

ARUDE MAGAZINE

By Stephen Greco ISSUE # 21, 2004 pages 48-51

Timothy Greenfield-Sanders

Hot Stuff

Timothy Greenfield-Sanders may be the only photographer to have shot both the best-known senator of our time, Hillary Rodham Clinton, and the biggest adult film star, Jenna Jameson. The man who captured Ruth Bader Ginsberg for the *New York Times* magazine and George W. Bush for *Good Housekeeping* has also immortalized porn legends Seymore Butts and Sunrise Adams — proof not only of his commitment to documenting the breadth of the contemporary cultural landscape, but his legendary ability to make anyone comfortable in front of the camera.

After decades as the go-to guy for probing portraits of prominent political and cultural figures, and having created a historic series of portraits from the art world, Greenfield-Sanders decided several years ago to turn his attention to the rarefied world of pornography. It was the death of Linda Lovelace that initially inspired his two-year study: "That industry was changing," he says, "and

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I'd been thinking about it for a while." Consulting friends about whom to shoot, he started booking top porn stars; garnering some publicity for his new project, he suddenly found himself coping with "a feeding frenzy." The result of that frenzy can be seen this month, with Bulfinch Press bringing out *XXX: 30 Porn-Star Portraits*; New York's Mary Boone gallery opening a show of the portraits; and HBO premiering a special about the shoot and its subjects, directed by Greenfield-Sanders himself.

The book is great fun, with essays from luminaries like Gore Vidal, Salman Rushdie, Fay Wattleton, Nancy Friday, Simon Dumenco, and — why not? — Whitley Strieber. Its cover of a clothed Jenna Jameson is removable, revealing Jenna nude. Indeed, the entire *XXX* project bubbles over with a kind of exuberant wisdom — testament to the openness and savviness of many members of the porn industry, and to Greenfield-Sanders' powers of engagement.

The photographer spoke with *aRude* in his East Village headquarters, a former church rectory he shares with wife Karin.

Stephen Greco: I first heard about this project when we ran into each other at an erotic expo where I was pushing my book. I was so surprised to see you there!

Timothy Greenfield-Sanders: That's right, at Webster Hall. My interest goes back to having seen *Boogie Nights*, being so impressed with (its) brilliance, the way this director played out these lives — lives I had no connection to. It struck me that this would be an interesting world to capture.

You were going to approach the world of porn as you did the art world — asking who the players were?

Absolutely. Who are these people? How do they see themselves? How do they dress? I



Photography Timothy Greenfield-Sanders
This Page Sunrise Adams



Photography Timothy Greenfield-Sanders
 This Page At work on XXX in his New York City Studio
 Opposite Page Sunrise Adams

thought clothed might be more interesting than nude. But I was only thinking about the idea. Then Beauregard (Houston Montgomery) called one day and said he had a friend who was a porn star. He asked if I wanted to meet him. When they came over, the guy was fabulously dressed, in a tight T-shirt and jeans — very hustler, very look-at-me-on-the-street. So we did a portrait like that and then the guy said, "OK, now let's do the nude one." I immediately thought, let's just do the same pose. That'll be interesting. On top of which, it plays off Goya (the naked and clothed majas).

Did you immediately start booking other porn stars?
 Actually, I put it off. Then 9/11 happened and I became depressed and didn't want to do anything. I couldn't really get excited about any project. I felt depressed about the way the Bush Administration was using this moment to take over the world. Then, in 2002, Linda Lovelace died. I thought, *If I'm serious about this project, I should really start doing it.* So I started to talk to people.

The project took off as a kind of affirmation of life?
 In a way. I had done a portrait that really worked, and I liked the idea of doing nudes — it was new for me. In my book (*Timothy Greenfield-Sanders, 2001, Alberico Cetti Serbelloni Editore*), Demetrio (Paparoni) talks to me about the fact that I don't have any nudes.

I only do the face; it's all about the mind and the way people look — the thinking person.

I thought about the possibility that maybe I'd avoided sexuality in my work. And then there was Linda's death ...

An era was passing.
 I know from past experience that if you don't move fast, someone's going to die. I was doing the abstract expressionists twenty-five years ago, and I missed Clyfford Still (1904 – 1980), Philip Guston (1913-1980), and Harold Rosenberg (1906-1978). I thought, I just missed Linda Lovelace; how can you do all the great porn stars without Linda Lovelace?

How did you decide whom to shoot?
 I knew two or three names from straight porn, though I don't watch porn. I knew who Nina Hartley was, Jenna Jameson, Tara Patrick. I'd heard of Brianna Banks. A friend of mine knew Matthew Bank, the publisher of *HX*, who was producing a gay erotic convention. Matthew gave me a pass.

Looking at these photographs, a viewer might not even know what industry these people belong to, let alone their sexual practices. I love how automatically post-political the whole project feels. There's no pleading for legitimacy.

I very much wanted the book and the film to be non-judgmental.
 You've photographed Presidents, First Ladies, big stars in art, music, literature, film. Did you approach your porn stars in the same way as all those distinguished folk?

Over the years, I've been able to have a conversation with almost anyone, because there's always some topic we can talk about. Though with Bush it was virtually impossible, because I don't know a lot about biking — and if I had spoken truthfully, the session wouldn't have lasted very long. With the porn stars, there were two issues. One, they're very open people — about sex, about everything. At the same time, they're nude, and that was very uncomfortable for me, at first. But as a photographer, if you're not comfortable, they're not comfortable, and you're not getting the best picture. I always kind of soothe the subject through the studio, to the camera, to where they're standing there in front of me, feeling their best. I needed to learn how to do that with people who were totally naked. It was a little awkward at first, but then you get very comfortable because they're so comfortable. They're so proud of what they do.

You move in a certain circle, Timothy — with stars, celebrities. Are there now porn stars in your posse?

Some of them have become friends. I have great respect for them. Some of the ones I've gotten to know are very smart people. What they have in common — aside from maybe obvious things like exhibitionism and ... well, not sex addiction, because that's a negative way of putting it — what they have in common is tremendous drive. And that's the world I've always covered.

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