



# THE DARK LORD OF ASS

**Martin Eder has made a name for himself as a painter of brightly colored cat and lolita motifs. When he trades his brush and canvas for a camera to produce standalone photographs, his vocabulary becomes a lot darker: worn-out, sometimes even physically scarred women expose themselves to the limit of what seems bearable. Sex is more a notion than a possibility. Still it's creeping in and one can't help but wonder what it must be like to work with these women and how the artist manages to get so close to them. We meet a humble man who only temporarily let's his mischievous side – we suspect him to be quite cunning – shine through. Welcome Martin Eder, The Dark Lord Of Ass.**

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**Suppose I was one of your models – which technically I couldn't be, we'll get to that later though – how would you go about the shoot?**

The model comes in. We sit down and have a little chat. Then I show them around a bit. Once I start taking pictures – and I never take longer than two to three hours – I know already that the first hour is good for nothing. I'd skip it if it wasn't necessary. But it is because after a while – and it's always the same – there's some kind of 'magic moment' which lasts about ten to twenty minutes. Everything after that is useless again. What is it? I guess that my subjects become tired, they start to let go. This makes you realize: taking pictures is more than just placing the model, adjusting the light, and pressing the button. It is a very psychological process which is hard to control. The only way control it is via speech. You have to talk with that person that is standing there in front of your camera. While in some moments it's better to say nothing at all. In any case a photographer has to be very selective with his words.

**Is this what makes a good photographer – his way with words?**

Sometimes, when I'm being photographed myself, I notice how some photographers don't give any directions at all. Or even worse: they give directions like 'do something' or 'hold it'. That's not the way to do it if you want to get something out of that person in such a short period of time. You have to let yourself in. I believe I'm not as talented at taking pictures as I am at being some kind of horse whisperer who coaxes that something out of his models without taking advantage or coercing them into something they normally wouldn't do. I'm not interested in some manipulated portrait or anything that's overtly staged. I want to get to the core of that person.

**"I AM A HORSE WHISPERER."**

**The Dark Lord casts his spell. How do you direct your models? What are the things you say?**

Since most of them are complete amateurs and might never have done this before, one has to get into them like one would put on a glove or a puppet. Like the devil himself you have to be in them and move the limbs and facial expressions of that person from the inside. Obviously the model has to be willing to let that happen. It's very intimate. A great deal of trust has to be involved. It can only happen on the basis of a social contract that assures the person who is being photographed that he or she won't suffer any harm, that they won't be made a fool of. That is one thing. Once you have them eating out of the palm of your hand you have to feed the model with information that he or she can digest. And everyone has different a taste. I honestly believe that this is fundamental for a good picture: the approach. And I want to get as close as I can. My subjects expose themselves to an enormous degree. They're looking directly at the viewer and in doing so they aren't victims any longer. Even if they have been hurt. No matter if they're cut up or ill, if they had a tough life or are still troubled, in my pictures they aren't victims. Quite the contrary: they assert control over their lives.

**Have their been situations when your 'magic' hasn't worked?**

Yes. Most of my models are rather quiet but there have been a few who came in fidgeting around with a bundle of wigs and donning their over-the-knee boots. That doesn't do it for me. That doesn't get me where I want to go. Props are like an armour, a protective mechanism people bring along because they are afraid. It is also a sign for me that I haven't managed to break through their crust of reserve. Actually it's a display of my incapacity when people still sit on their prop case after two hours.

**Nevertheless your pictures aren't totally devoid of props. There is the occasional stick or vegetable.**

Well, they can be useful in the beginning because they are something the model can hold onto. But still: the less props the better. Some people make a big fuss, with a mark on the floor where the model has to stand. That's not me. I don't plan. I just make it up along the way together with whom I work with. The best pictures are the ones with a simple backdrop in black or gray.

