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*Sexual Magic:  
the S/M Photographs*

**Michael A. Rosen**

**With an Introduction by the Photographer,  
Text by the Participants,  
and an Afterword by Mark I. Chester**

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*for Lucile*



PLATE 1

# Foreword

In the summer of 1982, I found the magnificent photographs of Max Waldman, in his book *Waldman on Theater*. The photographs excited me. Especially, the style excited me—high contrast, grainy and soft. Many of the photographs had movement blur and some had a very narrow range of sharp focus. The style was perfectly suited to the highly emotional content of the photographs. I resolved to use that style.

Grain, resolution, movement, focus and tonal range are the variables of the craft of black and white photography. In this medium, these elements are to be enjoyed, explored and exploited. I had recently completed a portfolio of nudes, and, in that body of work, I pushed the variable of grain as far as I could. The photographs are abstract, static, contrasty, sharp and very grainy. They were done in my studio with rented models. Everything was entirely under my control. With the knowledge I had gained from doing this work, and after some experimentation, I knew that I could master Waldman's photographic technique. I awaited appropriate subject matter.

Later that summer, I heard a radio announcement about the First Annual Berkeley Erotic Art Festival. Wanting to enter my nudes, I telephoned and then visited Kat and Layne, the organizers. They loved my nudes and gave me a place in their group show of erotic photographs, videos, drawings, paintings and sculpture. Much of the art was oriented toward sadomasochism. In fact, Kat and Layne were prominent and outspoken members of the S/M community in the San Francisco Bay Area. I found many people that I met during the festival very attractive and interesting, especially Ms. Kat. One day, I said to her, "I'd really love to photograph you." She made a whipping motion and replied, "Do you mean *in action*?" Everything fell into place; here was the subject matter. I accepted her invitation.

Kat and Layne had been planning a play session with a woman. They spoke to her and she agreed to be photographed. So, we met at Kat and Layne's house one Saturday afternoon. We chatted, and Layne and I set up a large hoist in the living room. I cleared the walls and floors of extraneous objects and set up my lights. I had absolutely no idea of what to expect. Then, they played and I photographed. I did not control or direct the action in any way. The resulting photographs reflect the energy exchanged that afternoon.

Subsequently, I've met many interesting Bay Area people who are into the S/M scene, and I've done many photo sessions like that one. Think of it as journeying to a distant place, where the culture is different, and bringing back photographs. In Irving Penn's wonderful book *Worlds in a Small Room*, the viewpoint is that of an advanced culture—the photographer—visiting primitive cultures, examining them—photographically—and finding much human value there. In my book, the converse is true; I am the primitive.

Here, then, are the S/M photographs. Photographs of sexual magic. Photographs of Dominance and Submission, of Sadism and Masochism, of giving and receiving erotic intensity, of giving and receiving pleasure, of role playing and role reversal. The participants are having fun. They are "turned on." This is sex play and a journey of self-exploration.

—*Michael A. Rosen*

## *About This Digital Version*

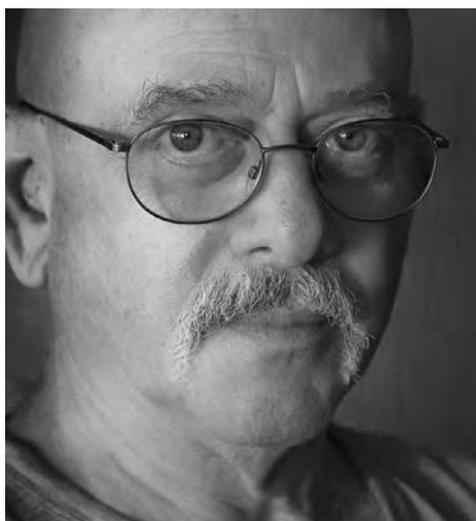
This PDF is a digital version of *Sexual Magic: the S/M Photographs*, which was published as a high quality paperback monograph in 1986. The 53 photographs are of actual S/M scenes.

### **What's Free, and Why, and What's For Sale**

First, what is it that I'm giving away? Contrary to my previous PDFs, these pictures do not have a visible copyright notice. The license agreement allows printing the pictures, but forbids any alteration. So think of this as an advertisement for myself and my work. For me, publication has always been about putting my point of view out in the world in the most effective manner. Last century, I chose printed books for sale; this century I've added a free PDF option.

All images in this body of work are for sale as modern archival inkjet prints, which will last longer than traditional gelatin silver photographic prints. \$50 for an 8x10, \$100 for an 11x14, as of October, 2015. Support this work. Buy my art prints.

Buy my books—*Sexual Art: Photographs That Test The Limits*, *Sexual Magic: the S/M Photographs*, *Sexual Portraits: Photographs of Radical Sexuality*, and *Lust & Romance: Rated X Fine Art Photographs*—from Amazon and other online vendors, and *Vanilla Sex: Explicit Fine Art Photographs* from blurb.com. Or from me at my website, michaelrosen.com.



### **What's Next?**

I continue to actively photograph healthy sexual behavior and publish books of my photographs. I am always looking for individuals, couples or groups—of all genders, races, ages, and persuasions—who want to share their sexual energy, from the vanilla-ish to the outrageous, with my camera. Email

michael@michaelrosen.com. See more of my work at michaelrosen.com.

—Michael A. Rosen, October, 2015

Here are a few things I know about erotic dominance and submission (D&S):

- It doesn't look like what it feels like;
- It provides insights into parts of ourselves we seldom consider, but casts shadows over others we thought we understood;
- It's a fantasy world, a constructed time and space, and yet it is most exciting when it seems real;
- It feels as good as orgasm, yet it isn't really "sex;"
- Its effects are therapeutic but it's too much fun to be therapy.

