

Pornography in Advertising – Vivienne Stone

7 September 2013, Gus Fisher Gallery

What's the brief?

That's a commonly asked question in most advertising agencies. All good communication ideas start with a brief. It's the document outlining stuff like who the target audience is, some of their behavioural characteristics or current media preferences, a product's key benefits, the core idea of the communication proposition, who the competition is and so on.

Looking through the materials surrounding this show I was pleased to see this project had a brief. It's available on the website www.sexualpoliticsnow.org

The bottom line of the brief and also the curator's essay, also available on the website, seemed to me to be to get people talking, to engender conversations about representations of sexual identity in our contemporary visual culture.

Julie Ewington, an esteemed Australian curator and one of the speakers at the opening of the exhibition "A Different View – Artists Address Pornography" said the exhibition embodied a tough set of questions, and that in fact it was a conversation piece between a number of different and even contesting points of view.

She commended the artists, the curators and the wider research project which collectively constitute "Pornography in the Public Eye" for being up for the conversation – for being prepared to speak up and to speak out. Her reading of the project is that by negotiating the visualization of sex and sexuality, we address fundamental aspects of human life and society – our human freedom and dignity.

Clarifying assumptions

One of the best things I learnt in my career in advertising is the saying "assumption is the mother of all fuck ups". It's a phrase I first heard Howard Greive (one of New Zealand's respected advertising creative's) say about 5 years ago, and it's a phrase I've since said to myself regularly.

When I checked its provenance with him just the other day he responded by saying, 'assumption is the mother of all fuck ups is a harsh but accurate statement that was floating around production companies in the early 90's. still valid and still no one listens to it '.

So, an assumption that I need to clarify up front is that I'm an expert on advertising, or indeed that I'm an expert on advertising and pornography. I'm neither of those things. For starters I don't currently work in an advertising agency, and in fact the last time conversations about visual culture and sexual politics were topical in the public arena, approximately 18 years ago I was busy having those kind of conversations in the art world, not the advertising world. Come to think of it, I don't think I've had many conversations with my colleagues in the advertising industry about sexually explicit or sexually appropriate representations of women or men in visual culture.

The art world gives advertising a pornography brief

So inspired by the conversation that the artists, curators and researchers in this exhibition have started, I thought I would attempt to have a conversation in the advertising world addressing pornography.

I sent an email to approximately 40 of my friends working in the advertising industry. The gender split was roughly equal; I had an age range of 20s - 60s. Unfortunately racial diversity was very limited, as was sexual orientation, most of the participants being practising heterosexuals. Some of the participants are family members – so as a piece of empirical research its deeply flawed, but it's not empirical research I remind myself, it's a conversation ...

The questions I emailed out to my advertising friends are:

1. What is an example of an ad, which uses sex/pornography in an effective way?
2. What is an example of an ad, which uses sex/pornography in an ineffective way?
3. What's the funniest example of an ad, which uses sex you've seen in advertising?
4. What's the least funny?
5. What's the ad that uses sex/pornography that you wish you'd made?

My pornographic lens

Before we go any further, I'd like to acknowledge Laura Kipniss, an American academic and author. She's written an essay entitled "How to look at Pornography" which I've found very useful and I want to read a few excerpts here. My approach to how I'm viewing pornography/sexually explicit material is very much influenced by her.

"How to look at pornography" – Laura Kipniss

Pornography grabs us and doesn't let go. Whether you're revolted or enticed, shocked or titillated these are flip sides of the same response. An intense visceral engagement with what pornography has to say. And pornography has quite a lot to say. Pornography should interest us because it's intensely and relentlessly about us. It involves the roots of our culture and the deepest corners of self. It's not just friction and naked bodies. Pornography has eloquence, it has meaning, it has ideas. It even has redeeming ideas. So what's everyone so wrought up about? ...

A culture's pornography becomes in effect, a very precise map of that culture's borders. And a culture's borders whether geographical or psychological, are inevitably political questions – as mapmakers and geographers are increasingly aware. ...

