

## IT'S NOT ABOUT ME: A CONVERSATION BETWEEN PHOTOGRAPHER GREG GORMAN AND PATRICIA LANZA

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Andy Warhol, Los Angeles, 1986, copyright Greg Gorman

"For me a photograph is most successful when it doesn't answer all the questions and it leaves something to be desired. I like each picture that I take to be a testament to the individual character of my subject." -Gorman

Gorman is an iconic Hollywood photographer and master of portraiture. Over his fifty-year career, he has photographed the most recognizable faces from the entertainment industry and music world. This retrospective book, *It's Not About Me*, published by teNeues, showcases many images never before published, and is a tribute to his long successful career of photographing the famous and the notorious with a distinctive approach and style. From Kirk Douglas, Eartha Kitt, Robert Redford, Marlon Brando, Sophia Loren, Elizabeth Taylor, and Al Pacino to Viggo Mortensen, Diane Lane, Iggy Pop, Christopher Walken, Dennis Hopper, and Liza Minnelli, as well as Mark Wahlberg, Halle Berry, Leonardo DiCaprio, Sharon Stone, Michael Jackson, Brad Pitt, Robert De Niro and Marina Abramović – to name just a few

**Patricia Lanza:** This will be your 12th book publication. What was the impetus for making this retrospective book, *It's Not About Me*?

**Gorman:** I felt that I had a lot of work that had never really been explored. I think one of the interesting things, being seventy-one, and having shot portraits for the better part of 50 years, is going back and looking at the work with a different eye, a different point of view. I think it's been quite challenging looking at work that I may have oversmiled many years ago and finding pictures that I wouldn't expect. What I was looking for was a comprehensive overview of my career, revisiting and publishing images that had never been seen before, including color imagery for the first time.

**Lanza:** What is the time period for this book and how many images did you edit from your archive?

**Gorman:** The book covers 50 years of my career. It took me three and a half years to create the book. I did a solid year of editing. I'm an intense person when I start on something- I go full tilt. I had 160 large boxes in cold storage where I probably belonged, and I would bring them home one or two at a time. I set up an editing bay at my desk in my bedroom where I have a beautiful view overlooking the city. I didn't want to edit in my office. I moved everything upstairs with a light box, slide pages, contact sheets and a grease pencil- something the younger generation are probably not familiar with. I spent the better part of a year working feverishly. When I was in town, I was definitely editing.

**Lanza:** What was the editing process? How many images did you review?

**Gorman:** Thousands upon thousands of images at the very least! I narrowed it down to roughly a thousand images; scanning the balance of what I didn't have already scanned. That was the film, just looking at my analogue work, not even any of my digital work, which began around the year 2000. For the film work, I settled on about a thousand pictures. I edited for a solid year; taking the next year off thinking about where I wanted to go with this project.

So it was about three and a half years, almost four years before the publication of the book. I really took my time with it. Then it became a question of which images made sense. The irony was that much of the early work showed me how my career had evolved. I reviewed a lot of the early work and regrettably saw a lot of pictures of major players which were not lit in the style for which I became known, however that is the evolution of an artist's work.

My style began to change around the time of my shoot with Tom Waits in the late 1970's. My signature style focused more on the relationship between my highlights and shadows. Thanks to my brilliant art director, Gary Johns, we were able to incorporate some of the overly lit early works into creative, interesting photographs by positioning and cropping. He has been a friend of mine since the seventies. He's done a lot of my books, including the campaign for La.Eyeworks.

**Lanza:** Your book has many portrait pairings. How did you arrive at this?

**Gorman:** That's the genius again of Gary Johns. I think that he did such a beautiful job editing and of putting pictures together.

In fact, sometimes from a humorous point of view, sometimes from a logistical point of view they paired well together. But I think the pairings make our book kind of fun. Normally you would not see them together, like pairing Barry White and Betty White for example. However many of the portrait pairings have meaning and poignancy. Some of the portraits needed to stand on their own on- deserving a double page.

**Lanza:** What are some of the most defining moments in your career? What would you say were the big breaks?

**Gorman:** A big break early on, getting the likes of Dustin Hoffman in the movie, *Tootsie*, as the special photographer. This was a major. Barbara Streisand calling me up one day when she was recast in a film called *All Night Long* at Universal. Knowing that I was the special photographer on set, she wanted to know how I was planning on photographing her. The sign of a true professional. Having these big names in my portfolio early on in my career certainly didn't hurt. Having David Bowie and Bette Midler, by my side added more credibility as well.