In short, D&S (or S/M, if you prefer) is a paradox.

—*Mistress Kat*



PLATE 2



PLATE 3



PLATE 4

So many dark emotions spurt through me when I'm playing S/M, it's like a kaleidoscope of forbidden and delicious feelings—evil intents, wicked delight, sadistic curiosity, gleeful selfishness, narcissism, superiority, extreme self-indulgence, and of course, high sexual arousal. I feel as though I'm expanding in body and soul. It's a feeling of grandness like a queen at her coronation.

And what magnifies the paradox is the fact that I care deeply about the very person I'm mistreating. Regardless of how close they may or may not be to me in “ordinary” life, I always feel a unique affinity—even for strangers met at a party—with the submissives I use. And with my closest lover, the best times have been like a religious experience. We have shared moments of remarkable intimacy and trust and transcendence.

But the real attraction of D&S is that it's hot. Done right, and with the right person, it really is hot, and in volcanic dimensions. And in surprising ways. For example, I never would have thought it possible that I could come by inflicting pain. But I have.

—Mistress Kat

It is the inner experience of luxuriating in waves of dark emotions that lures me back for more. This is most likely to happen, for me, while feeling helpless and vulnerable at the hands of a beautiful and cruel (yet erotic) “oppressor.”

I yearn for her to touch me, and it is especially nice when she does, for it is a special touch that roams with license to tease, to create pain, to fondle lewdly. Such touch goes beyond mere common touch, which is usually, at some level, negotiated and tentative. Even the passionate touching of lovers has boundaries, each partner concerned with issues of permission and the expectations of the other.

Dominant touch, at its best, dissolves boundaries and thereby scratches an almost unutterable itch to be violated, penetrated by another. Strong walls have been created in the straight world to avoid touch without permission. SM seems to break through, consensually, so that there actually is permission. Yet that permission is forgotten in the moment.

Trust plays a key role in this. It eases fear so that I am free to dissolve into mindless ecstasy. The best moments are when I can uncritically accept the ruthless (yet ultimately harmless) will and passion of a creative dominant in heat, and when the dominant takes what she likes without concern or hesitation. (Perhaps because she knows me so well.)

Some intense sensations, or humiliations, are more difficult to accept with a relaxed, open heart. Some people refer to the difficult place as their “limit.” I think of it as an “edge,” the almost too much place I would like to be forever if I could (or so it seems at the time).

Pain, synonymous with “undesirable” to many, is not that at all. It can be thought of as a battering ram for the very thick walls we build around us, as a means for another (the dominant) to touch us even if we have made ourselves not so easy to touch. When the wall is breached, the pain transmutes magically into intense pleasure.

—Layne Winklebleck

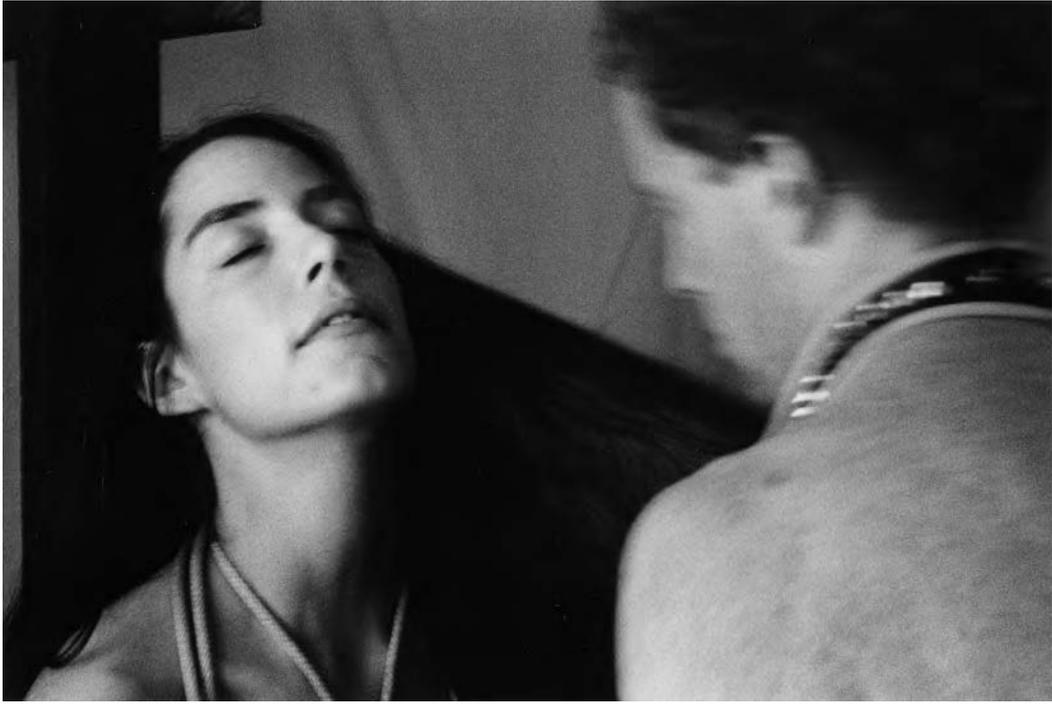




PLATE 6

SM is positive, consensual, loving.... I'm not talking about violence or brutality. I'm talking about two people wanting to be there, perhaps negotiating ahead of time, perhaps not. But wanting to be there and wanting to go through the experience, knowing what the experience is, or trusting that the other person will take them to a good place.

