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PORNOGRAPHY VERSUS EROTICA.

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE
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BY

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INTRODUCTION.

Is the pornographic distinguishable from the erotic or are the two forms of cultural representation essentially related? My intention in this thesis will be to debate this question and to uncover many of the strategies employed in the production of the representations of human sexuality. In consideration of the pornographic or the graphic description of whores or prostitutes; the graphic description of female flesh bought and sold, its motives are quite blatant. Its purpose is direct, unambiguous and expedient. It is this purpose or intent I wish to discuss, primarily in relation to its significant cultural message.

My second chapter deals with 'erotica', representations of sexuality which have been elevated to the status of Art. My intention with regard to these images is also to explore the mechanisms involved in the production and communication of a cultural message. Ultimately, however, my interest lies in discovering points of correspondance or commonality between both systems of representation and in revealing oppressive and illusory structures common to both.

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INTRODUCTION (Contd.)

by the male gender. As a consequence, female experience has been obscured and falsified and I believe that this phenomenon must be central to any interpretation of the construction of images within our culture, and it is this concept which is central to my thesis.

My first chapter considers the strategies employed in pornographic representation and in my second chapter I use this set of criterion to explore and expose the mechanisms at work in 'high art' erotica. To illustrate my discussion I have included examples of publications representative of both fields or both systems of representation.

CHAPTER 1 : PORNOGRAPHY.

The primary motive behind the cultural production of pornography is economic, it must sell itself. The author is consciously aware that he must use the most expedient means at his disposal to retail his product well, in order to accrue the greatest profit. To his mind, sexuality is yet another commodity within the consumerist society and his purpose and intent is to exploit it to the fullest possible extent. This also is the popular understanding of pornography, that it exploits the weakness of the flesh and man's susceptibilities. Many other cultural productions function in this way but none so directly and blatantly. It takes the most expedient route to feed directly into the male fantasy and for this reason its mechanisms are very visible, there is no embarrassment in the display of the elements which combine to form its operation.

For the purposes of a feminist analysis the blatancy and visibility of its mechanisms are very useful. Feminist theory views pornography as being an oppressive patriarchal tool with which to control, degrade and insult women. It is the female body which is at the very centre of pornographic representation and it is the female body which functions as the vehicle through which the pornographic imagination is expressed. In this expression, the purpose of woman is to cater directly to the male fantasy and her existence is conditional to the sexual gratification of the male consumer/spectator. I wish to discuss the different

elements involved in what I have referred to as 'the male fantasy' and expose the profound undercurrent of structures oppressive to women and of structures oppressive to any healthy relationship between the sexes.

To repeat, the popular understanding of pornography being the exploitation of man's weaknesses and susceptibilities, I believe is not very far off the mark. There is a certain truth hidden beneath the assumption that wherein man's sexuality lies also his folly. The assumption is that male sexuality can't quite help itself, that it is driven to pursue the outlet, the release, the orgasm. The feminist analysis of pornography being the exploitation of women, and the popular one of the exploitation of man's 'weakness' amount to the same thing. The embodiment of 'man's weakness' is woman, it is 'foolishness' which compels him to lust after her, it is 'illness' which urges him to contemplate her image. Woman, not only within the pornographic frame of reference, is seen as dirty, depraved, disgusting and as a consequence so also is man's 'weakness'. Yet the perpetuation of this ideology is universally sanctioned, because it legitimates patriarchal control and oppression, the foundations upon which our society is built. Although the primary motive behind the authorship of pornography is economic, its deeper purpose and intent is one of maintaining the status quo of patriarchal supremacy and of maintaining existing unequal power relations between men and women. Its effectiveness cannot be underestimated, the pornographic industry in the United States is

larger than the film and record industries combined*, and growing. I believe pornography to be powerful male supremacist propaganda and wish to expose it as such. I wish to begin with a discussion of the common ingredients typical of the pornographic recipe.

OBJECTIFICATION.