Pornography is profoundly and paradoxically social, even more than that, it's acutely historical. It's an archive of data about both our history as a culture and our own individual histories – our formations as selves. Pornography's favourite terrain is the

tender spots where the individual psyche collides with the historical process of moulding social subjects.

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/lfuwtgefb5khy5z/KIPNIS.pdf>

Examples where use of sexually explicit material has been put to interesting use:

Advertising of sexually explicit material as political fund-raiser

Let's Start a Pussy Riot is a collaborative art book curated by German-born performance artist Emely Neu. When the three members of Pussy Riot were imprisoned last year, Neu staged a mini-festival to raise funds for the women, and started a blog for the public to submit artworks. The first half provides an overview of Pussy Riot, including their manifesto and court statements, while the latter section features the work of nearly 70 artists and musicians such as Yoko Ono, Jenny Holzer, Judy Chicago, Kara Walker and the Knife.

<http://www.theguardian.com/music/gallery/2013/may/25/lets-start-a-pussy-riot>

Cliteracy – an advertising campaign by New York artist Sophia Wallace.

What's the brief? A campaign designed to counter ignorance about the clitoris.

Wallace says, "It is a curious dilemma to observe the paradox that on the one hand the female body is the primary metaphor for sexuality, its use saturates advertising, art and the mainstream erotic imaginary. Yet, the clitoris, the true female sexual organ, is virtually invisible,"

"Even in porn, the clitoris is treated as this optional, kind of freaky, 'wow he's doing her this huge favor' thing," she told HuffPost, adding that women often feel "embarrassed" to ask their partners to pleasure them. "It's insane to me that this is still happening in 2013."

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/08/28/cliteracy_n_3823983.html

Use of sexually explicit material in fashion films and advertising campaigns for fashion brands:

A lot of advertising for fashion campaigns uses sexually explicit material that could traditionally be considered sexist/ or looking at women in an exploitative way from a male gaze. In this portrayal as in all her work, Ellen Von Unwerth's heroines are very active and very much owning their own power and their own sexual fantasies. The gaze is very much a feminine one.

<http://www.premiere-heure.fr/labels/psycho/news/Commerciaux/psycho-ellen-von-unwerth>

At your corner store

This is an example of pornographic/sexually explicit advertising that I find more offensive than any of the more 'hard core' images that I know Tracey and Sandy are going to discuss.

The reason I find it so offensive is its perceived harmlessness in the first instance, whilst deep down it embodies a whole lot of sexually offensive and racist messages. I call it corner store pornography because it's everywhere; its insidiousness ensures that it can be displayed at most corner stores of NZ without comment.

In Magnum's poster we see the woman's shoulder has been photo-shopped to look more penis-like than the average shoulder. The skin has cracked and we see a suggestion of the ice-cream/sperm threatening to explode from her chocolate skin at any minute. Meanwhile the woman's mouth is open in ecstatic anticipation as she contemplates the next lick of her shoulder/penis. Alongside the offensiveness of the phallic shoulder is the suggestion that underneath her brown skin the woman is white. This is advertising at its most lazy, reductive and offensive. Personally it's enough to ensure I don't buy Magnum's.



I'd like to end by quoting a good friend who is also one of the respondents from my advertising and pornography email conversation. I think she encapsulates one of the upsides to the visually sophisticated, complicated and permissive society we live in.

"on a personal note ..i love to feel great and sexy for me. (my husband takes no notice and i am not trying to catch a man or a woman) i dress up for ME. to make ME feel great. coming from a 1970's feminist up bringing i'm learning (maybe rebellion) to celebrate and enjoy my own sexuality and femininity. my mother certainly didn't do this . – sara orme

On a darker side, just a few days ago this article appeared in *The Telegraph*

“When [Hannah Smith committed suicide after being viciously bullied on social media site Ask.fm](#), we vowed as a society to do more. We said we would force social media sites to be accountable for their lax moderation, and crack down on those tormenting teenagers to death with vile abuse. Why, then, less than a week after her funeral, [did photos of a teenage girl performing oral sex on a boy in a field become the second worldwide trending topic on Twitter on Monday?](#) And why were there endless jokes, insults and disapprobation slung her way, and not at the boy concerned?

