

DOUBLE EXPOSURE

DAVID RIMANELLI ON TIMOTHY GREENFIELD-SANDERS'S XXX

IN 1990, I DID A FEATURE on '80s-era gay-porn idol Jeff Stryker for *Interview* magazine, where former *Artforum* editor Ingrid Sischy had recently taken the helm. I had pitched a story on Stryker—and also one on Porsche Lynn, a star of the straight adult-film industry at the time—and the idea was received with considerable enthusiasm. I met Stryker at a West Hollywood bistro. The substance of our conversation, to the extent that I can remember it, was exceedingly banal: Mr. Stryker seemed unwilling or incapable of providing any deep insights into his chosen career, or even some titillating details, although he did chat amiably about his hobby, marine tropical fish tanks. But this lack of eloquence or nuts-and-bolts information scarcely mattered. The premise had always been that pornography was gradually entering the mainstream of American culture. The very fact that *Interview* was running the story demonstrated this very process, albeit perhaps not in a manner that would satisfy most logicians. The magazine flew Stryker to New York, where the artists McDermott & McGough photographed him to his great advantage in their characteristic blue-tinted, Olde Timey style. Simply by doing a multipage feature on a “famous” porn star, *Interview*, with its heterogeneous readership and its perpetual focus on the up-and-coming as well as established celebrities of movies, music, and fashion, bestowed, however briefly, the imprimatur of mainstream American pop culture on the star of such flicks as *Powertool* and *Bigger Than Life*.

Fourteen years later, Timothy Greenfield-Sanders, the tremendously successful photographer of presidents, Supreme Court justices, movie and music stars, famous writers, and the full panoply of artists, dealers, and critics who constitute the art world, has turned his large-format 8 x 10 Deardorff camera on the parallel universe of pornographic stardom. In October, Greenfield-Sanders releases *XXX*, a trifecta of projects—“Triple X, triple venues,” he says—



“THE MOST UNCOMFORTABLE POSITION IS REVERSE COWGIRL,” PORN STAR GINA LYNN EXPLAINS, PROVIDING THE TRUE INSIDER’S VANTAGE ON THE EXIGENCIES OF MAKING THE CINEMATIC MAGIC POSSIBLE.

devoted to a selection of exemplary stars culled from the realm of adult film: a book of photographic diptychs depicting with candor yet tact thirty porn stars, first in their street clothes and on the facing page, naked; an accompanying exhibition at Mary Boone Gallery; and an HBO documentary, sort of like “Real Sex with Timothy Greenfield-Sanders.” He approaches his subjects with the same crisp, unencumbered style he brings to any public figure, be it Madeleine Albright or Monica Lewinsky, Peter Halley or Kenny Scharf, Susan Sontag or Julia Child. Simply put, Greenfield-Sanders is Mainstream par excellence. Having photographed Hillary Clinton, Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter, George and Barbara Bush, and—the day before I met with him to see a rough cut of the HBO documentary—George W. and Laura Bush, he certainly provides a species of legitimation to the subjects of this latest body of work. And they know it.

“My husband says porn is desperately trying to clean up its act so that it can become trash,” she relates. “The mainstreaming of porn will only go so far, because ours is still a very puritanical culture, but also because porn is geared toward niche markets, very particular fetishes, very distinct types of models. Also, the appropriate response to porn is arousal, which is inappropriate in a multiplex setting.”

Another star of *XXX* is Michael Lucas, a Russian-born Jew who emigrated to the West in 1995, moving first to Paris before ultimately settling in New York, where he is a producer, director, and often actor in films made by his own very successful company, Lucas Entertainment. “It’s great to be photographed by an artist who also shoots presidents and Hollywood stars,” comments this Cecil B. De Porn. “I’ve been lucky, fortunate, chosen—a worldwide famous entrepreneur in the gay arena. Of



Top: Timothy Greenfield-Sanders with Briana Banks, 2004. Bottom: Timothy Greenfield-Sanders, *Thinking XXX*, 2004, still from a documentary program on HBO, 40 minutes. From left: Kim Goodwin, Gore Vidal, Timothy Greenfield-Sanders, and Jordan Schaps.

course I'd rather be in Hollywood, but I'm not waiting for miracles like some fools. I am very happy doing what I am doing now. When gay-porn models say they just do it for the money, they're lying. For money you can do many things with minimal risk. It's the desire to be famous and be photographed, the same desire to perform they had as kids posing in front of the mirror." Lucas evinces diffidence regarding the whole mainstreaming "issue": "I'm gay and that is even more stigma than porn alone. Nina Hartley has a heterosexual population watching her, so maybe she has more mainstream chances. For female actresses in straight porn, this is their moment. For me, it's more difficult. I'm very thankful that Timothy chose to include some gay stars in his book." I mention to Lucas that when I first visited Greenfield-Sanders to check out XXX, there were two giant nude photographs on facing walls, one of Jenna Jameson and another of Chad Hunt, a friend of Lucas's who has appeared in many of his films. "That was a mistake on the part of the artist," he says smiling. "Of course the picture should have been of me." I wonder aloud if this should be off the record, given Lucas's professional and amicable relationship with Hunt—who, by the way, has an eleven-inch penis that "always stays hard," Lucas says approvingly. "Write it down," he insists, evidently still very amused. "What's Chad Hunt going to do, stop taking my checks?" I also mention to Lucas that in an alcove of the studio Greenfield-Sanders had hung his portrait of the elder Bushes. "I think they should be in [XXX], just for fun, with a huge dildo stuck up the old granny's ass."