The first and foremost prerequisite for the reduction of a cultural production to the status of pornography is objectification of the female body per se. The discussion of objectification is problematic in that the female is perceived as object in relation to male subject on all levels, throughout all forms of cultural production and perception, it is pervasive within our society. Indeed, feminist theorists would argue that the basis of the ideology of individualism lies in this duality. That the concept of the individual/human being/man is articulated wholly in terms of his relationship with what is other than him, the object in relationship to his subjectivity, and in patriarchy the generic object is female. This duality is viewed as normative and completely natural, from psychoanalysis to sexology it has been sanctioned and endorsed. The tradition has been one of regarding sensate beings as objects, in fact the entire surrounding environment outside man himself is viewed as the object world, a series of things to which he must learn to relate. To quote Ernest Becker from Dworkin's

* Andrea Dworkin, THE PORNOGRAPHY OF REPRESENTATION, Page 201.

"Pornography, men possessing women",

"We know that man needs objects in order to come into being as an organism, and subsequently in order to provide for continuing action and experience. The organism needs objects in order to feel its own power and presence".(1)

Therefore, men need objects in order to experience power and presence and the use of the word object to define persons other than adult men is considered normative and appropriate. In our society the experience of 'power and presence' over and above objects in the world is considered central to the development of the individual as opposed to inter-subjective action or experience.

This principle of male culture proves a useful tool in the maintenance of the oppressive order. Objects exist or are made in order to be used, and the objectification of women ensures our continued use, so that the male can experience his desire, power, presence or pleasure with equanimity and freedom from censure. It is taken for granted that the appropriate object, woman, will illicit an appropriate sexual response. In other words, sexual response is objectified response, the object that will provoke an erection.

The object of pornography, woman, is displayed or described in terms of her evacuated humanity or subjectivity. She is presented as commodity to be consumed, as an item, or sum of items,

is vastly more important an ingredient in the maintenance of patriarchy and pornographic structures.

POWER.

Intrinsic in both the substance and production of pornography is male power. The degradation of women in pornography exists in order to define, exercise and celebrate male power. Men have claimed the human point of view which has effectively excluded women from their definition of humanity. It is the power of the assertion of self, the constitution of male subjectivity, the means by which the male subject convinces himself he is more real, the less real the other, the less of a subject the other. This is manifested in the objectification of woman as I have discussed above.

The power of naming has enabled men to define experience, to determine what can and cannot be expressed, to control perception and thought. Female experience has been articulated, throughout history, by men and, essentially, for men. Within the system of pornographic representation it is also men who write, image, edit, distribute, produce and own the means of expressing female experience. It says women's bodies belong to men and proclaims to know, to teach, what women want, falsely articulating our sexuality in male terms for male consumption.

The power of wealth, money and property is also the province

of man and has its expression quite directly in male sexual power. Men have always owned, bought and sold women. Money is primary in the acquisition of sex and sex is primary in the making of money. Items which can be bought with money are eroticized through advertising in a manner which connects sex, women and property as purchasable commodities.

The assertion of physical strength and the capacity to instill fear and terror is yet another form of male power. Any pornographic representation functions as a do-it-yourself manual on how to instill fear in women. Specializing in rape, mutilation, murder, punishment and bondage of women, pornography accurately reflects, in this instance, the condition of threatened violence many women experience. As Susanne Kappeler points out in her book - 'The Pornography of Representation' - "If there is any chronology between behaviour and the desire to represent it, the behaviour comes first, the desire to represent it after."

The violence and force used against women, which is a primary characteristic of pornographic representation is not just fantasy but actuality. Pornography can also perpetuate crimes of violence in that it conditions, trains, inspires and educates men to despise women, it fuels the fire, so to speak. Within patriarchy, men also develop a loyalty to violence, it is a prime component of male identity, institutionalised in sport, military training, history and mythology of heroism, boy's schools, boy's clubs, men are

rewarded with status and prestige for learning the practice of violence. Through the process of learning they also cast off any commonality they had with women as children and cast off that consequent status of victim. They can now become the victimizers and associate themselves with authority and power; confirmations of their masculinity.

