



2809 Saucon Valley Road
Center Valley, PA 18034-8447
lehighvalley.psu.edu/gallery



AMY ARBUS AND MARTHA POSNER
A #METOO PROJECT

AMY ARBUS AND MARTHA POSNER
A #METOO PROJECT

Cover image: Amy Arbus, *Kathryn*, 2019, Archival inkjet print on paper, 40" x 28". (artwork © 2019 Amy Arbus)

Foreword

By Amy Touchette

What We Carry

“Once I started, I couldn’t stop,” artist Martha Posner remarked. Ironically, the sheer power and pervasiveness of sexual harassment had kept it from rising to the surface, personally, for the artist. Despite spending decades creating paintings and sculptures that emanated from women’s inequality, sublimation, and abuse, there that pain sat, dormant, pushed aside, swallowed, even forgotten, “or whatever it is that we do with the things that we really don’t want,” Posner said. “And then it all came flooding out of me.”

It was a watershed moment. The Harvey Weinstein case had just broken, and, like Posner, many women were beginning to talk about the unspeakable. In a possessed, trance-like state, she began handwriting “me too” over, and over, and over again on secondhand slips and bed-jacket linings. More empowering than cathartic, Posner divined the psychic energy and memories of the previous garment owners as a way of proclaiming and releasing what had, for too long, been hidden, buried beneath layers of clothing, anguish, sorrow, anger, and despair. Posner’s story, she realized, was every woman’s story.

The profundity of the outpour immediately struck an emotional chord with photographer Amy Arbus. “When I saw Martha’s garments, my heart stopped for a minute.” Arbus had recently abandoned *Goddesses*, a photography project portraying women in vintage nightgowns and lingerie that celebrated the vulnerability, strength, and overall complex nature of women—a subject she had yet to tackle during her prolific career, despite having been raised by four formidable women herself.

In the end, Arbus felt the series was missing something essential, an underlying thread that connected her subjects, so she reluctantly shelved it. But the fact that she and Posner, long-time friends and colleagues, were simultaneously utilizing intimate secondhand garments was not lost on her—nor was the way in which Posner processed and transformed women’s pain into a symbolic collective of beauty and perseverance. Within days, they began planning their collaboration.

Two months later, on January 20, 2019, on a closed set in Easton, Pennsylvania, Arbus photographed 19 subjects in Posner’s garments. Neither were prepared for the emotional intensity that would envelop that day. Both Posner and

Arbus cast the shoot with women of diverse sizes, shapes, ages, and ethnicities, the majority of whom they didn’t know personally or whether they’d had a “me too” experience. “We were choosing random women on the theory that almost everybody has a story,” Arbus explained, “and that was true in this case. You could see that 17 out of the 19 women had one. It was just painfully obvious. It just registered on their faces.”

At the same time, Arbus’s subjects were grappling with another dynamic of sexuality on set. Clad only in a slip, the insecurity many of the women felt about their bodies and how they compared to others was palpable—something that echoed Arbus’s own experience and struggle from a young age. “The pressure to be an object of desire is so intense for women in this culture. It’s so ingrained. It’s inextricable from behavior. I didn’t want anyone to feel that they were less beautiful because there was someone else in the room who was a traditional knockout.” It was an exercise in fortitude, and their ability to push forward through it, together, further cemented their bond and the impact of the installation that would ultimately result.

Aside from helping cast and set up the logistics of the shoot, Posner was deliberately hands-off that day: “I respect Amy and I like her work very much, but even more important than that, I trust Amy. I trusted her with my work, and I also believed enough in my work to release it to someone else to bring their vision.” What resulted are 14 emotionally charged portraits, several of which were expressly printed to portray the women in a larger-than-life scale. “These women are survivors,” Arbus said. “Life is tough for everybody. I don’t mean that life isn’t tough for men. But these women know how to make it on their own.”

Posner had always viewed her garments as an invitation for collaboration. Unlike her past projects that involved clothing, these slips and bed coats are actually wearable. Seeing women from today clad in undercover apparel of another woman’s buried personal memories brought the project, in Posner’s mind, to its full fruition. “It wasn’t just a collaboration between Amy and I. It was a collaboration between all of the women who were involved,” said Posner. “You walk by people all the time and you never know what they’re carrying.”



Pink Bed Jacket



Blue Bed Jacket



Red Coat Sketch



Red Coat



Baily, Samantha, and Amina



Donna, Tsigie, & Anonymous

#MeToo #WhyI didnt report #MeToo #WhyI didnt report
Because he said he would kill me. Because he was a family
friend. Because it was swept under the carpet
when I was little. Because I was told no one would
believe me. Because I was told he was a good man
and it would ruin his reputation. Because I was
astunned. Because I was drunk. Because I
didn't trust law enforcement. Because I was
told rape is hard to prove. Because he was a
trusted friend. Because he was my boss. Because
I was told I would lose my job. Because I was
told he would hurt my family. Because he said
it was consensual - and they believed him.

Because I was wearing a short skirt - and they
said I was asking for it. Because he was a
prominent figure in the church. Because I
thought I loved him. Because he said they
wouldn't believe me because I was poor and
came from a bad family. Because I felt it
was my fault. Because I didn't have the
vocabulary to explain it - I was so young. Because
nobody else saw it - was told no one would believe
me. Because my mother protected and covered
for the rapist. Because I froze - I didn't fight
back - the cops said I must have liked it. Said
I should have come forward sooner. Because I
felt like no one would care. Because I was out
late myself. Because they said he came from a good...



Bailey



Claudia



Frances



Amina



Alicia



Kathryn



Regina



Laura



Donna



Samina



Dylan



Mona



Tsigie



Heather

Artist Biographies

Amy Arbus' photographs have been published in her five books and in hundreds of periodicals such as *New York Magazine*, *The New Yorker*, *Aperture* and *The New York Times Magazine*. Arbus is a native New Yorker known for her style feature, "On 'The Street'", which ran in *The Village Voice* from 1980-1990. She has had thirty-six one-person exhibitions around the world, and is represented by The Schoolhouse Gallery in Provincetown, Massachusetts. Her photographs are in the collections of The National Theater in Norway, The Museum of Modern Art, The New York Public Library, and The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Martha Posner is a sculptor living on a farm in Martins Creek, Pennsylvania. She takes much of her inspiration from the two hundred and fifty acres of surrounding forest, fairy tales and mythology and her many barnyard creatures. She is a Mary H. Dana Fellow, and an Experimental Printmaking Workshop Fellow. Some of her collectors and exhibitions include: The Allentown Art Museum, The Cleveland Museum of Art, The Butler Museum of Art, Lehigh University, The George Gund Foundation, and The Spoleto Festival. Publications and reviews of her work can be found in the *New York Times*, *Surface Design*, *Art Forum*, *ArtNews* and *Sculpture Magazine*. She is represented by Accola Griefen in New York City. For more about Posner's work, visit her website at marthaposner.com.

Artwork

All portraits are archival inkjet prints
printed 40 x 28 or 24 x 20 inches
© 2019 Amy Arbus

All garments are found objects, handwritten text by artist
© 2017-2019 Martha Posner

Red Coat Sketch, 2017, Watercolor, 8.5" x 11"
© 2017 Martha Posner

Sponsors

Lehigh Print & Data

Penn State Lehigh Valley receives state arts funding support through a grant from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, a state agency funded by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency.



Penn State is an equal opportunity, affirmative action employer, and is committed to providing employment opportunities to all qualified applicants without regard to race, color, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, disability, or protected veteran status. This publication is available in alternative media upon request. U.Ed. LVO 20.XX.