



Credits

I would like to thank:

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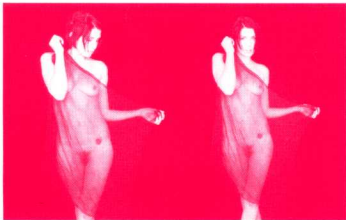
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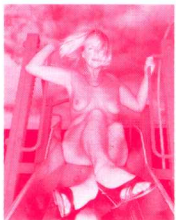
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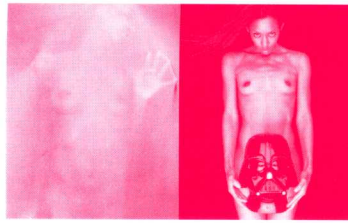
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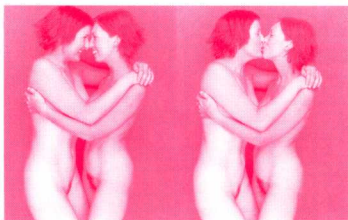
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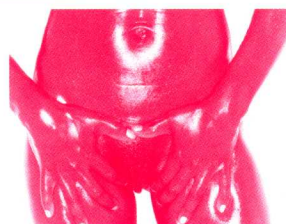
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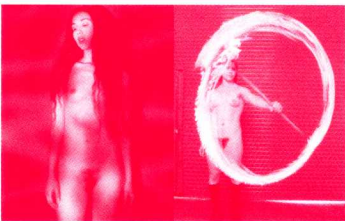
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Rankin

Nudes

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This exhibition and book are dedicated to all
of the subjects that have been kind enough
to 'get their kit off', to Miranda for her patience
and to Sandra for always bringing me back
down to earth.



Welcome to Nudes

Dan Ross

This book is the result of a collaboration between Rankin and the women who agreed to stand naked in front of his camera. Whilst some of the faces (and figures) will be familiar from films, fashion spreads and pop music, many will not. These are 'real people,' people who are not used to being photographed, who aren't necessarily entirely comfortable with their bodies but who gained confidence through participating in the project.

Some of the shots were conceived by Rankin, but in many cases the ideas were the subjects' own – they were given the opportunity to decide how they wanted to be shown. They chose to bathe in jelly, smear themselves with ketchup, sit trapped in the wire frame of a shopping trolley, in alleyways, courtyards and on rooftops. Behind the shots are concepts that reflect the beliefs, feelings and fancies of the models.

Witty, sensual, proud, the images ahead demonstrate that women at the end of this century know who they are and how they want to be seen. They illustrate Rankin's belief that beauty comes in different sizes, it changes and can remain through all ages.

Rankin sees Nudes as a work in progress, and wishes to point out that he's just getting started – if you're interested, give him a call.

SF: Why nudes?

R: It's a genre I think every photographer is drawn to. The female form – I mean the female form and the male form – are really fascinating to photograph because they're kind of pure and all that, but I guess I'm also interested in the conventions of the field I've taken up and how I can try and challenge them.

SF: In what way?

R: For me, photography is collaborative; it's a process of understanding between the photographer and the subject. This in itself is challenging to most photographers who guard their contact sheets like gold dust. I also try to have a real sense of women's issues, like the influence of fashion and magazines, because I'm part of that process. So I have approached this project from the beginning with these relationships in mind.

SF: So why did you decide not to shoot the men who wrote in?

R: I'm just more interested in photographing women than men. The men's ideas weren't as experimental as the women's, I never thought they would be. There is always a sense of humour in my pictures, that's very important, and I prefer women's humour to men's. I also think that women's imagination in terms of sexuality can be much more interesting. Commercially speaking, it's important to me that people like my photographs, I like that populist appeal – nudes of women appeal to everyone, women and men; nudes of men simply aren't as appealing. But I intend to return to the men and see it through.

SF: If you're completely honest, do you not just think that the reason you're not so interested in photographing men is because you are a straight man?

R: Oh yeah, there's no doubt about that.

SF: When we first talked about this project, you said you worried about it being pornographic.