Male power also specializes in sexuality, the area from which its power structures were initially spawned. The device patriarchy has employed with which to wield sexual power has been a reversal of terms. Woman has always been defined as The Sex, the embodiment of carnality, the incarnation of all that is lascivious and lustful. She has been defined in terms of her power over man, her power to provoke desire, or sexual response. She is the cause of a stimulation for which he is not responsible, she can produce penile erection. But this reversal is ultimately self serving, again reducing her to the status of sexual object, forcing her to be the cause of the penile erection, containing her sexuality within male defined parameters. In Mary Daly's words:

"Male lust specializes in genital fixation and fetishism, reflecting a broken integrity of consciousness generating masculine and feminine role constructs."(3)

Man fetishizes woman's body, reduces it to a sum of parts and as Daly points out disintegrating sexual experience, fracturing any sense of wholeness, splintering human identities into opposing

sexual role constructs. But this is an important element in patriarchal control mechanisms along with the convenient scape-goating of women as the containers of sexual power which protects men from the consequences of their own sexual acts. The sexual pleasure, in pornography (as in life), of the male requires the annihilation of women's sexual integrity which is the ultimate manifestation of this sexual power. She may possess no vestige of any sexuality which is not posited in phallic terms, that is, in the terms of male sexuality. Her representation is constructed by and through male sexuality for self consumption, the strategy is the self perpetuation and reaffirmation of the existant power structures. In Dworkin's words:

"Male power, in degrading women, is first concerned with itself, its perpetuation, expansion, intensification and elevation... it is violent and self obsessed; no perception of another being ever modifies its behaviour or persuades it to abandon violence as a form of self-pleasuring. Male power is the raison d'etre of pornography; the degradation of the female is the means of achieving this power."(4)

LOVEBIRDS.

I have discussed how the objectification of woman and the deeply entrenched patriarchal power structures unite to operate

the mechanisms of pornography. They unite to form the basis upon which the pornographic message or ideology is built. The contextual manifestations of these underlying structures are more particular and with reference to what has been defined as 'soft porn' publications I wish to discuss the manifest strategies at the grass-roots level. The publications are "Fiesta" Volume 22 No. 3, 1988 and "Lovebirds" No. 107, 1988. Both magazines print full colour photographs of naked, exposed women or bodily parts of women, women engaged in sexual acts together and (though rarely) with men. There is no penetration or display of male genitalia. There are short narratives and texts which accompany the photographs. The majority of 'articles' include a number of photographs of one particular model and a short text which introduces her to the reader. The texts repeatedly refer to how much the model enjoys (sexually) posing for the camera and to her exceptional sexual allure and enjoyment of men. She is described in terms of her commodity status, the text highlights her charms "look at her beautiful bottom and brilliant bazookas!" as though she were a packet of washing powder and the advertisement sings her praises "look at the brilliant whites and beautiful colours.". The vast majority of the short stories and articles are purportedly authored by women and written from the female perspective. The emphasis throughout the narrative is one of the reaffirmation of the assumption that all women are available, inviting penetration,

completely willing and enjoy male constituted genital fixation and fetishization. Men make all the women very, very happy, it is repeatedly stressed. The women characteristically display no individuality, they all fit perfectly the mould of Robert Connell's 'emphasized femininity', functioning in harmony with hegemonic masculinity which I discuss later. Connell's definition of 'emphasised femininity' is:

"... defined around compliance with this subordination (global subordination of women to men) and is oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men." (5)

This is the role women are assigned within the confines of pornographic representation, it is the only function which women can possess: to please, to accommodate, in relation to the reaffirmation of 'hegemonic masculinity' which is endemic of pornography.

