

END FRAME

State Of A Nation: Andres Serrano's America



ANDRES SERRANO DESCRIBES HIS NEW BOOK, *AMERICA and Other Work* (published by Taschen) as his artistic response to 9/11. An unexpected work from the controversial artist (best known for his photo "Piss Christ"), there are no sexual or religious extremes. Instead there are over 100 stunningly beautiful portraits of people whom Serrano feels somehow encapsulate the social, political and cultural extremes of America. So we have Arthur Miller, Snoop Dogg, Anna Nicole Smith and Bill O'Reilly. There are also "ordinary" people: firefighters, bankers, pimps, doctors, people who are HIV positive, funeral directors and so on. They are all photographed against colored canvases—one of Serrano's signatures—close up in a slightly detached manner which makes the photos appear somewhat like very surreal and highly stylized passport photos.

I don't know what the book says about America, but it says a lot about Serrano as a photographer: namely, that he has reinvented himself and altered his vision in a profound and compelling way.

Here he talks to *PDN* about "Boy Scout John Schneider: Troop 422," the first photograph in the book: "Getting the models is really down to my helpers writing to people, making lots of phone calls—I couldn't have done this book without them. One of my helpers, Cynthia, called Boy Scouts of America, explained to them the project and after some time, she said that there were three potential models: one white, one black and one Chinese. Instinctively I wanted a white one.

"I shot it in my studio [which is also his spectacular home in downtown Manhattan]. He came with his mother and I spent about an hour with him. I don't meet the models until I take their picture and that to me is fine because that's when the relationship starts. I don't really explain what I'm doing.

"I shoot with a Mamiya RZ 67 that I've had for about ten years, usually with Provia Fujifilm, using one soft light and two backlights. I shot maybe 200 images on 20 rolls of film. You would think there would be plenty of choices, but I'm lucky if I get a few photos. I liked this pose and there were five shots like this. I studied them all with a loupe and chose this one because his dimples are the most pronounced in this image. I do very little post production, maybe take out a nose hair, but not in this case; he's not at that stage yet. I give all my model's either \$200 or a print. It's a good way to start the book."

—Reuel Golden

Andres Serrano will be talking about some more photographs from *AMERICA*, his controversial career and other work this month on *PDN*online, at www.pdnonline.com