R: I did feel a bit like a kid in a sweet shop and I've had to get a grip. But I never wanted this to look like 'Playboy'. I readily admit I'm attracted to women and taking photographs is erotic, it is sexy. I would be lying if I said it wasn't. But I left a lot of the shots out of the exhibition because I thought they looked too like soft porn, where maybe I felt like I'd got carried away or didn't have the right perspective. Then I've used really, really close-up shots of girls touching themselves, where I felt it was more of a study in terms of form and how I'd shot them. That was something the book needed. Some of the images are there because they're challenging. A lot more are there because they're fun. I'm not going to kid you and say I don't create images that are sexually provocative. I like those kinds of photographs but they have to be saying something, whereas pornography says 'wouldn't you love to shag me.' It's all about context.

SF: You've said that this project is all about the women involved and it is, to a certain extent, but it's also about you.

R: You're right about that. At first I didn't think it was and didn't want it to be, but recently I've realised it is a lot about me, partly because it's been very difficult extracting the ideas out of some of the women involved – I've had to fill in the 'gaps' – but also because some of them see me as the professional. Yeah, originally it was me allowing them to do what they wanted but then ultimately them saying 'you decide'. Even the people who came to me through the ad in 'Time Out' (which didn't use my name), as soon as they realised it was me taking the pictures, they handed it over to me, like, 'it's your job'. And then there were some ideas that were just so fantastic there's no way I could do them. One woman wrote to me saying she wanted to be photographed riding an elephant. I just couldn't make that happen. We did try to get a cow in over the weekend though.

SF: So what happened if, once you'd taken a woman's portrait, you couldn't agree on the same shot?

R: Of course I can explain to them why my choice is a better shot. But saying that, that takes away from them. Because a lot of the women have been really specific. In some cases I've had no choice – they've told me what to do. I really don't want to take anything away from what the women are like. The overriding feeling about the women's desire to be photographed was about empowerment, it's not that they wanted to control how their image was seen but they've felt empowered by just feeling confident enough to take their clothes off. I loved the variety of reasons why they wanted to do it. Recording how they look as an impulse thing or trying to feel better about their bodies. If anything the fact that they can choose the final shot and what it's used for has been something they've regarded as a benefit or maybe a safety net. When you give people a safety net they feel more daring, more confident. It's the same in portraits, people are prepared to do more for you if they know they have the power for you not to use it. In my opinion they are all really empowered by this, and in that sense, in the process of doing it they've started to trust me. I think, by now, I've got a sense of what these women's attitudes to nudity are.

SF: Have you ever broken that trust?

R: Not as far as I know. The only time that happens is because someone in my team makes a mistake and say sends a print of a nude to the wrong magazine, without the subject's permission. That only happens because the project is so big, but actually we've avoided that this time. Everyone has seen their contact sheets, approved their shots and said what we can and can't use them for. Obviously I respect their decisions completely.

SF: So what are women's attitudes to nudity?

R: I believe they think: 'I'm going to do this for me and I don't care what people think, I don't give a fuck if people are shocked by it'. They only care about what they think and that's what's really interesting. Nearly all of them have realised: 'Yeah, men are going to look at my body and think it's sexually attractive, there's nothing wrong with that, it's the way men feel about it.' Men finding it sexy is by the by. And that's what I think I've tapped into.

SF: Given that the original brief was to include nudes, all ages, all sizes, you might expect to see less models, or at least women with model proportions, included.

R: Yeah, you would. I think I'm going to be in for some flack for that. 'Nudes any age, any size' was the ad I put in 'Time Out', but I'd always intended to phone up the model agencies looking for models who were prepared to do nudes and who had ideas. And models did have ideas. The models involved were very free about their bodies and I felt I could give them more direction, because they are professionals and they have a very developed awareness of their bodies, of how they move, and what they look like. But they were a bit surprised that I was asking them for their own ideas about how they wanted to be photographed; models aren't used to being able to choose which image from the contact sheet is finally going to be used.

SF: What about the celebrities?