In Connell's definition:

" 'hegemony' means... a social ascendancy achieved in a play of social forces that extends beyond contests of brute power into the organization of private life and cultural processes." (6)

Therefore a male social ascendancy constructed in relation to women and to subordinated masculinities which extends into the arenas of private and cultural processes. Connell goes on to say:

"There is likely to be a kind of a 'fit' between hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity. What

it does imply is the maintenance of practices that institutionalize men's dominance over women.".(7)

The practice of pornography institutionalizes this dominance successfully and the 'fit' between hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity in the pornographic mould, femininity here functions as the perfect compliment to the standard male hegemonic role. The female is submissive and willing, albeit lustful, in response to the power, endurance and sexual aggression exhibited in the male. There is also a pervasive 'men's club' attitude evident throughout, references to 'us men', 'what we blokes want', the very structure of the magazines themselves strongly assert their 'men only' condition. The unifying sense of male bonding is manifested in the glorification, at every possible opportunity, of male sexual prowess. You, the reader, is reminded and encouraged regarding your own arousal, you are coaxed into identification with male characters described in the scenarios who are paragons of vigour and virility, who display an unusual ability to attract any female and possess her sexually and who also exhibit great feats of long lasting repeated performance, unusually large genital size and the ability to discharge copious amounts of bodily fluids.

The combined strategies in 'soft porn' may be listed as being, the objectification of the female body and parts thereof, the fetishization of the female body, the consignment of the female

to roles which compliment the hegemonic masculine role, that is servility, submission and passivity. It also functions to falsify and belie female sexuality in order to proclaim to know and teach what women are, what women want. The power structures which I outlined earlier are more covertly constructed. Economic power exists in the purchasability and saleability of female flesh, reduced to the status of commodity. The power of naming is articulated in the false representation of female sexuality and experience, in this instance taken to the extreme of the pretense of female authorship. Male sexual power situates the onus of sexuality onto woman, reasserting her status as 'The Sex' and moulding her as such. The power of force and aggression is minimised in 'soft porn' as opposed to 'hard core' where it is overtly displayed and represented for the purposes of male arousal. In this instance it is manifested purely in the identity of hegemonic masculinity where the male role is defined in terms of strength, forcefulness, dominance, control and a cool calculated distance.

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FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER 1.

1. Ernest Becker: Page 104; Andrea Dworkin:
"PORNOGRAPHY, MEN POSSESSING WOMEN."
2. Andrea Dworkin: Page 121; Andrea Dworkin:
"PORNOGRAPHY, MEN POSSESSING WOMEN."
3. Mary Daly: Page 31; Mary Daly: "GYN/ECCOLOGY,
THE METAETHICS OF RADICAL FEMINISM."
4. Andrea Dworkin: Page 25; Andrea Dworkin:
"PORNOGRAPHY, MEN POSSESSING WOMEN."
5. Robert Connell: Page 184; Robert Connell:
"POWER AND GENDER."
6. Robert Connell: Page 184; Robert Connell:
"POWER AND GENDER."
7. Robert Connell: Page 185; Robert Connell:
"POWER AND GENDER."

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CHAPTER 2 :

The world is not what it seems to be. It is a vast and complex system of interconnected parts, each with its own role to play. The human mind is a powerful tool, capable of creating worlds that are as real as any that exist. The journey of discovery is a never-ending one, and it is in the pursuit of knowledge that we find our true purpose. The world is a canvas, and we are the artists, painting our lives with the colors of our experiences and the brush of our imaginations. The path is not always clear, but the destination is worth the journey. The world is a mystery, and it is our duty to uncover its secrets and share them with the world.

CHAPTER 2 : EROTICA.

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OBJECTS D'ART.

My intention in the previous chapter was to expose the strategies employed in the production of popular forms of pornography, pornography marketed for mass consumption. I would now like to discuss these mechanisms in relation to what has been defined as 'high brow' erotica, a different form of (sexual) representation yet in many respects very similar.

