

SOCIETY NEWS

Don't Blame It on Rio

The porn star Vanessa Del Rio burned herself into the retinas of masses of American males now in their 30's and 40's

BY GEORGE GURLEY

Vanessa Del Rio made her last film 20 years ago. Yet people who weren't even born then approach the 55-year-old actress on the street and tell her how much her movies have meant to them. This month a book of her life's work, signed by Ms. Del Rio and weighing 12 pounds, is selling for \$400 (\$1,000 for a special edition that includes a drawing by R. Crumb). There was a book party in SoHo on Nov. 8, to which Bill Clinton was invited.

The former president was, regretfully, unable to attend, but there was an impressive turnout—hotelier André Balazs, movie director Brett Ratner, fashion photographer Sante d'Orazio. At 6:30 p.m., Ms. Del Rio stepped out of a 1960 Cadillac Fleetwood and onto a red carpet. Her raven black hair was teased up into a bouffant, and she was wearing a gold Cleopatra necklace, a long velvet coat slit to the waist, a leopard-and-patent-leather corset, black velvet pants and stiletto heels. She was accompanied by her boyfriend, Vito, and her French bulldog, Matilda. There were cries of "Viva Vanessa!" as she posed for pictures and signed autographs.

Also in attendance were members of the New York porn community: female-friendly director Candida Royale; cross-dressing expert Veronica Vera; Cecil Howard (who directed Ms. Del Rio in *Babylon Pink*); and Jaime Gillis, star of *Deep Throat 2*, who was accompanied by his girlfriend, Manhattan restaurateur and PBS chef Zarela Martinez.

Only 1,500 copies of Ms. Del Rio's book, *Slightly Slutty Behavior*, were printed. One copy contains a "golden ticket," good for a night out with her, to be documented by a "world famous photographer"—the book's publisher, Taschen, won't say who, but it could be Terry Richardson, whose 2005 photographs of himself receiving what he called "the best blow job I've ever had in my life" from Ms. Del Rio appear in the book.

On the cover is an image of Ms. Del Rio taken right after she'd completed a different blow job, circa 1976. It's a romantic moment—the member in question belonged to her boyfriend at the time, George Payne, and the two were in the first flush of porno love.

The folks at Taschen would not lend me a copy of the book, and so for three afternoons I planted myself on an Eames chair in Taschen's SoHo store and examined hundreds of pictures of Ms. Del Rio doing unto others, and having done unto herself. I did my best to ignore glances from patrons checking out El Greco, Bruegel and Caravaggio. I became very familiar with Ms. Del Rio's carnal mouth, behemoth breasts, fleshy rump and piliferous 1970's pudenda.

In the introduction, Ms. Del Rio writes: "Why does everyone deny being a slut? Why is it acceptable for a woman to have sex for money and not acceptable to do it because she loves it? Or for money and because she loves it."

Vanessa Del Rio (née Ana Maria Sanchez) grew up in Harlem and the South Bronx. Her God-fearing Puerto Rican mother worked in a factory; her Cuban father was a jeweler and philanderer. He used to beat his daughter with an electric cord, leaving bleeding welts. "He doesn't love us, he doesn't love us," her mother used to say.

Ms. Del Rio had an aunt who was a flasher, always pulling up her skirt; an uncle used to molest her while playing "horsey" in full view of her mother. She remembers being 14 and going with her mother to a Spanish movie house on 42nd Street to see *The Virgin Goddess*, which starred Argentinian actress Isabel Sarli, "the woman no man could possess." "I want to be just like that," the young Ms. Del Rio thought.

At 16 she lost her virginity to her boyfriend, also a virgin. After her father walked in on them, he stopped talking to his daughter and soon moved out.

Ms. Del Rio dropped out of Catholic school and worked at an insurance company, where she slept with the 42-year-old boss. By 19, she was helping a boyfriend—"Larry the Outlaw"—steal cars. For two years they drove around the country, taking drugs and getting arrested. She turned tricks and collected unemployment to finance their adventures. Up in New Hampshire the couple was pulled over by a state trooper, and Ms. Del Rio had sex with him to get Larry the Outlaw off the hook. That wasn't really the sort of thing she found romantic, so she

struck out on her own. She worked as a barmaid, a go-go dancer, then a streetwalker around Times Square.

At 22, she met a porn agent and became Vanessa Del Rio. Her first day on the job, she did a "double penetration"—an act she is credited with pioneering on film. She says she was so aroused, she blew the hippie cameraman during a break.

