



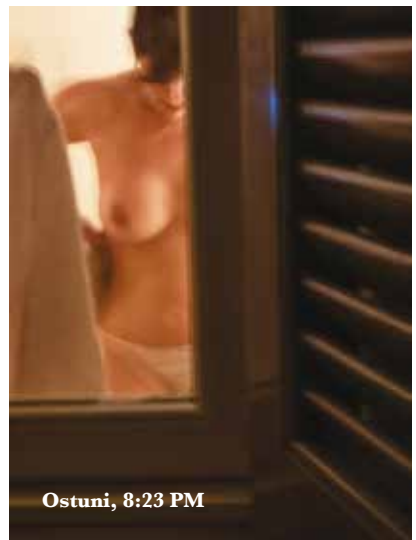
Paris, 11:23 PM



Paris, 11:13 PM

Would you mind if I spied on you?

Photography Leonardo Pucci



Ostuni, 8:23 PM



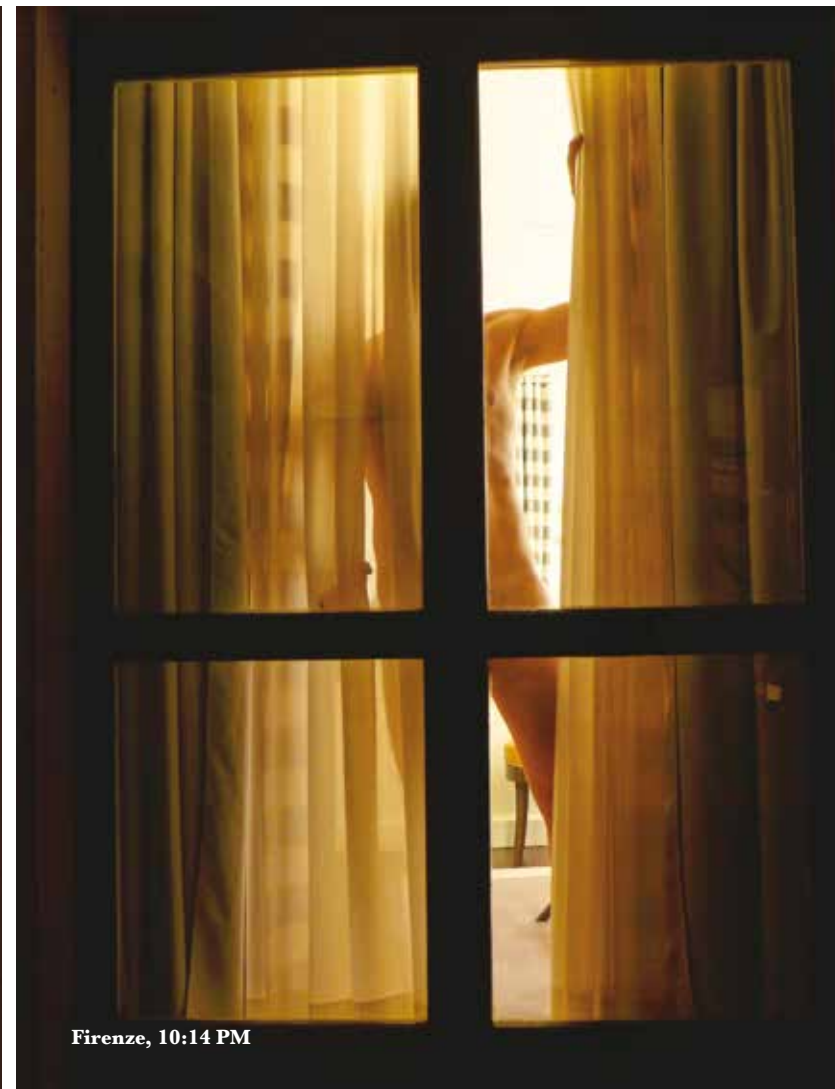
Ponza, 9:38 PM



Savalletri, 8:27 PM



Paris, 11:30 PM



Firenze, 10:14 PM

Text Matthias Rosenzweig

To see the world through Leonardo Pucci's lens is to focus on its subtleties. He has worked for the world's largest, most monumental fashion houses, yet has developed a passion for photographing humanity's tiniest moments. In particular, the moments he captures "belong" to unaware strangers - a surfer peering out at an incoming wave, a blond woman staring worriedly at a dance partner's shoulder, a young man sitting with his back to the window as he waits at a laundromat, couples kissing by a window at dusk, caught under a city's neon lights. His gaze is delicate; dark like a film noire, naughty like a porno, beautiful like a fashion editorial, and lonesome, like a man in his solitude, recording others around him.

