

MODEL

A PHOTOGRAPHER CAPTURES
EROTIC LIVING DOLLS

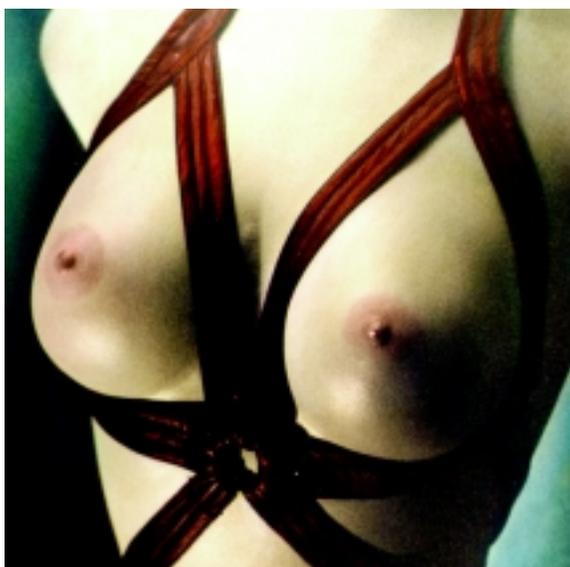
You stare longingly at a photo of a tall remote brunette. Her gaze is cool and seductive; her pert nipples poke alluringly through her blouse, inviting your glance, perhaps your hands. And then you take a second look. Where her wrist should join her arm, there is a seam. Where her shoulder and torso should connect, there is another gap. She has removable limbs. She is not real. She is beautiful. She is plastic.

For the past five years, Los Angeles photographer Lanning Gold has produced a series of striking photographs of display-window mannequins. Gold shoots them in black and white, and later hand colors the photos to capture eerily realistic personages. His ability to draw a highly erotic image from an inanimate subject has resulted in a line of popular greeting cards that feature the mannequins, wearing everything from bridal gowns to bondage gear.

IMAGE

Interview by Janet Ginsburg





CHIC: How do you decide which mannequins to photograph?

Lanning Gold: The first response is from me driving by in the car. If I see something that catches my eye, I go around the block, or slam on my brakes and get out to take a closer look at whatever it was that attracted me to the window. It's almost a voyeuristic thing. When I drive around at night looking for interesting windows, the sexier mannequins are the ones I'm drawn to. Even if they are conservatively dressed, if there is something about the pose, the angle, the way her head is tilted, or if she's looking flirtatious—if there is a certain flirtatious look about her, I'm going to try to capture that look.

CHIC: Do you remember the first one you shot?

Gold: I found a mannequin with her tongue sticking out. How often do you see a mannequin with her tongue sticking out? I blew that one up to see what I could do with it. That was the first one. After that, the others were a lot easier.

CHIC: The girls all have very different expressions. Some of them are demure or coy, some of them are sassier. How do you determine their attitudes?

Gold: They already have a certain look. I capture that and enhance them by coloring them and giving them makeup. The transformation makes them appear to be real. It all comes together quite naturally.

CHIC: Their expressions never actually change, but you get different looks out of them.

Gold: When you photograph live models, certain angles make them look more hard-core, and with other angles they look so sweet and innocent. Then you move the camera, and their whole look is different. It's kind of the same thing here, only it's harder, because these are fiberglass people who look incredibly fake from most angles. Once you get her head to look right, sometimes her body is wrong—the shoulders and arms are twisted the wrong way, because whoever set the thing up didn't set it up quite right.

CHIC: People looking at these pictures find the women attractive, and then realize they're plastic dolls. As soon as they realize that, you see the shock register in their minds. Is that something that you're looking to get from a viewer?

Gold: I love shocking the audience.

CHIC: There's a perfect kind of beauty about the mannequins.

Gold: I wouldn't say that they represent the perfect woman or they don't. They are just like real people. Originally, a sculptor used a live model to create these things. So, in one way, these are sculptures of real women.

CHIC: Why do you think these photographs provoke human responses from people, even after they're aware that the subjects are plastic?

Gold: The ways the photos are put together creates an intimacy. At the same time, there is a little distance. Almost intimate but not quite. There's an invitation to try to get to know them. You want to see more.

Like any kind of art, it's a representation. Whether it's a photograph or a drawing, it's a representation of the female form. The female form is the most beautiful form there is. People are attracted to women. Women are attracted to women. I've found that women are attracted to [the mannequins] as much as men are, if not more. Men are into shapes, the curves, the sexiness of the woman. Women might find the clothing, the makeup and the pose attractive. Ultimately, people are just drawn to the female form. Whether it's an illustration, or a representation of women in the form of mannequins.

CHIC: Do you prefer working with the mannequins as opposed to humans?

Gold: I've always loved working with people. I still do work with people all the time. The difference between this and shooting real people is that normally I would interact with the subject. Here, there is no interactions. It's frustrating to shoot through a store window and try to make a mannequin look real. On the other hand, they

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don't talk back, they stay still, and they never complain.

CHIC: And they're not shy.

Gold: And they never get tired.

CHIC: What kind of response have the cards generated?

Gold: I get a lot of positive and negative response. Some store owners think that the stuff is too raunchy. It depends. I actually have two sets within the mannequin series. I have the nice girls and the naughty girls. So I target some stores for the nice girls, and some for the naughty, and at some stores I'll do both.

CHIC: Which ones are more popular, the nice girls or the naughty?

Gold: Definitely the naughty girls.

CHIC: Now these bondage ones, and the ones with the nipple rings and harnesses—are you drawn to those because they're different than others?

Gold: I'm not going to photograph something that's boring. I'm not going to photograph a model in a summer dress, but then again, if it's the right summer dress.... Clothing is 90% of what attracts me to a window. Whether it's bondage gear or a wedding gown, a leather outfit or topless with pasties. Then I look at the person underneath the clothes. If she looks real, I'll say, "I have to photograph this." If she looks fake, I just forget about that window because there is no potential.

CHIC: Do you ever shoot displays where there's a group of mannequins interacting with each other?

Gold: I actually prefer to have them looking at one another. I love a window where it looks like there's a party and everybody is having a good time.

CHIC: How long do you spend shooting them?

Gold: I try to get in and out as quickly as possible. If it looks good, I know immediately. I'll have that experience where I know I'm getting a great shot.

CHIC: Do you try to avoid photographing the joints?

Gold: I like to show the joints. Usually people don't see the joints initially. Once they take it all in, they see them, and they realize what they're looking at.

CHIC: It's a strange feeling to be attracted to these women and then realize that they aren't real. And yet it's not like they're suddenly ugly. They remain attractive. Some look so sexy and real, but if you look closely, they've got very obvious mannequin marks all over their bodies.

Gold: Those are the best ones. ✱

"Mannequin Man" greeting cards are available at novelty and stationary shops nation wide. More information is available by contacting Gold's Web site at <http://members.loop.com/~mannequin>

