

The Copenhagen Post  
By Jessica H  
25 February 2013

### **Even Oedipus wouldn't do this**

Leigh Ledare is a Seattle-born artist who primarily uses photography – but also video, archival material and text – to explore taboos, social relationships and human agency. In a relatively short period of time, he has been able to create an already impressive body of work.

This exhibition draws inspiration from his most famous series, *Pretend You're Actually Alive* (2000-2008), which explores the various sides of his mother's personality – reality and fantasy – through the use of explicit photography, portrait and text. The result of an eight-year collaboration with his ageing ex-ballerina mother, we are offered a no-holds-barred portrait in which his mother demonstrates a defiance and a vulnerability from one image to the next. It is clear why she was a fêted ballerina in her day; a true American beauty with an unapologetic bohemian bend, she has boyfriend after boyfriend of her son's age and is very comfortable with her body. After witnessing her vulnerable and defiant side, even though these are photographs created by her son, she appears unafraid to allow him to see her sexual self in a series of portraits in which she is naked, legs akimbo, happily touching herself or even engaging in intercourse with her current boyfriend.

The opening piece, directly related to Scandinavian affairs, is *An Invitation* (2012), in which the wife from a well-connected family commissioned nude portraits from Ledare. Upon request to create a series with the portraits, the couple had Ledare sign a contract to protect themselves. The photographs are set against the front page of the New York Times on the same day in which he took each portrait, complete with a reflexive note from Ledare. The first piece was shot on the same day of Anders Breivik's attack in Norway. The notes allow us to understand the developing relationship between Ledare and his subject, in which we glimpse his reluctance to direct his subject, allowing her to objectify him by his unwillingness to objectify her.

The last major part of the exhibition is *Double Bind* (2010). Ledare convinced his ex-wife, Meghan, who was about to marry another photographer, to hide away in a cabin in upstate New York for a few days in which he took about 500 photographs. He then asked that her new fiancé do the same. The resultant 1,000 photographs are set against either black or white backdrops: black being Ledare's images and white being the fiancé's. The outcome is an exploration of how Meghan's body language responds to the camera lens depending on who is behind the camera. In Ledare's portraits, she wears a constant weariness in her gaze and is very self-contained with only the odd rare smile. In her fiancé's portraits, an easiness and loveliness shines through, as well as a sexual self that is comfortable with nudity in front of a lens.

Other and smaller pieces are also in exhibition including *Alma*, a collaboration with a three-year old child; *Upon The Death of My Grandfather ...* (2008-2011), a strange gift from his grandfather; *Personal Commissions* (2008), in which he explores the world of amorous newspaper ads; *Collector's Commissions* (2008, ongoing) in which the photographer is the



subject; and videos: *The Gift* (2007), his mother's unsuccessful attempt at soft-porn thwarted, and *The Shoulder* (2007), a touching moment constructed.



Leigh, what have I told you about creeping up on me – okay, just this once, but don't show anybody!

---

**Leigh Ledare, et al**

*Kunsthall Charlottenborg, Nyhavn 2, Cph K; ends May 12; open Tue-Fri 11:00-16:00, Sat-Sun 11:00-17:00, Weds 11:00-20:00; tickets: 60kr, under-16s free adm; [www.kunsthallcharlottenborg.dk](http://www.kunsthallcharlottenborg.dk) [7]*