For me it's like a drug and I can get drunk on the energy. I know, I have gotten drunk as a top, on the bottom's energy. It's a delicious place, where I am hurting somebody, and this is where you must know when to stop and to realize that it takes two to do this. And I am sadistic, when I'm in my top space. I'm a loving sadist. I don't hate men, or women or anybody. And I think in each human being there is a streak of liking to hurt people, liking to power-trip. I believe everybody has a dark side, but our society teaches us to ignore it. Instead of denying the dark side of yourself, denying that you like to hurt people, denying that you like to be hurt, accept it. And accept that there are other people who can enjoy that side of you in a conscious, safe space. You go into it, you go do it, and there's an end. There's a beginning, and a middle, and an end. And you handle it in that space, so that you don't go and power-trip other people, or be a victim and get abused.

In vanilla sex I get very bored. I don't care how good a person is. I know the mechanics. I know what my body's going to do and my body will do it just fine. But so what?; it's like I haven't been touched anywhere inside me. In SM that's not so. In SM I'm very present. I'm not wandering off inside my head, wondering what I'm going to have for dinner tonight. And I guarantee that there are a lot of couples that practice vanilla sex, and both are wandering off in their heads when they're supposed to be so into each other. In SM, with the intensity, you have to be there. As a top you are responsible for your bottom. You have to be focused on what's going on. As a bottom, the physical intensity is such that you can't be thinking about anything else. You are present. Your bondage ties you there. You have to pay attention. The intense sensations bring you right back, so you don't wander off.

—*from an interview with Sybil Holiday*



PLATE 7



PLATE 8





PLATE 10

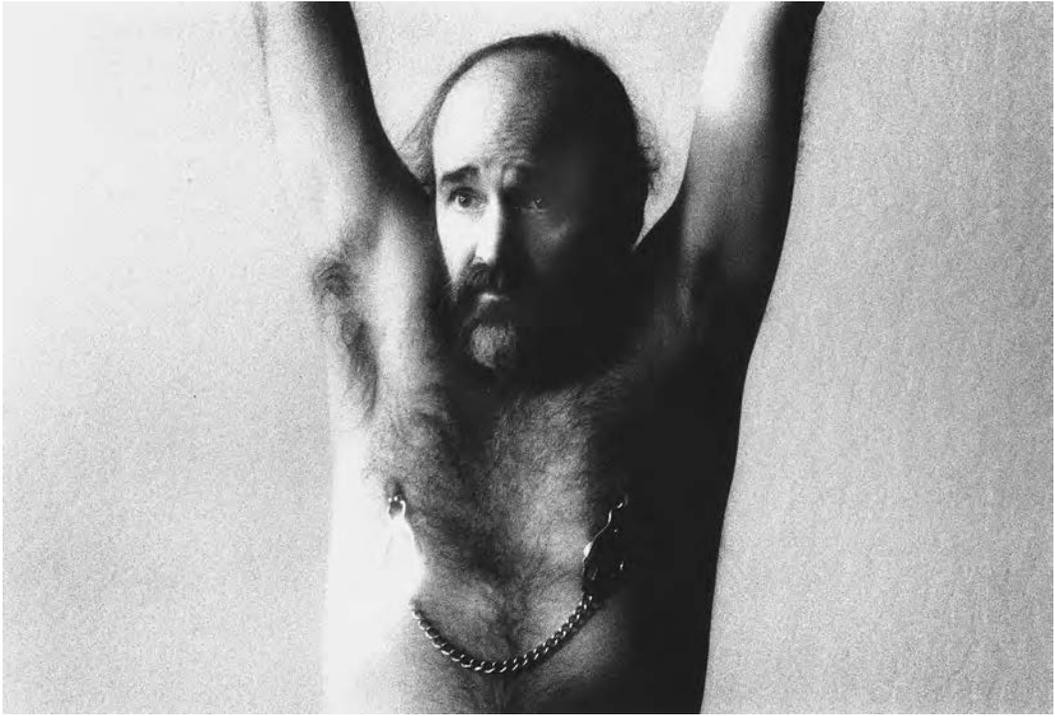


PLATE II

I do not call this activity S&M except as a kind of shorthand. The words discipline, sadism and masochism do not describe what I like to do. For me it is a form of play, of sexual exploration, of making love. It has not always been this way.

I first began to explore this kind of sexual expression with men only, in the gay bathhouses and sex clubs. Then it represented the opposite extreme from the stultifying roles I felt had been forced upon me by society and my parents.

In those early days the “scene” was a means of punishing myself for not being the man I thought I was supposed to be. It was a form of rebellion against the prevailing norms and mores of society. Yet at the same time it began to be a means of celebrating myself and my sexuality. I began to learn that I am valuable, sexually and in many other ways.

Today I do not see this particular kind of sexual activity as “kinky” or strange. Instead, it is one of the many ways open to me to share energy, creativity and love with others. Through “S&M” sex I have come to be able to express the wonderful and seemingly opposite aspects of my nature. I have the freedom today to make love with men and with women, to behave submissively and dominantly, to acknowledge my masculinity and my femininity, and to take emotional risks. I love the empathy that exists between us when we explore the very natures of pleasure and pain. I love the feeling of being helpless yet the object of affection and desire. I love the feeling of being in control yet carefully gauging and meeting the needs of my partners.

This form of making love allows me to experience complete trust and to joyfully acknowledge all of my sexual and emotional needs. To me the beauty of “S&M” is in its paradoxes: through the intensity of pain we give ourselves more completely to each other than in perhaps any other way; through the exploration of fantasy we are more honestly ourselves than at perhaps any other time.

—*Steve W.*



PLATE 12



PLATE 13



PLATE 14

The one most gratifying element in s/m is the *consensual exchange of power*. Power has an exhilarating effect on me. The exchange of power fills me with a nurturing glow. I feel love and trust from one who would give me their power. And I must feel love and trust to give my power up. In return I feel nurtured, taken care of.

