



Venus Inferred

Laura Letinsky

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We are all, it is said, looking for love. But what does love look like? Does it look the way it feels? The visual vocabulary of romance—its attendant comforts and vulnerabilities, ambivalences and unclarity—is the subject of *Venus Inferred*. This collection of 46 richly reproduced color photographs is Laura Letinsky's study of contemporary lovers as they are seen, as they show, and as they see themselves making love and inhabiting domestic space. Entering what might be called the intimate sphere, Letinsky's camera explores a space too personal to be termed public and yet whose cultural and emotional shape is uncannily recognizable. Over a seven-year period, Letinsky visited lovers in their homes, hotel rooms, bedrooms, bathrooms, and kitchens and recorded in detail the promises, disharmonies, and disappointments that inhere in modern coupling.

Accompanying the photographs is an essay by critic Lauren Berlant, which presents an aesthetic and cultural analysis of the contemporary images of romance and intimacy. Berlant contemplates the burden of clarity that sexuality bears, implicit both in conventional romantic ideals and in the "counterpolitics of the flesh" that desires to escape them. Thus arises the sublime ordinariness of Letinsky's couples, Berlant argues: "As 'normal' pleasures themselves become deemed modes of domination, the already destabilizing aspects of sexuality can feel even more unsettling." An interview between Letinsky and Berlant unfolds the artist's intellectual formation while exploring the unsettling and pleasurable power of her images as they circulate through the domains of romance, sexuality, and contemporary culture.

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