imagery. This diverse mixture is well represented by the 15 film photographs on view, often picturing those close to her, in particular her partner Denis and their son. Chetrit's imagery presents a compelling statement about the fine line between self-investigation and self-objectification in photography, a medium renowned for bridging the public and the private spheres.

In addition to her fine art practice, Chetrit is a successful fashion photographer, and several of the images on view are from magazine editorials. In many cases self-portraiture seeks to explore the self while commercial fashion photography objectifies its subjects, yet through Chetrit's lens, the two meet in a dynamic that is, alternately, dissonant and harmonious. A nude photograph of Denis wearing a barely there ensemble, attended by their son in a tutu, layers what might otherwise read as a high-fashion advertisement with a comment on masculinity and traditional family roles, as Chetrit assumes the active stance of the photographer and her family becomes the object of a complex gaze.



Talia Chetrit, "Self-portrait (Downward)" (2019)

She applies this approach to her self-portraits as well. In one of the exhibition's most striking images, a pregnant Chetrit poses nude above a mirror, legs splayed, camera pressed to her face. Despite what we might view, initially, as in-your-face sexuality, it compels viewers to face questions about spectatorship: Is this an image of vulnerability or empowerment? Is it erotic or distant? Does it grant viewers entrance into something private or push them away? Chetrit has asserted that her work is not about private disclosure, and this image testifies to that; she may be turning her body into an object, even an eroticized one, but in so doing she's really drawing attention to our reaction to it.

While it's helpful (and not entirely inaccurate) to envision the exhibition as a kind of family photo album, replete with shots of her parents and her son shortly after birth, it's less about personal investigation and more about conjuring the illusion of something ordinary — photos of family life — in order to question how ordinary that life really is.

Chetrit selected a documentary by Barbara DeGenevieve (an artist whom Chetrit considers influential) entitled "Desperado" to be screened alongside the exhibition. The film features footage of DeGenevieve's erotic encounters as well as a tense interview with a viewer of the footage. It's an apt complement to Chetrit's work: both artists train their lenses as much on their viewers' assumptions as on the subject matter itself, often their own bodies. Chetrit's photographs capture more than just faces and body parts — they show us something of ourselves as well.



Talia Chetrit, "Buckle (Pam Hogg)" (2023)



Talia Chetrit, "Mom and Dad" (2023)



Talia Chetrit, "Body Parts (Detail)" (2022)



Talia Chetrit, "Hard to Title" (2019)

Talia Chetrit: Matrix 193 continues at the Wadsworth Atheneum (600 Main Street, Hartford, Connecticut) through January 7. The exhibition was curated by Jared Quinton.