



Sasha Grey, porn's biggest star, reads Nietzsche, likes it rough and says she's liberating women one gangbang at a time

*By Vanessa Grigoriadis
Photographs by Theo Wanner*

THE DIRTIEST GIRL IN THE WORLD



BEDTIME STORY
Grey in New York in April

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N AN OVERCAST Sunday in Los Angeles, Sasha Grey arrives at a set for the film *The Fuck Junkie* promptly at 9 a.m. This is not her real name, though it's a subtle one for a porn star, a mash-up of Sascha Konietzko, a founder of the German industrial band KMFDM, and the Kinsey scale of sexuality, which identifies sexual orientation as shades of gray. The shoot location is unexpected as well, a brick warehouse in downtown L.A., far from the porn epicenter in the San Fernando Valley. In her dressing room, Grey unpacks a suitcase of makeup, lingerie and dozens of barrettes, then applies a thick coat of eyeliner in a mirror. "No one in porn knows how to do makeup right," she says, flicking the brush across her eye. "The only thing they know how to do is make my face orange. I'd rather do it myself. I'd rather have it be my fault."

Grey, who is known for exploring the outer edges of pornography, is shooting a solo scene today. It is her first bit for Grey Art, a new production company founded with director Oren Cohen, a 31-year-old third-generation porn purveyor. "This is my company, a new chapter, a positive step up for me," she says. "I wanted to start it right." In fact, deliberate, symbolic action is the defining characteristic of Grey, who, at 21, has managed a risqué ingénue's hat trick: She's the adult industry's reigning princess of porn, celebrated as the *Adult Video News* Female Performer of the Year in 2008; a muse to rock stars, featured in videos for the Smashing Pumpkins and the Roots; and, most impressively, a potential crossover sensation, making her film debut as the high-class-escort star of Steven Soderbergh's *The Girlfriend Experience* this month.

"In the adult business, you're forced to grow up and work for yourself, or somebody else will work you and you'll be done," she says, before stepping out of a black cotton dress. "There are maybe four people in the industry that I hang out with, because they're interesting people and not coked up. I'm not calling anyone up to say, 'Hey, let's get a mani-pedi together.' I do my own nails."

At five feet six and 110 pounds, with straight black hair that shoots to her lum-

Contributing editor VANESSA GRIGORIADIS profiled Taylor Swift in RS 1073. She lives in Los Angeles.

bar spine, Grey's naked body is exquisite and natural, with taut skin free of blemishes and tattoos (she resembles Kate Beckinsale in physique, and her affect is a similar mix of languor and brutal hauteur). "As far as I'm concerned, Suicide Girl types with black hair and tattoos are the new blondes with bolt-on tits," she draws. "Those women look the same, and they're idiots." She pulls a pair of frilly underwear from her suitcase - "Is that the type of thing you put around a rack of lamb?" asks Cohen - then reconsiders the choice, slipping on a black G-string. The porno theme of the day is "neckties." Grey holds a green tie to the daylight before settling on black.

"You feel like you can rub one out with this?" says Cohen.

"That could happen," says Grey, nodding. "I could feel that."

As cliché as it is to note the arid thousand-mile stare of sex workers, there is something about Grey that is hard to reach, like talking to a woman behind glass. When she perches on a wooden chair in the center of the warehouse, training her eyes on a fresnel light above her and beginning to masturbate, the glass shatters. The crew watches silently, transfixed. We stand 20 feet away, but it feels like two. She works herself mechanically, transferring her fin-

"I AM A PERVERT," SAYS GREY. "IF I'M WORKING OUT ANY ISSUES THROUGH PORN, IT'S ANGER AT SOCIETY FOR NOT BEING OPEN ABOUT SEX."

gers to her mouth every 30 seconds or so, then chokes herself with the tie before erupting in a minutes-long close-eyed orgasm, at which everyone finally exhales and claps. In her ecstasy, she is a vision of a terrifying goddess fueled by her own bliss energy, a half-woman, half-machine Kali springing forth to wreak destruction on the safe, timid sex habits of our world. Her performances are calibrated to destabilize, and they succeed at that goal. If Grey had been masturbating someone else this way, it would have been violent, but because it is self-imposed, it seems OK.

AS ENTERTAINMENT businesses are thoroughly transformed by cultural shifts, the recession and the digital age, there may be only one way for performers to survive: Get a lot smarter, exclusivize their vision and pursue multiple revenue streams.