The incident happened during an Eminem concert at Slane Castle in Ireland. And immediately the girl was branded a slut online with hashtags: 'slanegirl' and 'slaneslut' fast becoming trends.”

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/10255283/Girl-performs-oral-sex-on-boy-in-field.-Photo-goes-viral.-Shes-a-slut.-Boys-a-hero.-What-should-we-do.html>

It's another reminder of why it's so important for us to be having this public conversation about representations of women, sex and pornography in our culture, and its potential consequences. Here nothing has changed but for the fact the platform for humiliation and shaming of the woman has become bigger with the addition of social media.

I'd like to commend all the people involved in this project and thank them for instigating the conversation. Thank you.

Thanks for participating in the advertising and pornography conversation:

Kirsty Cameron, Howard Greive, Kate Smith, Chris Bleackley, Paul Thompson, Natalie Knight, Lara Bowen, Sara Orme, Shanti Freed, Danny Butt, Ben Alden, Marie McNeely, Angela Barnett, Sean McCready, Juliet Dreaver, Liz Read

ENDS

Responses from participants to advertising/pornography conversation:

1. What is an example of a recent ad, which uses sex/pornography in an effective way?

...However there is one thing I've found interesting. To me I'm always quietly astonished when I drive by a New Zealand dairy and they have a Magnum advertisement on their wall. Like the one attached.

Quite often we go to the advertisement and forget the important part context plays. Like a corner dairy store and the random traffic that walks and drives by it.

Its different when you have an ability to target an audience but to me the Magnum campaign and its casual ubiquity that inserts itself into every New Zealanders minds is a very interesting pointer in the seepage of sex/pornography into the everyday.

Levi's Ass Cam - I'm sure it was faked but I think there's a nice cheeky, human truth in this piece. It was unbranded but received millions of YouTube hits and got the world's press talking.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m501NIBSpys>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yFanM16FkRE>

BMW.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=snVZhCgy37Y>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9cn7gEM6jYs>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yIkW08z2MN4>

<http://www.ispot.tv/ad/7Irs/the-cosmopolitan-hotel-las-vegas-song-black-rebel-motorcycle-club>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XeytL4nypNA>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4LF11LGqYSA>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Fd54s2cgPE>

Gina's Italian Kitchen billboard, Newton Rd ...can't send you a pic of the real thing but here's the image, and an example of its effectiveness!

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Ginas-Italian-Kitchen/128082543947374>

airline advertising . this article is interesting (brief but valid)

<http://limelightprsonar.wordpress.com/2010/06/18/women-in-airline-advertising>

2. What is an example of a recent ad, which uses sex/pornography in an ineffective way?

V Australia 'Fly Girls' - Terrible gag at the end and pretty weak brand positioning - Fly with us because we've got the hottest girls.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nymPHeZLMdk>

Air New Zealand - Again, I know this was popular and did well but I reckon it's pretty lazy advertising.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kEsZColk23g>

Carl's Jr - BBQ's Best Pair

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1krJqn3smbI>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VyuT-spwH8s>

Kate Upton - Car Wash - Same as Carl's Jr... just soft porn

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uPq7jVGPs3g>

Diesel XXX Invitation - I included this as an alternative to the Skittles ad you referenced. The Skittles one wasn't made by their advertising company but rather a parody site, Share the Rainbows. Not sure anyone would remember what the Diesel ad was for, but they'd definitely remember the brand.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gCk4YAA-6PM>

Nintendo...

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a2rzRhKVlow>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wmdaB21E2tY>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hsAwksPoBfM>

<http://scaryideas.com/i/4057.jpg>

this type of advertising hasn't changed for 30 years. perfume / make up / lingerie.
boring . who is it appealing to ? mostly women.

we can say it's to look sexy for their man.

on a personal noteΣ..i love to feel great and sexy for me. (my husband takes no notice and i am not trying to catch a man or a woman)

i dress up for ME. to make ME feel great. coming from a 1970's feminist up bringing i'm learning (maybe rebellion) to celebrate and enjoy my own sexuality and femininity. my mother certainly didn't do this .

i think 21st century lesbianism is interesting as wellΣ..there is a feeling of celebrating their sexiness and gorgeousnessΣno longer need to look dykey and sexless. this is women doing it for women.

