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*Sexual Art*  
*Photographs That Test the Limits*

**Michael A. Rosen**

**with an Afterword by David Steinberg**

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*for Lucile*

Thanks to my friends for help and encouragement. Special thanks to Mark I. Chester, Charles Gatewood, and David Steinberg. And special thanks to David Glenn Rinehart, a comrade for many years and the one responsible for the design and implementation of this PDF book.

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# Foreword

Many people believe in Evolution, but they don't carry the concept to its logical consequences. They think that we are at the conclusion of the Evolutionary process, rather than a step along the way. I believe that we are today's manifestation of the ongoing process we call Evolution.

The family system, with male dominance, was once central to the survival of the species, but it's no longer crucial that the family unit stay monogamous and intact. We know how to control having or not having children and how to protect ourselves from sexually transmitted diseases. And women in the more progressive countries now have equal rights before the law.

If Evolution once dictated that sex was solely for reproduction, I believe that Evolution now says it's OK to have fun with sex play and to push the limits of sensory experience—as long as the experience is consensual, non-exploitative and safe. Erotic power play, sadomasochistic sex, gender play, and other extreme forms of sexual communication are all OK in this society at this time. Evolution now approves of multiple sexual partners and sexual partners of the same gender. Who knows what Evolution has in store for us?

In *Sexual Art: Photographs that Test the Limits*, I continue the work of my previous self-published books on radical sexuality. *Sexual Magic: the S/M Photographs* presents impressionistic, gritty, cinema verité images of actual

sadomasochistic sex scenes. *Sexual Portraits: Photographs of Radical Sexuality* comprises sharply focused, elegantly composed, studio sexual portraits involving S/M, erotic piercings, and gender play.

But there is no sex in those books. In *Sexual Magic* there is S/M, but there is no sex; there is whipping, but there is, for example, no penetration. In *Sexual Portraits* there is radical sex, but there is no sex; there are exposed, pierced genitals, but there are, for example, no stiff dicks. I wasn't ready to take on the additional challenges in producing and promoting the work that explicit sex brings. In *Sexual Art: Photographs that Test the Limits*, I present transgressive images of explicit sex, and I feature what I call non-standard penetration.

Can sexually explicit images be art? I say, "YES," and that such art is good for you! Sexual art is a means of expression that is protected by our First Amendment, but sexual art also can be a healthy part of our lives. The function of art is not merely to decorate our nests and make us feel good, but rather to challenge our notions of what our world is about. I hope that my work shows something of what the possibilities can be.

It's unfortunate that we live in an erotophobic society, where the opposite of love (philia) is not a word for hate, but is the word phobia, which means fear. For we fear what we do not know.  
—Michael A. Rosen, July 1994

## About This Digital Version

This PDF is a digital version of *Sexual Art: Photographs That Test The Limits*, which was published as a high-quality paperback monograph in 1994. I believe I coined the term, “sexual art.” The 53 photographs are transgressive images of explicit sex.

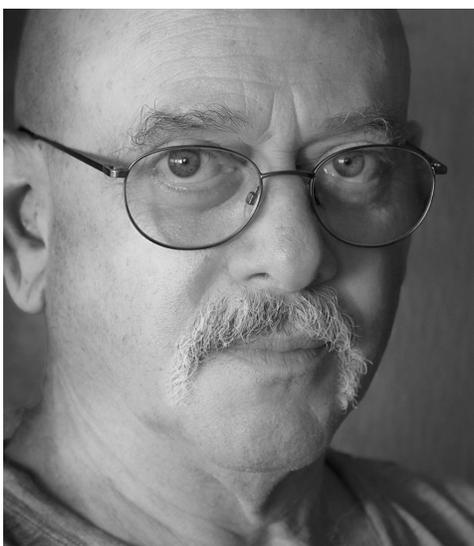
### What’s Free, and Why, and What’s For Sale

First, what is it that I’m giving away? The pictures all have a visible copyright notice. The license agreement allows printing the pictures, but forbids the removal of the copyright notice.

So think of this as an advertisement for myself and my work. For me, publication has always been about putting my point of view out in the world in the most effective manner. Last century, I chose printed books for sale; this century I’ve added a free PDF option. All images in this body of work are for sale as modern archival inkjet prints, which will last longer than traditional gelatin silver photographic prints. \$150 for an 8x10, \$325 for an 11x14, as of June, 2010. Support this work. Buy my art prints.

