

M+B

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LISA JACK
BARACK OBAMA: THE FRESHMAN

May 28 – August 29, 2009

Artists' Opening Reception: Thursday, May 28th, 6 – 9 pm



M+B is pleased to announce the inaugural exhibition **BARACK OBAMA: THE FRESHMAN**, black and white photographs by Lisa Jack. First featured in *Time Magazine's* 2008 "Person of the Year" Issue, which chose then President-elect Barack Obama for his "rare ability to . . . organize himself and others to anticipate change and translate it into opportunity," these photographs offer a window back in time before the posters and before the campaign, when a 20-year-old young man was caught up in just such a change that *Time Magazine* would later describe. Lisa Jack, then a student of photography at Occidental College, sought a striking subject for a portrait project and was tipped off about a charismatic freshman named "Barry" Obama who would make an ideal subject. After the shoot, these images would remain locked away for the next 28 years, until a dare from a friend triggered Lisa Jack to seek them out. At first worried these images could be used against President Obama, Jack realized they were not incriminating of anything other than being young and self-conscious, and that they offered a unique glimpse into how the man who made history went from being "Barry" to Barack. This exhibition marks the first time these rare photographs have ever been printed and on display.

As described in his memoir *Dreams from My Father*, Barack Obama's time at "Oxy" (Occidental College) was one of confusion and self-searching. He was chided by his mother for being friends with someone who was arrested on a drug possession charge, having so-so grades and, worst of all, being undeclared. Having recently moved from his grandparents' home in Honolulu, he searched for his place in his new environment and eventually translated a situation of uncertainty into opportunity. These images from 1980 offer a view of that young man grappling with issues that would shape him to become the 44th President of the United States. During this year at Oxy, Obama vigorously sought out peers who were politically active and would transfer a year later to Columbia in order to be part of a larger community. These photographs evidence the shift from what he described as "going through the motions" to finding a sense of self and, subsequently, purpose.

Of this session, Lisa Jack described it as initially awkward. "Barry" showed up to the shoot with a bomber jacket, flared jeans, a pack of cigarettes and a Panama hat he thought would look "cool." Initially, he posed self-consciously, but as the shoot progressed, the personality and charisma we would all later bear witness to emerged. He began asking questions, which was unusual since normally the photographer asks questions in an effort to draw out the sitter's personality. According to Jack, the key to Obama's personality was his desire to understand where one comes from and how that determines one's sense of self. Being herself a young undergrad, her interests did not lie at the time with questions of identity and selfhood, but rather she secretly hoped that "Barry" would ask her out afterward. He did not, and although pleased with the photographs, they did not maintain contact afterwards, until a random chance encounter 28 years later in Washington DC. Lisa Jack ceased photographing and went on to pursue psychology and is currently a professor of Counseling Psychology at Augsburg College. After having her one roll of film from that day sit neglected for almost thirty years, Jack now offers up these images "so that others may see a side to him [she has] yet to observe captured in the maelstrom of contemporary media".

Location: M+B, 612 North Almont Drive, Los Angeles, CA 90069
Show Title: LISA JACK: BARACK OBAMA: THE FRESHMAN
Dates and Opening: May 28 – August 29, 2009; Opening: Thursday, May 28, 6-9pm
Gallery Hours: Tuesday – Saturday, 10am-6pm and by appointment

For more info, please contact Shannon Richardson at M+B at 310.550.0050 or shannon@mbart.com