



High Glitz: The Extravagant World of Child Beauty Pageants

Susan Anderson

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High Glitz is a close-up and intimate look at America's child beauty pageants, and in turn our society's obsession with youth, beauty, fame, and fortune. Susan Anderson's vibrant portraits of pageant contestants twist notions of sexuality and identity, with a new perspective on this uniquely American subculture.

"High Glitz" is a subgenre of child beauty pageants characterized by couture "glitz" costumes and a broad array of cosmetic preparations including, among other tricks of the trade: glamour makeup, elaborate hairstyles, and "flippers" (false front teeth veneers). Anderson's stunning visuals are complimented by a "High Glitz Style Guide," defining and providing examples of the following categories: Beauty/Formal Wear, Western Wear, Sportswear, and Swimwear, with a special section on hairstyles such as "the Barbie" and the "Up-do."

Each year as many as 100,000 children under the age of 12 participate in U.S. child beauty pageants, and it has recently become a billion-dollar industry. Parents invest thousands of dollars on costumes and private coaches to give their children a competitive edge. Countless hours are spent by professional hair and makeup artists on each child in preparation for the competition. The girls are spray-tanned, made-up, and groomed to a glossy perfection. Anderson captures the results of this time-consuming transformation process in exquisite detail.

In seeing how our society's values of beauty, glamour, and celebrity are reflected in the hopes and dreams of thousands of young girls, we come to see that these pageants are a reflection of American culture itself.

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