



© Masseur from *Chez Moi*

At Home with Evergon

Provocative and uncompromising, Montréal photographer Evergon is one of the most sought-after art-makers in the ARTSIDA roster this year. The Concordia professor's donation, "Tom" is a strikingly cold portrait of a porcelain cat the artist found on a trip to Italy with his late lover; it speaks to the sense of loss, but also humour, that infuses the *Chez Moi* series from which it is drawn. *2B* spoke to the profound (and campy) wit about his family, his late lover, and being in erotic limbo in advance of the big ARTSIDA auction on April 7th...

By Jordan Arseneault

Born in Niagara Falls, Ontario, in 1946, Evergon belongs to the generation of artists and thinkers who helped define what a queer aesthetic became. His humungous portfolio spans over 40 years, from his earliest Crucifixion Series (1970) to the *Hot Boys*, *XXX-L* and the eerily empty *Manscapes* of the 2000s. Evergon made his reputation by depicting beautiful young men (remember Ramboys?), and documenting the intersecting gay realities of cruising grounds and art history, until his recent departure from the nude male, a series called *Margaret and I*, in which he took photos of his mother in the nude, following the death of his cantankerous father. That series was the inspiration for Donald Winkler's 2011 documentary *Margaret and Evergon*, which screened to critical acclaim, recently winning best documentary at the Macon Film Festival in Georgia, USA.

"I think the sexy boys photos and the *Margaret/Chez Moi* series are a continuum," the photographer says with an almost spiritual lilt in his voice. "Margaret was a different body of work, which was celebrating the death of my father. The two bodies have very different connotations and reasons for existing," he added, describing the sense of delayed mourning with which he infused *Chez Moi*.

The *Chez Moi* series, like Evergon the man, is campy and deceptively simple. The 27 photographs in the series include individually placed objects, like the ithyphallic "Tom" statuette – which Evergon found in an Italian flea market with his late lover, Roberto – as well as portraits of himself, his masseur, and again, his mother. "Some people knew it was a memorial, and others didn't, because there was camp throughout. There was a code: objects placed on the pedestal, like 'Tom', are part the house, whereas the masseur and one of the Great Danes that comes to visit were guests to the house." Like the men in *Manscapes*, Evergon's deceased lover is conspicuous by his absence.

"We were always working together or looking for things to photograph," he reminisces. "The house is organized clutter, remembrances of different events and different people," giving the series the feeling of a deconstructed personal shrine to the love of his life, including a shawl that belonged to Roberto's mother. As with his little brother's death from AIDS in the early 90's, Evergon's photography has rarely dwelt on tragedy. "I was trying to get my brother to work with me, and heal some old wounds, but he died in the middle of the process. He lived fast, because he didn't want to live to be 40, in fact we buried him on his 40th birthday. There was this joke – or maybe it was a real deadline - I'm 39 [like classic comedian Jack Benny] and he came in just under the wire."

Evergon's only artistic commemoration of his late brother, whom he mentions often, were two large Polaroid pieces of young men dancing with death, which are now in storage or sold, he wasn't quite sure. "I chose to continue the gay history rather than get bogged down with death," a credo to which his body of work has become a strong testament.

Of his transition from erotic provocateur to professor, Evergon jokes that he has gone from "tormentor to mentor," but it's clear that he takes the latter role very seriously. Of the student strike, the wild-bearded academic says he's "gotten through unscathed," hiding out at the Galerie Trois Points in the Belgo Building (his Montréal dealer), and by going "coffees and beers and sandwiches, which is the best way to hold a class anyway."

"Tom" from Evergon's *Chez Moi* series goes up for action at ARTSIDA on Saturday, April 7th, at the Musée d'art contemporain, 6pm.

www.artsida.org
www.evergon.ca



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