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Lust & Romance
Rated X Fine Art Photographs

Michael A. Rosen

with an introduction by David Glenn Rinehart

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for Lucile

Are You Aroused?

In the classic tradition of twentieth century photography, Michael Rosen's photographs in *Lust and Romance* speak for themselves. And not only that, they also giggle, moan, sigh, and make gushy sounds for themselves as well. They do everything but blush.

There's a very good reason why these aromatic images don't blush: there's nothing embarrassing about what's going on. These are ordinary people doing about the most ordinary thing humans can do: having sex. And, by all appearances, having lots of fun.

Still, there's something strange about these photographs, something unusual about the people in these photographs: they're normal. Some people are a bit overweight, some people's bits are the wrong shape, and almost none of them look like the tanned retouched and implanted models one might expect to see on the printed page.

So who are these people? They're people like us, people who don't have idealized bodies, people who enjoy each other's sexual company, people who are working from their own script, not someone else's.

This is Michael's fourth book, and perhaps his most challenging ... challenging for him that is. After all, what can be seen and said about sex that hasn't already been seen and said? That's a question that every person has to answer individually. I'll plagiarize my answer from Aldous Huxley: "Sex is almost as completely private a matter as death, and a work of art which powerfully expresses the truth about either of them

is very painful to the respectable figure we imagine ourselves to be."

Michael's photographs work at a conceptual as well as a retinal and erotic level. To use a well-worn question from decades ago, are these photographs mirrors or windows? When you turn the pages, are you looking into someone else's world or seeing a reflection of yourself? Or perhaps someone you'd like to be?

Having known Michael for many years and three previous books, I know he'd dismiss these questions as the inbred art world nonsense, and he could be right. As Michael described these latest photographs, "Here, I want to arouse! What's wrong with that?" Sex! You got a problem with that, pal? There's something implicitly confrontational about his work, a challenge not to turn away from what he wants you to see.

Michael's been taking an unblinking look at sexuality for years, beginning with traditional nudes from the Breast and Buttocks School (my phrase, certainly not his). Like most good artists, he consciously imitated classic images—the ones that made it into the art history books—before asking himself *The Question*.

The Question is this: what do I have to say? Answering *The Question* is the difference between being a dilettante and being an artist; answering *The Question* is the rite of passage into the real world of art.

Michael's answer was *Sexual Magic: the S/M Photographs* (1986). His images of the world of sadomasochism had the

same effect as the first photographs from Egypt and Antarctica: they showed places most people had heard about but would probably never visit.

He continued his journey in *Sexual Portraits: Photographs of Radical Sexuality* (1990) and *Sexual Art: Photographs that Test the Limits* (1994). These well-executed books gave armchair travelers a view of other worlds few will ever enter. (A padlock through the penis?! That's going to hurt in the morning!)

Lust and Romance breaks the pattern, it takes us out of our comfortable seat and into our bedroom (or hot tub or office floor; this is no place to make assumptions). From going from the more or less exotic to the more or less familiar, Michael made the wise move of not repeating himself. He chose perhaps the most difficult area to explore: the familiar.

Has he succeeded? Absolutely. As Charles Horton Cooley observed: "An artist cannot fail; it is a success to be one."

Do you think he's succeeded? Are you aroused?

—David Glenn Rinehart
San Francisco 1998

A Technical Afterword

Why is it that painters never talk about brushes, sculptors never talk about chisels, photographers usually talk about cameras and digital artists always talk about computers? I don't know why, but it's true so I will.

These images began life in a camera, spent their adolescence in a computer, came back to film during their midlife crisis, and are spending eternity on the printed page. As for the specifics, Michael used cameras of the type used several decades ago that are still state of the art and state of the art computers that will be almost useless by the time you read this.

Some of these images are straight photographs, some are composites of images made on the same roll of film, some show things that weren't there (a sheet extended to fill the edge of the frame is missed the first time around), a few tattoos and lighting stands have been humanely removed.

Digital imagery! You got a problem with that, pal?

—DGR













































































































Michael Rosen has been doing sexual photography in the San Francisco area since 1977. Previous work has been published as *Sexual Magic: the S/M Photographs* (1986), *Sexual Portraits: Photographs of Radical Sexuality* (1990) and *Sexual Art: Photographs That Test the Limits* (1994). His photographs have been exhibited in many solo and group shows. He has received a Good Vibrations Venus Award in 1997.

Special thanks to Charles Gatewood, David Rinehart and David Steinberg.

You can visit Michael at <http://www.shaynew.com>.

David Glenn Rinehart is an artist, writer and ne'er do well; his thoroughly unerotic work is at <http://stare.com>.