Buy my books—*Sexual Art: Photographs That Test The Limits*, *Sexual Magic: the S/M Photographs*, *Sexual Portraits: Photographs of Radical*

*Sexuality*, and *Lust & Romance: Rated X Fine Art Photographs*—from Amazon and other online vendors, and *Vanilla Sex: Explicit Fine Art Photographs* from blurb.com. Or from me at my website, michaelrosen.com.



### Technical Notes/ Printing The Pictures

The images for this PDF were scanned from the original gelatin silver prints that were used to make the 1994 monograph. For this project I made check prints the size of the ones in this PDF using Photoshop and my Epson 3800 printer with Epson K3 ink via

their ABW (Advanced Black-and-White) mode on inexpensive glossy paper. It’s best to use a grayscale mode for grayscale pictures, if your ink jet printer has one, rather than printing in color—although it is certainly possible to achieve good results printing grayscale files as a color image. The Epson 3800 uses two gray inks, a black ink and very little color ink in their ABW mode. Canon and HP offer competitive systems.

I’ve always worked with Macintosh computers, currently a Mac Pro with Leopard (OS 10.5). After building this PDF, I made test prints of pages using Adobe Reader and the Mac Preview application, also via the Epson ABW

driver. At Printer Settings/Basic, I chose ABW, and the paper type. At Printer Settings/Advanced Color Settings, I found that the most accurate setting is one or two lighter than the default: the settings are Darkest, Darker (default), Dark, Normal (best, in my opinion, with my setup) and Lighter. I chose the default for all other settings.

My monitor is profiled and, hopefully, yours is, too. But I have no control over what my pictures look like on your monitor. And I really have no control over what my pictures look like coming out of your printer. Please don't complain if you don't like your results; I offer no help.

### **What's Next?**

I continue to actively photograph healthy sexual behavior and publish books of my photographs. I am always looking for individuals, couples or groups—of all genders, races, ages and persuasions—who want to share their sexual energy, from the vanilla-ish to the outrageous, with my camera. Email [michael@michaelrosen.com](mailto:michael@michaelrosen.com). See more of my work at [michaelrosen.com](http://michaelrosen.com).

Watch for my forthcoming *Crimes Against Nature*.