They thought, Oh he's shooting David Bowie... he must be a pretty damn good photographer. I was just lucky enough to have been in the right place at the right time. And certainly a big defining moment in my career. In another arena, my editorial days with *Interview Magazine*, was a *big plus*. I think that was a breakout for a lot of photographers that were working around that time. During the period of Robert

Hayes, as the editor in chief of *Interview*, this was a significant moment. Another defining moment in showcasing my signature lighting style, was the La.Eyeworks works campaign. .

For the La.Eyeworks campaign I created some of my most iconic portraits. And for sure, my most famous picture of Andy Warhol. He called me up one day after signing a deal with Ford models and asked me if he would be a good candidate for one of their advertisements, since the adverts appeared monthly in *Interview Magazine*. Shooting the campaign became a challenge for me because this was before celebrities realized the value of a personal endorsement.



David Bowie, Los Angeles, 1987, copyright Greg Gorman

**Lanza:** You have degrees in photojournalism and fine art cinematography. When did your work evolve to portraiture?

**Gorman:** I have an undergraduate degree in photojournalism and a Master of Fine Arts in filmmaking from the University of Southern California.

I started my career in photography when I borrowed a friend's camera to shoot a Jimi Hendrix concert. I fell in love with photography and enrolled in a course at the University of Kansas. The only photography course they offered was a course in Photojournalism. My passion has always been people. I went through the School of Photojournalism at K.U., but then moved to California to finish my degree in film. However, when I graduated from film school, I realized that I would enjoy a career more in still photography than as a film maker in the movie business. I always cherished more that one on one relationship with people.

**Lanza:** How did your education in cinematography or filmmaking affect the development of your still photographic style?

**Gorman:** That's a great question. And you know, no one's ever really asked me that during an interview. My career in lighting has come full circle. And the answer is when I got out of film school I suddenly didn't have the money to be able to afford buying strobes (electronic flash). So when I first started shooting I used, one K quartz lights and two K quartz soft boxes.

I started out with those continuous lights, but once my career took off, I realized that I needed more power to capture my imagery. I turned to electronic flash which I used for most of my career. You know, I was shooting a lot, and I eventually bought a Six K HMI Arri light, with a ballast for a very modest price of \$30,000. It was very heavy and on a huge stand.. So today I've come full circle, and I shoot with LED Rotolights, including the new Titan X2, my favorite light. I like it because not only are the skin tones stunning, but there is enough power to back it up.

In 2000, I started shooting digital. I couldn't believe how well digital saw light in low luminance. BUT you have to understand that at the beginning of digital, I was still shooting with a Hasselblad because digital cameras, were represented by a three-megapixel camera. I turned to digital, and shot with the Canon EOS 35mm cameras, when the file size became larger and the technology became more sophisticated.

**Lanza:** What is happening with you now, having this long career in photography?

**Gorman:** In the last nine years, my passion for shooting commercial assignments started to diminish. I have been focusing more on teaching and education. However, just recently my excitement for shooting re-emerged. Not being a fan of medium format since the Hasselblad days I always preferred the 35mm digital cameras. 35mm was always a good fit because of how I shoot, with a little bit more spontaneity, and with a high ISO, which you need with the LED lighting. The higher ISO gives you a more film-like quality. Then I started watching NOBECHI Creative Live series online, of which I am a lecturer. I heard about the medium format Fuji GFX100, a 100-megapixel camera. A week ago I was sent the camera to try out. I printed and read the 350-page manual. Justin Staley of Fuji said that I was probably the first person he knew, that ever read a camera manual. When you have a multitude of choices and settings, I thought it best to read the manual and understand how the camera works before starting to shoot.

Frankly when I started shooting with this camera, I was blown away. The camera, which looks imposing because of its size was not heavy, and with all the controls at your fingertips it was a great match for me! The Fuji lenses are great. I am very excited, and I have a couple of special projects in mind with big prints and back to my classic black and white style. AGAIN, I have come full circle with my camera of choice and gone back to shooting medium format with the Fuji GFX 100 and the Rotolight TITAN X2 by my side! The perfect combination for studio portraiture!!

**Lanza:** Of all the famous people that are in the book, *It's Not About Me*. Who was the most surprising in a photo session? What was one of the most interesting stories?

**Gorman:** Certainly meeting David Bowie was a big moment. Of course I was anxiety ridden because he was such a hero of mine. He possessed a wicked sense of humor and consequently was fun on set.

