



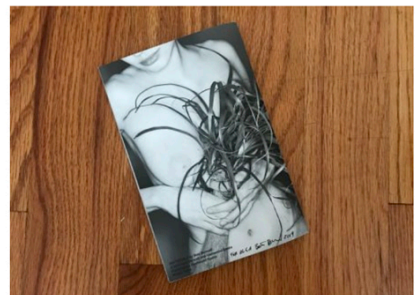
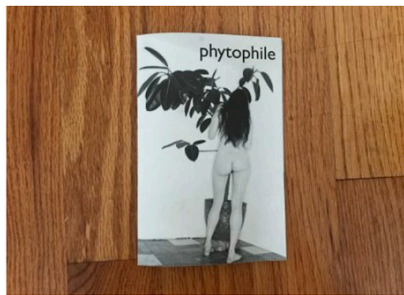
COLLECTOR DAILY

Bela Borsodi, *Phytophile*

By Olga Yatskevich / In [Photobooks](#) / July 19, 2019

JTF (just the facts): Published by Dashwood Books in 2019 ([here](#)). Softcover, 12 pages, with 15 black and white photographs. There are no texts or essays included. In an edition of 300.

(Cover and spread shots below.)



Comments/Context: The Austrian photographer Bela Borsodi grew up in a family of artists, and he naturally absorbed their creativity and artistic sensibility, which had an impact on his own life path. He came to New York in the early 1990s, ended up staying, and has made a successful career in fashion photography, creating still lifes that playfully challenge our perception. His images cleverly bring together reality and imagination, often incorporating optical illusions and constantly exploring and posing questions. Borsodi often builds the sets for his photo shoots from scratch, saying that they are “an integral part of his imagery and conceptual process.” His first photobook *Unicorn*, published last year, presented a series of photographic rebus puzzles composed entirely in camera, reflecting his complex conceptual thinking, his impeccable technique, and his healthy sense of visual humor.

Last year, Borsodi was invited to contribute to the Dashwood Books zine series. All of the zines have the same format, but the content is generally open; artists are encouraged to submit the work they have already produced, but haven’t yet had a chance to publish. Borsodi, however, saw it as an opportunity to come up with something new. He was always interested in the aesthetics of erotica (from Georges Bataille’s writings and Balthus’ painting to Toshio Saeki’s illustrations), and this was a subject he wanted to explore further in his own work. His idea was to produce something sexy, yet he wanted to get away from contributing another obvious nude photo series. He also knew he wanted to create a straightforward black and white series featuring a woman with a fetish, and as he was exploring various ideas for lesser used potential fetishes, he hit upon the idea of a plant. He titled his series “phytophile” (from “phyto” plant and “phile” lover), meaning “a person who is interested in plants.”

Phytophile is a small zine publication featuring black and white photographs printed full bleed. The photograph on the cover depicts a tall rubber tree in a corner as a nude model stands very close to it with her back to the camera; the white color of her body matches the white of the nearby wall, and her dark hair falls down her back, much like the dark leaves of the tree. The title, *Phytophile*, appears on top in black font, bringing a particular meaning to the photographs.

Inside, the series continues as a parade of black and white portraits of the same model (named Faina), seen nude but without being overtly explicit, photographed with plants in various poses inside an apartment. The high contrast photographs are taken against plain backgrounds, paring away any distractions. In general, they combine intimacy with a sense of natural playfulness. All of the photographs are carefully and thoughtfully staged – from concept and composition to body language and the placement of the various plants – yet the model clearly performs the acts for herself, allowing the photographer to be a witness.

The first spread pairs two photographs. In the first, the model stands very close to the plant as her fingers gently intertwine with its long leaves that cover most of her body, creating an impression that the plant and the body are caressing each other. The image on the right shows her standing tall, holding a potted plant as she waters it; the plant and the watering can cover her breasts but her pubic hair is right in view. Both photographs are delicately muted, the interactions both natural and vulnerable.

Plants deliberately placed close the model's private parts create an interplay of provocative natural symbolism. Spiky leaves, tumbling ivy, straight trunks, and other succulent textures create a visual dialogue with Faina's hair and limbs, the plants seeming to seductively move with her body. In one image, she gently cuddles the leaves of a plant in a pot as she stands in the shower; her eyes are closed and her mouth is slightly open creating the impression of ecstatic pleasure. In another, she sits on the edge of the sofa with a plant on the floor between her legs as she pulls the leaves towards her body. In both photographs, the model appears in total control, playfully allowing us to watch her, pushing us into a voyeuristic position.

One of the most beautiful images in the zine is a full spread image of Faina curled up on white sheets with a plant in the center, its leaves gently covering her like a blanket and the angles of her arms and knees pulling the composition in toward the center. And one of the last photographs shows Faina as she looks back toward the camera, reminding us that even when she is exposing herself, she is the one in charge. In this picture, she leans over towards a plant on the floor; her

legs are slightly apart, her breasts look like mountains, and her long hair merges with the leaves of the plant.

Phytophile is a modest publication that shows how a zine can be the perfect photobook venue for a small self-contained project. It's quirky, sexy, and decidedly offbeat, but Borsodi's surprisingly engaging images are the result of both consistently thoughtful staging and successful collaboration with his model.

Collector's POV: Bela Borsodi is represented by Supervision in New York ([here](#)), and by BMR-Fotografen in Zürich ([here](#)). His work has little secondary market history at this point, so gallery retail remains the best option for those collectors interested in following up.

Read more about: [Bela Borsodi, Dashwood Books](#)