

BEYOND THE DARK— THE ART OF DAVID GAMBLE

by Toti O'Brien

In 1987, David Gamble received the 'most memorable assignment' of his glamorous photojournalistic career: taking photos of Andy Warhol's house shortly after the artist had passed. Fred Hughes wished to document Warhol's collection of artifacts in view of an upcoming 1988 auction of his art and personal belongings, in order to gain interest of European collectors.

Gamble's work took on a new life. Ten years later, his pictures were exhibited at the Groucho Club, causing a sensation that only a look into the secret life of one of the most well known artists could justify—in particular, a shot of the medicine cabinet in Warhol's bathroom. Rows of anti-aging lotions and pills filled the shelves, eloquently showing the fragility hidden beyond publicity and fame. That shock of revelation wasn't the only surprise. Gamble had superimposed the empty rooms with silk-screen constructs of their owner (echoing Warhol's well-known portraits of celebrities). The effect of the overlap was eerie and mesmerizing—Andy's ghost had returned to eternally inhabit his home.

"It was the first time," Gamble says, "that I was called into a space where somebody had lived, but was not living any more." Nothing yet had been changed, everything was untouched. This unique combination of absence and presence was tangible, permeating the atmosphere, charging it with a peculiar intensity. Some of Gamble's assistants disliked working after hours, made uncomfortable by whatever lingered around. But he was unconcerned. On the contrary, he delved into what could have been a frightening sense of emptiness, looking for death's own watermark.

Andy Warhol's House photo series isn't a spare episode. The ability of exploring



Andy Warhol sitting in his living room .East 66th St NYC 1987
©David Gamble

life's darkest areas is a defining feature of Gamble's art. All of his work—spanning from photography, to drawing and painting, through a variety of mixed techniques—deals with complex, deep, rich, layered matters. Themes like death, madness, and fear, aren't shunned - they intertwine with other motifs, addressing the whole spectrum of our human condition.

Gamble's art focuses on seizing a moment, with all its undertones. Gamble's photojournalistic accomplishments prove his talent for instantaneously squeezing and externalizing the essence of a fact, a gesture, a scene. He can frame the salient, the unusual detail, and catch the meaningful contrast

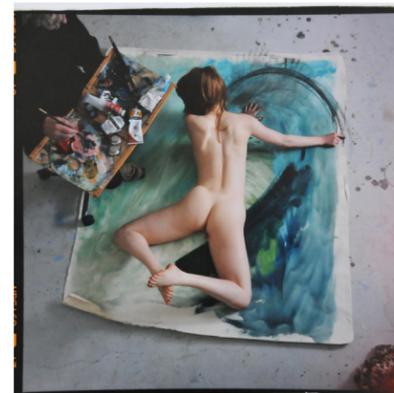
that no one else sees. His celebrated, award winning portraits of renowned icons and preceptors show how deeply he can reach inside a personality and present it with a meticulous eye. David Gamble is also a painter, and painting as Gamble puts it, is an extremely personal commitment. "Exhausting, yet enormously enjoyable," he says. Painting, in the exquisitely unpredictable way Gamble intends for it to be, stretches the moment to an extended period of time—listening to its echoes, bringing them onto the canvas, building multiple narratives and opening new fields of resonance.

For someone mastering a great variety of skills, what's the meaning of choosing



Warhol Wig Glasses and Watch, East 66th Street, NYC, 1987 ©David Gamble

one over another? It's a matter of knowing each time what he wants to say, then finding the form that better expresses it. As the unconscious suggests the next image and series, the artist's task is to switch to the most suited medium—sometimes to invent the medium, which Gamble isn't scared of doing.



Drawing the line of control. Muse series 2008
©David Gamble

This extreme freedom is paramount to his practice, as he certainly favors the process—the making—over the output. Limiting artistic production to a specific genre "is a habit as recent as the mid twentieth century," and it doesn't fit all.

The personal take Gamble chose for his Warhol's series also sprang from his sincere admiration for Andy as an artist. Pop Art was a constant inspiration to Gamble, as well as Pop Art's antecedents—Dada and Surrealism. But his work references many other artists and movements, dialoguing with them in subtle yet recognizable ways. Such openness to a multiplicity of visions creates a spacious landscape.

Influence, Gamble says, doesn't imply following the direction of the artist who

impresses us.

For example, though the human figure remains his core inspiration, Jackson Pollock's process was particularly meaningful to him. Influences can have a 'negative' sign as well—the response, then, becomes a critique. Such is the case of "Memories of Arles," a stunning series of paintings (among Gamble's richest in color and composition), which criticize Balthus' sexually charged portraits of young girls. "Muse," a series of photographs addressing the role of the female model and male control, similarly confronts and subverts Manet's nudes.

Issues of manipulation, control, sexual abuse and its consequences are observed, questioned, then frankly denounced throughout Gamble's work—always in smart, puzzling ways, yet quite unequivocal. Such crescendo culminates in Gamble's upcoming exhibition, "Silence," which will take place in 2018. The show is themed after the scream that victims of sexual abuse swallow and repress—letting it transmute, alas, into self-destroying energy. The full project includes collaboration with a dancer/choreographer. Adding a performance element to the visual further expands media, fostering new possibilities.

One of the oil pastels of "Silence" shows an elongated taunted and sinewed, angsty neck, topped by an open mouth. As he painted it, Gamble entered the mindset he wanted to express, visiting once again a place of darkness and pain. "It isn't," he says, "a familiar condition." Not an easy journey either. Making art compels him to explore, understand, and then translate such states as faithfully as possible.

He has always been capable of ferrying himself back and forth. This is what artists of his caliber do. "I knew I was painting my last image of 'Silence' series," he admits, "Return was getting too difficult."

Why go there, then? Just as when he spent a whole week in Warhol's home, unafraid of questioning death, mulling over traces of isolation and sadness, it seemed hard for him to resist empathy at its most profound. And the following, unavoidable step that he takes is witnessing. In some cases, perhaps many, it means giving silence a voice.

David Gamble's work is managed by Jason Burdeen. He has shown in exhibitions, museums and galleries nationally and internationally. ♦

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Andy Warhol's Medicine Cabinet en suite East 66th Street NYC 1987
©David Gamble



Arlesian and the open window. 2007
©David Gamble



What I Feel. Silence Series 2006
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