Unlike its 'low brow' brother, the production of works of erotica is seen as an artistic pursuit, the final result is a 'work of art', the producer is 'an artist'. It belongs no more to the realm of the 'popular' and its primary concern is not one of immediate commercial viability. Rather, it is not marketed for mass consumption. The economic and political base is different, pointing to, initially, some kind of different emphasis. Economically the components in the exchange of 'erotica' are different, The consumer, the audience is privileged, educated and defined as possessing an aesthetic sensibility. It presupposes the author to be artist, educator, elucidator, creator and a person of a certain unquestionable integrity (being the common perception of an artist within our society). Politically, the audience occupies a higher rung of the class system, wealthier and more privileged than the standard working and middle class consumer of pornography. These elements point to intrinsic disparities between the two forms of representation on an ideological level, in the sense that the

cultural message informed by economic and political influences will have a different emphasis. It is this emphasis I wish, initially to discuss.

The terms, 'erotica' and 'pornography', are recently constructed categories, which imply to a contemporary understanding, two mutually exclusive forms of representation of sexuality. Pornography implying a degraded and exploitative system of representation, erotica suggesting a more acceptable system, befitting those of us who object to the distasteful and disgusting mentality of the pornographer. To quote Paula Webster:

"Erotica became the code word for stimulation appropriate to a feminist consciousness, while 'pornography' was defined as exclusively male and therefore 'naturally' devoid of distinction between sex and violence... The implications of this neat dichotomization and sex-typing of desire reflect, unchanged, the Victorian ideology of innate differences in the nature of male and female libido and fantasy. Men we are to presume, because of their 'excessive' drive, prefer the hard edge of pornography. Women, less driven by the 'beast' find erotica just their cup of tea."⁽¹⁾

The notion of erotica being stimulation appropriate to 'a feminist consciousness' could easily be substituted with 'a more sensitive, informed, privileged or educated consciousness', to illustrate my discussion of the construction of the two categories. But the

essential point Webster makes is that the two categories further isolate and diversify male and female sexual experience from each other. The term eroticism is often used as a sentimental word implying beautiful, romantic, soft, nice lovemaking where the emphasis is not placed on genital experience and centrality as in pornography and the traditional view of male sexuality. Therefore, the term is feminized, in the traditional sense, also, of female sexuality. The existing divide is further separated and the resulting cultural message of 'erotica' may be seen to be just as damaging as that of pornography. Inherent in the term 'erotica', a certain regressive attitude can be seen to emerge, an attitude or message which in no way assists to readdress the imbalance ingrained in human sexuality or the representation of it. The assumption that erotica is less objectionable, less degrading, exploitative or violent need not even be true in practice for this dichotomy to exist, my contention is that the term itself, when used in relation to the term 'pornography', is problematic. Essentially, it indicates that systems of erotic representation may not provide the answer to the difficulties of the imaging of sexuality.

As I pointed out earlier, the fundamental difference between both systems lies in the aspiration of erotic works to the status of Art. To understand how representations of the erotic function, we must first recognise the definition of an 'art work' within our culture. A work of art is perceived primarily as an aesthetic

object and as such its merit is supposed to derive entirely from an ability to inspire a disinterested contemplation. Aesthetic pleasure has been seen to be a pleasure derived from imaginative stirrings caused by this uninvolved contemplation, through the condition of pure perception. The aesthetic sense must, by definition, be divorced from cognition, understanding or sympathetic involvement with the content or object of representation. In other words, formal qualities are significantly prominent in the evaluation of works of art. To illustrate, I quote Kenneth Clarke from "THE NUDE":

"In Europe aphrodisiac art is seldom successful. Cranach succeeds because he does not exploit the advantage of his universally attractive subject*, to the neglect of his precise and delicate style. In spite of their side long glances his sirens never cease to be objects d'art, to be enjoyed by him who may, as dispassionately as crystals or enamels."(2)