—Michael A. Rosen, June, 2010



*Scott, 1992*



*Peter and Jack, 1992*



*Michelle, 1993*



*Yossie, 1992*



*Twenty-two Clothespins, 1994*



*Chicken Bone, 1992*



*Joyce and Tatiana, 1992*



*Tatiana and Joyce, 1992*



*Marian, 1993*



*Jenne with David and David, 1992*



*Lady Thorn and a friend, 1993*



*Geof and Doug, 1993*



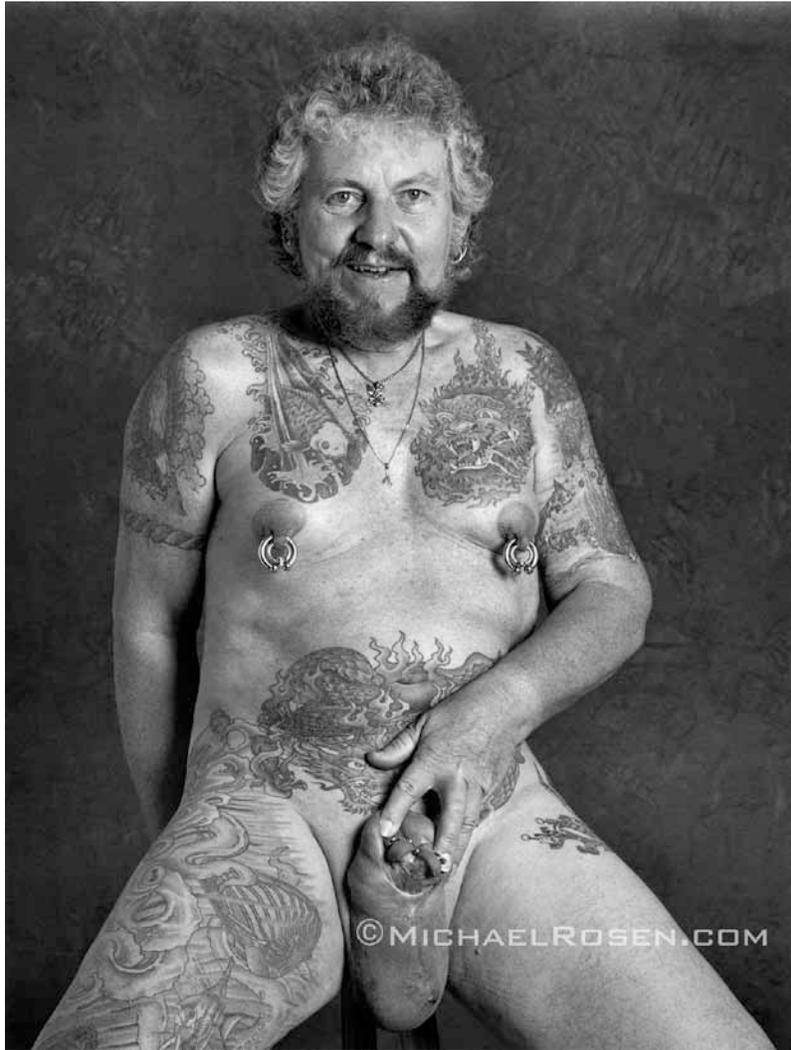
*Ten Brass Rings, 1993*



*Pierced to a T, 1992*



*Selena/Andy, 1991*



*Jack, 1992*



*Greta, 1992*



*Greta, 1992*



*Melissa and Marian, 1993*



*Breast Bondage, 1985*



*Vice Grips, 1984*



*Kathleen, 1992*



*Molly, 1993*



*Brian, 1992*



*Jorge and Bill, 1993*



*Bill and Jorge, 1993*



*Honey Lee and Susie, 1987*



*John and Frank, 1992*



*Roland, 1993*



*Robyn, 1992*



*Simultaneous Penetration, 1992*



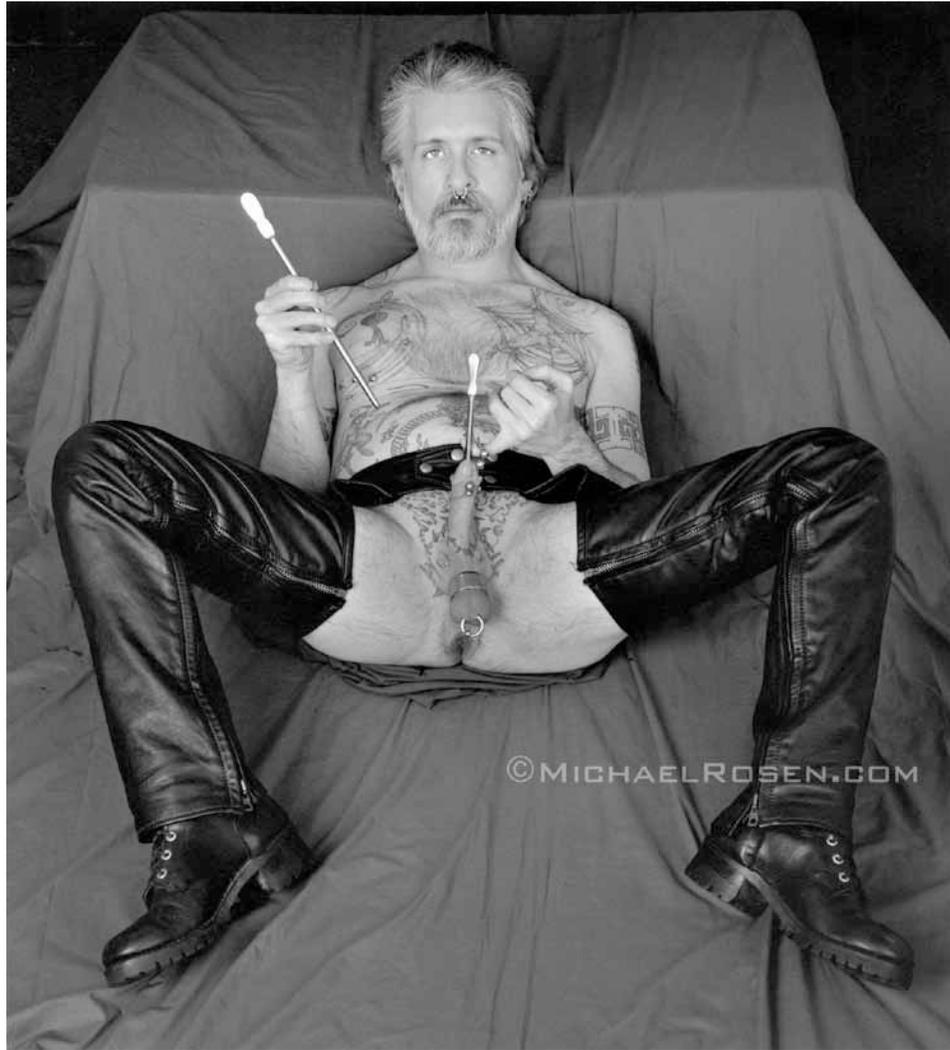
*Simultaneous Penetration, 1984*



*Carol and Robert, 1993*



*Robert and Carol, 1993*



*Daddy Bear, 1993*



*Petra and a slave, 1993*



*Carol and Ruby, 1992*



*Chris and Cathy, 1992*



*Marty, 1994*



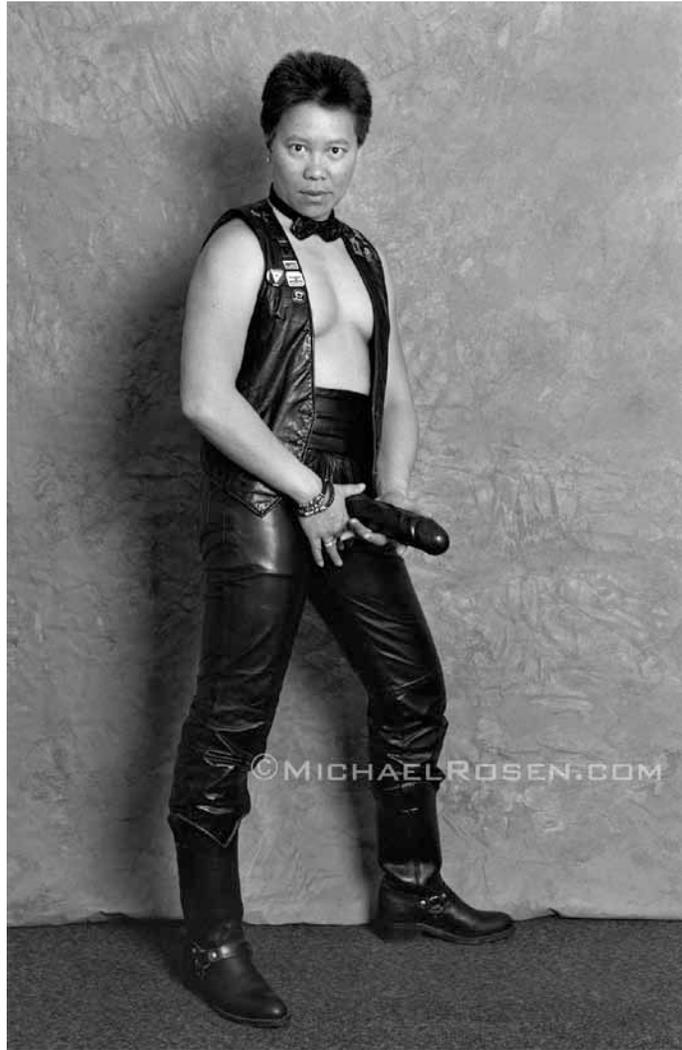
*Packing, 1989*



*Buddies, 1993*



*Hooded Individual Sucks Condomed Cock, 1993*



*Kitty, 1991*



*Woody and Mark, 1992*



*Mistress Venus and David, 1992*



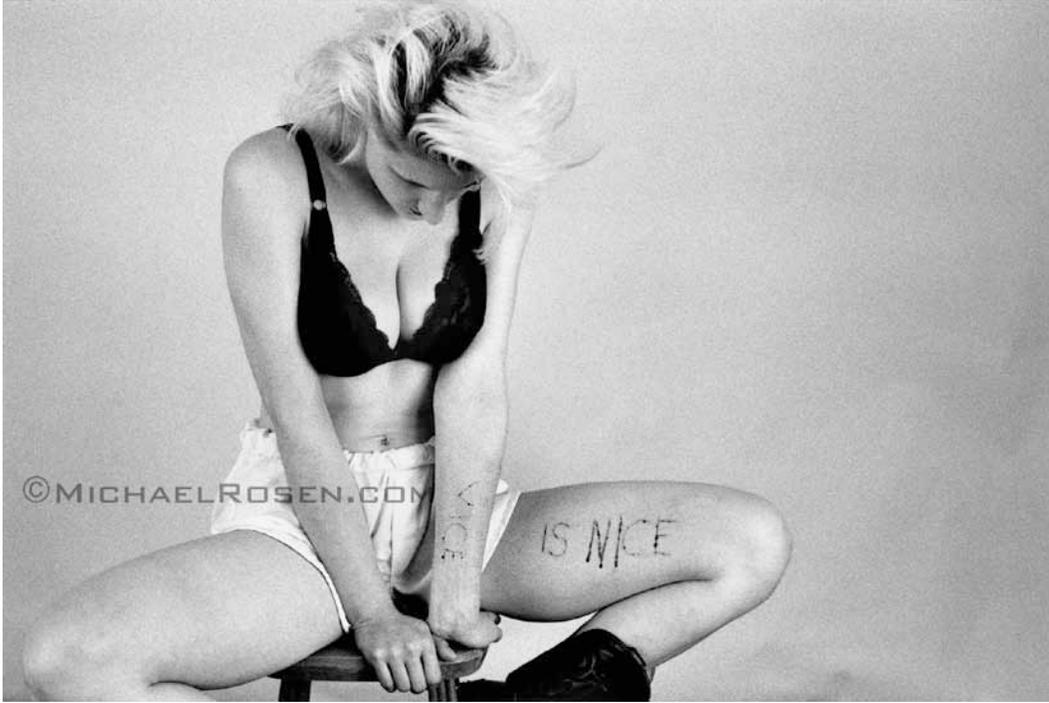
*Mistress Venus and David, 1992*



