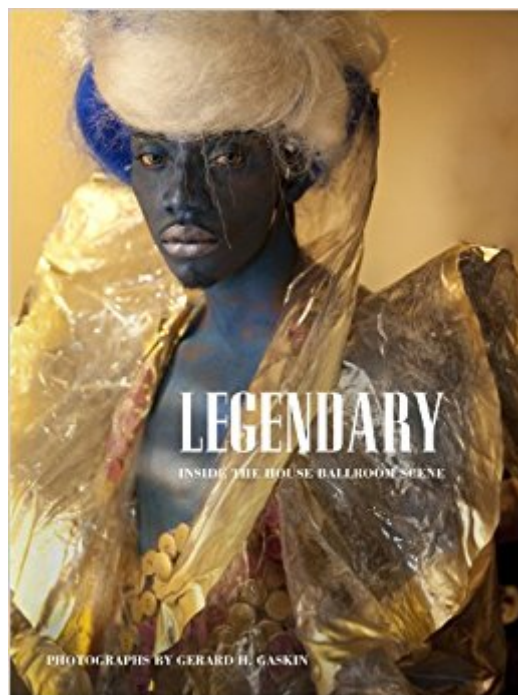




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# Legendary: Inside The House Ballroom Scene (Center For Documentary Studies/Honickman First Book Prize In Photography)



## Synopsis

Gerard H. Gaskin's radiant color and black-and-white photographs take us inside the culture of house balls, underground events where gay and transgender men and women, mostly African American and Latino, come together to see and be seen. At balls, high-spirited late-night pageants, members of particular "houses"—the House of Blahnik, the House of Xtravaganza—"walk," competing for trophies in categories based on costume, attitude, dance moves, and "realness." In this exuberant world of artistry and self-fashioning, people often marginalized for being who they are can flaunt and celebrate their most vibrant, spectacular selves. From the quiet backstage, to the shimmering energies of the runway, to the electricity of the crowd, Gaskin's photographs take us to the ball. *Legendary*, comprised of photos taken at events in the New York city area, Philadelphia, Richmond, and Washington, D.C., is a collaboration between Gaskin, a camera-laden outsider who has been attending balls for twenty years, and the house members who let him enter the intimate world of ball culture. In addition to an introduction by Deborah Willis, *Legendary* includes an essay, "The Queer Undercommons," by Frank Roberts.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

œTens across the board! Photographer Gerard H. Gaskin's new book *Legendary* provides a vivid pictorial examination of contemporary ball culture. • (Lambda Literary Review) œA lovingly devised coffee table book, winner of a now well established photography prize, *Legendary*, welcomes you into a fabulous world. This hall of mirrors is akin to the dazzling Emerald City of

"some where over the rainbow" fame. • (Kay Bourne Edge) "Photographer Gerard H. Gaskin has put on a gorgeous show in his impressive new photo book. . . . Gaskin's collection of portraits of the primarily African-American and Latino queer competitive drag scene is both a work of art and of history, documenting drag "houses" (or families) in New York and across the country as they strive for the most "realness" in categories ranging from butch to femme and beyond. • (Brian Lowder NY1 and Slate) "Legendary is a beautiful, lavish portrayal of underground house ball culture . . . . For the ball walkers, who are limited in how they can express themselves in their everyday lives, Legendary honors the possibility of a truer self, performed. • (Leo Hsu Fraction Magazine) "Gaskin's awareness of the effect the performers have on the audience is a crucial aspect of his vision. Through his lens, he conveys the showmanship these actors and artists exude, their knowingness of the spectacle created by their flair. . . . He shows us the power the performers have to reveal themselves through spectacle, to challenge viewers to recognize this display of selfhood. Regardless of our walks of life, we are all looking for safe spaces to express ourselves. Legendary allows us to bear witness to a group of people who are courageous enough to create their safe space." (Deborah Willis, prize judge) "On one hand, Legendary is a beautiful showcase of Gaskin's talent for capturing moments and, in this case, a movement " his vibrant and stunning images bring us into the ballroom scene, and face-to-face with those who inhabit it. On the other hand, that sense of pulling away isn't there. Not with me, when viewing the work; it doesn't feel exploitative, nor opportunistic " there is no sense of discomfort. Instead, the work is marked by intimacy. The faces that are looking at us (and those that aren't) show no sense of wanting to pull away. Perhaps it is Gaskin's empathy and his skill at connecting to an individual and then to the viewer that make us want to lean in even closer. • (Melanie Archer Caribbean Review of Books 2015-11-01)

Gerard H. Gaskin, a native of Trinidad and Tobago, earned a B.A. from Hunter College in 1994 and is now a freelance photographer based in the greater New York City area. His photos have appeared in the New York Times, Newsday, Black Enterprise, OneWorld, Teen People, Caribbean Beat, and DownBeat. Among his other clients are the record companies Island, Sony, Def Jam, and Mercury. Gaskin's photographs have been featured in solo and group exhibitions across the United States and abroad, and his work is held in the collections of such institutions as the Museum of the City of New York and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

The photos in this book are "Legendary". Buy it today!

A wonderful photography book with an original and graphic subject. Touching!

## GREAT BOOK

An interesting look through pictures into the house/ball scene.

Great Book!

Legendary is a compilation of twenty years of photographer Gerald Gaskin's chronicling the underground House Ballroom scene. The joy of the house ballroom movement was to give gay and transgender individuals a chance to see and be seen among peers, and tends to include elaborate competitions. The whole House Ballroom came to mainstream with the 1990 documentary film *Paris Is Burning*, when the scene was at its peak. It was especially notable for the prevalence of the "Vogue" scene - upon which Madonna based her song. *Legendary* includes images from this time as well as more modern images of how the Ballroom scene has evolved. But unlike the movie, which was shot by a white female heterosexual, the book was shot by a young African American who, although also heterosexual, made the work feel less exploitative since the scene tends to favor Latino and African Americans. The book has both black/white and color images. What is notable about the book is the acceptance of the photographer by the community and the large time scale (20 years) of the work. He quietly and respectfully moved around the rooms to take his images. And honestly, while some images are utterly fascinating, others honestly feel more like a crazy wedding reception, with a lot of motion blurred images and odd angles. The images are large and well presented for impact, laid out on a clean white background without clutter or words. Information about each image is presented at the back of the book. My first impression was that I wish there had been more. It felt like I reached the end of the book very fast. I also wish the photographer had stuck with either color or BW film throughout. With the black and white, we see beyond the bright colors of the make up and outfits to the person underneath - with very revealing portraits and pathos. But at the same time, it feels almost disrespectful to strip the performers of all their glitter and gloss by 'removing' the color in a BW image - to take away all the artistry and love they put into their performances. So many of the images really needed that color to get the full impact of the scene. The book is very professionally presented and with a compelling subject matter. My personal opinion is that I would have liked to see much more insight by the photographer himself - what the

scene was like when he started, why he felt he was accepted so easily, and how it evolved over the years. Or, even better, interviews with the participants past and present. The visual is only part of the story - what also matters is the experience. I found I wanted to know the story of those photographed but their stories go as unexplored as they were in the Paris is Burning movie. And as such, feels somewhat exploitative as well. Received as an ARC from the publisher.

The photos are beautiful and very special....the photographer had a rare and very extended opportunity to take these photos and he did a terrific job. The photos are fascinating, as is the backstory.

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