Bowie was so smart and sophisticated. He basically knew that photography was a necessary evil as part of the marketing program. When Bowie would have a project coming out, he would call, and we would shoot for two or three days. We made sure we covered all the magazines and press media releases, to help him avoid other photo sessions with other photographers.

Those times have really changed. For example, I shot Tom Waits, for the first time for an album cover for three days in the late 1970's. I'd start at about seven or eight o'clock in the morning picking him up at the Tropicana Hotel on Santa Monica Blvd. We often shot till midnight-something you would never see today. The last time I shot Tom Waits was well over 10 years ago. He gave me 30 minutes at a Chinese restaurant in Santa Rosa. I took him out back where there was a railroad track to get the pictures for the required pages for the London Sunday Times. Today with digital, everything's a rush. In some ways, digital has been fantastic, but in other ways, it's been a demise because everybody knows it can happen as quickly as we speak.

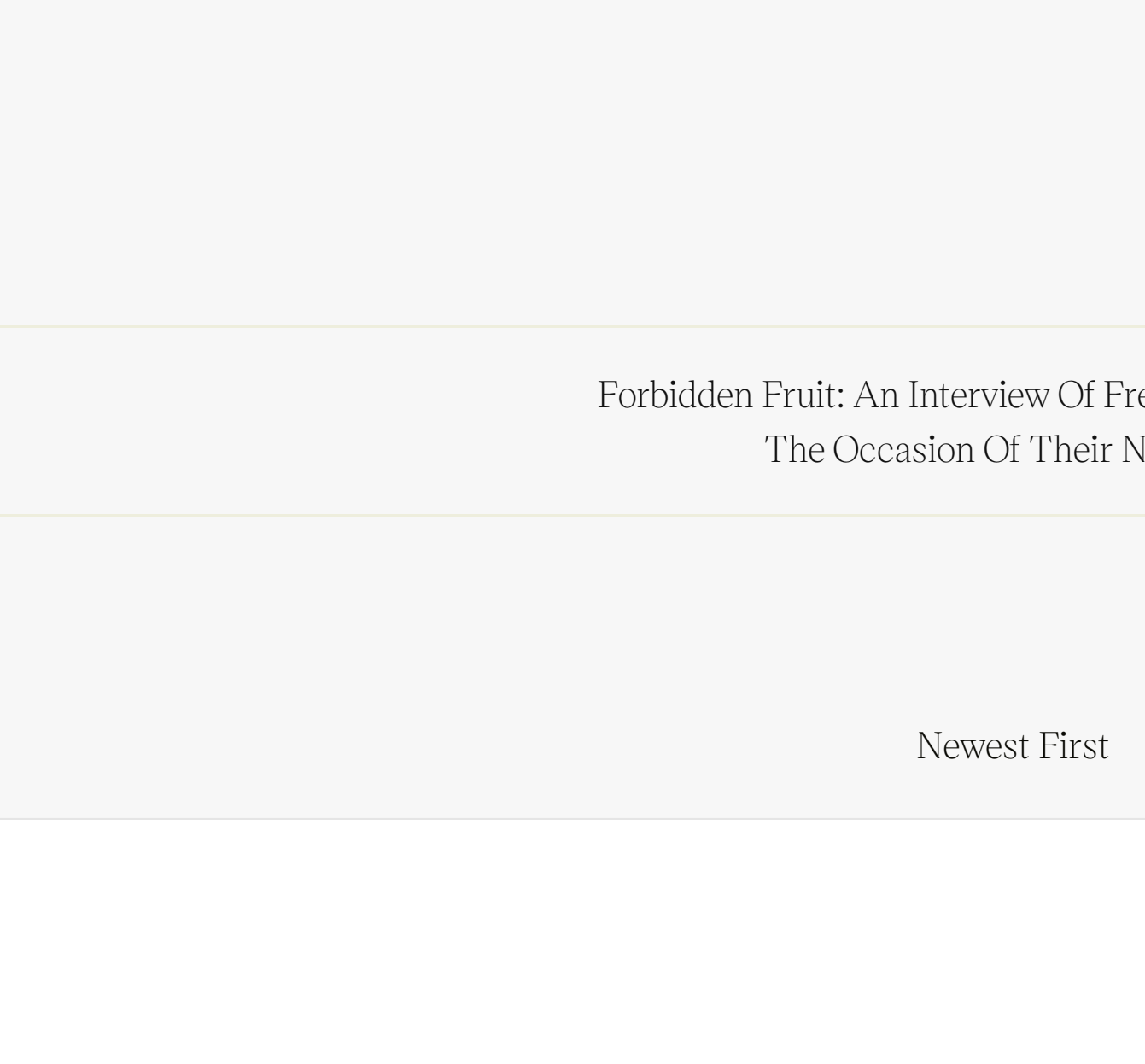
**Lanza:** Let's talk about the book what is happening this year in that regard?

