

## Gus Fisher Gallery Exhibition: *A Different View. Artists Address Pornography*

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Panel Discussion Topic: 7<sup>th</sup> September 2013

*How might the increasing pervasiveness of pornographic representation of women's bodies and sexuality be impacting the advertising genre? Today's panellists have worked extensively in the advertising industry and they reflect on the representation of gender and sexuality and how the visual and representational conventions of pornography might be segueing into advertising.*

Timing is everything. This week the Auckland University Law Revue Girls produced a video parodying Blurred Lines by Robin Thicke. It was taken off YouTube; they were interviewed on Campbell Live, and now they have produced a Snap chat extension.

We have had Miley Cyrus twerking and the ensuing social media storm. Needless to say she is very pleased with the outcome. There are twerking take offs all over Instagram, and we are learning that this has an African American history.

This summer in America the New Yorker notes 'we've achieved an historic break-through: the first completely digital big-time sex scandal – the sorry saga of Anthony Weiner alias Carlos Danger – running for Mayor of NY sexting AGAIN.

When you think about the broadening range of sex-related activities deemed immoral, unnatural, or icky, the greater the scope for righteous indignation; a technology enabled inter-connected globalised world; the media's insatiable appetite for titillating stories that we can all be shocked at; the blurring of the lines between private and public, and our fascination with celebrity culture, none of this is surprising.

For me the world of advertising and the world of pornography and their gender tropes have become somewhat conflated. They represent market economies, based on consumption models. They both operate in the theatre of spectacle and performance. The word is morphing too. Did we always talk about food porn? Or disaster porn? So I see pornography increasingly as a strand within the genre of advertising. But I should also add that I wouldn't have said this ten years ago. Things change. But some things don't change.

When Linda asked me to be on this panel I happened to be reading a book called *Other Objects of Desire: Collectors and Collecting Queerly*. It is a collection of essays with a historical take on the history of collecting around erotic/pornographic themes, starting with the Greeks, going the right way through to Robert Mapplethorpe and today's erotic/porn internet addicts. Apart from the obvious – that the desire around, and interest in, depicting peoples' sexual bits is ancient I did find it especially fascinating to learn more about what happened at another historic technologically disruptive moment. The introduction of the printing press did more than widen the scope of people who could access Bibles – it really played into the hands of collectors, widening the audience for this this type of material. It is a top down history from the personal library of a king or queen to the online catalogue of potentially anyone, anywhere.

It is a long way from marble bits and bobs to pixelated bits and bobs. But is it?

Advertising, the depiction of women and pornography in my mind, all play off constructed cultural myths, ideas and images.

But I wanted to get away from what I think. People like me with backgrounds in strategy always ask the consumer. I was particularly interested in the consumer who blogs, snap chats, is on Instagram, Tumblr etc. So that is where I started. I talked to a handful of twenty something university students, across gender – variously describing themselves as third wave feminists; bloggers, the person who writes the sex column for one of the university magazines, and some self-declared purveyors of porn. My question to them was given the topic today what material would they show the audience to stimulate discussion.

1. A band called **IS Tropical**. Their track. “Dancing Anymore”.

Single from album debuting 20 May 2013. Banned from YouTube just 25 minutes after aired. Million plus viewers on Vimeo. What did they think? They saw it as an ironic piss take on porn tropes. See what you think.

2. **The unholy alliances**

Next up an American Apparel print advertisement which appeared in Vice magazine. This ad was banned in 2010 in the UK and described as widely offensive as the model was thought to look like a child.

Then we have Sasha Grey in all her glory in another American Apparel. Sasha Grey is a celeb porn queen who is morphing into the world of business. Think Victoria Beckham and Spice Girls. Canny business women

American Apparel is known for its sexually explicit advertising. Women, men, porn stars, and the company is now on the outlook for Tran sexy models. It is praised in some quarters for its honesty and lack of airbrushing. Oh and it is a big US vertically integrated manufacturer which has kept jobs in America and it's supportive of immigration reform. So where is the line for us?

We live in a world where porn princes and princesses are, as far as we know, in on the game. They are celebrities with fan followers – brands if you like, playing the branding game for all its worth. All swimming in that current called advertising.

Finally the young adults I spoke too mentioned the porn boy next door - James Deen, who in July of this year released the first Google Glass x rated video.

Isn't this interesting, we have Google Glass as the must have accessory for porn stars and has anyone looked at the US September issue of Vogue? A 12 page spread with Google Glasses as the latest fashion accessory aptly called THE FINAL FRONTIER.

So what's my position?

We live in a world where a grey t shirt is not necessarily just a grey t shirt. Nor is what might seem like a porn shot necessarily just a porn shot.

We think of gender and sexuality as things we see in images rather than inherent in the very structure of relations through which images have been inherited, bought, sold, exchanged and enjoyed.

Advertising and porn operate in part, in the public world of theatre, of spectacle. But what makes me feel that something is truly creepy isn't just the visual on display, nor the standard tropes. It is the knowledge that the persons involved might have been coerced, or underage, or that the grey t shirt was made in terrible conditions in Bangladesh. I can't always tell by looking. I also think that this masks an equally important conversation around the ethics of consumption in a resource constrained world.

But now because twenty something's plus can so easily generate their own content it is also easier to sabotage, express outrage, go viral on these issues. I think this is what makes this so interesting.

And one final thing all consumptive models are ultimately terribly unsatisfying.