

## Come Fly With Me

By Peggy Roalf Wednesday February 20, 2008



Above: Three from *Flight Attendants* by Brian Finke. Courtesy of ClampArt Gallery.

Brian Finke's new book, *Flight Attendants* (powerHouse 2008) arrived from the printer yesterday, just in time for the opening of his exhibition tomorrow night at [ClampArt](#). I met him there today for a preview of the show.

In the skylit gallery are 10 images from the project, large scale C prints except for one. At first glance it seems to be a retro-style fashion show, with beautifully attired young women, poised and perfectly groomed. They seem to represent what many travelers would think of as "the romance of the skies." As I studied one picture after another, I wondered why the photographs don't jibe with the reality of air travel today.

I asked Brian about this and he said, "After photographing for a while on domestic flights, which operate in the most bare bones way in terms of services, I decided to try shooting in Europe and Asia. I found that with the smaller Asian airlines I could get better access, with fewer restriction." He said that he wasn't going for the romance of air travel, but the choices he made as to which flight crews to travel with, and his practiced eye for fashion, combined to steer the series in a rarified direction.

Among the images on display is one of a Tiger Airways crew descending the roll-up stair onto the tarmac. As if models in a runway show, the smiling flight attendants show off their uniforms to promote the brand. In one from a series on Cathay Pacific Airways, which introduced a wardrobe designed by the Paris fashion house Nina Ricci to celebrate 60 years aloft, the vintage style exudes European elegance. But the shot of a Tiger Airways attendant winding up to toss a plastic wrapped sandwich to someone off camera adds a grounding effect to the view of life at 40,000 feet.

Brian was able to work with some of the flight crews at training facilities. These images in particular reveal his bent for photographing uniformed teams performing practiced actions, and revealing the uniqueness of the individuals in the process — as he did in the *Cheerleaders and Football Players* series. I told Brian that it reminded me of the Post Impressionist painter Edgar Degas' decision to paint thoroughbred racing and the ballet. "I see what you mean," he said. "I found that by looking at people doing pretty much the same things again and again I was able to cut through the clutter of the environment and focus on their personalities."

The last crew he worked with was from Icelandair. One image shows a woman wielding a fire extinguisher as smoke and foam billow into the dimly lit cabin. Clearly something you hope never to see in your travels, it makes a dramatic addition to the series.

The book of the same title probes the gleaming veneer of this world, offering views into the down time of these high flying women, and the few men who made the final edit. Exquisitely printed, it includes an essay by Alix Brown, Deputy Style Editor of *The New York Times Magazine*.