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Larry Sultan: The Valley



Synopsis

Since 1988, Larry Sultan has returned time and again to photograph on porn sets in Los Angeles's San Fernando Valley--the Silicon(e) Valley of the porn industry. But The Valley is by no means a documentary on porn filmmaking. Rather, it is a dense series of pictures of middle-class homes invaded by the porn industry. Sultan's lens focuses on pedestrian details--a piece of half-eaten pie, dirty linens in a heap, "actors" taking a break--that offer clues to a bizarre other-world. The lush and intricate images adroitly play with artifice and reality, adding up to rich, elliptical narratives that circle around the concepts of "home" and "desire." These images of homes and gardens, porn actors and film crews, studio and location shootings are an ambiguous meditation on suburbia and its trappings, family and transgression, loss and desire, the utopias and dystopias of middle-class lifestyle. The Valley and its many-layered photographs outline the complexity of domestic life at the beginning of the 21st century, opening up new perspectives for photography through its innovative combination of staged and documentary photographs. In 1998, an English magazine asked me to go on a porn set. I flew down to Burbank Airport with my wife, and we went to the house they'd given me the address of. It was a dentist's house on Van Alden. That name had all kinds of connotations when I was in high school. Because the Valley is so haunted for me by the ghosts of childhood, all of these street names have Proustian connotations. All I have to do is to say: Havenhurst, Van Alden, Vineta, Dubois, and a flood of associations comes back to me. [...] After the first five minutes of the strangeness of it all, I started to look around, going to the bedrooms, wandering through the house. It felt like a permission to go into a house in L.A. and to imagine how someone would live their life in this house. I made the pictures for the magazine. I left and thought, "This is it, this is what I have to do." --Larry Sultan Hardcover, 14.5 x 11 in./176 pgs / 90 color.

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Customer Reviews

Larry Sultan's The Valley is an elegant social documentation. He depicts a portrait of a "typical" middle-high class lifestyle through the most private point of view: the interiors of private houses. At the same time he documents the working days of a very peculiar type of professionals: actors and workers of the adult movie industry. In my view the topic of this book is intimacy, interpreted in different ways. Sultan's pictures drive you into intimacy intended in its literary meaning (an intimate interaction between two people, involving also a sexual aspect), since they have taken on porno movie sets. But the accuracy with which Sultan explores the private interiors where the movies were shot makes you forget about physical intimacy, and consider its meaning of "privacy", making you wonder who usually lives there, what they do, why they rented out their homes to an adult movie production company, etc. More than the actors performing on sofas and carpets, it is the perfection of Sultan's pictures, their extreme detail, the pureness of colours, the lighting, that makes them "pornographic", if this word is used to define something depicted in its extreme detail. Nevertheless, Sultan is never detached from what he photographs, and his survey is also a trip into memories of his childhood spent in the Valley, and a tribute to people working in adult movies, usually perceived as "dirty" and unspeakable, but that he shows us simply as people earning their living, in a way that is probably much more honest and "clean" than many others.

Great book.

The Best Fashion Book!

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