For the next 12 years she acted in 8mm "loops," 16mm "one day wonders" and 35mm motion pictures—120 films in all. She made \$40 a loop (a dollar a minute) and \$150 for feature films, which paid her rent on the Upper West Side. At first she was cast as maids, then finally, simply and magnificently, as herself (*Viva Vanessa*, *Deep Inside Vanessa Del Rio*).

She became known for ravenous blow jobs and a willingness to try new things, like having sex with "little people." She made her share of "roughies"—films that involved bondage and rape scenarios. The biggest penis she ever sucked was Dick Rambone's, but she refused to engage in anal sex with him, so they used a stunt ass.

The first thing she did every morning was smoke a joint. She'd get to the set by 6 a.m., sit around doing drugs, wait for her scene, wash up, do the next scene, then go home and end up at clubs like Max's Kansas City, where the porn people mingled with celebrities. She gave blow jobs in bars and one night went home with five gypsies, all members of the same family.

She took a hiatus from porn in the 80's and focused on stripping. In 1983 she was arrested for indecent

exposure in Kentucky. The charges were dropped, but she had to serve 35 days in jail for possession of cocaine. After she was released, she made a bodybuilding video.

She returned to porn to make four more films. She was taking steroids, which acted as an aphrodisiac—in *The Devil in Miss Jones 3* she has sex with eight guys wearing pig masks. Still reeling after her plane landed in New York, she persuaded the cab driver to have sex with her for double the fare.



In the late 80's she went into therapy and tried to disassociate herself from the business—"I did not want to be Vanessa Del Rio anymore." However, she continued to pose in men's magazines, and run her fan club and Web site.

Then the Taschen publishing house called. "She was a juvenile icon for me, you know?" Benedikt Taschen told me. "She inspired me for many nights."

The book's text was written by Dian Hanson, editor of *Leg Show* magazine. "If you think what makes art *art*, it's that you're doing it for something beyond monetary gain," said Ms. Hanson. "Vanessa was just about the only one doing that in porn, the only woman doing that. There are always men willing to get up there and have sex for free—though they sure *wish* someone would pay them—but with Vanessa, it was *clear* that she was something apart. She was not given the starring roles, because of her ethnicity, and yet she would walk into a premiere and they would just *mob* her. She was the fan favorite because she was legitimately there for the sex, and that is the ultimate male fantasy, that women will be doing porn for the sex.

"And there's *never* been a break in this," Ms. Hanson continued. "Even today, she's there amusing herself by looking at naked men on the Internet...She is truly what men fantasize about. Though she's kind of *scary* in reality for most men, and they don't imagine they can meet her demands. But her demands aren't big!"

On a Saturday afternoon, I visited Ms. Del Rio at the little house in Staten Island that porn bought her. From the new book, I already knew she drives a Jeep, watches *CSI*, that her favorite actors include Clive Owen and Leonardo DiCaprio ("he's turning into a fine actor"), and that she wants Rosario Dawson to play her in a biopic.

She listens to alternative jazz, likes vodka and rare steak, peanut butter on anything, and she gets off watching men masturbate via Web cam on Yahoo chat.

She has two cats, Lola and Taran, and there's a scar on her ass from sitting on a curling iron. She's always been faithful in relationships and thinks of herself as "the biggest friggin' feminist there is."

Wearing jeans and a T-shirt that read *Forbidden Fruit*, she welcomed me inside. There were leopard rugs, leopard foot stools, pink flamingoes, mermaids, mini palm trees. We sat next to each other on a couch in the living room. Her bulldog was all over me.

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"Down! Stay!" Ms. Del Rio said.

I told her that the night before, I'd watched her DVD with my girlfriend, who excused herself during a cucumber scene. Ms. Del Rio laughed and added she was pressed for time, because she had to go to the Bronx to visit her mother, who is sick with pancreatic cancer.

How did she feel about the book?

"I am completely flattered, honored and just flabbergasted that Mr. Taschen wanted to do this book on my life and, well, that the porn part is art," she said. "It's almost like I don't know *what* to think other than like, *Wow*."

Why is not bad for a woman to be a slut?

'I'm sorry, I don't believe in marriage. Marriage is just a thing to control human beings from going buck wild.'

—Vanessa Del Rio

"Well, it's an archetype of woman," she said. "There's our horny side, and there's our more nurturing side, and rather than use the word 'slut' in a derogatory way, I embrace it. Yes, I enjoy my sexuality, and throughout history women have been held down from enjoying their sexuality, because it's a very powerful thing. The clitoris is the only organ whose sole purpose is *pleasure*. Even a man's penis has a purpose—it shoots sperm so people can conceive—yes, there's pleasure, but there's also a purpose."

