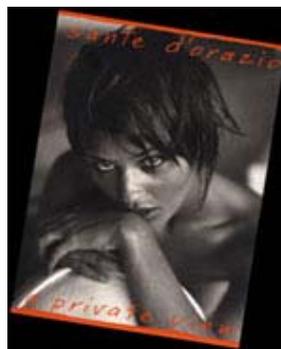


Sante D'Orazio's

Private View

an interview by **Freddy Galiani**

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It is quarter to three in the afternoon when I arrive at the Serge Sorokko Gallery in New York's Soho to interview Sante D'Orazio. Autumn's sunlight on West Broadway just off Prince Street slants shining on the opposite side of the road. I had met him two nights before during the inaugural reception of the exhibition that accompanies the release of his book, 'A Private View.'

Sante, a painter/photographer with a sixteen-year career in fashion and celebrity photography, has just launched his book a week and-a-half before, and - he tells me - it has already sold out in Germany.

The book, a diary-like collection of Sante's experiences, includes photographs of famous models, personalities and artists. His images are a behind-the-scenes look at the glamour-filled world this much-traveled man - born the son of an immigrant barber - now moves in.

The pictures, many times part of collages, range from regular snapshots and spontaneous fun shots to overtly sexy pictures of subjects who seem to have been captured in the midst of a sensual connection with D'Orazio's camera. A Private View also includes paintings by his friend Francesco Clemente - who signs the foreword - and of Sante himself.

As a photographer myself I wonder if I will be able to capture a true 'private view' of this very successful colleague's spirit.



Sante D'Orazio

How did you start in fashion photography?

I got into photography because this man who lived around the corner taught me, so I never went to school for it. I had painted most of my life and I was studying fine arts. When I graduated from university I needed

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a job and happened to get one as a second assistant to somebody who was doing fashion work. So, it was - you know - by chance that I started to do fashion. I just cleaned dishes and mopped floors thinking, all along, that I was gonna still paint. And three years later I had my first Vogue cover.

How long ago was this?

My first professional job was in 1981.

Let's fast-forward to the present. What was the motivation behind "A private view"?

Every photographer wants to show his work in a book, for the sake of posterity – if anything at all. David Fahey, who represents me in Los Angeles as my gallery, thought it would be an interesting idea to include my diaries, because I keep 17 years worth of diaries - visual ones - and people are always fascinated by them. They were always the center of attraction whenever I pulled them out. So, to include them was a logical choice. It's what sets it apart from every other book. It brings you into my world and gets you to see a private view. And that's why we called it that.

What defines a good photograph?

A good photograph, basically, is an image that has a certain kind of spirit. You take an inanimate object like a piece of paper, put an image on it and it becomes alive. It has an essence, a spirit. You feel it and you respond to it immediately, and it's that essence that makes it a work of art... or not.

The book mentions that your proceeds of this edition will go to the Elton John Aids Foundation and to the Children's Hope Foundation. Why did you choose them?

I chose Elton John's foundation because I felt it represented my business - not only photography 'cause he is a collector - but fashion, because he is so involved in it. And I thought that, symbolically, it was a way of giving back and of allowing all the people in my book to be a part of this donation. The book in itself is also a way of giving back to the business.

As to the Children's Hope Foundation, I have a four-year-old son, so children have a special place in my heart. That is why I split my contribution between the two charities.

I've heard you are a photographer with the knack for creating good rapport with models. Why do you think this is true?

I think, I am lucky enough to say, that I get a good rapport with everybody, not just with models. You can see that in my celebrity pictures. People seem to open up to me as a person and they respond to me as a human being, so there are no walls up, there are no barriers... They sense that, and that's what allows them to open up to me photographically.



So it's more of a natural occurrence, rather than something you have to 'provoke', for example, by creating an atmosphere.

It's not fake. It's not fake. It's a real thing, and it's a real moment. It's them relating to me as a person, and then as a photographer and I think it has to come in that order. Also, they obviously have chosen to work with me because they respect my work, but they open up to me because they like me as a person. And I think that helps a lot.

From among all the famous people you have photographed, who – off the top of your head – might you say has impressed you the most?

Hum, you know, I love John Travolta (looking at his picture on the front wall). But what impresses me about anyone of the stars I have worked with, is that they are super famous - well known - and yet, when you meet them, they are very humble and down-to-earth. The mere fact that they're loving, that they're caring is what impresses me the most.

After all these years of knowing and meeting famous people are you still impressed by that fact?

Yes, I am impressed with anybody who's got a loving nature and I appreciate that in any human being, and if I don't meet-up with that, I am not impressed with his or her celebrityhood [sic]. If people are rude, I'll leave. I have no problems leaving.

Can you relate to us an anecdote that is not in the book, but that is connected to one of the photographs that do appear in it?

I remember a time I went to shoot Mike Tyson. I had to wait outside his house for a while and when I finally went in, I told them I wanted to shoot outside. So I went on the backyard to look for a place, and suddenly I heard what I thought was a dog running after me. I turned around and it was a tiger! (laughs) This animal came out and jumped at me and I practically - excuse the expression - sh*t myself. Mike came out right after that laughing. He thought it was funny.

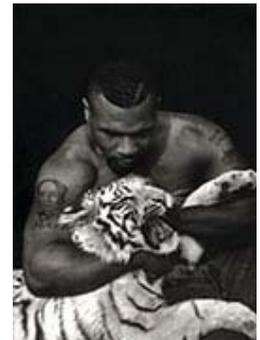
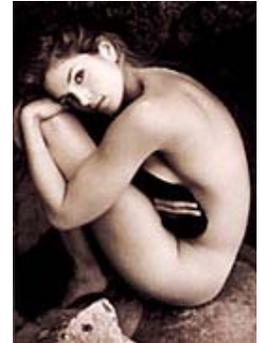
In 'A Private View' we can see that you have been to our country, Spain, several times. What parts of it do you like the most?

I love Madrid, the people there, but what I really love is the south, Seville. Its flamenco spirit - the gypsy spirit - the sense of everything from religion to the Moorish culture, the landscape. It's like Southern Italian - or is it Northern Italian? It's that "*caliente*" thing that exists down there, that raw passion. That's what turns me on about Seville.

I love Spain. I love its people. I like the whole energy, the buzz, and can't wait to go back.

What is your next project?

I am preparing my first feature film. It's based on a script I wrote and I hope to start it in the New Year. Its name will be "Cousin Joey". It's about two



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guys who grew up in a very violent environment and one of them is trying to be good, he's trying to find the light, and his best and only friend is really violent. It's the odyssey of these two people. It represents the two sides of each one of us: the one that wants to look for the light and the one that basically is bent on self-destruction.

How are you planning to depict this story, in black and white or in color?

I am filming it in color, but it will always have a black and white feel to it.

How do you plan to achieve the black and white feel with color?

It's your use of color. If you shoot early in the morning - at dawn - when everything looks blue, it gives you the essence of what black and white does. It's how you use color, it's harder to describe than to show.

Finally, where do you see fashion photography going in 1999, right at the end of this century?

I think it's gonna go back to being sexy, open, friendly and more accessible. It's gonna be about sensuality again. It has to come back 'cause It's almost ten years since it's been gone from the fashion industry.

There is a lot of sensuality in your pictures...

Yeah.

You feel the physical presence of the person there, be it a man or a woman.

That is my forte. That's what I think I do best. I am able to get that out of people. I am able to see it and find it and then extract it out of my subject. I don't know why, or how, but I manage to do it.

Chemistry?

Yes, it's all chemistry.

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'A Private View' is
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yourself or
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