



Hans Neleman is best known for creating provocative, often surreal still lifes that fuse sculpture and painting. He photographs these complex arrangements by controlled light, usually with an 8x10 view camera. But when

New York-based Neleman went on vacation in Guatemala a few years ago, he left his 8x10 at home. Stopping at a bar in the town of Antigua, he soon realized it was selling more than beer and fried plantains. "The waitress who took my order had a scar around her neck as thick as a pearl necklace," Neleman recalls. "She winked her swollen black eye at me, puckered up her blistered lips and tried to give me a kiss on the mouth." The drunken prostitute fell into Neleman's arms, literally. "I was disgusted and intrigued," says the photographer, who was fascinated by the lurid windows of Amsterdam's red-light district when he was growing up in Holland. "It was like that mixed feeling you get driving past a highway accident. You want to look, keep going, and help all at once."

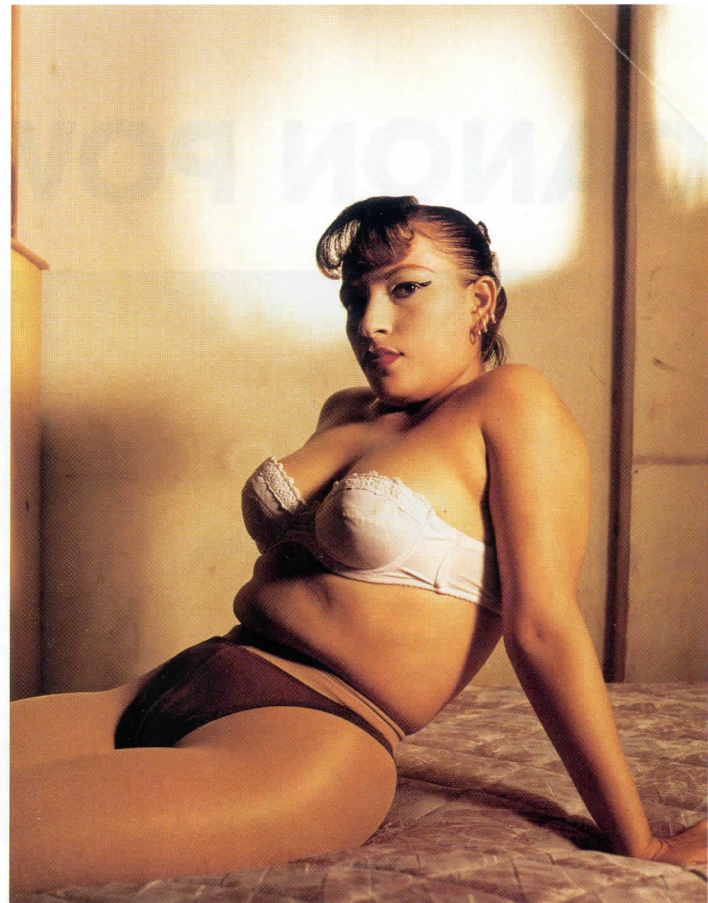
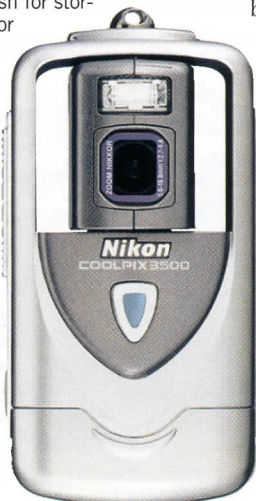
A year later Neleman returned to Guatemala with his 8x10 view camera—a surprising tool for the project he had in mind. He went back to the same bar and bought the freedom of a 17-year-old English-speaking "waitress," who became Neleman's translator and liaison to other women trapped in the "clubs" of Guatemala's sex trade. For fees much higher than the going rate for sex, Neleman made powerful existing-light portraits of these exploited and abused women, returning six times over the next three years and scaling back to a 4x5 camera, then to 2¼ to achieve more spontaneity.

Most are nude, some quite graphic of the subjects' own accord, but Neleman never forced a pose.

This sensitive and disturbing work is collected in a new book, *Night Chicas*, and will be exhibited as large-scale Fuji Crystal Archive prints at New York's Ricco/Maresca Gallery this June through August. (For more on the book and examples of the photos, visit neleman.com.) It would be easy to dismiss Neleman's portraits as sexist or pornographic, but they absolutely are not. Even at their most explicit, they bare their subjects not to titillate but to read the story of wear and tear on

body and sense of self. Unsparring in their descriptive power, they aestheticize these women. But the pictures' strange beauty is not at odds with their subjects. Instead, it reveals a dignity even in the grotesque, and a true sensuality beneath the one for sale. —RUSSELL HART

A couple of our favorite pocket-sized digital point-and-shoots come in new versions that ramp up resolution from two to three megapixels, enough for a decent 8x10 print. One is the **Minolta Dimâge Xi** (about \$450), identical in design and tiny size to the two-megapixel Dimâge X; the other is the **Nikon Coolpix 3500** (below, about \$380), a charcoal-and-silver take on the Coolpix 2500. Each camera borrows its sibling's unique solution to squeezing in a 3X optical zoom, the Nikon with an internal lens/sensor module that stays flush for storage and swivels out for pictures (also letting you shoot from high and low angles), the Minolta with an optical mirror that bends the subject's light 90 degrees down into a vertically positioned lens (which never protrudes from the 0.8-inch thick body when you zoom). We can't decide which is more clever.



© HANS NELEMAN

technology & vision

- 88**
Hands On
- 91**
Field Test
- 95**
Destinations
- 98**
On Location

A Guatemalan prostitute (above right), from Neleman's *Night Chicas* (above left).