3. What's the funniest example of an ad which uses sex you've seen in advertising recently?

Axe - Morning After Pillow. Made me laugh.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rKj0801FC0A>

GoDaddy - The Kiss. Simple thought executed well.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o-3j4-4N3Ng>

Stop spreading the Virus (it's a bit old 2010)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EHD8k46f5GM>

Bud Light 'Beer & Porn' (again, old)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5REfqr6dxXQ>

Ikea - Tidy Up

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7KuTDv_Dy0

Shake Weight

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xXHUdvvHTkw>

IKEA....

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9-503Jf0L8>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0wKL5RuiQsQ>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y-prqqaUMGw>

Not recent but makes me laugh every time...

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Gt9Yp-ZHuQ>

4. What's the least funny?

Lynx Body Buffer. Just not very funny.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=srVe7PQuWlw>

Bavaria beer...

<http://www.ebaumsworld.com/video/watch/842114/>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hsAwksPoBfM>

5. What's the ad that uses sex/pornography that you wish you'd made?

Harvey Nichols - Walk of Shame - Not very shocking but executed brilliantly. I love this ad.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kwxTf7NGVXg>

Levi's Ass Cam

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m501NIBSpys>

Pot Noodle - The ad looks old now but I just love the campaign line!

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L_6GGDhHzKI

<http://antmelder.wordpress.com/2013/09/01/better-a-spectacular-failure-than-a-benign-success/>

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TcOOopf_YBk

<http://www.campaignlive.co.uk/news/849174/>

"Horns" Chris Bleackley & Maggie Mouat's Saatchi & Saatchi ad for Wellington City Gallery Mapplethorpe exhibition that used extreme close ups of flowers and featured the Frank Zappa track 'What's the ugliest part of your body'...

A copy of this tvc is held at NZ Film Archive Moving Image, 1996, Reference number: C7506

i think there is a difference between celebrating and denigrating women.

i used to hate helmut newton's work and thought of him as a misogynist until i watched a documentary and really felt he genuinely loved women.

- ellen von unwerth . fashion photographer since the mid 80's. famous for her 'sexy and playful ' imagery.

(check out more of her work)

portraying a feeling of erotic femininity.

personally i have mixed feelings about her work. the obvious challenge is that she is a woman mostly photographing women with women.

interestingly her work has got raunchier as she has got older. i get this.....it's like we're reclaiming back our sexuality before we loose it.

unlike a lot of fashion imagery typically taken by men her subjects really own their space. they participate in the framework of eroticism and appear to be really enjoying it.

they're naughty and fun. they're engaged in activity. devoid of passivity.

as a fellow female photographer i feel men and women come from a different perspective.....sometimes i feel like women are playing out their own autobiographical experiences and desires....
for men i feel like it is there fantasy of how they want women to behave for them.

Other:

like all things....there are no golden rules about male and female perspective....i think there is sleaze from both genders and there is love form both genders.
it's personal and cultural

<http://www.premiere-heure.fr/labels/psycho/news/Commercials/psycho-ellen-von-unwerth>

Women's sexual fantasies in 2013

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/sex/10268770/Top-5-womens-sexual-fantasies-in-2013.html>

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/sex/10282145/NSPCC-Girls-think-they-have-to-act-like-porn-stars-to-be-liked-by-boys.html>

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/sep/04/femen-men-feminism-victor-svyatski>

http://www.dazeddigital.com/photography/article/17005/1/robert-huber-sacred-profane?utm_source=MadMimi&utm_medium=email&utm_content=Gaga's+Comeback+I+Real+Life+Sex+Dolls+I+Glass+Candy&utm_campaign=20130903_m117101457_Gaga's+Comeback+I+Real+Life+Sex+Dolls+I+Glass+Candy&utm_term=1045266.jpg