Books

Porn in the USA

XXX: 30 Porn-Star Portraits, by Timothy Greenfield-Sanders ’74CC. Bulfinch Press. $35.

Winter 2004-05

Boy, 2004 sure seemed to be the year of the porn book. That is, books about what used to be porn. There was hardly a week last fall when a news-paper of record or a general-interest magazine didn’t run a review of Jenna Jameson’s best-selling autobiography or ex-ballerina Toni Bentley’s specialized “erotic memoir,” both from legit publishing house HarperCollins.

But the volume that may have attracted the most serious attention was *XXX: 30 Porn-Star Portraits* by Timothy Greenfield-Sanders ’74CC. It arrived on the scene in October, accompanied by an exhibition at the Mary Boone Gallery and followed a few months later by an HBO documentary. The book has received flattering write-ups everywhere from *The New Yorker to Artforum*. Greenfield-Sanders is renowned for his thousands of elegant portraits of political and artistic celebrities, such as Orson Welles, Lou Reed, Hillary Clinton, Nicole Kidman, Willem de Kooning, David Bowie, Jimmy Carter, and George Bush, all taken with a large-format antique view camera. His memorable portrait of Madeleine Albright is currently on display in your hand, and he provided the cover images for *Columbia’s* last two issues as well.

For his third book, Greenfield-Sanders invited a group of current and former adult-video stars up to his studio to get comfortable. Or maybe not so comfortable. The idea behind *XXX* — the triple X being not just the rating, but also the Roman number of performers photographed — was to pair a star’s clothed portrait with a nude portrait on the facing page. While the two poses are identical for a given subject, the expressions vary. Some people are clearly more comfy when overexposed.

With an introduction by Gore Vidal, *XXX* offers essays by the likes of Salman Rushdie (on pornography censorship in Pakistan, India, and Iran), Francine du Plessix Gray (on the Marquis de Sade, the “big daddy of porn”), and Lou Reed (who contributes a composite of X-rated e-mail spam). Little autobiographical pieces at the back of the

book by each subject are revealing in a between-the-lines kind of way. Actress Jesse Jane’s is typical: “Because of unfair stereotyping, many people think that the adult world is bad and that it uses and abuses women, but that’s not the case. Anyone in this business chose to be in this business. We are comfortable and strong and confident enough to use our sexual power to be successful.”



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