

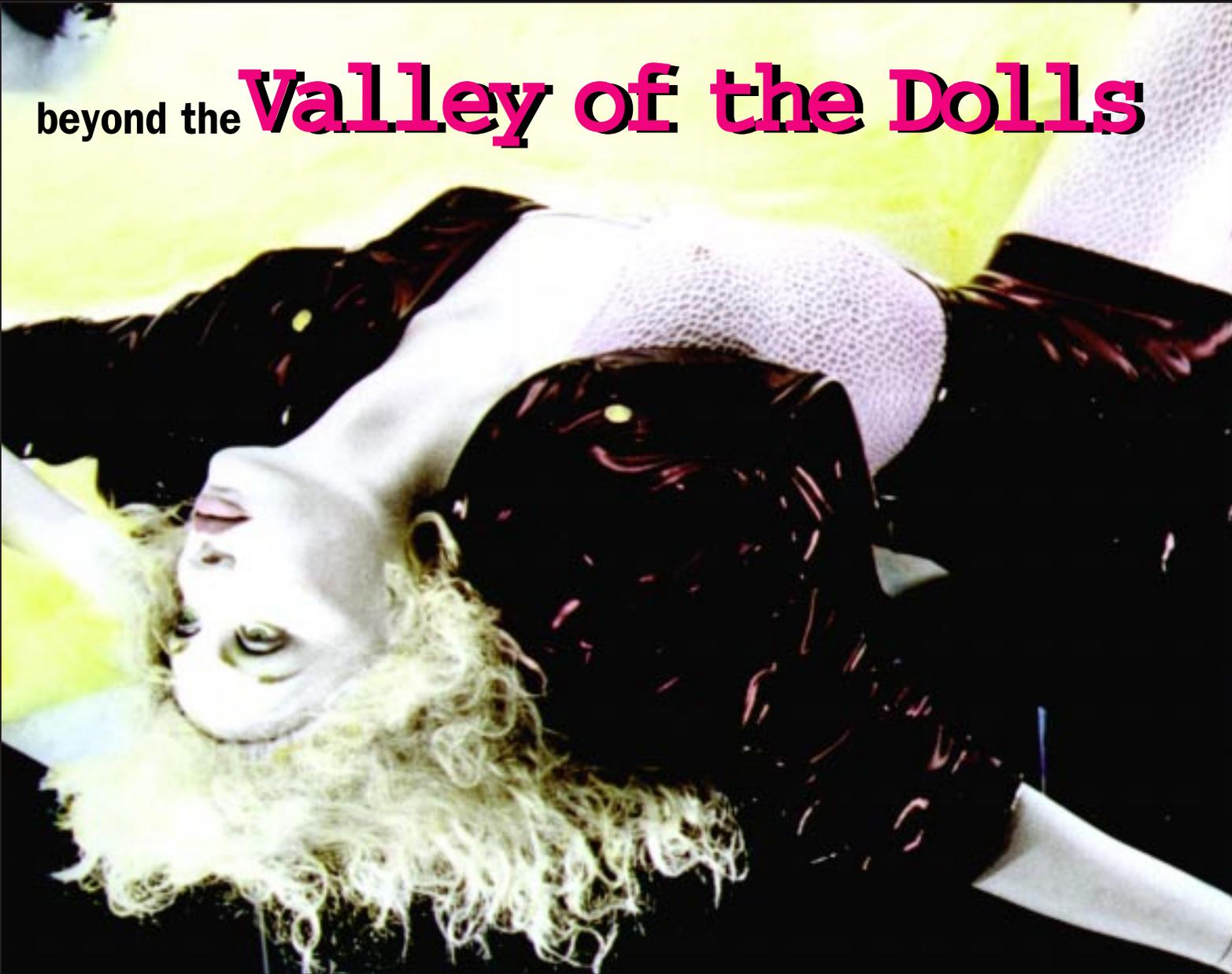
JUXTAPOZ
presents

Erotica

M A G A Z I N E

NUMBER IV SUMMER 99

beyond the **Valley of the Dolls**



Armed with transparent oil paint, Q-tips, and self-taught skills, **Lanning Gold** makes mannequins come alive. **Hee-Jean Kim** checks in to see what makes this man tick.