*Wolfe and Scarlet, 1992*



*RavenLight and Ilene, 1993*



*Lily, 1991*

# Afterword

## SEXUAL ART.

Combining these two words is a gesture as radical as it is simple: an affirmation that art can be sexual, that sex itself can be the subject of art, with no apology necessary.

That integrating the notions of sex and art is so unusual and therefore so radical speaks to the heart of our cultural confusion about sex. Why should sex—one of the most beautiful, profound, vital, basic, complex aspects of being alive—be anything but fertile territory for artistic exploration? And yet we experience an on-going, exhausting tug of war, individually and societally, between our basic fascination with this primal force and the culturally-induced resistance to surrendering to its power. Historically, artists who make sex the unapologetic focus of their work have been ostracized and trivialized. Even now, the artful depiction of sex is a matter of intense public controversy.

The difficulty of photographing sex when we barely know what sex is and when we are so much afraid of it, is itself a statement of how important a project this is. Submitting sex to artistic and photographic exploration is a way of coming to understand the sexual perplex that is not otherwise possible—a way of speaking of sex that honors its richness and power, speaking of sex as it really is: wonderfully complex, subtle, multidimensional, and paradoxical.

Some things can be well understood by the rational processes of science and

logic; sex is not one of them. The heart of the sexual matter lies beyond scientific investigation—in the realms of mystery, inflection, symbol, and nuance—the psyche, the heart, the deepest soul—even if we pretend otherwise. As much as love, as much as beauty, as much as relationship and emotion of any kind, sex needs the perspective of art to shed light on its multiple meanings and significances. This is precisely the kind of sexual perspective we have been consistently denied.

There has, of course, been extensive literal photodocumentation of specific sexual acts. This mouth here, this penis there: voila, the sexual photograph. Sexual photos of this sort have become commonplace, despite would-be censors. They have something to say about sex to be sure, but only at the most superficial level. Much more is left unsaid, and the heart of the sexual matter goes unacknowledged most of all. Silence equals death in more ways than one. What is unrepresented and undiscussed, what we cannot give form through verbal or visual language, withers and dies. To declare sex unrepresentable (except way over there, among the shadows and the garbage) effectively expunges the sexual core from the psychic landscape.

