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# Who Says Las Vegas Isn't a World-Class City?

Contributed by .

Greg Friedler plans to do for Las Vegas what he did for the people of New York, Los Angeles and London; disrobe them and take their pictures

By Bob Shemelgian

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For as long as people have worn clothing, those who think outside the shoe box have wondered why we feel so uptight when not hidden by leather and cloth.

Nearly a century ago, Katherine Mansfield, New Zealand's most famous modernist, asked: Why be given a body if you have to keep it shut up in a case like a rare fiddle?

Fifty years later, Ruth Bernhard, one of America's greatest photographers of the nude, noted how civilization makes us feel strange in our skin.

Today, Greg Friedler is seeking 200 Las Vegas volunteers who are comfortable with the idea of showing the world more than their Sin City smiles.

Friedler, 36, the author of Naked New York, Naked Los Angeles and Naked London, will spend the next month working on his fourth monograph: Naked Las Vegas, and he's looking for models.

"A lot of people have the wrong idea," Friedler said. "They email me and ask if I can take their picture in front of Caesars Palace, or at the Boneyard (collection of historic signs). But, that's not what it's all about."

Friedler's focus is on the model, not the surroundings. In a studio, he photographs models fully clothed in garments they normally wear and then stark naked. While there is some text describing what the subject does, it's the pictures that captivate the reader. The models have serious expressions. They are not trying to titillate. The goal is to show the reader how they appear clothed and naked. It's like they're saying, "I'm still me."

"This is my anthropological take on life," Friedler said. "The reader sees people as they appear

every day in society, and also as they appear naked, and so the reader is offered a look at the model's private reality.

And through this, the reader gains an entirely different and much more candid view of a city's population than he would by reading — for instance — a Frommer's or Time Out travel guide.

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"Naked New York sold 10,000 copies, which, I've been told, is phenomenal for a coffee table book," Friedler said.

After the success of Naked New York and Naked Los Angeles, Friedler traveled to London, where he was filmed for national television while taking pictures of people from all walks of life, both dressed and in the nude. Once again, Friedler's book sold out quickly.

A New Orleans native, Friedler, who holds a Masters of Fine Arts in Photography and Related Media from the School of Visual Arts in New York City, lives in Denver. But he quickly dismissed a suggestion that he profile people from the Rocky Mountain State.

"Denver's a nice city, but it certainly doesn't have as much going on or as much in the way of subcultures as Las Vegas," Friedler said.

The photographer is very excited about the Las Vegas edition, because of the city itself, and because it will be the first book to incorporate high resolution digital photographs. Previously, he worked with large format film.

Friedler, who has been photographing people clothed and naked for a decade, has generated a little competition in recent years.

In late 2004, portrait photographer Timothy Greenfield-Sanders published XXX, a compilation of photographs of 30 porn stars clothed and naked.

"I found with porn stars that they're much more comfortable nude than they are clothed," Greenfield-Sanders said when the book came out.

But that's just the point, said Friedler, who explained that while XXX is certainly an interesting piece of work, it's not a compilation of people from every walk of life — people who aren't necessarily more comfortable with their clothing off.

"I photograph real people, not those who are used to being before a camera," Friedler explained. "It's almost like a police line up. I don't necessarily make the models look bad, but I don't go out of my way to glamorize them. There's no airbrushing in my books."

Perhaps that's why — in Sin City of all places — Friedler is having difficulty finding 200 models interested in being in Naked Las Vegas.

Another reason why Friedler is having difficulty finding models in the destination that generates enormous profits from the businesses of gambling, groping and government, is because we like to keep all three separate. We focus on the artistic qualities of Strip showroom entertainment that features nearly naked young women, and we tolerate the gentlemen's clubs, billboards advertising "Girls to your Room," and countless massage parlors throughout the city because we know it helps the local economy and gives us the money to buy those nice threads at upscale malls.

Shedding those threads for Naked Las Vegas cuts too close to the bone.

"I need more mature Las Vegas residents," Friedler explained. "I don't want all the models in the book to be 18 and look like they just came out of a health club. In fact, the older the better."

And so, if you want to be part of local folklore and don't mind showing the real you to the world, drop Friedler an email. For your trouble, you'll receive 15 minutes of fame as well as two complimentary copies of Naked Las Vegas.

"I'm on a tight budget, and I can't really afford to pay the models," Friedler explained.

And besides, if he did, it really wouldn't be photojournalism — would it?