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THOMAS RUFF

Mai 36

Zurich

In creating his series "Nudes" (1999-2001), German photographer Thomas Ruff used as his source material pornographic images taken from the Internet. He downloaded photos of naked and nearly naked bodies various Web sites, digitally altered their shapes and colors, and then printed enlarged, blurry, and ultimately striking versions.

Compared with the more bizarre material found online, Ruff's selections are rather main stream-couple s copulating, boy toys sprawled lazily on a bed, and soft-core girl-on-girl action, for example. Ruff's aim is not to shock. Instead, he attempts to draw formal correlations between classic porn and modern painting.

His white-skinned protagonists do share a plastic sort of beauty, but this also made for a certain sameness. There were, however, noteworthy exceptions, including a muddy yellow close-up of a young woman with latex drawn tight across her face, her flattened features accentuated by Ruff's digital handiwork. It seems a death mask, yet her body language--fingertips brushing cheeks a la Audrey Hepburn--expresses a delicate vibrancy.

The most abstracted works proved the most captivating. In one of these, a woman's panties are exposed when her miniskirt flares open. The original image is so manipulated that the underwear stands out as a white diamond shape, the skirt forms two winglike streaks of red, and the flesh tone of the woman's legs fades into the background. It's closer to Rothko than to RAW Sexxx!

Marc Spiegler