WHEN LANNING GOLD FIRST STARTED photographing mannequins five years ago, perhaps the novelty of his subject matter is what first got the attention of his viewers, but it is his use of vibrant colors, intimate compositions, and the simple celebration of beauty and sensuality captured in a human form that has maintained and captivated them. During an age when the intellectual concept of artwork has been stressed, his quest to make the object as beautiful as possible succeeds not only in touching the aesthetic nerve, but in encompassing the intellectual sphere by powerfully evoking the very question as to where lie the true lines between human and object, goddess and slave, and fantasy and reality.

Erotica: What exactly is your technique?

Lanning Gold: I start with a black and white photograph and then I hand-tint the image using transparent oil paints, and I use small brushes and cotton and Q-tips to blend the pigment onto the print. Once it's blended properly and I've layered the pigment so that it's either transparent or opaque depending on the effect I want, I've transformed the image.

Where do you find these mannequins? Are they all from storefronts?

Originally, for the first four years I was doing this series, I drove around Hollywood and other area in the middle of the night just looking for interesting store windows, and I would shoot from the sidewalk whatever mannequin I thought looked interesting—usually a window display of women that looked very provocative.

So this is something that you are specially looking for?

I am looking for something provocative, something enticing and sexy, something that I can work with. The whole thing came about kind of as an accident; I used to hang out with photography buddies of mine and we would do night photography, and one day I ran out of color film and I shot everything in black and white.

Your pieces seem so private and personal, but is it hard when you are actually shooting because you have a physical pane of glass dividing you and the mannequins?

Yeah, but as a photographer, when you're focusing on an image, the glass is not there. Whether I'm photographing a mannequin or I'm photographing an actor or a model for high fashion, I have the same frame of mind. Sometimes I don't even think of them as mannequins. I'm just trying to make whatever it is look as good as possible. And that's basically what every photographer should do—make every image look as good as possible whether it's a real person, or a mannequin, or a plate of fruit. You want to find the right angles and create a composition that's compelling.

Are mannequins modeled after real people?

Yes. They hire sculptors to do a sculpture and make a cast from that, and then they make the mannequins from the mold.

That must be interesting because you're taking a woman who was made into an object and taking the object and making her back into a woman.

Yeah. Somebody posed for these mannequins to begin with and I'm essentially bringing back to life what the sculptor was initially working with.

Do you think that there are things that are gained and lost in that process?

Sure there's a lot of the essence of the person that can be lost and refund. Sometimes, it depends on the wig that they're wearing; but the essence is always there.

What inspires you? I heard that you quoted Warhol and Man Ray.

I like a lot of stuff. I've always been a big fan of surrealism. I love Salvador Dali and Magritte. There's a certain surrealistic quality to my work. At the same time I was influenced in the seventies by Patrick Nagel.

Has fashion also influenced you?

Well, I love fashion. There's a certain fashion aspect in my work



because they're wearing clothing. I've never done anything with nude mannequins. I'm trying to come up with imagery that's enticing, but not overtly sexual and not pornographic in any way. Just enticing.

I heard that one of your first mannequins was the one with the tongue sticking out.

Yeah, that's Nasty; when I saw her in that store window, I had to photograph her. She's really sleazy, but there's something endearing about her and I wanted to capture that and see how real I can make her look.

Do you think there is a bit of that sleazy yet endearing quality in all of you work?

Yeah. Well, when I'm looking through the camera lens, at first, it's always frustrating because I am looking at something that looks fake. We're talking about a thirty-second experience where I'm looking through the camera lens and I'm going "no no no" and then all of a sudden there's a "yes." I've moved the camera a half inch and that made all the difference in the world. Now she looks alive. When I get the prints back, I go through that frustrating process again.