When a person is kneeling at my feet, *submitting* to me, there is *such* a feeling of power. Previous to my involvement in s/m I did not relate to the term, “lust for power.” I have since experienced the sensation as a heady drug. Power surges through me like a hot drink, beginning in my crotch, then fanning up and out to my nipples. At the places it touches, it bleeds and spreads, surrounding my thighs, belly, ribs and armpits with a warm red glow. I am still shocked by this. Surprised at the emotion generated from this unexpected source. I always seem to enjoy power in or out of “role,” but I don’t enjoy being powerless out of role.

Lust, passion and humiliation are other emotions to be expected in an s/m scene. I cannot explain the charge from humiliation. As a well-brought-up Italian woman, I was taught to protect another’s ego, especially a man’s. To defy such training is akin to knocking over a brick wall casually with one hand. There is the same charge from allowing myself to feel humiliated—flaunting a taboo. After spending just about all my life protecting myself from humiliation, to allow myself to experience it is a release and, somehow, good. Humiliation, however, unlike power, is no fun unless I’m playing—either way, ever.

So much for what I *feel*; now for what I *do*. Spanking is among my favorite

pastimes. I can have a complete scene with a spanking. But, usually it’s just *part* of a scene; a good warm up, a gelling of positions, a great way to get familiar. Almost everyone I know appreciates a good spanking now and then.

I use bondage for a scene as I use spices to cook with. In and of itself the charge is limited, but, in the context of a scene, bondage is expected and relished. I am creative when I bind a person. I weave my pretty tubular webbing around and through their body. When *in* bondage there is no choice, just a feeling of helplessness. The responsibility is no longer yours. You *must* just lay back and enjoy it. There is a sense of security here.

Whipping can be a kissing or a massaging. It’s like lots of little electric shocks going back and forth—rapidly, so fast, so bright. There is such an enormous physical charge, sometimes I lose track of who is the perpetrator. Whipping is above all a mutual activity; we must do it together for it to work. I won’t give more than my partner can handle. A successful whipping is noted by the whipped one begging for mercy and leaving saying s/he could have taken a little bit more.

Above all s/m gives me the opportunity to know and love myself. I get joy from being a bully, a tyrant. I have an insatiable ego. I get a “perverted” sense of security from being a victim. S/m provides me with the space to not just tolerate these things about myself but to celebrate and admire them. I can sincerely love myself unconditionally. There is freedom and power here. I am grateful to be part of a place and people that can respect all of me.

—C



PLATE 15



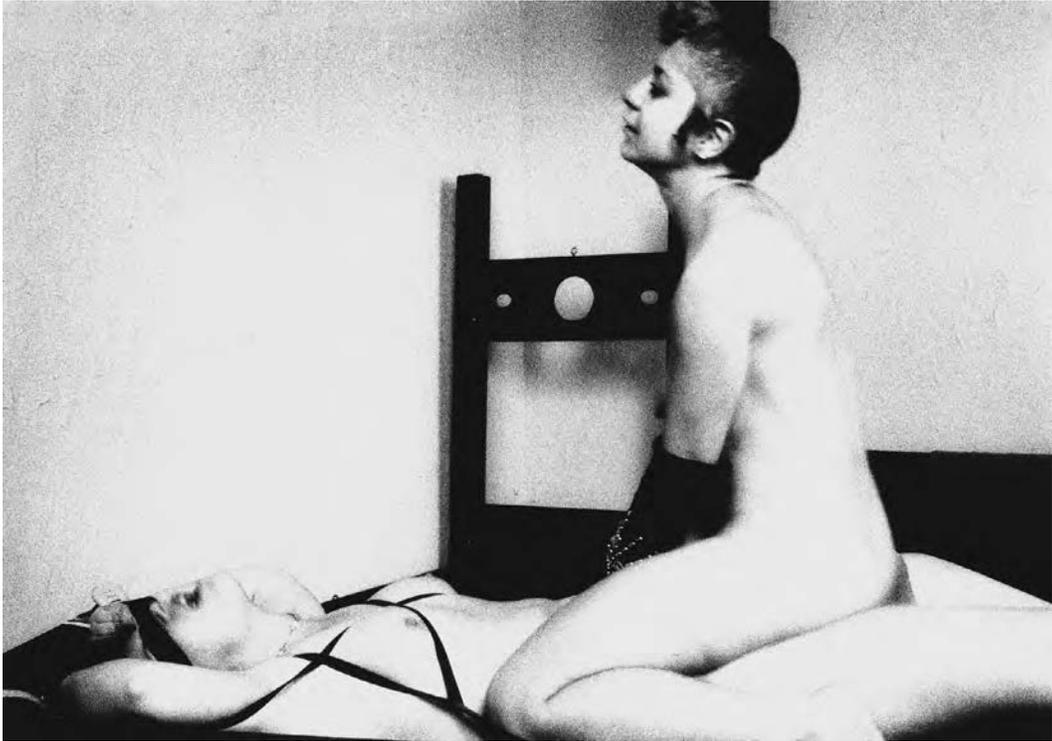


PLATE 17

How far can we take our pleasures?  
As long as it's pleasurable for both of us,  
we keep exploring and expanding. Limits  
are set so we have a framework in which  
to work, and the limits are expected to  
be expanded. We break limits, we expand  
them. Limits are based on when it stops  
being pleasure. We're not here to see if  
I can beat him black and blue, or raw or  
red or bloody. That's not the purpose at  
all. The purpose is to give pleasure, to  
receive pleasure.

