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This is hardcore: An exhibit of Timothy Greenfield-Sanders's portraits at John Berggruen Gallery bares the adult-film star circuit
By Glen Helfand

PORN STARS ARE the tenuous icons of our age. In the year that saw America oh so shocked by the unexpected sight of Janet Jackson's breast, hardcore actress Jenna Jameson became a best-selling author with her memoir, *How to Make Love like a Porn Star: A Cautionary Tale* (ReganBooks). That status earned her a *New York Times* profile (and led to the departure of *Times* writer Neil Strauss, who cowrote her book and allegedly left the paper due to the conflict of interest) and the mainstream celebrity cachet that comes with it. Unlike *Deep Throat's* Linda Lovelace, whose autobiographical musings were tragic (as was her death in 2002) long after her movie boasted an above-ground chic, Jameson is a steely, implant-aided business success story. While Lovelace's name is directly associated with a single film, Jameson is less known for specific titles – *I Dream of Jenna*, anyone? – than for her broader identity as an A-list porn star.

If you haven't seen her in films, you've probably seen Jameson's widely published portrait by photographer Timothy Greenfield-Sanders. The blond actress poses with her arms crossed, looking directly at the camera with clear blue eyes. Her expression is serene, her hair fashionably straight, and her bare breasts formidable. She's the cover girl for Greenfield-Sanders's *XXX: 30 Porn Star Portraits* (Bulfinch), a series of images of clothed and unclothed straight and gay porn stars (Seymore Butts, Nina Hartley, Ron Jeremy, and Michael Lucas among them) that has turned into a veritable cross-media extravaganza: it's a book (with 16 erudite pieces by an impressive array of writers and intellectuals such as Salman Rushdie, Nancy Friday, and Gore Vidal), a traveling exhibition, an HBO documentary (*Thinking XXX*, which premiered last October), and a CD soundtrack with sexy ditties by Peaches, Ladytron, and the Velvet Underground. A selection of the photographs is currently on view at John Berggruen Gallery, a venue that's more often associated with tasteful blue-chip artists. The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art has already blazed a path with sex industry-themed photography exhibitions by Regan Louie and Larry Sultan, and while those works have a breezier, more pop-cultural relationship to their subject, the *XXX* show may become part of a dialogue on contemporary manifestations of sex and celebrity.

Famous faces

Greenfield-Sanders is a highly successful portrait photographer who has made images of some of the most important and famous people of our age: Andy Warhol, President Bush senior and junior, and a thousand members of the art world. In a recent phone conversation, it was easy to get a sense of his manner: he's witty, forthright, and a clear

leftist who frequently mentions his distaste for the current American political climate as he discusses his most visible project to date.

"Before this project, I had never photographed anyone nude besides Karen Finley and Jeff Koons, who insisted on being photographed being nude. He was with Italian porn star Cicciolina at the time and was into that. I wanted to do something different with it," he said.

"When I started this project, I intended to shoot them with their clothes on. It seemed more radical," he confessed. But the first XXX actor he worked with wanted to pose nude, which brought out a different side of the subject's personality. The combination of the nude and clothed images, the photographer explained, created more nuanced portraits. The pictures literally look at the ways in which porn stars compose their on- and off-screen identities, though, of course, they also offer the pleasures of looking at exposed flesh and at how massive breasts and penises come across when clothed.

If there is a common thread through his work, it's that Greenfield-Sanders documents groups of people joined by a profession – artists, musicians, architects, and currently comedians – who invoke a concept of community. But is the porn scene one? "It's not as much of a community as you would think," he said. "Some have fucked each other; there's a strong connection in that sense." But, of course, there's just as much competition as there is with, say, artists. "If you can survive the art world, you can definitely survive the porn world," he jested.

Peek experience

Porn, however, has a much wider audience. Greenfield-Sanders pointed to Amazon.com sales rankings as a barometer. Art photo books are definitely peanuts in the quantity department. But instead of ranking number 165,000, XXX peaked at 39 on the Amazon list.

"Porn stars have become mainstream, but porn has not," he said. "In a sense you can make a celebrity of anyone – America is good at making anyone a celebrity. Think about reality shows. Porn stars *are* stars, they are beautiful, and they are sought after by the machine that is searching for new mainstream celebrities. But I don't think porn itself will ever be mainstream. It's too blatant; it's a bit too hardcore," he said.

The idea that porn has become mainstream is contentious, perhaps contributing to a backlash revival of what some call "moral values." Greenfield-Sanders's stance is humanistic. "'Moral values' is not starting a war," he said. "How can you care about a fetus and not care about a person who is already alive [in Iraq]?"

There's irony in the fact that last year he also photographed George W. Bush and Laura Bush (as well as John Kerry). "As a subject, [Bush] was very good. He's a pro – more of a pro than the other presidents that I've shot, and I've photographed quite a few. I didn't connect to him the way I was able to connect to his father," Greenfield-Sanders said. As a

result of the shoot, Greenfield-Sanders ended up in the interesting position of providing one degree of separation between the Bushes and Jameson.

"I approach all of these shoots with a common technique of making people feel comfortable," he added. "I talked about biking with the president; I talk about building with architects." *XXX*, on the other hand, posed an interesting etiquette question: "Do you compliment porn stars about their breast or penis size? I quickly found out that you do."

Selections from Timothy Greenfield-Sander's *XXX: 30 Porn-Star Portraits* are on exhibit through Feb. 12 at John Berggruen Gallery, 228 Grant, S.F. Gallery hours: Mon.-Fri., 9:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m.; Sat., 10:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m. (415) 781-4629, www.greenfield-sanders.com