

Dear Colin,

I am writing to introduce myself to you, and to your brother, upon your father's sudden death. I knew your dad well. He was my introductory painting teacher. He also saw me grow up, because my father was his closest colleague. A few years ago, we began taking pictures together.

He needed a model but had also shared extended contact with me over a series of self-portraits I had shot. I had shot thousands of photographs of my face, so close to my face as to let no space into the image. He suggested that he could take a less claustrophobic, more beautiful picture of me than I could take of myself. He could take a look from further away.

There are ten-thousand of our pictures in his computer. The pictures range from full nudity to fully clothed. The images are not by rule explicit, but many are.

At first, I did not really think of the photographs as art. I never thought of them as pornography either.

We were not collaborators, but an obscure artist and a once known artist, sharing a group of pictures.

The studio for our photographs was essentially the kitchen, bedroom, bathroom, and hallway of his apartment. We almost never had intercourse without the cameras turned on. The relationship is not a documented real one. It began as an artificial relationship that we tried to make more and more real.

Michael often moved my arm or rotated my leg to find my best angle for the picture. He sometimes disappeared behind the camera. Behind the camera he could best see me, reaching his hand out into space to touch me in order to reacquaint. Sometimes the activity shifted. I would walk back and forth down the hall, or, run back and forth from inside the apartment to outside the apartment onto the roof. I took a picture of him, in return, for the first time in the hallway. We tried to make it look like he was coming out of the shadows. Admittedly, your father was more alone than he might have liked, but not as alone as you might think.

Michael died on the day that I took my version of these photographs down from a gallery. I excerpted my project from the only photographs he gave me – some, a few thousand, not all of the images. His face is absent in the pictures I have shown. He actually never showed the pictures that he first suggested taking at the beginning of the process.

With his passing, the photographs remain with you in a locked computer. The pictures are under heavy password protection, though you may have broken in and seen the images by now.

The files we both had in our possession are in a hard drive, between July 2008 and March 2009, key-worded:

springbreak export

springbreak export XTRA, TRUST TIF

XTRA includes pictures that reveal your father's face. The other images are mostly of me.

I can verify my face in picture after picture, matching the files to the files I have in my computer.

Michael left the pictures to no one. I write to ask you for the remainder of the ten-thousand pictures, those that I have never had, but that you have inherited.

Sincerely,

Erin Leland