Once upon a time, porn was a schmuck's paradise where VHS tapes sold for \$75 and rubber sex toys manufactured for five cents sold for \$15; après Internet, a five-hour adult DVD compilation costs 45 cents when bought in bulk at wholesale prices, and no one believes AVN's estimate that the business is worth \$13 billion. Now, porn is easier to access than at any point in human history. The psychological charge of demented sex has lost its power, and stars like Jenna Jameson are harder to identify in the swarm of endlessly clickable talent. Grey is the first performer to emerge with a chance to rise above a broken system - and redress some of the stigma of her business.

Grey moved to Studio City at 18, after saving \$7,000 and writing herself a mission statement: "Most of the XXX I see is boring, and does not arouse me physically, or visually," it read. "I am determined and ready to be a commodity that fulfills everyone's fantasies." Yet hanging out with her is less like being with a businesswoman than an elderly anarchist, or a person whose life is defined by setting herself apart from the mainstream (though her practical side does come out in her abstinence from drugs or heavy drinking, as well as her choice of vehicle, a gray Saab

sedan). She refuses to make small talk, disdains common courtesies like smiling when she walks into a room and is deeply mistrustful of the media, citing Godard's famous line "Every edit is a lie."

Grey declines to put a price on her fees, but at one point in my presence she considers booking a boy-girl scene for five grand. A trained actress who took Method lessons through her teens, Grey is deft with put-downs, and she has a knack for dissing the conventional in conversation: She says that she wants to go on *Howard Stern* with the Palestinian flag wrapped around her breasts, because she believes he's a closet racist; she thinks Oprah is stingy and doesn't give enough money to charity, because as much as she gives, she has many millions more. "I love that Sasha is intimidating, powerful and introspective," says Dave Navarro, who directed her in his adult film *Broken* and is now co-managing her career. "When you're near

her, you don't know what she's thinking, but you really want to know."

In the future, Grey might fight many battles against society, but now she is in pursuit of one: the liberation of female sexuality. "I want to tell young women that sex is OK," she says. "It's OK to be a slut. You don't have to be ashamed. People think that young women can't understand sex, that there will be consequences for our actions, but we can be as analytical as anyone." Grey envisions herself as a performance-art Camille Paglia exploding the categorizations of second-wave feminists and female pop icons like Tyra Banks, who claims that women in porn are largely victims of sexual abuse. Tina Fey has weighed in too, on *Playboy* models: "These women aren't doing it for the money," she said on "Weekend Update." "They're doing it because they were molested by a family friend."

As far as sexual abuse is concerned, Grey insists she has never suffered at anyone's hand. "I am a pervert," she says. "If I am working out any issues through porn, it's anger at society for not being open about sex." On camera, she is vulgar and aggressive, yelling at co-stars to "go deeper" and "harder" (she is famous for asking a co-star to punch her in the stomach during her debut scene in porn). Grey derides softcore porn as good only for a "Valium housewife." She can tick off her taboos quickly—simulated rape scenes, ejaculation inside her vagina, fingers from male co-stars, breast-slapping, fecal play, animals and children—which means that everything else is pretty much acceptable. She claims to have genuine orgasms at least three-quarters of the time on set. "A lot of girls in porn fake it, but I never caught Sasha doing that," says Randy Spears, a male performer. "When she says harsh stuff on camera, she means it, because she is trying to kill us. At that moment, that's what it is going to take for her to get off."

These days, Grey lives in a spotless modern home in Hollywood with her fiancé, Ian Cinnamon, a 34-year-old filmmaker who is half-black and says he is "95 percent heterosexual" (that's his real name, too). A year's worth of *Dwell* magazines are arranged by date in their bathroom, and a poster of Godard's *La Chinoise*, a present from Soderbergh, hangs in the living room. There are no trashy novels on their bookshelves, which are so rigorously esoteric as to be ridiculous, a monastic undergraduate's library of Nietzsche and Brecht, and for lighter fare, the inscrutable *Philosophy of Andy Warhol*. A large collection of vinyl and DVDs is set behind a black curtain, split between art-house box sets and Grey's porn videos, with titles like *Blow Me #11*, *Apprentass #10* and *Meet the Fuckers #7*.

