



A Conversation with Photographer Tanya Chalkin

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Editor's Note: Her edgy and stylish images evoke stirring themes of youth, eroticism, and the alluring power of nascent sexuality. Her best-known portrait of intimacy, "Kiss" (2001) has sold thousands of copies in the United States and Europe in poster form. Her famous 2006 calendar has been met with wild enthusiasm across Europe.

Now, British-born photographer Tanya Chalkin is taking her works to a bold new level of visibility. Atlanta, Georgia-based Reality Bedding is featuring a selection of her most prominent and alluring images as part of a unique and innovative collection of premium comforters for the bedroom.

True to her calling as a professional artist, Tanya Chalkin prefers to allow the silent eloquence of her images to speak for her. It's the rare occasion when she grants an interview.

For that reason, we were privileged and fortunate when Chalkin graciously spoke with us by phone from her studio in London, England.

During our wide-ranging conversation, Tanya spoke candidly about her works, her inspirations and aspirations, and the bold new attitudes that have re-defined sex, intimacy, and self-acceptance among members of the new youth generation.

Q) Tanya, let's go back to the beginning. Tell us how it all started.

Tanya: I think a deeply ingrained love and appreciation for Photography, Art and Design is embedded in my character. For me photography it not just a profession or a pastime; it's really more like a passion. While I was growing up, my parents gave me my first camera. Rather than randomly point-and-click, I recall always taking that extra moment to frame the shot. It's as though my eye had its own innate sense of composition. The creative bug has been a part of me ever since.



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Q) So it was no surprise to your family when you turned this talent into a career, then?

Tanya: I think they were expecting it. I studied first at the Chelsea College of Art and Design in the U.K., and went on to earn my B.A (Honors) at the world-renowned London College of Printing. I've been working professionally now for the past seven years.

Q) Reality Bedding is proudly featuring your images, “Kiss” and “Sleeping Beauties” on their inaugural line of comforters in the U.S. Don’t these images push the envelope too much for some tastes?

Tanya: If the viewer thinks too seriously about the subject matter, then it might. Though I prefer for the viewer to think of my images as light and fun.

I tend to shoot sexy imagery because I enjoy portraying emotions of love and lust, which draws the viewer in. There is so much erotic photography out there trying to be sexy, in my view it can often miss the point. For this reason I like to keep my shots sexy but with a certain subtlety and tenderness. I think its easier being a female and creating this kind of subject matter as there is already an inherent understanding between the female models and myself.

Q) It’s not as easy as it looks?

Tanya: It takes hours to select the models, get them comfortable with each other, and get the framing and lighting just right. I shoot many of my images in black and white as it contributes to a classic, timeless look, and the tonal qualities of black and white photography suit my images.



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Q) There's a direct relationship between time spent planning the shot, and the quality of the final product?

Tanya: That's the key idea here: Quality. I am a perfectionist and it is important to me that the end results are striking. The pre and post production of any of my shoots takes up a lot of time. It makes a big difference in the quality of the final product and is definitely worth it.

Both "Kiss" and "Sleeping Beauties" evolved as imagery from two separate photo shoots, People want images that are erotic, fun, and that stand apart from what is out there. I receive so many requests to my website from fans around the world requesting more of my work, which is fantastic! I really appreciate all of the comments and it makes me feel elated that I can bring pleasure to someone.

Q) If the quality of the final product reflects the quality of the process that creates it, then that must speak well of the camera you use.

Tanya: My preferred camera is a Mamiya with a 6x7 negative. It's a Japanese make, and is well known and widely used in fashion photography.

Q) "Sleeping Beauties" is a new release, isn't it?

Tanya: I think Sleeping Beauties is a great image. I hope the public will agree; only time will tell! The beautiful models sleeping alongside one another feels so vaguely erotic and sensual, yet so innocent and sweetly charming. I want the viewer to wonder what the girls are dreaming about! It was released in October '05, so it's appearance on Reality Bedding marks its first broad exposure to the North American marketplace.

Q) Aren't these erotic images of women meant to serve as eye candy for men? What about women?

Tanya: Men will always be drawn into imagery such as "Kiss" and "Sleeping Beauties". There's something about scantily clad women lying together. Still, you'd be surprised at how much women enjoy them too.



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Tanya (continued): I think we live in an age where the young, especially young women, feel validated by openly acknowledging and celebrating their sexuality. They're more at ease casting aside their sexual inhibitions, and more freely expressing themselves in ways that their mothers and grandmothers never did. Look no further than "Sex and the City" for evidence of that notion. Life imitates art, which in turn imitates life. That's what good art is, after all – a reflection of the curious alchemy of our own underlying values, attitudes, wants, and desires.

Q) Your words sound like poetry. What about images of male models?

Tanya: I have two photographic posters of men on the market right now. One is entitled "L'Homme", which features a rugged, masculine model in an outdoorsy pose. My more controversial poster is "Boy" which features a well-defined, frontal, youthful male trunk and torso in somewhat revealing white briefs, taken from a low angle. It's perhaps a bit too homoerotic for the mass market, and may appeal more to gay men than to women. Male sexuality is by its nature more rough and raw, whereas female sexuality is naturally more sweet, discreet, and discerning. As a photographer in these genres, I try to smooth out their rough edges in order to bring out their mass market appeal.

Q) So after the success of "Kiss" and "Sleeping Beauties", what else can we look forward to? You must have some eye-catching new images in the pipeline.

Tanya: As well as continually working for fashion magazines, I would like to shoot a portfolio of exclusively male images for my 2007 'Male' calendar, which will be my first male calendar to be sold in North America. An all-male portfolio will demonstrate my versatility, and will be a challenge as well. In the near term, my 2006 calendar is already on the market here in Europe and has had a brilliant response from the public. There will also be a 2007 female calendar to be sold in North America available from around March 2006.

Thanks, Tanya.

For further info on Tanya's work please contact agent@tanyachalkin.com or visit www.tanyachalkin.com