We are told that there are aspects of sex we may know and speak about, but that many other sexual forms are unmentionable. Of the vast spectrum of sexual possibility, only the narrowest of slices is designated “normal,” while the

rest is vilified as “perverted.” We are fed huge doses of processed sexual imagery, cleansed of “impurities”—and nutrition. Not surprisingly, we come away hungry, often not even knowing what it is we have been denied.

With the heart of the sexual matter condemned to silence, people image sex in the most trivial of ways: Sex equals heterosexual, monogamous intercourse. Sex equals the pursuit of orgasm. Sex equals neurons (the more the better) engaged in rapid fire. We need language and imagery that help us to engage sex in all its richness, depth, and diversity, despite the cultural prohibitions. We need images of the sort that are in this book.

Photographing sex is no simple matter. How does one photograph sex with a complexity that is truly artistic? What about sex is important to photograph? What about sex can be photographed? What illumination can artful photographic attention bring to sex? Can the private intimacy of sex happen in front of a camera? How do photographer and model(s) work toward such a goal?

The part of sex that matters most cannot be directed to happen. The best you can do is to create hospitable circumstances and hope for the best. Trust is essential. Respect. Leave all judgment well outside the door. Sexual feelings are tender, personal, and painfully subject to ridicule. They expose themselves only when they sense they will be honored, appreciated, valued, and understood on their own terms.

Sexual magic appears and disappears

in an instant—moments at which entire universes are contained in a smile, a gesture, a touch, the connection that flows from one eye to another. On film these nuances can be frozen and then experienced over and over again, gradually revealing aspects of the original moment previously unseen or unappreciated. By looking at these photos, we get to see things about the subjects (and ourselves) we would never see otherwise. If we dare.

#### PHOTOGRAPHS THAT TEST THE LIMITS.

Michael Rosen’s honest, unsimplified photographs of untidy, unsanitized, unconventional sexuality intentionally push us up against any number of limits we have set for the sexual matrix, as well as limits that have been set for us by others. Happily, they push us against these limits with a friendly, rather than an aggressive, touch. Look at this, they say. What do you think of this? Have you ever imagined this? Have you ever felt like this? Most dearly, these photographs test the limits of what is allowed and what is forbidden, as art and as sexual practice. More significantly perhaps, these photos also test the limits of what is known and what is knowable about sex, and the limits of what can be communicated from one person to another about something as intensely individual and interior as the sexual complexities. The power of these photographs lies in how much of what is happening for the subjects is captured for us to see.

