

TITLE: IMAGE-COUNTER IMAGE (Working Title)
A Symposium on Sexuality and Representation

PROSPECTIVE DATES: November 29-December 1, 1985

PLACE: WOMEN IN FOCUS
456 West Broadway

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INTRODUCTION

In the past several years a critical debate of great significance has emerged in North America. It lies within the broad terrain of sexuality as represented by imagery, both the imagery of art and that of mass culture, be it advertising, pornography, romance magazines or other media. Feminists have brought the issues to the foreground, exposing sexist attitudes and violence toward women. The debate echoes through social and legal discourse which attempts to come to terms with a generalized 'public' morality: Censorship is the weapon used to maintain the position of political authority on the subject. Feminists now find themselves on both sides of the debate as legislation can be used to suppress all images dealing with sexuality, potentially inhibiting opportunities to restate and reform images which express the evolution and change in sexual dynamics, which move from the backlash of repressed and frustrated sexuality and into a more sex-positive presentation.

Artists too have been caught in the crossfire over sexual imagery and state censorship, both artist run centers (A Space, Toronto, 1984) and individual artists (Paul Wong, Confused, Vancouver, 1984). The commitment of artists generally to creating a practice free from government intervention into content is based on the valuation of diversity and creativity and the understanding that alternative, powerful, and valuable imagery can be produced which reflects the role of creativity and experience.

A positive aspect of the debate within the art community is that it contains, on one hand, a critical discourse that has enriched and expanded over the years, and on the other hand, a practical discourse manifested in a growing body of work. While the tradition of erotic art is a long one, this new aesthetic discourse is enlightened by the intensity and parallel course of the written and spoken debate. In addition, a new feature has been added to the discourse; women, traditionally the objects within representation, have increasingly become active subjects. Women artists are producing work that asserts a new understanding of female sexuality and sexual experience in our culture. A number of group and individual shows are occurring, such as the Woman to Woman exhibition at Women In Focus in Vancouver and Alter Eros in Toronto.

While the debates within the art community and those on the feminist, political and legal terrains sometimes interact (such as the recent anti-censorship campaign by A-Space in Toronto,) opportunities for a structured discussion which presents the varying perspectives have been very limited. Feminists have focused on the problem of pornography, and artists are only beginning to become politicized on these issues. While a few cities have hosted symposiums or visits by critics concerned with this issue, Vancouver has been notably bereft of a context for a thorough debate.

PRESENTATION AND SYMPOSIUM

We are proposing a symposium which will directly address the issue of sexual representation and look at the tensions between popular culture and feminism, artistic representation and censorship, and the limits and strains of morality and tolerance. We would like to involve women who have worked with pornography issues and artists whose work addresses sexuality as panelists to initiate the discourse within the community and address the discussion in practical and theoretical terms. Panel topics will include "The Social/Political Context of Sexual Imagery," an analysis of the continuity of language on different levels of culture, and market values, power and morality; and "The Female Viewer," female sexual identities and different points of view, with a look at the tradition of women's erotica. The last panel will be artists presenting their work and talking about it. Discussion time is planned after each panel. Performance art, readings and video will be incorporated within the conference to create a context to stimulate discussion. The events will begin on Friday evening with a video screening. A second evening screening will be presented on Saturday, and possibly a third evening of work presented by the artist. Sunday will begin with a brunch, followed by a performance and the final panel. Organizers will present a summation after the discussion. A catalogue is planned to contain presentations and documentation of the event.

A working plan for the symposium is attached.

a means through which the artist can explore the layering of erotic experience. Video is also challenging because it is one of the central media of pornography. It contains references to television, advertising and programming), another sex-stereotyped medium. Exploring video as a 'counter' medium will be a valuable challenge.

The exhibition and symposium centre on the theoretical and practical contribution of women. By doing this, we hope to stress the ways that women can take control over the production of sexual imagery and by analogy, their own sexuality, and transcend a position where they are consistently on the defensive against imagery that distorts their experience. As well, we hope to explore the vast diversity of perspectives that women hold and bring to their perception of sexual experience. We hope to engage the non-artist feminist community in this debate as well as a broader public. We feel that it will be instructive to both men and women to see the ways that women artists express sexual experience. For this reason, both the exhibition and symposium will be open to men and women.

The exhibition and symposium will be presented at Women In Focus, a gallery committed to the exhibition of art by women. They have been valuable in initiating exposure to feminist art and, in particular, feminist film and video which they distribute. They have endorsed this event, with Karen Henry and Sara Diamond working as independent curators. Video Inn is also contributing support to the event. Major funding has been received from Canada Council Exhibitions.

The consulting group for IMage-Counter Image is currently composed of:

Coordinators:	Sara Diamond	Feminist artist, writer, lecturer, Labour History and Creative Arts Instructor
	Karen Henry	Writer Curator
Members:	Pat Feindel	Writer Director, Vancouver Status of Women
	Caffyn Kelley	Artist Writer
	Kellie Marlowe	Feminist active in Women's Issues