R: Everyday subjects have insecurities in front of the camera, they have a lot in common with celebrities in that respect. I have to get them to trust me. I actually also wanted to include glamour models in the project and try and reinterpret the stuff they were doing, but I gave up on that because I just felt their ideas weren't very good. Someone interviewed me the other day and said: 'But they're all really beautiful.' Some of that is because that's the sort of photograph I take. I can't get away from that. I'm the sort of person who thinks: 'How can I make you look really amazing?' That's my style of photography.

SF: There's not a lot of cellulite on display, no broken toenails...

R: No, I'm not going to make a point of showing you broken toenails. But I think if you look closely, it's there. It's not as if I'm trying to hide it. It's just that the way I light the women, the cellulite will look good because I think it's really beautiful and I'm trying to accentuate the aesthetic of it. I think all the imperfections are really beautiful, but you don't have to revel in them.

SF: But the vast majority of subjects are skinny, white girls.

R: I think all these bodies are different. A lot of the younger women want to document themselves. They are women who feel comfortable with their bodies. And I have tried to balance that. It's very easy for people to be caught up with the fact that it's supposed to be about older women and bigger women but if I'd decided to shoot only them, it would have been marginalising them. Big women shouldn't think they have to be in a 'big' book. It doesn't matter. Beautiful women are beautiful women. All the older women, I love their bodies, but I'm not going to make them look old. I'm going to try and make them look fresh, make them feel good about themselves. That was the point of this project. It was supposed to empower.

SF: Is that the only point, to make them look good?

R: No, it's about them feeling good. Of course I am seduced by the glamour of it all, but I think these shots will make people think. They're not just throwaway shots. The differences are what's attractive and what's interesting and that's what I'm trying to accentuate. I tried to do something that was very democratic and also very populist. I think it will appeal to the general population, not some elitist camp of knowledgeable critics.

SF: Nudes tend often to be a photographer's way of aspiring to art.

R: Yeah, which I think is complete bollocks. I don't want the work to aspire to anything. That's not what I'm interested in at all. I'm not going to try and pre-empt what people think. I do it and it goes out there and I'm not going to be responsible for people's reactions. That's their responsibility. We both know there are people out there who will hate some of these images. Others that will truly believe it's art. I quite like that, that's what reality is. I'm not an art photographer, I'm not a media photographer. I'm disliked by a lot of the picture editors. I'm about the people I take photographs of, I'm not about the magazines I take photographs for.

SF: So, do you have a problem with art photography?

R: Yeah, up to a point. Art photographers lie because, just like anyone else, they have to produce work to sell. It is all about commerce. I am about commerce because I have to be, so do art photographers, but you try and get them to admit it. What I'm more against is mediocre fashion photography. That's what I really don't like. Because it just doesn't mean anything. That's what we set out to do with 'Dazed & Confused', we tried to take the good things about art photography and combine them with the seductive things about fashion photography and create a third type of photography that had meaning. So you can seduce people with images of beauty but you can also try to give it meaning. You also have to remember that I love photography – Jefferson and I set up 'Dazed & Confused' not just for ourselves but to act as a platform for young creatives.

SF: So what does Nudes say about contemporary women?

R: It's a reflection of women's attitudes to themselves, really. In the Seventies, the feminist attitude towards sex and pornography was very extreme. It's past its sell-by date now. Nudity in general is more acceptable. This exhibition shows that women are starting to feel comfortable with themselves. They're not stupid, these women, they're all really intelligent. It's about them feeling good about themselves taking their clothes off. None of them are doing it for me. Maybe they felt there must be something sexual about it because I'm a man. But, at the end of the day, 99 per cent of them took their clothes off and they could do exactly what they wanted, they could totally control the shot and therefore they were empowered. Just because they had the final say, they were empowered.

SF: What do you think you've learnt from this project?

R: I've had to work on my feet. One of the reasons I did it was for that. I've got back some of my integrity and creative energy from it. There hasn't been very much money for this, so I've had to use my initiative constantly to make it work. I had to forego the elephant for a cow. That's alright. But then, I couldn't even get the fucking cow, because the farmer thought we were perverts. The farmer thought we were complete raging perverts. 'You want to do what to my cow?'

Rankin

Nudes