As with sex itself, these photographs

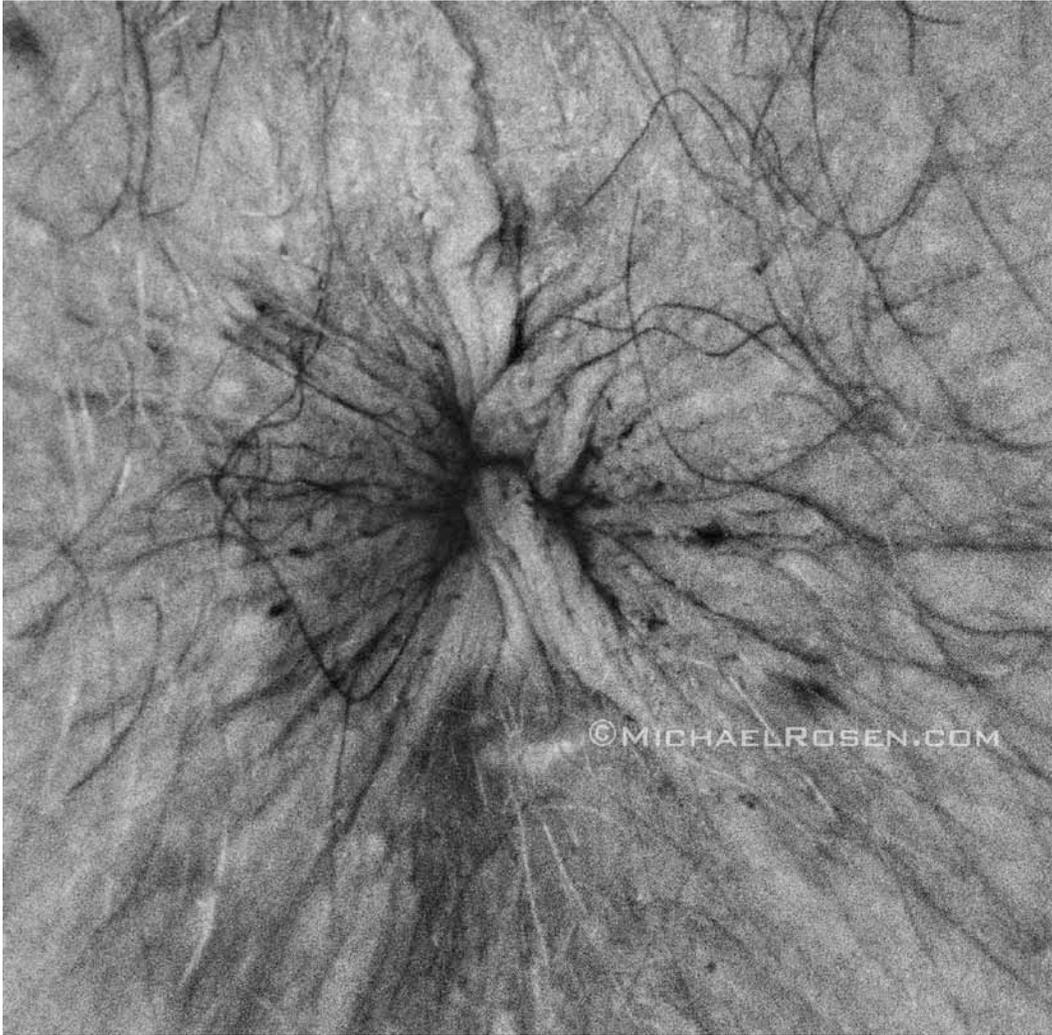
constantly surprise us. The silenced sexual elements reappear, but do not confirm our expectations of them. Often we can see ourselves in the subjects, even when who they are or what they are doing is foreign to us. We find smiles and laughter where we expected snakes and toads. We find warm, open, loving human beings where we thought there could only be demons and psychopaths. We find complex emotional matrices rather than one-dimensional simplicities. A sense of universality emerges; the sense of Otherness diminishes. This is an essential part of Michael's mission, and an important facet of his skill: his ability to humanize sexualities that are more commonly reduced to alienating stereotypes. We respond to these photos with parts of ourselves that are not used to being disturbed or exposed, parts that live deep in the belly of the unconscious. We are drawn in and taken aback simultaneously; intrigue and discomfort swirl in an unfamiliar mix. Perhaps we resonate with some images more strongly than we would have expected. We're not sure what it is that these photos help us, encourage us, perhaps force us, to feel. We're not sure whether it's all right to be fascinated by what we see.

What makes Michael's photographs so powerful and subversive is that the simple, friendly pleasure contained in

them cannot be denied, despite the parts of us that would rather hold on to less troubling preconceptions. Love is here, as well as joy, intimacy, connection, passion, tenderness, and beauty. Also fear, mystery, ecstasy, a vibrant aliveness, and hints of some very unscientific knowledge and wisdom. When we look at the faces in Michael's sexual portraits, when we look at the connections in his photographs of sexual activity in progress, we see quite simply that people do all sorts of different sexual things, alone and together. We also see that they have marvelous fun doing what they do. We see, in the end, that—despite all the bugaboos—sex simply is.

Nothing is true; everything is permitted. When we suspend the fixities, the realm of what becomes available to us—sexually and otherwise—is incredibly vast. Fiercely, gently, proudly, quietly, the people in Michael's images say to us, "Here I am. This is my body. This is who I am as a sexual being." We witness one person after another claiming their sexuality as their own—retrieving the birthright of their sexual natures from the state, from the church, from parents and neighbors, from guilt and shame, from fear and pain, from the constraints of imposed gender and sexual convention—inviting us to do the same.

—David Steinberg, July 1994



*Asshole, 1993*