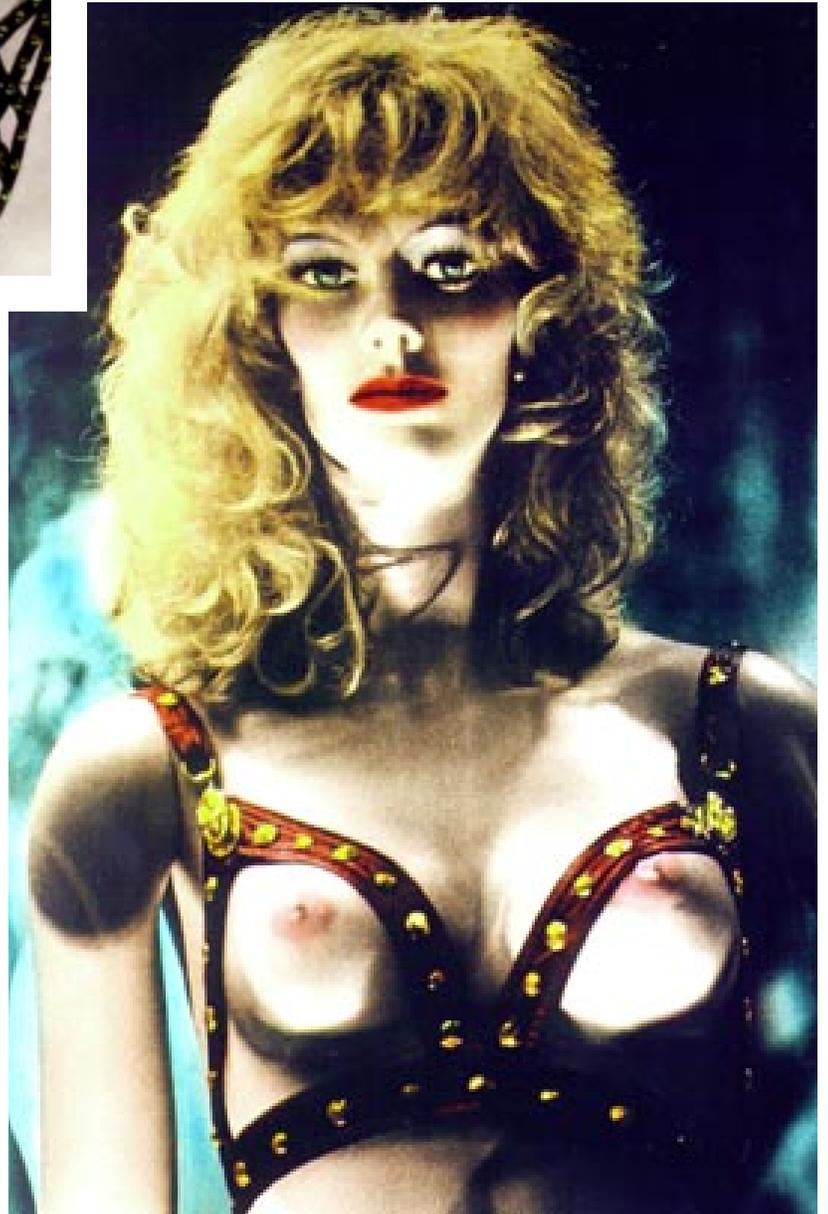
Do you find that certain looks get certain reactions?

I really don't care what people think anymore. I found from people I have sold my work to that after hanging my work in their homes, they get very dramatic and controversial reactions from people. Most men have very positive things to say about my work because they see the beautiful women. However, women who look at my work either love it because they feel that it is very powerful or they have a problem with it because they are attracted to the mannequins but at the same time don't like the fact that it objectifies women. I'll have fans who both love and hate the same piece at the same time. I guess that's good because it gives people something to talk about. "

Contact 323 936 5580 to obtain the art of Lanning Gold.



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