

Exposing the Exposed

TIMOTHY GREENFIELD-SANDERS' BOOK "XXX: 30 PORN-STAR Portraits" (Bulfinch Press, October), features nude photographs of porn stars juxtaposed against shots of them fully dressed. Ironically it's the clothed portraits that are the most telling.

The photos are bracketed by essays from 15 literary heavyweights performers and activists, including Salman Rushdie, A.M. Homes, Francine du Plessix Gray, John Malkovich, Nancy Friday and Gore Vidal, who weigh in on the highly charged subject of pornography.

Rushdie's essay, "The East is Blue," is about repressive Eastern countries where pornography is flourishing and mullahs — who once executed prostitutes — are unable to stop the offending tidal wave from engulfing the culture. Homes' "Porn A to Z" is a deft piece of alliteration filled with sexual metaphors. "Thou Shalt Not," by Faye Wattleton, president of the Center for Gender Equality and past president of Planned Parenthood, argues that the hypocritical view that sexuality occurs only in the context of marriage is evidence of why pornography flourishes underground.

Du Plessix Gray, who contributed an excerpt from her book "Sade: The Big Daddy of Porn," said in an interview on Friday that "clothing creates illusion and when you have no illusion you've got nothing else. The triumph of the book will be that we might end up saying how much sexier the characters are with their clothing."

"Sexual erotica has been around for a long time," said Wattleton. "Sex is not something that's supposed to be forbidden. How about if we try saying it's wonderful and enhances our lives as human beings. Someone of Timothy's stature undertaking this project to open up this subject, which remains largely as a taboo, gives it a salience and a buoyancy."

Greenfield-Sanders wanted writers with a cross section of opinions. He reached out to conservative authors, but said, "There are anti-porn writers who won't engage in a dialogue. It's unfortunate. I would have liked to have someone radically against it."

Greenfield-Sanders, who works in series, is noted for his portraits of artists, writers, actors and architects. At the behest of Fern Mallis, the former executive director of the Council of Fashion Designers of America, Greenfield-Sanders last year photographed 75 of the organization's members for a gallery show and possible book.

"My approach to portraiture is all about making people into human beings," he said. "I was 100 percent surprised by the porn stars as people. My perceptions were very clichéd and very misguided."

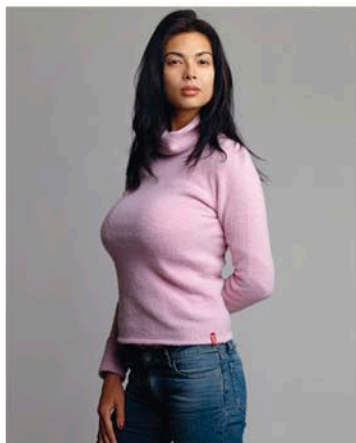
"XXX" has taken on a life of its own, spawning a documentary, "Thinking XXX," airing on HBO next month and directed and produced by Greenfield-Sanders, an exhibition of larger-than-life-size prints at the Mary Boone Gallery in New York the same month and a CD of the film's soundtrack.

"All my work is about people who've impacted society and the popular culture," he said. "Porn stars have had an amazing impact. They've certainly influenced style. They're hugely influential in music videos and have been particularly influential in fashion in terms of loosening things up and being bling-y. Just ask Madonna."

On a recent morning in a darkened studio of the downtown post-production facility, Outpost Digital, Greenfield-Sanders, an online editor and the film's editor, Lukas Hauser, were putting the finishing touches on the final print. The photographer leaned back and began discussing the genesis of his latest work.

"I'd been thinking of shooting porn stars because I'd never shot nudes," he said. "I thought they'd be more comfortable nude."

He first became interested in the denizens of the adult film in-



dustry after seeing "Boogie Nights," Paul Thomas Anderson's film based loosely on the life of real-life porn legend John Holmes starring Burt Reynolds, Julianne Moore and Mark Wahlberg.

"I thought, this is such an interesting group of people."

While it's doubtful many of the book's readers will make the connection, Greenfield-Sanders said the photographs were inspired by Goya, whose "Nude Maja" and "Clothed Maja" painted in 1804 caused a flurry in the Spanish court. "I wanted to shoot them clothed and unclothed in the same position," he said. "I always think in artistic terms."

In the film, the actors strip off their armor and lay bare candid and often poignant reflections on their lives.

"The film is very human," Greenfield-Sanders said. "You see the porn stars as people rather than as sex objects."

But some of them view themselves as just that. "I chose to be in the industry," said a platinum bleached-blond, Jessie Jane. "I'm very sexually aware. I'm choosing to make myself a sex symbol."

Heather Hunter, an African-American performer, said, "I came from a family that was like the Huxtables. I think I'm the Halle Berry of porn."

Greenfield-Sanders makes the analogy between adult film actors and boxers who use their bodies to attain a certain level of fame and fortune. But the price can be steep. "The body gets bruised," he said. "There's this wear and tear on the body."

Then there's the psyche. Tera Patrick, a beautiful brunette, in the film looks toward the camera and confesses: "I wanted to be a nurse. You come into this business and you give up a lot. You give up your soul in a way."

Jenna Jameson, arguably the most successful female performer of the decade, seems to have few regrets about her chosen profession. A shrewd entrepreneur, her empire includes a money-making Web site and recent book, "How to Make Love Like a Porn Star," published by HarperCollins' Regan Books imprint. The book and a pictorial of her home in the New York Times are further proof, if any is needed, that pornography has gone mainstream.

Greenfield-Sanders said it's a matter of supply and demand.

"People want to watch other people having sex."

— Sharon Edelson