That man, of course, is Pucci. However, in looking at his photos, his so-called voyeurism is transferred to the viewer. The subjects, or most of them, do not grant us access to these delicate and subdued moments. With that, we get to experience a buzz of excitement, the electric feeling that comes with knowing we are doing something "wrong" in order to reap the fruits of observing beauty, despite the lack of invitation. We spoke to the creative power house about his photographs, his reality, and where the two merge.

Can you talk about the brands you have worked with and in what capacity you have worked with them?

For more than twenty years, I have been able to nourish my eye for beauty and conception through my work at top Italian and French Maisons, such as Bottega Veneta, Prada and Dior, always supervising creative and development processes along with marketing and merchandising areas.

In these luxury fashion houses, I met extraordinary and inspiring people at all levels.

Each of the creative directors I have worked with have written some important pages in the fashion history of the last decade. I can honestly say that I "stole" something from each one of them.

From Miuccia Prada I learned how to break into the normally avoided aesthetic territories and also the sophisticated art of questioning yourself. From Tomas Maier I was able to understand the deep pleasure of luxury materials and refined techniques. From John Galliano, the perfect timing to impress and seduce the audience. From Raf Simons, the sensuality of abstraction. From Kris Van Assche, the captivating rigor of proportions. From Maria Grazia Chiuri, the vision of luxury through controversial issues in everyday life. And from Kim Jones, the powerful coolness of following your intuition.

How do you manage to maintain your own vision and style while working with companies that are so rigid in their own branding and vision?

These brands have an incredibly "heavy" heritage, which can apparently rigidify their vision. I say "apparently" because we should not forget that in the last two decades fashion has been one of the most important experimental terrains to obsessively redefine aesthetics and communication codes; for these fashion giants, the impact of some changes has been like a pervasive revolution among deep-rooted practices.

This necessary turmoil allowed me to develop and evolve an attentive and curious point of view, a sensuous way of observing the world, constantly searching for a synthesis between the seduction of details without losing the force of the whole.

And this is the point of view I try to express through my images.

Even if my photographs are capturing spontaneous moments, I force myself to carry on a ceaseless search for a sensual touch in the composition, in the way the image is cropped, in the proportion between elements, in the voluptuous yet rigorous use of colors and their calibration.

I want my work to reach a narrative vision, condensed with a dreamlike sensuality. Even the choice of the paper I use for printing is on purpose to enhance this effect. All this detail oriented effort to serve the whole result comes from the fashion discipline, surely.

When and why did you start taking photographs?

Photography entered very early in my life and never left. As you may know, my father, an amateur photographer, made me discover this art when I was a child, and only few years later, he gave me one of his cameras.

I still remember it was a Minolta SRT101.

I was in heaven!

I used it without any photographic notion during a family trip to Berlin. The photos I took were a disaster. But I did not give up. I still wanted to become a magician of that black box.

Photography has a somewhat magical side for me. It surprises me, like an unexpected narrative which goes beyond technique. If you think photography has this force right in its name: drawing with the light, this is magic, it is an immense power!

Have you taken any photos that got you in trouble?

Not yet.

My images are stolen moments of intimacy of individuals or couples, but I am very respectful of my subjects and I make sure no one can recognize them.

This is for the respect of their privacy, of course, but also because I do not want my images to relate specifically to the lives of others. These people, those specific moments, do not interest me.

They are just a pretext, a medium. My photography is mostly based on hidden feelings being revealed and not on specific subjects and their specific lives.

Are your photographs more romantic than real life?

Probably yes.

All my images are totally spontaneous and all subjects are totally unaware of their being photographed.

This spontaneity, this authenticity of private spaces of intimacy, enhances a delicate sensuality which spreads as a "fil rouge" through all my pictures.

You can feel a gentle sense of loneliness in my photographs, but my images are not novels of solitude. It is more a feeling of indefinitely fluctuating atmospheres and embracing the imprecision of everyday intimate moments.



How does sexuality play into your photography?

Is it any different than sexuality in “real life”?

Sensuality more than sexuality is the main focus of my photography. There is a song by Björk, “Big Time Sensuality”, which explains it all:

*I can sense it
something important
is about to happen
it's coming up*

*It takes courage to enjoy it
the hardcore and the gentle
big time sensuality*

*We just met
and I know I'm a bit too intimate
but something huge is coming up
and we're both included*

*It takes courage to enjoy it
the hardcore and the gentle
big time sensuality*

*I don't know my future after this weekend
and I don't want to*

*It takes courage to enjoy it
the hardcore and the gentle
big time sensuality*

Is it talking about sexual desire? We are not sure. But it is clear that it speaks about senses and intimacy, opposite forces and suspended possibilities. That is what I search for with my images. That is the stroke of sensuality I want to catch. Because that sensuality does exist in “real life”. It is there and just needs to be seen and revealed.

