

REYNALDO RIVERA

Kiss Me Deadly

October 14 – November 21, 2021

Reena Spaulings presents *Kiss Me Deadly* by the Los Angeles-based photographer Reynaldo Rivera – his first exhibition at the gallery and his first in New York. Fourteen black and white images have been selected from Rivera’s extensive documentation of queer nightlife in East Los Angeles, focusing on a few years in the mid-1990s. Photographing in the bustling backstage areas and makeshift dressing rooms of Echo Park drag clubs such as La Plaza and Mugy’s, Rivera produces intimate portraits of the performers as they assemble their stage personas. In one image, a besequinned Miss Alex poses just off-stage at the Silverlake Lounge, with a hand-written list of that night’s acts: Olga, Tatiana, Monte, Alex, etc. Other photographs present Yoshi performing with parasol and prosthetic breasts at Mugy’s; a sultry Gaby spot-lit among stucco stage sets at La Plaza, and a bewitching Melissa adorned in costume jewelry and shimmering organza for a regal close-up.

Venues that once hosted thriving queer and Latinx subcultures have since been eradicated, along with their self-styled superstars, by the twin forces of gentrification and AIDS. Rivera’s images reveal the experimental joys and intimate communities that once gave East Los Angeles its human pulse. The glamour, heat and humor that illuminate his mid-1990s photographs touch our present moment like the final and brightest rays of a distant star. Unearthed from Rivera’s rich, personal archive (some of which was lost in a fire), these low-rent images interrogate contemporary reality with a much less streamlined and supply-chained, deeply local, off-Hollywood fantasy of city life. The show’s title was taken from one of the most delirious and paranoid film noirs of the Cold War era, Robert Aldrich’s *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955).

Reynaldo Rivera was born in Mexicali; Mexico and spent his childhood traveling between San Diego de la Union, Mexico; Los Angeles and Stockton, California before settling in East Los Angeles. He was featured in the most recent iteration of the Hammer biennial, *Made in L.A. 2020*, Hammer and Huntington Library, Los Angeles, 2020-2021. In 2020, a monograph on Rivera’s practice was published by Semiotext(e): *Provisional Notes for a Disappeared City*, edited by Hedi El Kholi and Lauren Mackler, with essays by Luis Bauz, Vaginal Davis and Chris Kraus. His work is included in the collections of the Hammer Museum, MOCA, LA and LACMA.