

# FETISHOUSE

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A woman who is a willing prisoner in her own home, in the company of her erotic fetishes, her underwear and a closet brimming with shoes so that she can **ring the changes** in brief moments of impassiveness. Our heroine is Nora Ness and she is a Madame with a homey obsession, queen of solitary competitive narcissism, sexy mistress of single-guest ceremonies. Her universe comprises just a few square metres but seems to know no boundaries in its inventions around her own body geography. An organic ecstasy that feeds itself on fetish prostheses in an imaginative statuesque manner, breaking up the didactic centrality of the photo, fragmenting the scene with a mix of pieces that are slotted together, abstract, overlapping, misty and with anomalous angles.

But let us go back to just a moment before, to the necessary roots of recent photographic eroticism. Here we enter a sector with definite references and recognisable themes. Let's say immediately that various works (past and present) are far removed from art, remaining within the sphere of good photography more closely linked to a documentary status. Then, like the exceptions that confirm too many rules, there are those photographers with an abstract vision, the right iconographic impact and a pictorial construction of the elements. Helmut Newton, just to start at the top, took the fetishism of art into the contexts of glossy photos, introducing his chic dominatrices into glittering places of luxury. Robert Mapplethorpe ennobled the sexual act, even the most extreme, with the figurative logic of a neo-classic construction, suspended beyond time and space. Nobuyoshi Araki turned the geisha into a metropolitan icon for recurring fantasies which are within reach. Ben Westwood built retro images and provided long-term rehabilitation for the erotic concept of pin-ups. Jan Saudek blended body and nature in a jubilation of surreal cruelty. Tony Ward recreated a pornographic aggressiveness with wild colours. Gilles Berquet reinvented surrealism in the bedroom with refined solitary performances. Christophe Mourthé, Eric Kroll and Peter W. Czernich uplifted the reasons of fetish transvestism, turning latex into the new paint colour of erotic art. Today they represent a number of reference archetypes, creators of that missing vision with which Eros identified paths of valuable artistic interest. Through these and other maestros, photography has interpreted the anthropological costume, the vitality of antagonism, the sense of a transgression that categorically breaks the social taboo. Some (perhaps unfortunately, perhaps luckily) still believe that erotic art is not deep and long-lasting like other thematic fields. The truth is that art in general has always rotated around the erotic body: we learn this from Greek and Roman statues, murals in Pompeii, religious painting, African art, Japanese prints and Twentieth century avant-gardes. The body remains the field in which minds and messages grow, along with analyses and provocations, confirmations and splits. The human body, so recognisable yet without limits, has held the reasons of wisdom and of discomfort,

external and eternal questions, soft or radical revolution. Everything happened on its surface and everything will continue to form on its unstable skin. The body as the main seismograph of human nature, society, daily life and aspirations beyond the land. The body as a high form of thought.

Everyone is of the opinion that the sacred heart is called **obsession**. It is the petrol that fuels the sexual engine with its variable physical speeds. Without obsessive movement no erotic or pornographic cultures would have developed, precisely because the centrality of sex is nourished by untameable desire, growing thoughts, repetition towards an epilogue that is out of reach. Obsession rules daily life, dictates priorities, excluding everything that is not needed by the bulimia of mental desire. Sexuality, in other words, as a measure of evaluation and orientation, the code of an existential modus and an impulse between flesh and spirit.

Nora Ness moves with the coherence of one who makes the best of her obsession. Which means, first and foremost, adhering to the gestures, mannerisms and details that determine everyone's personal imagination. Then it means transforming your life into a project, using voyeurism as the final completion of a style that becomes a method. The formulation processes are joined by the personality of detail, the mark that stamps the work with a code of belonging. And then, last but never least, the iconographic talent, the quality of visual architecture with which a simple photo turns into timeless erotic propulsion. It makes me think of a number of projects with radical obsessions: "Motel Fetish" by Chas Ray Krider, inventive portraits of women in solitary poses in the rooms of classic cheap American motels; "Luba" by Petter Hegre, a man who made his young partner pose for years, she too an artist as well as a beautiful muse with a perfect body; Ken-Ichi Murata, the man who photographs his partner, Yumiko Kawasaki, blending the sensuality of the geisha with a flora of surreal tones, while the black and white photographic prints are painted by hand. In all these different cases, the artist never loses sight of his obsession and steamrolls on, relentlessly moving forwards, repeating that only the sexual impulse makes each time different, victorious and unique.

Sex right in front of your eyes. Sex that is the result of thought, the result of a conceptual obsession that involves the mind and hidden desire. Explosive sex even when the act is a pure intellectual gesture. The artist who recounts Eros holds an electric relationship with the completed form of sex, as if tension were continually and implacably running through it. Art becomes a form of desire, the evocative construction of an emotion that is full of adrenalin but also poetic. It is no coincidence that various artists of eroticism isolate themselves from the world, refusing any contact except that with their own mental journey. Because obsession calls for obtuse concentration, a sort of timid solitude where nothing must distance you from your vital fire.

There is always a second player on the stage with Ness: her **camera**. Never hidden, always in the fast-moving hands of the artist, confirming a clear game of mirrors that reveals the obvious on a stage without supporting actors or walk-on parts. Ness confirms her obsessive solitude in the declared gesture of the self-referencing shot. The digital camera invades the image as yet another fetish, deciding the very postures, looks and muscular tension. In the prismatic world of a revealing click, apparent solitude is transformed, the object expression of complete adherence to what is happening on stage.

## THE HOME PLACE

The rooms where the artist works are simple, furnished with just a few accessories, barely lit up by the tripod-mounted lights and professional spots on the floor. White walls with the odd picture, monochrome floors, coloured throws on some of the furniture, a bare bathroom with bathtub: the world of Nora Ness rotates around the silent rooms where the body becomes an energetic magnet that captures the set lights and floats, a flash of flesh. The apparent randomness of things in effect indicates marked attention to relationships between empty and full, balanced by that body, which catalyses objects, plays with empty spaces and adapts to perimeters and surfaces.

## THE SHOES

The choice of shoes takes on central importance when the attractive elements call for the body to be completely fetish-oriented. Like every self-respecting good fetish touch, the world of Ness walks on high and (often) slim heels, toes that are (often) tapered, colours with a bent towards black and red, but which also dip into oranges or greens. The shoe takes centre-stage with its elegant aggressiveness, it looks to be magnetically pulled forward, towards the willing spectator. It is no longer an accessory but a central dimension that dialogues with clothes, underwear, colours and furnishing accessories. The shoe establishes itself as the beating heart of fetishism, the element that attacks the setting and changes the emotional coordinates of the image. The important thing is that it does not become the sole protagonist but, as in the case of Ness, is amalgamated into the silent poses of the body.

## CLOTHING AND ACCESSORIES

Semi-transparent veils, underwear, bodices, dark glasses, gloves, necklaces... just a few elements but put together well, the right balance between clothed and revealed, giving and hiding, romanticism and aggressive attitude. The artist adores layers of elements on her body, avoiding any kind of pornography or forced style. She wants to be there and at the same time to create the right distance, come close without stepping outside that domestic boundary. Even her eyes never focus perfectly on us, on the contrary they tend to stay closed or half-open, often looking sideways as if Ness were looking for a personal vanishing point.