

MARIE ANGELETTI

**L D N**

**LONDON**

## SEX WORK / ART WORK

MARIE ANGELETTI  
"VANESSA'S"  
CARLOS/ISHIKAWA  
27 FEBRUARY –  
4 APRIL 2020

Walk into Carlos/Ishikawa, a gleaming white cube tucked behind an unassuming black door in an alley in East London, and you're met with a series of ten photographs. Most are close-ups of women's faces with obvious digital editing, some covering the subject's eyes with a white rectangle and calling to mind news clips of minors – and others editing out the background around the figure with ragged edges. The subjects look like women in their twenties and thirties. In a few, they pose on street corners or midway down a scenic hill, as they would for a friend or social-media post. Just as the jagged editing out of backgrounds leaves circumstances shrouded in mystery, some photographs seem slightly blurry, either from the jolt of the camera, an out of focus lens, or a sudden hair toss. The haze creates a sense of protective distance between viewer and subject. They're gentle portraits, intimate but not intimate.

As a group, the ten photographs that make up "Vanessa's" seem disparate, combined somewhat arbitrarily. Some are black and white, with varying degrees of contrast; others are in colour, with varying degrees of saturation. One woman rests her head on the crook of her shoulder in muted pixelation. Another poses on a street lined with out-of-focus twinkle-lights that seem straight out of the early days of Instagram, when



Marie Angeletti, *Moirra 01*, 2020  
C-print mounted on glass, 60.5 x 42.5 cm

heavy-handed filters were deemed "artsy", whatever that means. Another, more gently edited photograph of a black woman laying on her side, nude, has all of the noble elegance of an Annie Leibovitz. The aesthetic variations obscure any inkling of context – that is, until you pick up a press release:

"I was only turned on by a seductive piece of soft-core a friend sent me,

very well made, great music in fact, and I hoped to do the same," Angeletti explains. She posted an advert on Craigslist, asking for female nude models and offering forty euros an hour. When the women arrived, Angeletti explained that she wanted to film them masturbating, and they all accepted.

But this was just the starting point of the project. Save a few stills

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from these videos, most of the images on display came from the subjects themselves, sent ahead of time, unsolicited, in answer to the ad. What's interesting here is not the blurring of artist and curator, nor the question of authorship – often made much of in essays on Angeletti's work – but the question of the role of context. (There's a lot to be said on the topic of labour, too, for an artist who once organised an exhibition of Chinese paint-factory workers' art in their own factory.)

Consider the first line of the text: "If I ignored the urge not to explain anything what would I say?"

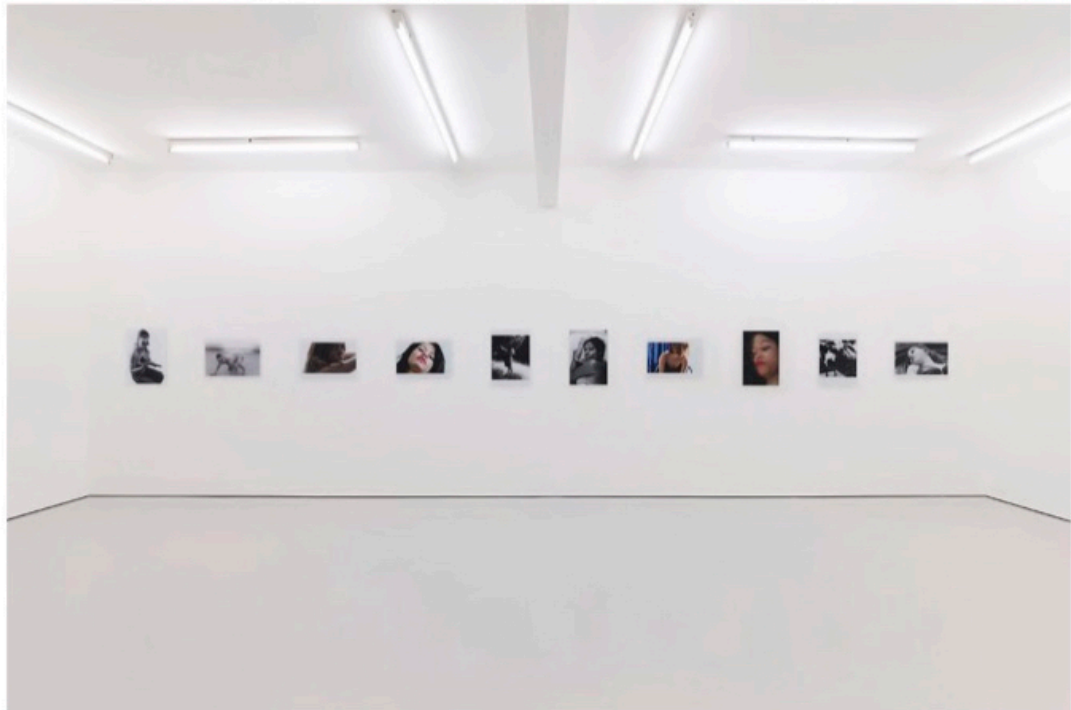
For Angeletti, that urge is so strong that an interview was off the table. But how to reconcile this with a curiosity about the conditions of each session, and about the origins of each photograph? And the comfort brought by the fact that, in a work with the potential to exploit, the artist is a woman, and the models had some authority over their own image?

In a then-controversial 1991 essay, the late queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick linked self-pleasure to "amnesia". Without the risk of reproduction or the involvement of others, there's a tracelessness that threatens

"propriety and property", she writes. Here, that absence is preserved, or at the very least, any visual evidence is relegated beyond the frame, as context is relegated to paper in the corner.

Historically, there's something to be said for portraying female eroticism as present, in all of its glory – Carolee Schneemann, among many others, taught us that. But there's also something to be said for the artist's encouragement that we take from this what we will; almost no one today with internet access is at a loss for erotic imagery. The degree of eroticism is up for question. To each their own.

**Alexandra Leake Germer**



View of Marie Angeletti, "Vanessa's", Carlos/Ishikawa