As I whip him, his body responds to  
my whipping. It contorts and contracts.  
I can tell how hard to whip him from  
the contractions of the lower ass, the  
shaking of the arms, the movement of  
the head. Body movements—a sigh, a  
moan, a twitch, ever so slight. You have  
to be there to know what I'm referring  
to, but it's all in the intensity and the  
feedback that I get. I give him energy. He  
gives energy back, and, as I whip him, we  
exchange a flow of energy. I can tell how  
hard I can go, how far I can go. When  
I've crossed that threshold, I take him  
one step beyond.

So, our limits are when we stop giving  
and receiving pleasure. That's our limits.  
It's not "how hard can I beat him?" That's  
for jerks out there in the street who claim  
to be into S&M, and all they want to  
do is beat somebody till they get their  
jollies off, whether the person getting  
the beating is enjoying it or not. There  
are people who enjoy being taken to that  
point, but that's not *our* relationship. Our  
relationship is giving and receiving, back  
and forth, the pleasure of the act.

—*from an interview with Sir Charles*



PLATE 18

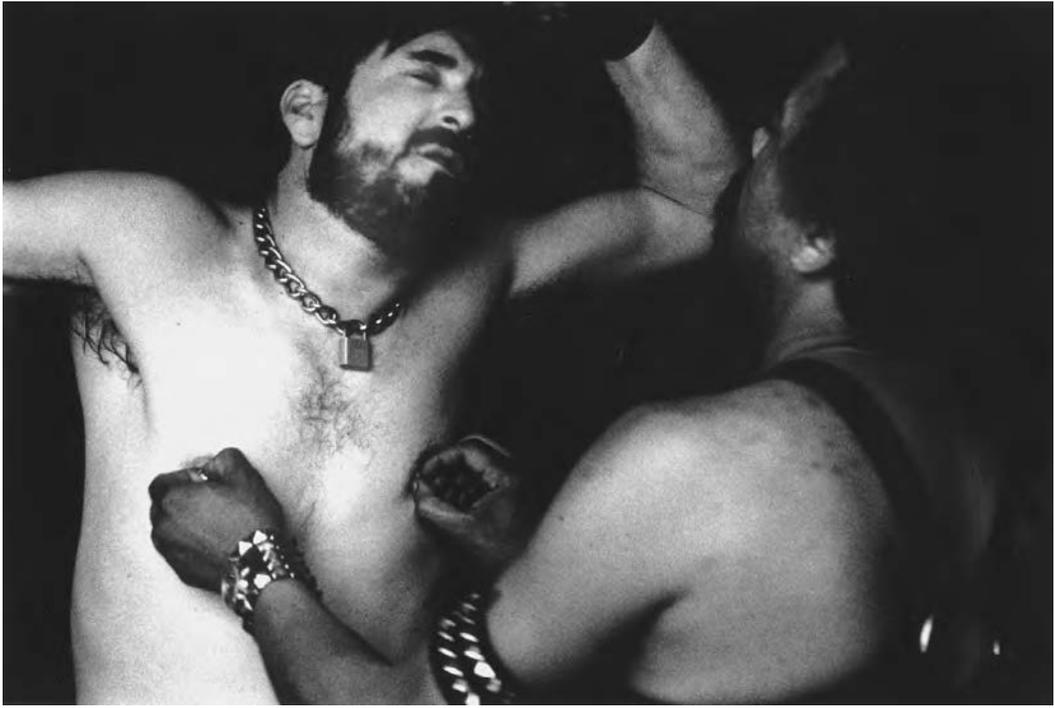


PLATE 19





PLATE 21



PLATE 22



PLATE 23



I've learned to get into causing pain, mostly because he really loves it. And I can really enjoy it, but, so far, the main reason I bother with it is because of what I get out of it later. What I basically want is sex. I love sex, and I want to make it as intense as I can. I really believe that the most important thing in life is people, and how people relate to each other and love each other. Sex isn't only physical pleasure; it can also be as enlightening, spiritual, and cosmic as other consciousness expanding things, like the mostly Eastern religious and philosophical disciplines, and even drugs. Of all these paths to what I suspect is the same place, sex seems to be the easiest, the most natural, and even the most fun. We have this immense energy and power that we just have to get hold of and use. Being dominant is fun and exhilarating, but in the long run, I usually end up using it as a tool to increase the intensity of the sexual, emotional and psychic interaction. So, when we do SM, and I hurt him, we generate a lot of energy. The more turned on we are, the more energy we'll have to play with, whether what we're after is a really good, physical fucking or a profound mental connection (or both).

Lately, I've gotten into being submissive, and it's really much easier, because all the things I have to do are in my head, and I can do that. It's a challenge and it's scary and real intense, but it's not as much work as being dominant and having to make a lot of decisions and think a lot. Being submissive, and getting into pain, I don't have to really pay attention or think at all. My focus goes way inside myself. I almost become an observer, and can sort of feel the hitting, but it doesn't *hurt* anymore. It's a real tricky place to get to for me.

When I'm being submissive, I can get into being used as a sexual thing. I can get into some mental imagery, just wanting to consume that person. It's consciously directing all my attention to the point where we touch. By focusing all my energy on that, that physical connecting point becomes the whole universe. That's what magic is. Even with witchcraft and other magical things, it's taking the energy at your disposal and controlling that energy to make things happen. They both (SM and witchcraft/magic) have to do with focusing and channeling energy to make something happen.

—*from an interview with Marsha*





PLATE 26



PLATE 27





PLATE 29





PLATE 31



“Eros” in a strict classical sense is not synonymous with “sex,” but is a transcendent, transformational experience that usually happens for most people through orgasm. Another such experience is the spiritual ecstasy some people call being “born again,” as are certain catalytic psychological experiences.