**“YOUR SEXUAL  
ORGAN CAN BECOME  
AN ORNAMENT.”**

**Surely there must be photographers with a different approach who inspire you?**

*I do admire Helmut Newton. But it's not the images and not the models. It is the situation he puts them in. A girl in front of a gas stove – absurd! This feeling for the right scenery, it's something I lack. I would like to have that but it would probably still look pretty ridiculous.*

**You have made yourself a name as an artist who – among other motifs – portraits naked women. What constitutes a nude?**

*We all know there's a line between nudes and pornography. An image is pornographic when there's some kind of contact between the model and the viewer. And this contact has to have a distinct sexual connotation. A naked human being is not necessarily sexy. Sexiness is nothing I aim for in a picture anyway. Nakedness is better. Because it's a classic. This whole armor, this semantic surface – who am I? what do I represent? how do I want to be perceived? – disappears. It's like in one of those sci-fi films where they time travel and become one with – excuse me for being a bit lofty here – ancient times. Already the Romans looked the way we do and people in the future will too. It is wonderfully timeless. And when naked the primary sexual characteristics become your dress. Your face too becomes your dress. The most physical parts of your body, in and out, become decoration or ornament. Depending on the person's ability to move in front of the camera they can control it themselves: it can be your sexual organ or it can become an ornament.*

**Some of your works are quite explicit. A lot of people might consider them to be pornographic.**

*But they are not. Firstly because an oversexed atmosphere during the session would send the shooting down the toilet. My studio is not a porn set. The whole process is a very private affair. It's like reading poems to one another. This delicate telepathic connection would instantly break if the situation became too sexual. But more importantly I think that even with my more explicit works the viewer should be able to tell that the model hasn't been captured before or after a sexual act. They are just sitting there being very much themselves. Which makes my pictures pretty boring actually.*

**“WHAT I DO IS VERY  
TOTALITARIAN.”**

**Yet you are only working with women.**

*That is true. (PAUSE.) I've always been wanting to shoot a series with men. The reason I've only worked with women so far is quite simple: they are the prettier of the two. With their fragility, this frail beauty, and their well wroughtness– they seem much more complex to me. It's pretty unlikely you'll find an obese man to be beautiful. But a fat or wrinkled woman or a woman with cellulitis can be very beautiful. It obviously has to do with our training, with art history and all that. Still, women offer a much greater variety of beauty in contrast to their ugliness. I haven't found that with men yet. I'd love to be able to do that though.*

**Have their been models – women – who misunderstood the situation during a shoot? Who made advances?**

*There's always an underlying tension when one person is wearing clothes and the other is not. Simply because of this uneven balance of power. And while I try to even that out, the initial situation of a nude shooting is sexual. There is this latent sexuality. It is about as sexually charged as undressing in front of a doctor.*

**It is about power.**

*Well, yes. One is telling the other what to do. And he or she does it. But it's also about trust. Because that person believes in the photographer.*

**Some models are said to ‘make’ the picture. Have you experienced sessions where this balance of power switched around?**

*One time I had this model, she was very short, about 1,5 meter. That woman came in and sat there with her sleeves pulled over her hands, clinging to her cup of tea and staring at the table. I was about to send her home. That is never going to work out, I thought. But once we started she became a completely different person. She transformed from one extreme to the other. Actually it's not that uncommon that some people, who are rather unimposing in ‘real life’, become quite vigorous in front of the camera – but usually to a far smaller extent than this woman.*

**Have you become dull after having seen so much flesh in various conditions for over a decade now?**

*Nope. Definitely not. Last night I saw this program about this coroner who had dissected more than 20.000 corpses in his life and who'd still feel nauseous if he ate something bad for lunch. It's not that me and my models go on holiday together. Two to three hours isn't very long and apart from working with the model I have all this technical stuff to deal with. When the shoot is over I haven't got a clue about what just happened. It is very much like furiously trying to dig a hole.*

**You always work alone.**

*I have to. When models bring their boyfriend, I'll always say: ‘he can leave again right away’. ‘Why’ they ask. ‘He'll just sit in the back and smoke’. I'm sorry but that is not working. It has to do with the aura. It disturbs the shoot if there's another source of energy in my studio. What I do is very totalitarian. It only works if the other person is able to open up completely. I can't have someone sitting there who goes: ‘well, she never does that when she's alone with me’. Absolutely impossible. Once I took pictures for a magazine and they sent some stylist or whatever. I chased that guy away at once.*