According to Clarke, Cranach is successful in creating an art both dispassionate AND aphrodisiac which at first glance seems to be a contradiction in terms. However this is the assumption, the domain of the aesthetic objects themselves are separated from the objects they might represent in the world, from reality. In this separation, the pleasure may then be derived from the object here, woman, 'to be enjoyed by him who may' without any inconvenient or unfortunate reference to a reality which might not indulge his uninvolved

* a woman.

contemplation. Clarke continues:

"the difficulty of the nude as a subject for art is that these instincts* cannot lie hidden... but are dragged into the foreground where they risk upsetting the unity of responses from which a work of art derives its independent life."(3)

In Clarke's own words, the work of art must possess 'independent life' in the imagination of the spectator and any real life response to the content is totally inappropriate and presumably revokes its 'Art work' status. Therefore, the work of art should function as independent, irrelevant and totally devoid of meaning in relation to anything outside itself. In my opinion, the function of the myth, the assumption of disinterestedness, sanctifies and legitimates the position of the voyeur/spectator in relation to erotic works. The female nude, the object d'art or the representation of the sexual art can be dispassionately analysed for its formal qualities and this safety net can conveniently obscure and belie the immediate sexual response of the spectator. It can function as a device with which to pretend the objectification or voyeurism or fetishization does not exist and to disguise any real intention of the artist. Of course the myth itself positions the artist as creator, innovator, educator and elucidator, a 'genius' above all human error. To summarize, this historical and contemporary conception of art, is one which has

* sexual instincts.

no author behind the work in terms of social and political being, which has no questioning process of economic consideration of the work or the 'selection' of the work. In relation to my discussion of erotic art works this condition ensures that works, which adhere to this definition of what art should be, may be allowed all manner of travesty or even pornographic intent with complete equanimity and freedom from censure.

The premise underlying the pornographic work, that the spectator derive the most immediate sexual gratification and involved pleasure possible, may be seen as quite different from the ostensible premise assumed by erotic art. Yet the pornographic involvement is never an involvement between sensate human beings or even between subjects. Essentially, pornographic intent cultivates an involvement of subject and object as I discussed earlier, it promotes the immediate sexual gratification to be derived from contemplating the object who is also allowed no existence above and beyond her context. Similarly with 'works of art' or erotic art, the object of representation should inspire the aesthetic pleasure of disinterested contemplation which also presupposes no existence of object beyond context. The explicit aim of pornography, however, is to induce erection and ejaculation, whereas 'works of art' have never overtly articulated this particular intent.

My discussion, up to this point, has focused on the elements

in the production of erotic art which are exclusive to its Art-work status. I have shown a certain comparison exists between the mechanisms involved in the perception of the object of representation. Where a definite commonality exists, I believe is in the objectification of woman, pervasive within both conventions, in fact within all forms of cultural representation. Woman has always been central to the range of fine art products, the female nude has probably been the most frequently employed image in the history of representation. To quote Kenneth Clarke:

"we have come to think of the female nude as a more normal and appealing subject than the male".(4)

The female nude has become an architypical image within our culture, she has become a recurrent symbol, not only of the embodiment of sexuality, but of the embodiment of all man perceives as other than himself and all he perceives as his invention, in that woman's 'nature' to a greater extent has been his invention. In Simone De Beauvoir's words:

"She is all that men desires and all that he does not attain. She is the good mediatrix between propitious Nature and man; and she is the temptation of unconquered Nature counter to all goodness. She incarnates all moral values, from good to evil and their opposites... She is man's grasp on the world and his frustration: as such

she is the source and origin of all man's reflection on his existence and whatever expression he is able to give to it."(5)

Within the fine art tradition, the image and symbol of woman has been employed as a device with which to represent all that man has loved and hated, feared and embraced. Woman is nature and artifice, virgin, whore, mother and castrator, the 'normal and appealing' object upon whom man's fears and fantasies have been projected.