S/M is one way of achieving that transcendent eros. When I transcend as a submissive I become as the universe, matter and spirit, a great limitless void containing all there is. When I transcend as a dominant I become as God, raising, weaving, directing the energies and body of the universe of my submissive’s transcendence.

More than exercising power over another, we negotiate and share power. The bottom is a foundation. His trust and cooperation are necessary for the dance of love and strength. Any abuse of that trust and cooperation is not S/M, but is a cruel and vicious violation of the victim and of the principles of S/M.

Whips, chains, melted wax, bondage: the images are frightening to outsiders because they are popularly associated with torture, horror, and punishment. Indeed some people play out those scenes. But taken out of the usual context, well, imagine...

You are securely bound, carefully held by somebody who will take care of your every need, who will take you to the edge of reality and fantasy, somebody you trust enough to have you tied and immobile. Indeed there is no need for mobility. Master will take care of everything. He strokes you along your back and thighs, slaps your buttocks, not enough to hurt, never quite enough to hurt. Master will never hurt you. The tempo and strength of the spanking builds up, along with it your own threshold of pain. Resistance or struggle are impossible. You can’t fight back, nor would you want to. You can only allow the feeling to move through and past the associations of “hurt.” “Pain” cannot hurt you, cannot be a signal of damage. You have slowly, carefully examined your limits. In perfect communication with your master, he knows them too. Accepting the heightening intensity of the slaps, your breathing accelerates, hyperventilation inflames the sensations. Through the rhythm of growing intensity, spirit moves through the flesh. Ecstasy comes through the transcendence of sensation. The universe opens as an infinity of loving acceptance. The feeling is like orgasm, but more than a joyous quivering of flesh, it is a release of body and soul. In nakedness, bondage and humility you find yourself strong, free and proud.

©1986 Jack Fertig







S&M to me is an exchange, first and foremost, of trust, and then of respect. Sex does not necessarily have to be involved. I think the ultimate S&M is the level of consciousness, the plane, the space that the participants ultimately get into. That feeling of euphoria, of power, ultimately of gratification. And knowing, no matter what end of the whip that you're on, that the two of you have created this electricity, that a person could walk into the room and be stunned and feel the power surging throughout the room and surging throughout each person's muscles, genitalia, hair, teeth... It's electric, and you feel it. That to me is the ultimate beauty of S&M. That to me is S&M.

As a matter of fact, when I first got into S&M it took me a long time to connect S&M and sex. Because I only did S&M professionally. And then all of a sudden one day I was in a session, just going along happily in my session, y'know. I had him all tied up, and was doing the basic whips and chains and stuff, and all of a sudden, it was on top of me before I realized. I was getting incredibly aroused, and the next thing I knew I creamed in my jeans. Or rather my garter—my corsets. Creamed my corset! It just happened and I said, "Oh, my God, there really is sex involved in this." It really does get sexual. I have experienced light S&M in my sexual encounters. But I don't think of that as doing S&M. I think of that as having sex where there was some pleasurable pain involved for me.

—*from an interview with Dède de Haviland*



PLATE 36



PLATE 37



Pain is such a harsh word. Pain to me is when I break some glass at work, and I have to pick up the pieces, and I get a piece of glass in my finger; that's pain to me. What we do isn't pain. He's loving me, he's touching me in a loving way. I guess that's the perception that's missing sometimes.

For a long time I was looking for Daddy, but it just never happened. The flow of energy didn't happen, no one knew how to accept my surrender, until I met him. And before we met, I had very negative feelings toward S&M. I'd never had anyone beat my ass like he does. It's not pain, or rather not pain negative, but pain positive. Pain ecstasy. I feel helpless, hopeless, joy, sorrow... I feel a whole range of things, but I think they all encircle, they're all composed of surrender and submission.

In terms of total submission to him, the physical act of giving my ass to him to beat is actually one of the lesser of the things we do. The week-end beating is wonderful, and I love it, but, everyone focuses on that physical act of being strung up and beaten. There are many more ways of being submissive that carry on into our daily lives. Cleaning the house. Keeping the house straight. Keeping the kitchen clean and Daddy's clothes clean. All the time, week after week; that, to me, is real submission. I feel much more dominated, and much more under his thumb during the week.

*—from an interview with Boy Steven*



The experience that I get from him isn't pain; he takes me somewhere else, and I ride with it. I keep opening up and letting go. He's very good at what he does—whipping. He seduces you into it. He's not vicious or cruel. He doesn't descend on people. He builds up intensity. He starts out where the touch of the whip is like a caress, a leather caress, and then it builds on my body. Usually, I've been on my back or my stomach in some sort of bondage, and I feel very secure; I can move, but I can't go anyplace. And the warmth, the heat, just starts building. It gets hotter and hotter and then it dawns on me that it's like I'm on a roller coaster and I'm starting to go up and there's no turning back and it starts getting more intense and it's very dramatic, and more intense and more intense. It's like I'm on a roller coaster and then it starts getting *really* fast. If I tighten up, resist, I lose it; it becomes no fun. There's nothing there for me if I'm resisting. If I surrender I find myself flying. It's release, intensity, a high; it's like a rain of fire and I'm flying inside. I'm high. I'm very high. I get very, very high and when I bottom out it takes me a while to come back.

—*from an interview with Sybil Holiday*





PLATE 41





PLATE 43



PLATE 44

I hate pain and yet at times I'm a masochist, so what do you make of that? I don't enjoy pain, I enjoy a certain kind of input that turns me on. I definitely don't enjoy unintentional pain. I enjoy playing with energy and directing it in a certain kind of erotic way, where everything else goes away. Playing with erotic energy and focusing it. I think that's what the whole SM trip is, in a nutshell: playing with erotic energy and focusing it so that it's really clear and really hot, and nothing comes in the way.