If we are judged by the quality of those we take as partners, the evidence of Cinnamon does much to recommend Grey: An indie filmmaker without many credits



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Hardcore Princess

Grey is the most shocking, business-savvy porn star working today. (1) With fiancé Cinnamon in 2006, the year she shot her first movie with Rocco Siffredi (2). Grey grew up near Sacramento (3), but at 18 she left for L.A. She's appeared in more than 150 scenes.

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or a hipster's fashion sense, he was raised by a showgirl mom and is steady, sweet and gentle. They began dating around the time Grey started to shoot porn, at 18, in her first "committed relationship, and deeply emotional one," she says. They have an "open relationship," though they don't take advantage of the benefit often (off-set, Grey has slept with six men, and about 60 on camera). "We've learned a lot about ourselves as a couple, and you learn a lot about yourself as a man," says Cinnamon of Grey's occupation. "Even as liberal as I am, I'm still a guy. You go from a normal sexual relationship, which means, 'I get turned on, I approach you, we go for it' to having rules. 'I have to work tomorrow,' which means, 'I don't want to be sore.' I don't get jealous of the sex, honestly. I get frustrated because of the time it takes."

After Cinnamon cooks a light dinner of green salad and barbecued chicken, Grey boils a pot of water for loose-leaf tea, then shows off a prototype of her new website. "People rip you off, and this way I'm responsible for my updates, so I don't have to rely on anyone else," she says. She clicks through fetish photos of herself, like one where she is wearing a strap-on and looking sarcastically at the camera, and then a series of icons linking to interviews with her favorite filmmakers and artists, but the links don't work, and the perfectionist in her becomes ruffled. Cinnamon begins to give a tour of the house, pointing out a framed Terry Richardson photo of them

in their downstairs bathroom, but Grey storms in. "I have to pee, and I don't want to go upstairs," she explains brusquely.

In the living room, we check out their Chinese dulcimer, perched in a corner: Grey, who plays guitar, has formed an experimental noise band named aTelecine (they have sold out a limited release of 300 seven-inch EPs). The couple, who are also in the market for a vintage Moog, are fans of industrial music who attended Coachella only to hear Throbbing Gristle.

Suddenly, Grey bursts out of the bathroom and cuts Cinnamon off. She juts her chin forward and bellows, "You're like the wife!"

WITH HER ÜBERALPHA attitude, Grey can sometimes be hard to take. At one point she burbles about a text she has received from a celebrity who has just watched one of her videos: "He says he's all about me now, and is peeling cum off his stomach!" She doesn't believe in God and isn't afraid of death. She seems to have obliterated her feminine self in favor of a masculine one, with values of only bravery, achievement and plundering. Sometimes, she seems as calculated as any actress. "Sasha pointedly decided to have an extreme presence to achieve entree to Hollywood," says Nick Jarecki, executive producer of the new Mike Tyson documentary, who met with her last year about a

role in another movie. "My impression of her attitude is that porn, while part of her pastiche, is ultimately a gateway to her mainstream ideas and acting career."

Grey grew up in North Highlands, a rough area outside Sacramento, the third of four siblings. Her father, a Greek-American mechanic, left the family when she was five, and they are no longer in touch. "He told my sister recently to tell me he loved me, and hoped that 'she accomplishes everything that she says she is,'" says Grey. "Basically, he was saying, 'I hope she doesn't fuck up.'" Her mother enrolled in college, worked to support the family and married a man with whom Grey does not get along ("They had a traditional Mom-cooks-dinner relationship, and it disgusted me," she says). A popular tomboy who mostly kept to herself, she never played with Barbies as a kid, preferring to listen to the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, then Black Sabbath and Led Zeppelin as an adolescent, followed by Skinny Puppy and Nine Inch Nails. "I had a girl come up to me and say, 'I was always afraid you were going to beat me up,' and I'd never spoken to her," says Grey. She laughs. "It's funny how you can make an impression on someone without saying anything."

As Freud taught, children have sexual fantasies that they later repress, but Grey thinks she remembers hers. "From the time I was four or five, I had a lot of BD/SM fantasies," she says. "I vividly remember coming down some sort of manhole, but when I came under there was a big black room. I'm shackled up in there, and I'm fucking some guy." She told her best friend, who told Sasha's parents. "They said I wasn't allowed to dream those things, that it was for adults. I felt incredibly guilty that I couldn't have these thoughts." She also says that she and another girlfriend performed oral sex on each other around this age. Later, she had dreams about sex between men and enjoyed the masochistic pleasure of skinning her knees. "Kids

would joke about anal sex, and I would think about how it was really done, not in a joking way," she says. "I asked my mom if she ever thought about it, even a finger, and she would just say it was gross and laugh."

