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'Two Colors' Unnerves Celebs

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Mark Abrahams

"Two Colors," Mark Abrahams' photography exhibition at Stoleshnikov Pereulok, kicked off Tuesday night, featuring celebrities shedding their refined veneer. The exhibit consisted of over 30 black and white portraits, most from the 2000s. They include novelist Dennis Cooper, artist Tim Hawkinson, actresses Kate Winslet, Christina Ricci, Anne Hathaway, music duo Daft Punk, actors Daniel Craig, Dustin Hoffman, and James Franco, among others.

Abrahams' portraits broke through the physical and emotional armor that these high profiles built up over the years to protect themselves.

"I try to turn celebrities into people," he told The Moscow Times. "The camera can be a window into people and their story. Occasionally when celebrities come to my studio, they put on specific clothes, try to cover something up or choose a certain feature to be photographed. But I don't want to portray people as famous, I want to show their inner world."

When Abrahams tells celebrities he isn't interested in creating their perceived concept of self, he gets to work. And once the weight of self-serving filters is lifted, Abrahams reveals sides of individuals not typically seen by the public. "It's far easier to set up a scenario where everybody looks like a hero, or where the environment tells a story, than to sit down in a studio with somebody and try to strip things down," he said in an interview with NOWNESS website.

"Two Colors" steps back from the fervent, ever-changing world of fashion photography and uses a few simple props and backdrops, or none at all.

Photographer Anne Lebowitz famously said that at Abrahams' New York studio, "Superstars come back to Earth and in doing so they simultaneously elevate the quality of the portrait."

"Anyone can take a passport photo. But Abrahams finds a connection with the subject, not with just their physical presence," added aspiring photographer Sergei Gelman.

Abrahams' expressive minimalism is reminiscent of the fashion photography icon Richard Avendon, whose deliberately simple images contrast with the elevated status of his subjects.

An image taken in 2000 shows Tim Hawkinson bent over, gripping onto a latex doll and deflating it. Wires are scattered over dusty floorboards.

Born in Santa Ana, California, Abrahams used to work as a truck driver, transporting sand and gravel. Then he received a Nikon FM from his mother as a gift. Soon, he turned his former bathroom into a darkroom to retouch negatives and develop film at night. By now, the self-taught photographer has worked for international editions of Vogue, Harper's Bazaar, GQ, Nylon, and other fashion, arts and music publications.

The "Two Colors" exhibition is running at the Jaguar Summer Museum on Stoleshnikov Pereulok until Oct. 31.

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