What keeps you awake at night?

I sleep very little at night. I don't need to rest many hours. Probably because I am constantly traveling and my body is somehow adjusted to recover quickly. And that is probably the reason why my photography is mainly night-time photography. At night, everything is suspended and amplified. In the darkness, if there is a noise, a movement, a shadow, my attention is taken immediately and I tend to focus much more on details than during the day when the landscape of everyday life distracts me. Eventually it is at dusk or at night-time that you feel protected and at ease in your spaces. It is when you get rid of constrictions, conventions, bans. Even your body moves differently than during the day. My images try to steal those moments of intimacy and such crystallized instants become the un-staged canvases in which we all recognize and disclose our own lives, we all confess our hidden feelings.

What is your favorite photograph in the world?

Without a doubt, it is “Untitled (Black Porn)” by Leigh Ledare. It is part of a project in which Leigh pushes family intimacy to its limit. The subject is the artist's mother captured while on the bed as she is putting on some black stockings. It is a very sensual image, not vulgar nor perverse. Just perfect.

What is your favorite photograph that you have taken?

I am really in love with all of my pictures and it is quite difficult for me to select, edit and choose among them. I can not pick only one image, I have to name at least two of them. One is “Istanbul, 10:43 PM” for its powerful storytelling and composition. One man in bed with two women, while outside, the nightlife of the city carries on. This image was shortlisted by the British Journal of Photography and exhibited during Les Rencontres d'Arles 2019. I am really attached to this picture. The second photograph is “Paris, 10:52 PM” with the smoking angel in a warm summer night. Well, there is an anecdote about this picture. This photograph is the result of an image that I actually did not shoot a few moments before. The caption would have been “Paris, 10:31 PM” or something similar to that. The angel was not yet sitting at the window, but he was just standing half-naked in the middle of that room in front of my building. He was facing a crying young woman who was wearing a light white dress. They just had sex. She was repeating, full of sadness, almost chanting, the same words on and on: «How can I sleep tonight... how can I sleep tonight». It was not a question. She was so desperate, though full of love. I could not take the picture as the end of their story. I lost my detachment. I waited in the dark, hidden by the curtains, when she left and then the angel just sat out of the window, smoking and drinking red wine as you see him now captured in the image.



Do you ever see anything in your photos that you do not see with your own two eyes?

When you start shooting, your eyes open wider, and you begin to see things that before you did not notice. It is incredible how many sensual instants go unnoticed every day, and we just pass by. That is why I am constantly attentive, my eye is always ready to capture an image that suddenly appears in front of me. I have my camera with me, night and day, and when the opportunity arises, I try not to get too involved. I remain as detached as possible, trying to block in a fragment an action that is about to take place or that has just been accomplished. This detachment is essential for the effect I want to reach through my images.

All this is strictly related to my way of thinking about photography, which owes much to the art of theater. Not in the concept of staging, as my photos are totally unforeseen and not a result of an organized set. But in the consequence they produce in decoding ourselves as spectators.

When we watch a theater play, it is like looking at each other in a mirror.

Not in the old sense of theater as a mirror of society but in the sense of a reflection in which we see ourselves; what we would like to be, what we expect to see, our pre-visions, our pre-judgments. We find ourselves following marginal details to discover spaces that open paths of forgotten emotions which are ready to come back to the surface. In the same way, through my images, I try to tell a story without saying everything about that story. I give the time and a name of the city but thanks to a careful play of atmospheres and color calibration, I subtract concreteness from the subject. It is the viewer who, on the track of those ambiances and instants that I suggest, personally reconstructs the “space” of that story, and sees it, feels it, experiences it as if they have been living in it.

Does “voyeur” have a positive or negative connotation to you? Why?

Robert Frank, a milestone in photography history and someone who recently died, once said: *«I just go and watch the people and photograph them and try not to do it so people see me. It is a way of photographing. It is very quick... that's one of the reasons I think the pictures succeed. None of [the subjects] is really conscious of the camera».*

As you can see, it is not a matter of a positive or negative connotation; it is just part of the mission in recording and decoding the world.

That is why I want to quote another artist, Shizuka Yokomizo, cited in an interesting article that came out in The Guardian a few years ago:

«Dear Stranger, I am an artist working on a photographic project which involves people I do not know. I would like to take a photograph of you... if you do not want to get involved, please simply draw your curtains to show your refusal. I really hope to see you from the window».



«If you do not want, just simply draw your
I really hope to see you from the window»

curtains to show your refusal.