John Berger in WAYS OF SEEING, has discussed the two primary characteristics of the oil painting/fine art tradition, the first being its principle ever recurring subject, the female nude, and second, its function in the celebration of private property and ownership. The art work or oil painting has occupied the position of the ultimate instrument and object of possession, it has functioned as a vehicle through which its owner could confirm his possession of all that was beautiful and desirable in the world. The oil painting would remind him of objects he actually possessed or of objects he could possess in the future. Presumably, there would have been times when the owner of the work of art was quite satisfied in owning the tactile and beautifully rendered image of a desirable object. Berger points out that the oil painting showed what the owner already enjoyed among his possessions and way of life which

consolidated his sense of his own value, gratified his sense of acquiring the real thing and reminding him of how he might or did actually possess the real thing.

When this tradition is combined with a recurrent treatment of the female nude, the motives become clear. Woman is yet another desirable object to be possessed; to be represented and possessed. Her image is never her own, but is presented in such a way to flatter and gratify the male spectator/owner. The female nude is therefore always conventionalised:

"She is not naked as she is

She is naked as the spectator sees her"(6)

She is offered up primarily as a sight, her gaze directed at the viewer, or modestly averted. Her body displayed for his delectation, for his possession. To quote Berger again:

"Almost all post-Renaissance European sexual imagery is frontal - either literally or metaphorically - because the sexual protagonist is the spectator/owner looking at it."(7)

The spectator must feel he has the monopoly over her sexuality and that ultimately she (her representation or the real live woman) is his property. In many ways contemporary pornographic imaging of woman has its foundation within this tradition. The highly tactile means employed by pornographic representation, full colour prints, glossy and sensual, also play upon the spectators sense of acquiring the real thing, the image reminds him

also of how he might or does possess the real thing. The image of woman in both instances is designed to flatter the male spectator/owner and through the generalization of her sexuality (i.e. she is Woman, not any one particular woman) sexual desire becomes sexual fantasy, she is thing, object, abstraction devoid of any subjective existence.

"An image of an erotic object is a negation of the object's essential character or humanity... The model thus becomes a token of nature, an objectified artifice that allows the viewer to handle her mentally and to fantasize about her: the human becomes a manequin, a doll."(8)

I have discussed earlier how male power is intrinsic in both the substance and production of pornography and how this power manifests itself. I have pointed out that the cultural production of pornography has many precedents within the tradition of high brow art work and the visual language, employed by both systems, is essentially similar. The language of the oil painting, its concern in the celebration and reaffirmation of private property and ownership, its concern regarding the gratification of the male spectator and the positioning of woman as object in relation to him, has been directly translated into the language employed by pornography and other forms of visual communication within our culture, such as publicity. As a consequence, I believe the power systems manifest in pornography are similar to those manifest in erotic art works.

Both are cultural products informed by patriarchy and the history of representation has been the history of the male gender representing itself to itself.

The various forms of power I discussed in my first chapter on pornography may be equally applied to erotic works which have been elevated to the status of art. The power of naming within systems of representation, has been the preserve of the male. Throughout the fine art tradition, it has been the male artist who evolved and developed the language of visual art, who has defined experience and all forms of expression. To use the same phrase I employed in my discussion of pornography, the fine art tradition has articulated the premise that women's bodies belong to men and has proclaimed to know, to teach what women want, falsely articulating our sexuality, in male terms for male consumption.

The power of owning of wealth, money, property has been central within the fine art tradition. As I discussed earlier, the function of the work of art or painting was to reaffirm the spectator/owner's lust for acquisition and possession, to consolidate and gratify his sense of his own value. In connection with the representation of sexuality and erotic works this power took the form of an inducement towards feeling a sense of ownership or possession of the object/woman represented. This power is directly related to the power of sexuality in that the spectator/owner was

encouraged to feel a monopoly over the sexuality of the object/woman portrayed. Her sexuality belonged to him, was created and controlled by him. Similarly to the representation, in pornography, of woman as The Sex, the embodiment of carnality, within the fine art tradition (which informed this element in pornography) her status is reduced to sexual object and her sexuality defined in male terms for male consumption.