I have never felt the same kind of closeness and trust with vanilla sex relationships as I have with SM friends and lovers. The bonds are tighter. Some boundaries of normal social ways of behaving are being crossed, and it's magical. It's *great* that people can do that, that we don't have to pretend and play-act like my parents told me was the only way. We can really touch ground with others and reach inside and they can reach inside me and we can do all those things that we're not supposed to do and share love.

When I'm submissive, I whine and I'm shy, which is the opposite of what I'm like when I'm dominant. It's not play acting, it's real, and comes out that way because there are two different personae in me. The little girl in there that needs to be whipped and spanked and humiliated is not the same woman who wants to see men crawl at her feet and get them really hard and turned on and tease them and make them do her the way she wants. It's not the same person. They're both me, but they're different aspects of me. I believe that if people tap into the different personae of themselves and play with them in the context of SM or B&D with someone they trust, then life gets richer.

I have the space to be a whiny little girl that really needs a certain kind of input and punishment that really doesn't fit in my life as a grown woman. And there's a space for my anger and my desire to overpower men; it's a whole lot better than screaming at the clerk at the store because he's not giving my change right. You find a place for different sides of yourself. Then you have to balance things out.

—*from an interview with Cléo Dubois*



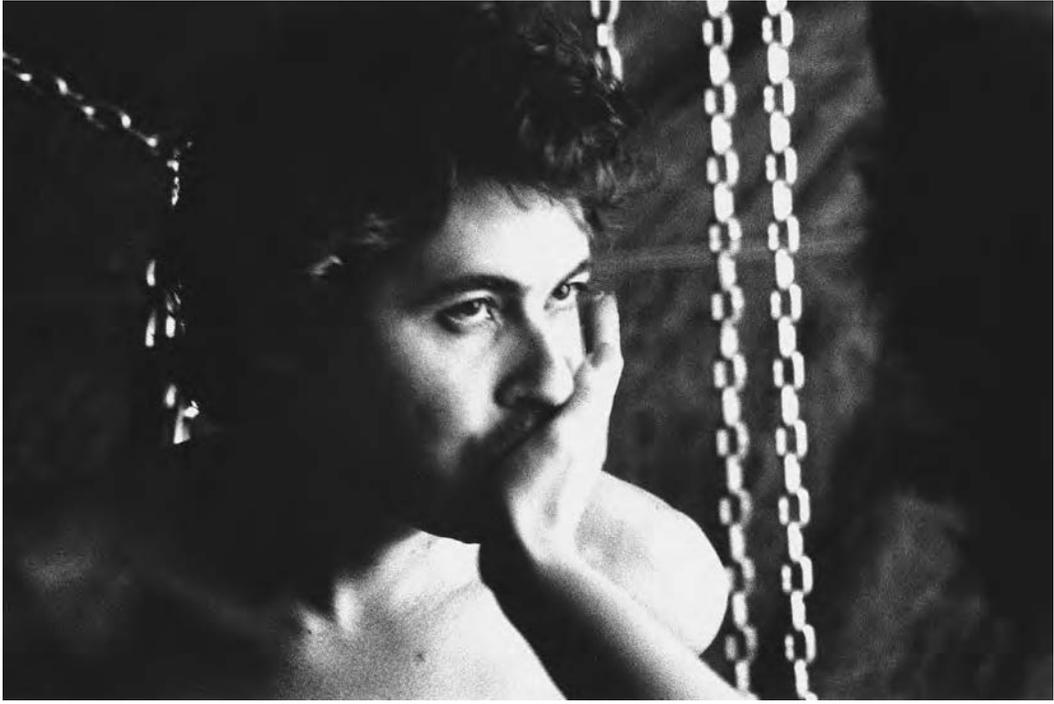




PLATE 47

# *Dangerous Photographs*

With this body of work, photographer Michael A. Rosen proves that he is dangerous. But no less dangerous than the photographs that inhabit this book. Michael (he insists upon being called Michael) and his photographs are particularly dangerous in 1986; in an erotophobic society that seems to believe less and less, with each passing year, in the basic tenet of free thought.

Photographs are pieces of time. Fleeting moments cut from the unending fabric of time. They are true. Except that the truth they reveal has been filtered through the subjective eye of the camera and the photographer. There is no such thing as a photographer who objectively records what he sees. In choosing a camera, lens, film, related camera settings, camera perspectives and angles, methods of film processing and printing techniques and most importantly, "that" moment when the photographer exposes light on celluloid and captures a subjective reflection of what we call reality, the photographer influences and puts his personal stamp on what he photographs.

With *Sexual Magic: the S/M Photographs*, Michael puts his stamp on sadomasochistic (S/M) sexuality. It is challenging because the acceptability, morality and legality of photographic images of nudity, eroticism and sexuality have been hotly debated in public opinion, the legislature and the courts since the invention of photography nearly 150 years ago. Unacceptable images break through borders, become mainstream over time and make way for a new set of unacceptable images to break through a new set of borders.

Some of the earliest photographs were explorations in light and shadow that viewed the nude in classical terms, as an object of idealized beauty. Others recorded the shape and movement of the human form as study material for artists and scientists. Since the mid 1930's and 1940's, some photographers have added dimensions of eroticism, mystery and implied sexuality to their nudes. But it is only during the last ten years that a few fine art photographers have begun to exhibit and publish images confronting sexual energy directly. While the great majority of this public work has focused on the female form, clandestine work of the male nude is currently being rediscovered, exhibited and published along with the more sexually open work of contemporary photographers.

We live in a perverted world. Images of death and dying become more frequent on television news and in the printed media. That is acceptable. At the same time sly sexual teasing oozes from advertising and popular entertainment, enticing the viewer or reader. That also is acceptable. But images of honest nudity and eros are decried as pornography and remain unacceptable.

