

GIRL TALK

MAGAZINE

NINA HAGEN
ICONS "Women We Adore"

**PLASTIC
FANTASTIC
WOMEN**
The Art of Lanning Gold

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LANNING GOLD'S



Department store mannequins have often been the focus of artists' attention as a metaphor for the illusion of beauty and to satirize the attempts of business owners to subtly seduce us into buying their wares. Marcel Duchamp caused an outrage, believe it or not, when he placed just a man's hat and jacket on a female mannequin in the window of Bonwit Teller in the 30's. Times have indeed changed! Andy Warhol began his career in New York as a window dresser and several artists have presented living models posing as mannequins in London, New York and Paris department stores. So what is it about window displays, and the mannequins that inhabit them, that attract us? At first glance it seems that the illusionary world that exists behind the glass of store windows is always perfect, always seductive and always very carefully contrived to project whatever image the store wishes us to believe that we will encounter inside.

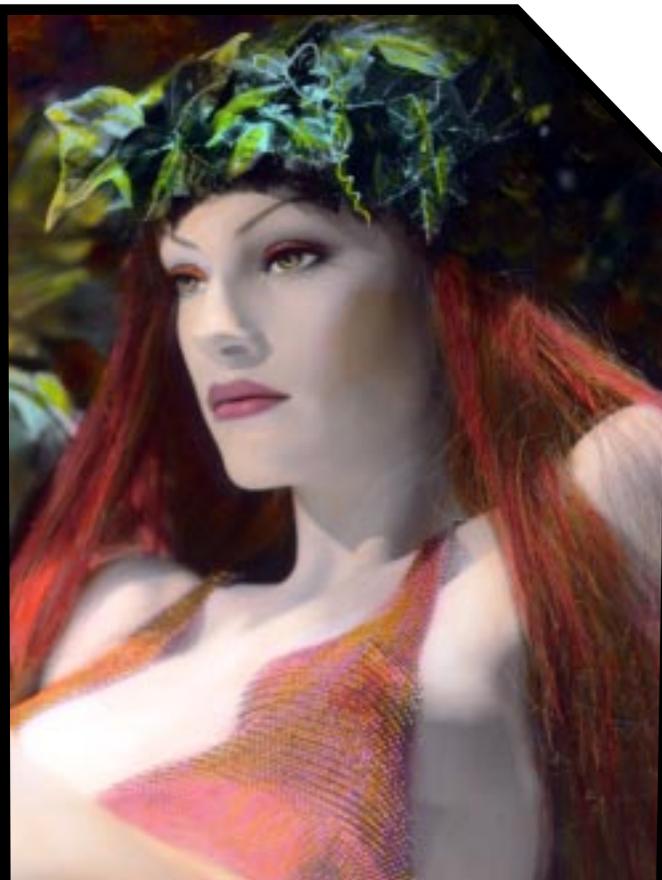
There is of course, a lot more to it than meets the eye and recently I am sure we have all noticed that these plastic sirens of commerce have become much more real, erotic and definitely more seductively. Perky nipples (some with nipple rings), poke through diaphanous blouses, stockings and garter belts have become passe and perfectly round flesh colored fiber glass female asses now sport thongs and even tatoos. Some world-famous supermodels, such as Tyra Banks, have franchised their bodies as models for mannequins

and now stare at us with perfect doll eyes from behind the windows of Neiman Marcus. Suddenly they don't look quite so doll-like anymore and the runway model, it seems, must have a very hard time keeping a step ahead of their plastic counter parts as role models for those of us who keep an eye on female fashion. Is it a case of life imitating art or vice versa?

L.A. based photographer, Lanning Gold, has a serious fascination with the world of fashion mannequins and the illusion that they present. His close cropped, carefully hand tinted black and white photographs invest the silent seductresses in upscale Los Angeles store windows with life and mystery and it comes as some surprise when you realize that these are not flesh and blood beauties that you are looking at. Even more important is the realization that the images that he has captured will last forever while the mannequins themselves have already been recycled to other windows, striking new poses, wearing different wigs, different clothes but always the same perfect smiles.

I first met Lanning at a very successful opening of his work at the Backstage Cafe in Beverly Hills.

Trisha Van Cleef: Lanning, your photographs of mannequins have attracted quite a lot of attention from the straight media. It seems that they have not noticed the increasingly provocative nature of window displays - particularly in



BY TRISHA VAN CLEEF



PLASTIC FANTASTIC WOMEN

Hollywood. Do you think that artists and photographers see things that the average person on the street might miss?

