



FRIEDLER

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PRESS

Naked Las Vegas

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Go ahead and stare. Look closer. You might snicker a little. Indulge yourself by peeking at Greg Friedler's frontal portraits of ordinary, everyday people clothed – then naked- and staring right at the viewer. Then put the book down. After the initial conflicted, giddy shame of inspecting other people's naked bodies has worn off, pick up the book again. That's when Friedler's photographs of a range of Las Vegas residents with various body types takes on its peculiar power.

Naked Las Vegas, the fourth book in Friedler's Naked series, resulted from a month of shooting a variety of subjects from college professors to porn stars, attorneys to strippers. Each subjects appears before a burgundy curtain, and is shown fully clothed, then naked on the opposite pages.

Viewers are encouraged to ponder the bodily imperfections and idiosyncrasies that clothing usually conceals, such as wrinkles, disproportionately small or large breasts and penises, shaved pubic hair, rolls of fat, body piercings, mastectomy scars, tattoos, scratches, stretch marks, and razor-burn bumps. These details hint at complex stories of hidden trauma, rebellion, insecurity, and eager or reluctant sexuality without providing any further information. For example, one subject, an attorney, hides a vast expanse of tattoos under his conservative suit and tie. We can only speculate about the stories this man and his body art might have to tell. Therein lies the poignancy of Naked Las Vegas: it reveals without revealing. After all, what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas.

Friedler's project also manages to be beautiful without relying on the trope of bodily beauty. Like Edouard Manet's Olympia, the subjects of Naked Las Vegas evoke the observer's self-consciousness. But that direct, unabashed gaze is not necessarily a statement of the subjects personality. Instead, it reveals the photographer's imposition of the egalitarian, provocative pose upon his subjects. As such, Friedler takes the conventional frontal pose that prevails in portraiture, snapshots, and class pictures and shatters it's normalcy with, well, nakedness.

While Friedler's book focuses on a series of individuals, it also defines a collective – the citizens of Las Vegas. In this sense, Friedler's work finds it's precedent in August Sander's portraits of the German people, and in nineteenth-century ethnographic studies. Friedler's introductory essay defines the book's "Sin City-ness" ; it's tendency toward excess and transience, it's support of Sunset Strip cultures (of gambling, sexual indulgence, and the cult of Elvis), the widening gap between what Friedler calls "the minority haves and the majority have-nots", and some of the residents' struggles with drug addiction and homelessness. The subjects of Naked Las Vegas represent these themes and confront viewers with the brutal visual truth of the worn bodies that strain to support the city's main industry of self-indulgence and licentiousness. And fittingly, like and extended visit to Vegas itself, this collection of photographs takes viewers through the sensation of initial guilty giddiness and into a realm of complex realism and psychology.