That makes things difficult for the fine art photographer interested in exploring the human body and its sexuality. Only a minuscule fraction of the general population is even aware of the work of fine art photographers that deal with nudity and eros. Who knows how much other sexually frank and controversial work has been concealed, ignored or even destroyed over the years, because of its subject matter, and therefore will never see the light?

Photographs of S/M remain the most controversial legally permissible images. Contemporary photographers such as Arthur Tress, Robert Mapplethorpe, Helmut Newton, and Joel-Peter Witkin have all grappled with S/M images, each within his own stylistic domain; controlling and arranging S/M scenarios for their cameras. Their images are metaphors and symbolic recreations of S/M; obsessive personal reinterpretations of the myth of sadomasochistic sex.

The parallel exploration of sexuality in pornography is hard to trace because of its underground and taboo nature. Even so, current pornography lays claim to pictures of sadomasochism. It offers sharp, detailed, too brightly lit pictures of the fetishism of sadomasochistic sex. But most of the paid models do not pretend to be into S/M in their private lives, and the images in stop-action poses of imagined cruelty have little to do with the reality of consensual sadomasochistic sex.

In *Sexual Magic: the S/M Photographs*, Michael creates his own photographic path and raises difficult questions that touch the viewer's tender spots, but cannot logically be denied. Unlike other fine art photographers who create symbolic images of S/M, and unlike pornography with its stop-action S/M poses, Michael walks a thin line between photojournalism and art. Like a social documentarian, he watches the action, uninvolved, from the sidelines; his camera recording. He gives us an entrance, opens a door into a world rarely seen without jaundiced prejudice. But like the artist, Michael intentionally influences and molds the resulting photographic reality, allowing us to see, not with frightened eyes, but with our hearts.

There is no question that looking at S/M photographs is a difficult and scary process for the uninitiated. We carry within us deeply held prejudices about religion and sex and horror stories about violence, rape, sexual psychopaths and torture. We hold on to them tightly, for if we are wrong about S/M (and the great majority of the time we are wrong about S/M), then we can be wrong about any other conviction that we hold. With his photographs, Michael challenges us to new ways of seeing and thinking.

By applying a series of technically crafted photographic choices to the subject of S/M, Michael has created moody emotional photographs. They are filled with sharp whites, intense darks, and tonalities of gray that shimmer. Their pointillistic grain and visual softness make them appear painterly. Bodies, faces and objects take on a surreal, almost dream-like quality.

Michael also blurs the startling flash of the surface reality of S/M sex, by using a slow shutter speed. Whips become trails of energy. Frozen emotions turn into waves of feeling. By shaking us loose from our lurid fascination/horror with the accouterments and look of S/M, he reveals and exposes the underlying emotional and psychological interactions that can occur between top(s) and bottom(s) who play with S/M energies. Look at their eyes. They speak volumes and bring me back again and again. The surface reality of S/M is only a physical manifestation of the emotional/psychological exchanges that form the basis of S/M.

Michael's photographic techniques have their antecedents in the history of photography. Some early photographs, using the then available technology, were grainy, soft and painterly. Michael's photographs make me think of Edward Steichen's early nudes and portraits taken around the turn of the twentieth century. With technical advances in film and changes in paper processes, painterly photographs were replaced by sharp, detailed mirror reflections of reality, although that now seems to be swinging back the other way.

Michael's photographs are also connected to the work of low light, live performance photographers that currently document theater and performance art. Using only the available stage lighting, live performance photographers create grainy, high contrast photographs that have a narrow range of sharpness and are filled with emotion and movement.

Michael's controversial photographs further break barriers by highlighting a unique group of San Francisco Bay Area men and women who are deeply involved in S/M in their personal lives. They are a very select, very special cross-section of people into S/M sexuality. Knowledgeable, they have read about S/M, talked about it and explored and learned its techniques and safety aspects. They believe intensely in S/M as a consensual, positive, liberating force in their lives.

Just read their words. S/M is a powerful force. In the right hands, and treated with the proper respect, it has a great potential for growth and love. In the wrong hands, or used in the wrong ways or without the proper preparation, it can be negative and destructive. If *Sexual Magic: the S/M Photographs* appears to be one-sided, it is. Michael's subjects are caring, loving and honest enough to acknowledge to themselves, and through these photographs to the world, who they really are. It is risky business.

But Michael's subjects don't stop there. They politically define themselves as bisexual, heterosexual, gay, feminist and lesbian. They are word processors, sex worker/counselors, professionals, artists, social workers and others. The world tends to divide people and put them into exclusive little boxes. But if you look, you will see that some people who are dominant in one session are submissive in another. Some people who play with the same sex in one session play with the opposite sex in another. And some people who play one-on-one in one session play with a group of people in another. They make us question our ideas about people who are turned on to pleasure mixed with pain.

*Sexual Magic: the S/M Photographs.*

With this book, Michael breaks through borders. By using particular photographic techniques refined by other photographers as a point of inspiration, and in exploring sadomasochistic sexuality in a totally different manner from other photographers, Michael has created a body of work that is unique in the history of photography.

Michael A. Rosen wants to leave the world a better place than he found it. In photographing S/M sex, a subject belabored by stereotypes and misconceptions, he confronts us and challenges us to look at the world around us anew. Nothing is always good. Nothing is always bad. Michael challenges us to look beneath the surface reality to find the essential truths. In doing so himself, he has created radical photographs of radical people involved in radical sexuality. And in 1986, that makes this photographer and his photographs dangerous.

—Mark I Chester  
*gay radical sex photographer*  
San Francisco, California, January 1986