

DANA LIXENBERG

AMERICAN IMAGES

Jan 12 – Feb 29, 2020
202 Bowery, New York

Opening: Sunday, Jan 12th, 6-8pm

GRIMM is pleased to present Dana Lixenberg's *American Images*, a selection of portraits of American icons who have been instrumental in shaping today's cultural landscape. This exhibition marks the debut of this body of work in New York and in the United States.

Nowadays, the appearance of stardom is more accessible. Not only has fame become democratized through digital media and a culture of abundant self-promotion, photographs are more mediated by celebrities than ever before. When first confronted with the photographs in *American Images*, it is easy to clock the allure of celebrity, but Lixenberg's photographs puncture the veneer of fast fame by giving us something more substantial to behold.

Lixenberg summons the humanity of her subjects and makes visible where the reality of life and the mystique of stardom meet. The tone of each work is defined by the emotional state projected by her subjects. Her stripped-down approach revels in the elemental characteristics of these personalities, celebrating the ordinary qualities which supply their public personas. As a body of work, the images are at once bold and vigilant. They seem to dissolve the threshold between the 'celebrities' pictured and our own lives.

After publishing a portfolio of her early photographs from her *Imperial Courts* series in 1993 in the then newly-launched *Vibe* magazine, Lixenberg became a central contributor to *Vibe*. George Pitts (1951–2017) the magazine's legendary founding Photo Editor, who was also a photographer, painter, educator, and writer, grew to become a dear friend of the artist. Pitts was an early advocate for Lixenberg's work, he recognized the potential of her lens to tease out a more nuanced perspective of the charismatic, larger than life celebrities featured in the magazine. This is exemplified by the fact that one of the first assignments given to Lixenberg was to photograph Tupac Shakur for their February 1994 issue. Her work with *Vibe* led to further editorial assignments from numerous prominent publications, both in the U.S. and abroad.

All of Lixenberg's work is made using a large-format field camera, a cumbersome tool which requires the photographer to undertake a precise number of steps. These steps and the concentration they require make for what Lixenberg refers to as a slow dance



Dana Lixenberg | *Tupac Shakur, 1993* | Gelatin silver print

between her and her subjects. The resulting photographs contain an enormous amount of detail and texture, and are as revelatory as an intimate, personal encounter. The locations for most of these photographs are hotel rooms, homes, and in some instances rental studios. These settings serve to provide context without a sense of theatricality. Among these images we see a yawning Jay-Z, portrayed in a bathrobe at the end of a hotel bed; a fragile-looking Jon Bon Jovi, recovering from the flu; Mary J. Blige slumped in a chair, overcome by sleep; and Allen Ginsberg standing in the kitchen of his East Village apartment, staring past the camera as if lost in thought.

Now, in 2019, more than two decades after most of these photographs were made, the images retain a poignancy and cultural relevance. Some of the images, such as those of Tupac Shakur and Notorious B.I.G. have taken on lives of their own through wide dissemination and appropriation, such as in various memes, fan artwork, clothing and murals which have appeared around the world. In this way, the photographs themselves have achieved a kind of cult status.

This exhibition is dedicated to the memory of George Pitts.

not for publication

For more information, interview and royalty free image requests please contact the gallery in New York.
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About the artist:

Dana Lixenberg (b. 1964 in Amsterdam, NL) lives and works in Amsterdam (NL) and New York (US). She studied photography at the London College of Printing from 1984 to 1986, and at the Gerrit Rietveld Academie in Amsterdam from 1987 until 1989. Lixenberg pursues long-term projects with a primary focus on communities at the margins of society, such as *Jeffersonville, Indiana* (2005), a collection of landscapes and portraits of the small town's homeless population, and *The Last Days of Shishmaref* (2008), which documents an Inupiaq community on an eroding island off the coast of Alaska. The power of her work arises from its intimacy and the absence of social stereotyping.

Lixenberg's most extensive body of work to date, *Imperial Courts, 1993-2015* (2015), tracks the changing shape of a small, underserved community in Watts, Los Angeles. The project, consisting of a series of black and white photographs, a publication, audio recordings, and a three-channel video installation, was awarded the Deutsche Börse Photography Foundation Prize in 2017.

Dana Lixenberg has exhibited at Aperture, New York (US); Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (NL); Centre Photographique, Rouen (FR); MMK, Frankfurt (DE); The Photographer's Gallery, London (UK); Busan Biennale (KR); Huis Marseille, Amsterdam (NL); Kunsthal, Rotterdam (NL); Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (NL); FOAM, Amsterdam (NL); Frans Halsmuseum De Hallen, Haarlem (NL); LACP, Los Angeles (US); Mai Manó Ház, Budapest (HU) and Fotohof, Salzburg (AT), among others.

Collections include: ABN Amro Art Collection, Amsterdam (NL); Akzo Nobel Art Foundation, Amsterdam (NL); Deutsche Börse Photography Foundation, Frankfurt am Main (DE); Huis Marseille, Amsterdam (NL); Kunstmuseum, Den Haag (NL); Museum Voorlinden, Wassenaar (NL); Rabo Art Collection, Utrecht (NL); Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (NL) and De Nederlandsche Bank, Amsterdam (NL).



Dana Lixenberg | *Mary J Blige, 2001* | Archival pigment print

About the gallery:

GRIMM represents thirty international artists. Since its establishment in 2005, it has been the gallery's mission to represent and support the work of emerging and mid-career artists. The 300 square meter main gallery space is located near Amsterdam's museum square. In 2016, GRIMM opened a second gallery space on the Keizersgracht in Amsterdam, offering both artists and visitors a new exhibition space in a classical canal house. In 2017 the gallery opened a third venue, a large exhibition space across two floors in the Lower East Side of Manhattan, New York City.

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