**Gorman:** The book, published by teNeues, *It's Not About Me*, is coming out in July in Europe and August in the States. I have a show coming up this fall with the Fahey/Klein gallery - the actual dates are dependent on the current situation. Most of my European dates orchestrated by Anke Degenhard have been put on hold until we know better the current state of affairs. However my press for the book has been diligently moving forward thanks to my brilliant current agent Nadine Dinter. Many of the photographs in this book, stem from original assignments, advertising campaigns, personal shoots and work associated with the motion picture industry.

Often after these assignments, we would separately make our own set of pictures. Our more private moments. Most of the color and black and white images featured in this publication came from that body of work. I put all my energy into the talent and tried to take a back seat, putting their imagery front and center and thus, the title, *It's Not About Me*.

*Throughout Greg Gorman's star-studded portfolio entitled, It's Not About Me, you'll find the likes of Leonardo DiCaprio and Johnny Depp at the beginning of their careers, as well as the iconic posters Gorman created for films such as Scarface and Tootsie, record covers for David Bowie, and magazine covers for Andy Warhol. Foreword by Sir Elton John. Afterword by John Waters. Preorder here.*

*Patricia Lanza began her career at the National Geographic Society — first as a photo researcher, then as a photography editor, followed by eight years as a contract photographer. She began working for the Annenberg Foundation in 2005, researching an idea and writing an initiative on the uses of photography. In 2009, the Annenberg Space for Research opened. And as the Director of Talent & Content, Lanza is responsible for creating and carrying out Wallis Annenberg's vision through themed programming and photographic exhibitions.*



Elizabeth Taylor, Los Angeles, 1989, copyright Greg Gorman

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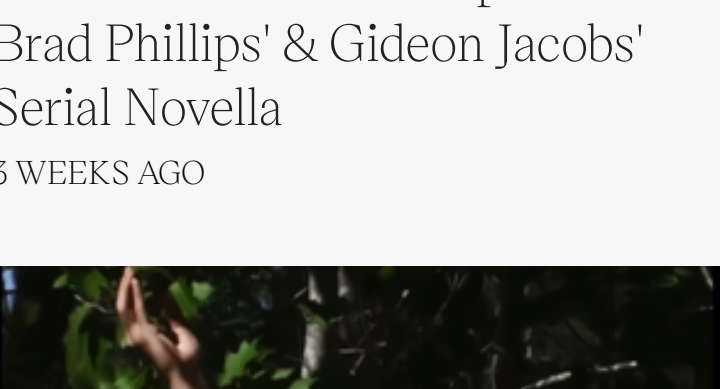
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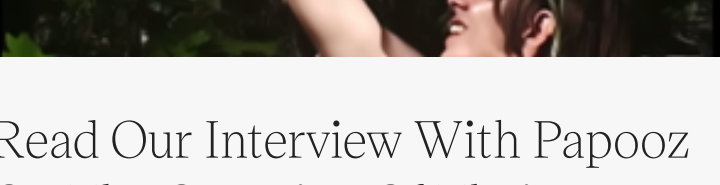
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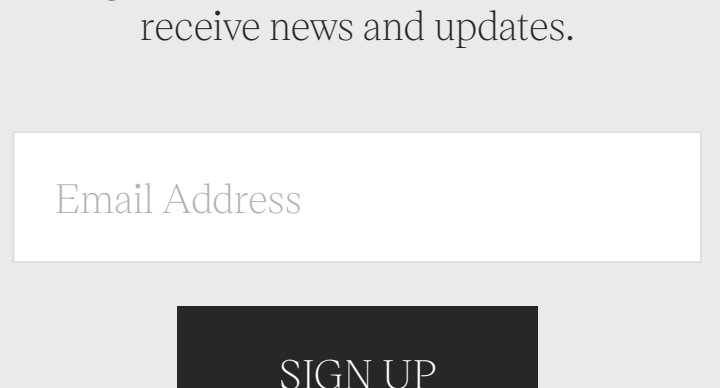
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