The question of porn's entry into the mainstream of American culture comes up frequently in Greenfield-Sanders's documentary, which, jokes aside, is vastly more compelling viewing than the slack tedium of the actual "Real Sex" programming on HBO. (I'm reminded here of a *Mad* TV segment parodying a fairly recent advertising campaign for the adventuresome cable channel: "HBO. It's not just television. It's porn.") Gina Lynn has appeared in an Eminem video and also on *The Sopranos*, but like Hartley she doesn't think of these opportunities as a hinge in her career from porn to "normal" (pardon yet more scare quotes, they're inescapable here) work in the entertainment industry: "When people see me on television, it brings them back to my website—my handcuffs, I have my whole bondage line, my ass and pussy mold." Tera Patrick takes a more ambivalent, not to say rueful, attitude toward her job: "You come into this business, you give up a lot. You kind of give up your soul, in a way. Once you do porn there's no going back. . . . As mainstream as the industry wants to go, there's still a big stigma attached to porn stars." Greenfield-Sanders's film largely steers clear of the abused-child/teenage-runaway narrative that girds much of the public perception of how these individuals entered into their particular line of work, but at least one female star attests (in a segment ultimately cut from

the documentary for legal reasons) that she started in porn out of pure financial necessity, because she had to support her younger sister, having gained custody of her from their mother: "I knew my mother wasn't sober. She beat us . . . put knives to my throat, threw turkeys at me, simply insane stuff." Busty Briana Banks doesn't bother considering other media-world trajectories: "I couldn't walk into Elite and say 'Hey.' You know, they would look at me and turn their noses up. I have big fake boobs to start with. . . . I made it, just halfway." Still, few of the women are sad sacks, and most of them speak humorously, if rather frankly, about what they do. "The most uncomfortable position is reverse cowgirl, and I'm sure every girl will tell you that," Gina Lynn explains, providing the true insider's vantage on the exigencies of making the cinematic magic possible.

What is really at stake probably isn't the purported mainstreaming of pornography but the ever more startling apparitions of the pornographic within the mass media. Witness the career thus far of hotel heiress Paris Hilton, whose "pirated" amateur porno appeared just weeks before her television series, *The Simple Life*. The ready availability of the video over the Internet didn't compromise the success of the TV show; probably it enhanced it. The widespread dissemination of Hilton's video—which bears a bizarre resemblance, stylistically, to *The Blair Witch Project*—just before *The Simple Life* aired looks like a strategic decision, in other words, a publicity stunt. (Recent reports of a hefty out-of-court settlement do nothing to disabuse us of such suspicions.) Then there is the way Hilton is often photographed, not by paparazzi, but by professional photographers. I was astounded by her image on the cover of the what-guys-like magazine *FHM*: the face shockingly hard, the body greased up; she looked considerably older than her actual twenty-three years. Did the editors want to purvey an image of Hilton as a veteran hooker sans heart of gold? A personal anecdote: One friend of mine in Los Angeles happens to live right next door to Paris Hilton. When another friend of mine saw Hilton alight from a Porsche, he said to Friend #1, "Who is that *ravishingly beautiful creature*?" So she must be pretty at the very least,



but there must be a market that wants to see her styled like a worn-out slag. Then there is Real Sex with Snoop Dogg, where the rapper acts as emcee (but nonparticipant) in an *outrageously filthy* gangbang video (*Doggystyle*); the sound track is, like, totally *dope*. I'd rather skip an excursus on J.Lo, Lil' Kim, et al. making grand entrances at various awards shows in outfits that plainly derive their inspiration from pornography, *but*—these stars enjoy looking like sluts, and America likes to see them that way. Forget about style rags, whether mainstream (naughty but still nice) or alternative (e.g., *Butt*, *Vice*, *Richardson*: naughty, not nice). Rather than mainstreaming pornography, pop culture leeches pornographic topoi from source material that remains, pretty much, cordoned off within its own realm. Maybe this is way fun and even liberating; maybe it's sick. I've never felt a fake boob, but I'd like to. □

David Rimanelli is a contributing editor of *Artforum*.

Top: **Timothy Greenfield-Sanders, Jenna Jameson Diptych, 2003**, color photographs, each 60 x 48". Bottom: **Timothy Greenfield-Sanders, Chad Hunt Diptych, 2003**, color photographs, each 60 x 48".