How much sex has she had in 2007?

"That's personal."

Does she feel proud of having given so many people so many orgasms?

"It's not something you think of," she said. "At the moment that you're doing it, you don't sit there and think, *Jeez, I'm so proud of how many guys are going to spill their seed over me*. A lot of people have actually communicated with me, either by mail or e-mail, that I *have* made their sex life better. A lot of *women* have said that by watching my films, they've learned how to please their husbands and they're thanking me.

"Just continue being your slutty self," she continued, "because once you say, *I'm getting older and I can't do this and I can't do that*—then you just *age*. I was just talking to a friend of mine who worked at a nursing home, and he said, 'What goes on in a nursing home you would not *believe*. I think they give them *Viagra*.' And I thought, I have no kids and I've got a very small family, so when it's my time, I figure, if I can't stay here and

can't afford to have somebody take care of me, give me my drugs in a nursing home. Tell me where all the horny old men are, and I'll keep them all smiling and laughing and I'll just be the nursing home slut! Nasty old Vanessa!"

Does she ever get sick of sex?

"I don't see sex is a thing I *need*," she said. "I have *fun* with it. I didn't really consider myself promiscuous, by my definition of promiscuous. I'm a head person, I'm an Aries, so I live here"—she pointed to her lovely noggin—"I like a good mindfuck and I like the *chase* and I like those moments between making contact. I like all the *heat*, and all that expectation."

Will she ever marry?

"No, no, I'm sorry, I don't believe in marriage. Marriage is just a thing to control human beings from going buck wild."

So you don't live with your boyfriend?

"Sometimes yes, sometimes no. I'd be insufferable to live with."

Did she really once have a fantasy about going into a prison and sucking out all the testosterone?

"I actually had a girl e-mail me, saying, 'Wow, I thought I was the only one who had that fantasy!' I have had that fantasy because *those* are *hungry* guys. I just like animalistic type of *hungry* sex. I'll bet you there are far more women than you think who have that prison fantasy. It's natural."

Thirty percent of your fan mail is from prisoners?

"A lot of fan mail from prison," she said. "They're all very respectful. Letters from San Quentin, from all the major prisons."

What is her idea of a good time these days?

"Walking my dog on a trail deep in the woods. I've found my bliss. Since I've gotten Matilda, she has really centered me. Because I guess, you know, I have to take care of her. I've never had a dog. I've always had cats, and cats are very independent. So having her has kind of sparked my little maternal instinct there."

She never wanted to be like her mother?

"Yes, like being a victim or subservient—but which I see in *her* as *beauty*, because she's who *she* is. I just didn't want to be that way, be-

cause I see how she was hurt by my father. So I was like, *No man's going to hurt me*. And also my father was very domineering. Freud would have a field day."

If she'd had a better father, would she have gone into porn?

"Well, he was a good father. They raise you how they were raised, so he was raised very strict, so all he knew was to be strict," she said. "He didn't want to *hurt* me. I'm sure he didn't want to hurt my mother—but maybe, because she used to read sexology a lot—maybe she wasn't sexual enough."

I'd read in her book that her biggest fears were crying and acknowledging love.

"I think people have a misconception that because you enter into a life of your *choosing* and you dare to go where society says you couldn't, that that somehow makes you like a hardened criminal person or something," she said. "No, I have real emotions, and I'm not the only one afraid of love. A lot of people are. I am just able to speak about it, and in retrospect, now that I've lived my life in the public and now that I'm doing this book—why withhold anything? I mean, those *are* the things that scare me.

I just think that's as common as sliced bread. Everyone's afraid of being hurt. What I'm saying is, society puts people down in my business as being unfeeling—but we are, we just dare to *live*, to live how we want to."

She still goes to swing clubs?

"It's kind of odd, being Vanessa Del Rio and going to a swing club—you can't just be part of the crowd," she said. "People recognize you and you feel like you have to be a little bit *on* or something; you have something to prove. So it can be a little bit of a spoiler that way. But it's nice to be in that kind of environment now and then, where everybody is just sexually abandoned. I'll tell you, swingers are a lot wilder than me. I'm still shy, basically.

"I'm not just a slobbering slut," she continued. "I just lived my life outwardly, in public, and put it out there. Because there a lot of people who do a lot of strange things, and nobody ever knows about it. I've lived an honest life.

"You know," she added, "by *today's* standards, I was being just *slightly* slutty."

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