



Statue Worship: One Artist's Answer to the Perfect Woman

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Bound For Glory

If someone asks me where to find the ladies of the night, I'd tell them to visit Sunset and Vine in Hollywood -- until I met photographer Lanning Gold. Gold captures women in their self-pervasive element when he photographs mannequins in window displays, oftentimes leaving them appearing more "real" than their real counter parts. His camera lens encapsulates life in the dead faces of these cold, stoic creatures.

Gold's venture into mannequin photography began seventeen years ago, when he was out photographing late into the night with a group of friends. The friends would display their vibrant color photographs to each other on photo slides. One night Gold ran out of color film and all anyone had was a roll of black and white film. At that moment, they were shooting some mannequins in a store window and Gold used the black and white film.

"The next week my friends were laughing that (they) got some great color shots of the mannequins for the slide show and I didn't. And I thought I could color the photographs, then re-shoot them and put them on slides," said Gold.

The idea worked to Gold's advantage. His animated slides, painted to give life to each mannequin, stood apart from the other shots taken of the same subjects. However, he kept them in his portfolio for a number of years without giving any thought to their value.

"I was showing some art directors my work and had slipped in, by accident, the shots of the mannequins," said Gold. "I kept getting the response that they were really special -- so when I felt the time was right, I dedicated my self to doing the mannequin series."

Gold hand-tints each black and white photograph which results in a perfectly decorated mannequin that could easily pass for any of today's top models, delicately posed with a glazed look in their eye as they silently let Gold make love to them through his lens.

Gold's series runs two fold: the naughty girls and the nice girls. "I wanted to put out greeting cards, but not all stores wanted naughty girls," he continued, "so I thought it would be easier to split it into two series, the 'naughty and nice girls'." Splitting the two sexually diverse girls made it easier for him to market his work. "A lot of department stores won't touch the naughty stuff, but they love the nice stuff."

When Gold juxtaposes the "naughty" and "nice" girls, the photographs encapsulate the society's view of women. The nice girls -- pretty, demure, fully clothed -- project the image of silent women posing complacently for the camera, just as women pose an image to the external world. The naughty girls -- bound, exposed -- are night women, representing the internal, dark elements of feminine sexuality exposed only through Gold's photography.



Congressional Housewife

Gold ventures late into the night to find inspiration in the window displays of Los Angeles. "I'd say 75 percent of my work is still shot through store windows, while I am driving around in the middle of the night," said Gold. "Until I see an interesting window display, and slam on the breaks."

The other 25 percent, Gold confesses, are staged scenes done with mannequins in his own apartment. "Right now I have ten mannequins in my living room," said Gold. "Five of them are mine and five belong to a window dresser friend of mine. And I can use them whenever I get inspired."

Still, Gold notes, it is the tinting process, not the mannequins, that breathes life into the still, black and white photos. "The magic takes place a few months later," said Gold, "when I'm looking at the proof sheets and deciding which ones I'm going to blow-up and hand color."



The Wait

When Gold makes the decision to hand-tint and begins to work on individual photographs, he uses only colors from the 1920s and 30s. "The old-style colors are pretty amazing, and I kind of gravitate to them," said Gold. "Cerise and Carmine are the favorites that I use, to get those vivid shades of red."

In some ways Gold starts as a photographer and ends up a makeup artist. "I do the makeup," said Gold. "It all boils down to trial and error. Over the years I've added more eye shadow and tried interesting things with lipstick to try to make them look like the women you see in glamour magazines."

A new twist to Gold's series is lovers. "It's interesting because if I am going to get two mannequins to look like they are in bed, it's very difficult for a standing mannequin to look like she's resting in bed." To achieve this effect Gold had to use arms from other mannequins in order to make the women look soft and rested, rather than contrived and hard in their typical mannequin form.

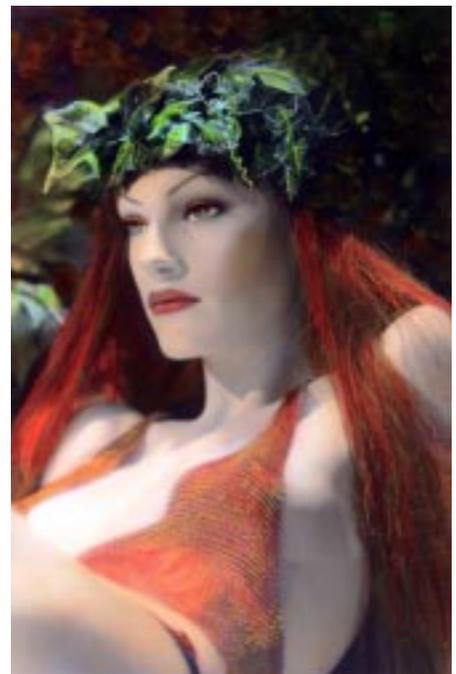
The public's response to his work is really positive. "Most of the time people love it, but once in a while I meet a feminist who gets really pissed off at me (about objectifying women)," said Gold. "Then I ask them if they hate my work, and they say they like it."

Gold said the bottom line is that he's enjoying doing his work regardless if people hate it or love it. "I have the respect and disapproval of other artists, but that doesn't matter. I'm having fun with it and that's what matters."

Although, Gold's critics accuse him of objectifying women, Gold says he is only mirroring how the rest of society looks at women. "I'm not objectifying women anymore than 90 percent of the magazines out there." Gold also notes that the window displays that he photographs are already there. The more provocative the displays are, the more enticing the items on sale are to the consumer.

Although Gold confesses that he can't pick a favorite of his "models," because it would be like picking a favorite child, there are ones that he favors to shoot. The mannequin from "The Wreath Goddess" and "The Wait" are among the most enjoyable.

Even though the mannequins are what has made Gold's name recognizable, he does commercial photography also. In fact, I found that he looks to make real women the object of his camera's desire, as well, when he offered to photograph me. "I could make you look better than any of them," he pointed to the mannequin photos. They say art imitates life, and it does—especially for Lanning Gold.



Wreath Goddess

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to reach lanning or see any more of his photography visit:
<http://www.lanninggold.com>

I've been to a number of Lanning Gold's shows & I must say his work is magnificent! The way he hand paints the photographs is so amazing, beautiful, sexy, and lifelike! Keep letting those mannequins inspire you Lanning! Peace & Joy. Denise Vasquez www.denisevasquez.com

Denise Vasquez
04.20.2004

I am here to speak on behalf of the mannequins. We feel that you are objectifying us. And we thank you profusely. Your work is beautiful and will help us mannequins finally gain the civil rights we have been fighting for!

Paul Chesne
04.22.2004

Lanning's work is fabulous and his attention to detail is phenomenal. I own several of his pieces and have been to many of his art shows since he began creating his mannequin girls. I favor his "Nice Girls" as I sense an "emotion" exuding from their enigmatic looks that Lanning has given them. Keep up the good work!

Sheilah Turner
04.23.2004

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