

Corpus- Peter Hamilton

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Booth: Corpus

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Corpus, the first book by New York-domiciled photographer Alvin Booth, offers an intriguing combination of styles and subject matter that connect the beginning and the end of the 20th century. The British-born Booth creates a turn of the century "Pictorialist-style" images of the body. They confirm the acceptance of the once-submerged practices of fetishism, bondage and sado-masochism as elements of contemporary Western culture.

At the beginning of this century, those who were fascinated by these aspects of sexuality were obliged by public morality to pursue their interests in the private realm. To the extent that they were represented in the modern arts such as photography, it was through a coded form of imagery – as in Fred Holland Day's then-scandalous series "The Seven Last Words of Christ" (1898). But a hundred years later, fetishism, bondage and sado-masochism have moved out of the closet and on to the catwalk. In Alvin Booth's striking images they become the inspiration for photographs in which the bodies of his models are the canvas on which his fantasies can be brought to life.

Booth's photographs are supreme exercises in style, as befits an approach which owes a large debt to fashion photography – but we should remember that this is a genre which documents as well as markets changes in public values. Although the content of these pictures might once have been considered socially controversial, it is a long time since Robert Mapplethorpe and others conveyed the private gardens of their sexual obsessions onto the white walls of the public art gallery. Booth's models have their bodies toned with gold paint (echoing the toning which his matt-paper prints also receive), and are clad in latex and rope confections of his own making. These constructions are designed to emphasise the sexual organs and erotic zones of his models, much as a Versace dress would do for wear in more public environments than the photographer's studio. Charlotte Cotton, an expert on contemporary fashion photography at the Victoria and Albert Museum (London) emphasises the stylistic roots of Booth's work in her Foreword to *Corpus*: "Booth's passion for sensuous innuendo is manifest in the compositions contained within these pages. His wit and glinting eye infuse the presentation of sexuality within the images."

Alvin Booth was born in the English industrial port of Hull in 1959, and worked for many years as a (gifted and eccentric) hairdresser before taking up photography in the 1980s, initially with the intention of working in fashion. When a watch inherited from his grandfather was stolen, he used

the insurance money to buy himself a MamiyaRB67, and has remained faithful to the medium format 6x7cm image ever since. Moving to New York in 1989, he gained invaluable experience by working as an assistant to a number of big names in fashion photography. During this period he was creating a significant archive of private work for his portfolio, and developing his own style, which extends beyond the gold-toned print and into the distinctive framing and presentation of his pictures. An exhibition of his work at Hamilton's Gallery in London during 1995 brought his images to the attention of collectors who include Elton John. Since then, his work has been shown in numerous one-person and group exhibitions. He is represented by the Yancey Richardson Gallery (New York), Stephen Daiter Gallery (Chicago), Robert Klein Gallery (Boston), and Jackson Fine Art (Atlanta).

ALVIN BOOTH: CORPUS. *Beyond the Body*

Photography by Alvin Booth

Forward by Charlotte Cotton

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