



Nudes

by Mary Landi



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Commentary

My, how times have changed! Perhaps this is nowhere more visible in photography and the way photographers have approached the female nude. When Edward Weston created those now famous “Weston nudes” in the first half of the 20th century, his images were his attempt to demonstrate grace and beauty — not mere shock value.

Well, fast-forward to today. By sheer coincidence I was amused recently by a headline at an online news site in which I was informed that a “celebutant” by the name of Courtney Stoddard (never heard of her, but she’d clearly like to change that) bragged that she, too, has a sex tape. Evidently, while I’ve not been paying attention, the release of one’s sex tape has morphed from an embarrassment to a badge of honor — one now promoted with press releases and marketed with pride. Similarly, blatant, hyper-exaggerated, sexuality has become normal in the art world — at the cost of subtle, sensual beauty.

As I say, how times have changed. This image — indeed this entire portfolio — by Mary Landi seems a breath of fresh air in that it celebrates the female nude without the necessity of screaming cartoon-like sexuality from the highest hilltop. Her images distinguish between *sensuality* and *sexuality* in a way that makes them subtle and captivating. They hearken back to the more innocent times of Weston’s nudes — and succeed in demonstrating grace and beauty in the photographic nude rather than mere prurient arousal.

In this example, Landi accomplishes this sensuality in four specific ways. First, there is the inherent sensuality associated with the glimpse of revealed skin. Next, we feel as though this cloth is a contrast in sensuality. Rather than some delicate silk, it looks as though it might be some rough canvas or heavy tent fabric, perhaps even a painter’s drop cloth. The incongruous placement of such a rough cloth against such delicate skin enhances the emotional sense of sensuality. Third, the model clutches this cloth to her which adds a consciousness to her motion and a sense of modesty in contrast to her exposed leg. And then there is the anonymity of the faceless model. The combination of these elements makes this a very sensual image.

Finally, it’s worth noting the rather harsh light. How many times do we see today’s nudes photographed in the cliché soft light, often with a soft focus filter that not-too-subtly shouts “boudoir!” Here, Landi uses a harsh light that gives texture to the cloth and a sense of reality to the image that — to my eye — brings us closer to life than the overly stylized approach so often seen in so-called commercial nudes.