Grey had her first boyfriend in eighth grade, but she didn't lose her virginity until she was 16, when she ran into an old friend. "We hung out at my house, watched movies and got a little drunk, and I was like, 'Let's do it,'" she says. "I was the aggressive one. My girlfriends said that it didn't feel good the first time, but I liked it a lot." Her brother told her not to believe that guys who wanted sex were also interested in love, so she didn't get attached. She hated high school, skipped prom to see a Miranda July movie and refused to take the SATs, furious that she'd go into debt if she wanted to attend college. Soon, she latched on to someone interesting: the 27-year-old cook at the steakhouse. "I told him my fantasies, and he said he wanted to explore them too," she says. She began watching gonzo porn on the Internet, then started with choking and worked up to anal sex. Everything that he did to her she insisted that she get a chance to do to him too.

"It was very healthy," she says, then pauses. "At 18, I was so into the harder side of my sexuality, I was like, 'Fuck kissing somebody,'" she says. "I still enjoy that, but now that I've explored it in a deeper sense, in a business sense and a personal level, it's good to be able to take a step backward, to say, 'With pain, well, I don't like being slapped on my vagina, maybe a little bit but not like I like being slapped on the face.'" I ask her what sexual acts she wants to perform, and she pauses. "There is one fantasy I haven't lived out," she says. "I want to have sex on top of a washing machine. But every place I've lived in with Ian, the washer has been stacked with a dryer, and we can't sit on it. I love the smell of laundry. I get off on the smell of laundry."

IT'S HARD TO EXAGGERATE the anger of 21-year-old American girls at our culture's double standards: Be sexy, but not too sexy; assertive, but not demanding; and the rest of the garbage that allows men to steal power. It's possible that part of Grey's enjoyment of her lifestyle is a revenge on that system, a renunciation of skewed gender relations meant to make girls weak. To her, the world of "normal" sex is unsophisticated, and she often tells stories of being mistreated by those who feel guilty because they have not embraced her path. Even with her star turn in the Soderbergh movie, she hasn't been able to land a good Hollywood agent, because they're worried their clients wouldn't want to be on a list with a porn star. With mega-corporations running Hollywood, Grey's best shot at stardom may be the international art-trash crowd, to be trotted out at Cannes as a mascot for a new Gaspar Noé movie. "Grey Goose was supposed to sponsor our party at the Tribeca Festival, and when they found out Sasha is an adult star, they no longer sponsored it," says Soderbergh. "Porn is beyond mainstream now, to the point where everyone on TV looks like they're in porn, but there's still an attitude that porn is wrong."

A few weeks ago, Grey had dinner at Pace, an Italian restaurant in Laurel Canyon. She was tired from a day of filming *This Ain't Star Trek XXX*, in which she plays a Vulcan ravished by Captain Kirk. There was a bruise on her arm from having blood drawn for an obligatory syphilis test. She's caught gonorrhea twice and chlamydia once—"Like getting the common cold," she says—and she requires partners to be checked for diseases two days before a scene. "When you're in the industry, and your body is what you sell, [catching something] makes you feel like shit," she says. "I have a good enough reputation that I can demand tests from performers now."

Grey's frankness is appealing, and though she says it a bit too loudly, she has me convinced that she is not a victim. She may be just another determined starlet, exploiting her perversity in the pursuit of fame. And it's not clear that women who are more turned on by foreplay than by the type of anatomically unpleasant porn she films benefit from her quest for sexual liberation. For the past 40 years, the conundrum of porn and its meaning for violence against women has been debated in feminist circles, with no resolution in sight. As heartbreaking as it is to think of sorority girls trapped in dorm rooms with boyfriends who expect them to act like Grey, it's just as sad to think of Grey as a repressed office drone who has to live out her fantasies in secret on Craigslist over the weekends. Someone is going to lose here, and it's not Grey. "I'm standing up for myself," she says.

IAN CINNAMON

FROM LEFT: COURTESY OF EVILANGEL.COM; COURTESY OF SASHA GREY; NO CREDIT