Lanning Gold: Yes. I believe artists and musicians see the world a little differently. Perhaps it is some kind of antenna we have in our brains that causes our perceptions to be different. For me, when I look into window displays, I see future paintings that maybe I'll pursue down the road or at another time.

TVC: In a lot of your photographs the mannequins are showing cleavage, nipples and lots of leg. Do you think that the intention of the storeowners is to attract women who would like to dress that way or are they just fantasy figures for the guys who pass by?

LG: Both. Lingerie is exceptional clothing. That is to say both men and women typically purchase lingerie. Men buy it for their wives/girlfriends and women buy it to excite their husbands/boyfriends. Usually. Of course then there are the men who buy it for themselves! But, the point here is that the lingerie displays appeal to both sexes for potential sales. Of course, the sexier and more provocative, the better!

TVC: The live models that I see in fashion runway shows and the mannequins in store windows seem to be almost

interchangeable, is it a case of life imitating art or art imitating life?

LG: Which came first? The chicken or the egg? Fashion photos have been portraying thinner models and so have the runway models. The mannequins since the late sixties have been designed much thinner than in the years before and with more detail. In the beginning, mannequins didn't have belly buttons, nipples, toes, and muscles like they do today. The new ones are pretty lifelike in their details.

TVC: I would imagine that the original models for the mannequins were not as perfect as the plastic reproductions that finish up in shop windows. Do you think that the apparent perfection of these life size plastic dolls is part of their appeal?

LG: What is perfection, really? They are designed to sell clothes.

TVC: Do you think that women see these inanimate objects as role models, something to aspire to in terms of appearance?

LG: I certainly hope not. I've been criticized for portraying women as thin waifs and that is not my intention. I enjoy all

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the imperfections of people, male and female, and some of my photography highlights the imperfections in all of us.

TVC: Everywhere we go we are assaulted by sexy and provocative images, advocating the S&M “lifestyle” & clothing skinny, petulant models who pout: it seems that every over-sexed high school girl wants to look like either a dominatrix or a slut. Why do you think that is and do you think that the whole HIV/AIDS epidemic has changed the sexual landscape so much that it is a lot safer now to pose and appear sexy rather than to actually indulge in sex?

LG: I don't know what an over-sexed high school girl wants to look like. And it has been over a dozen years since I have been in high school. Some people are just big flirts. Right? I think Britney Spears did help push the naughty schoolgirl look recently, though.

TVC: I find it very interesting that you shoot in black and white and then hand tint the images, adding yet another surreal element to the images. Why not shoot in color?

LG: I want to limit my color palette and the process becomes very painterly. Also, I decide near the end, who gets to be a blond and who gets to be a redhead!

TVC: Most of our readers are crossdressers, men who try to subjugate their male appearance and create a feminine

illusion for themselves. Why do you think that female clothing (particularly lingerie) and provocative female images are so powerful & alluring for men?

LG: The female form is so beautiful! Look at the classic paintings of Reubens! The female form has been used as a metaphor for rolling hills and sand dunes and, well the male body just doesn't compete. At least for me.

TVC: There is not a huge underground subculture of women wanting to dress like men, they just do it and it is totally accepted, even in the work place. Why do you think that is?

LG: Women can get away with almost anything. I used to think Annie Hall was very cute that way!

TVC: Do you find the mannequins and their images sexually arousing, or is it just art for you?

LG: Of course, there is some arousal if the figure is dressed provocatively, initially. Although, in the end it becomes problem solving because I am painting and working with color and thinking about makeup and details that take away from whatever sexual thought I might have had in the beginning. I guess I would call it fun problem solving.

TVC: All of your mannequin photographs so far have been of women, any plans to shoot their male counterparts?



LG: I've done several male photo paintings but most male mannequins are pretty ugly, the female mannequins can become prettier when I am painting in their makeup.

TVC: Who are your artistic and photographic influences and why?

LG: Dali, Picasso, Man Ray, Rembrandt, Rosetti and Patrick Nagel.

TVC: Apart from the mannequin photographs what other kind of photography do you do?

LG: Commercial, fashion, portraiture, and the ever-popular headshots.

TVC: Finally, what are your plans for the near future and do you have a website so that our readers can look at more of your work?

LG: I am working on a new series of landscapes that will incorporate the mannequins in my usual fashion. Wait and see! You can check out my work at:

<http://www.lanninggold.com> ■

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