

THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 28, 2006

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ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO ACQUIRES PHOTOGRAPHER

NAN GOLDIN'S MOST LEGENDARY WORK

The Ballad of Sexual Dependency Enters the Museum's Permanent Collection

On View in the *So the Story Goes* Exhibition Through December 3

The Art Institute of Chicago announces the recent acquisition of *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency (1981–86/87)*, a compelling slideshow by photographer Nan **Goldin**. This visual masterpiece is the seventh only in an edition of ten, and the Art Institute is the third major art museum in the country to own *The Ballad* (the other two institutions being the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Museum of Modern Art, both in New York). *The Ballad* was jointly purchased by both the museum's Departments of Photography and Contemporary Art—the first collaborative effort between these two curatorial departments.



Remarking on the newly acquired *The Ballad*, Dorie Sternberg of the Committee of Contemporary Art at the Art Institute, said: “The beauty of Nan Goldin's slide installation lies in its ability to build upon the poignancy found in her photographs, while adding an element of almost voyeuristic intimacy that catches the viewer by surprise. Her slides themselves, and the people that she photographs, are her diary as

well as a lesson in the duplicity of life. She has taken the living room slide shows of the past to a completely different level.”

In addition, Anstiss Hammond Krueck, Co-chair of the Committee on Photography at the Art Institute, said: “I came to *The Ballad* with reservations and a mindset that it would be ‘difficult’...I was, therefore, amazed at how it drew me in and moved me. Nan’s piece is a story of life and how almost everyone of us seeks another person to love and to be loved by. Far from being a hardened point of view, *The Ballad* is very touching and has a sweetness, along with its inevitable sadness.”

Arguably no artist, and certainly no photographer, of this era has created a more symbiotic relationship between life and art than Nan Goldin. For over 40 years, it has been her foremost project to record her world, and not once has she arranged or directed the subjects of her pictures. In perfect complements of technique and subject, an unsteady finger on the shutter release matches the swoon of lovers or the euphoria of a party, just as warm, interior light steeps a figure in isolation, amplifying the shade of the drink in front of her.

Goldin has said of this fusion of approach and theme: “to photograph from your own life has these components of risk and uncontrollable possibilities and subtext that you can’t impose upon the photos; they come from experience.” Goldin, much like an early Kodak enthusiast, snaps away, fully embracing photography’s potential for immediacy, emotion, and anecdote. Quite unlike either historical snapshots or today’s family photos, her pictures present the very subjects considered outside the socially regulated realm. As viewers, we witness moments of utmost intimacy—funerals, love-making, hospitalization—and the roller coaster of human emotions that accompany them. We also see the artist herself over the years in numerous self-portraits.

Goldin's *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* debuted as a slideshow in the bars and clubs of New York's artistic demimonde. Over time, the show evolved; Goldin set the show to different music and prepared different arrangements of the slides in order to more fully narrate its prevalent themes: couples, gender roles, sex, intimacy, and dependency. Pivotal to the piece was Goldin's own destructive and dependent relationship with a man named Brian. As the forty-minute show progresses, Brian and others appear and reappear in different moods, company, and settings. People rush forward on screen and recede again, in an almost cinematic mimicry of the nonlinear fashion of memories. Goldin's slideshow offers up a new, raw, and potentially more honest version of the domestic slideshow, a tradition that is just as culturally determined as that of the snapshot. The images in *The Ballad* create a dialogue about socially accepted notions of identity, relationships, as well as community and the potentially different experience of them individually.

Goldin's own history with drug abuse, as well as her friendships with gay and transvestites, placed her squarely in the midst of what would become known as the AIDS crisis, with which she was deeply involved. Her closest friend and longtime



subject, the artist Cookie Mueller, died from the disease on November 10, 1989. That same day, *Witnesses: Against Our Vanishing* opened at New York's Artists Space. The exhibition, curated by Goldin, marked the first significant gathering of art about and by those with the disease.

Reflecting on this moment, Goldin has said, "I used to think I couldn't lose anyone if I photographed them enough. . . . In fact, they show me how much I've lost." Goldin represents the tender, excruciating emotions of loss, just as she has also captured the

delight of a kiss and the longing for an absent body in an empty bed. Indeed, her pictures are relatable glimpses into the human nature of relationships and what it might look like were we to picture ourselves in such extremes.

The *Ballad* slideshow will make its public debut in the major exhibition *So the Story Goes: Photographs by Tina Barney, Philip-Lorca diCorcia, Nan Goldin, Sally Mann, and Larry Sultan*, on view through December 3, 2006.

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The Art Institute of Chicago is a museum in Chicago's Grant Park.

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The Art Institute of Chicago is a museum in Chicago's Grant Park, located across from Millennium Park.

IMAGE CREDIT:

Nan Goldin (American, born 1953). *Self-portrait*, 1978-1994/1995. Sixteen chromogenic color prints; 138 x 192 cm. The Art Institute of Chicago, partial gift of Dorie Sternberg, 2005.22. © 2006 Nan Goldin, courtesy of Matthew Marks Gallery, New York.

Nan Goldin (American, born 1953). *Cookie at Tin Pan Alley*, NYC, 1983, from the multimedia installation, *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*. Silver-dye bleach print; 30 x 40 in. Courtesy of Nan Goldin and Matthew Marks Gallery, New York. © 2006 Nan Goldin, courtesy of Matthew Marks Gallery, New York.