The remaining forms of male power: the power of the assertion of the male to have claimed the human point of view or exclusive subjectivity and the power of physical force and aggression which in Andrea Dworkin's words are:

"the unifying thematic and behavioral reality of male sexuality."(9)

Both function as foundational realities upon which structures of representation have been built. Both forms of male power are axiomatic although they might not effect tangible graphic evidence.

My intention in this chapter has been to expose some of the mechanisms involved in the production of fine art-works with a particular emphasis on works which have been defined as erotic or representations of sexuality. My interest has been to discover points of correspondence or similarity between the pornographic and the erotic art-work and to reveal oppressive and illusory structures common to both. However, there are points of dissimilarity also, pornography, by definition, is a narrow and limited form

of representation, one of its most important functions is the self reinforcement of a primarily genital response to strictly defined sexual role signals. Pornographic representation adheres without exception to the singular process I outlined in my first chapter, whereas one may consider many exceptions within the fine art tradition to the process I discussed above. There are many individual examples of erotic art works which refuse to fulfill any of the preconditions traditionally expected or presumed. My interest, however, has been with the rule as opposed to the exception and throughout the history of representation the rule has been the objectification, degradation and exploitation of women. I would like now to illustrate my interpretations.

EROTIC ART OF THE MASTERS.

To illustrate my discussion of the mechanisms involved in the production of 'high brow' erotica or works of erotica socially sanctioned in that their status is that of art work, I present a book titled "EROTIC ART OF THE MASTERS, The 18th, 19th and 20th Centuries", authored by Bradely Smith. The book purports to be "a visual study of the sexual history of the human race... a gallery of the most important erotic paintings of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries.". The author and editor, Bradely Smith, engages in a discussion of selected works representative of Asia, India, Europe and America produced within the last three centuries. The

section on twentieth century works is the section I am predominantly interested in, however, and is over whelmingly Western European and American. The text is mainly involved with the stylistic and compositional accomplishments of the 'Masters' with some (in my opinion superficial) inquiry into the social and political background. With regard to my interest primarily with twentieth century work, I would like to interpret the works and attitudes which inform them in relation to 'pornographic' structures or intent which I believe to be evidenced throughout this section more visibly than in the earlier ones. It is also well known that pre-twentieth century erotic works functioned in much the same manner albeit for the wealthy as pornography functions to-day, catering for the tastes and pleasures of a particular market. One assumes that some distinction must exist between the erotic and pornographic in contemporary representation because one is produced for mass distribution and consumption, consequently employing the most expedient means whereas the other, elevated to the status of Art, does not. It is this assumption which I would like to discuss.

To begin, much of Smith's social or political inquiry takes similar form to the following example:

"The 20th century may easily become known as the century in which true sexual freedom came within the grasp of everyone... the philosophers, scientists, artists and writers have laid a solid foundation for a new view of human sexuality."(10)

It is ironic that the pornographer consistently employs this argument, Hugh Hefner has been the self-acknowledged sexual freedom fighter par excellence. I consider that both parties define the concept of 'sexual freedom' as the freedom from censure, to depict or describe any form of sexual aberrance, perversion or phenomenon with equanimity despite any ethical deliberation or significance. This quote is also illustrative of an attitude pervasive throughout the book, one which presupposes the unquestionable integrity of the art work and artist, similarly despite any ethical consideration:

"as alterations occur in the status of humans, the eye of the artist is ever on them. He will stay ahead of the viewer of his works, ever breaking new visual ground - ever explaining entertaining and educating society's eye and helping to free it from inhibitions."(11)

The myth of the artist as individual above human error, educator, elucidator may be employed as a useful strategy with which to ignore or falsify the artists true motives or the true social and political background. For example, Smith's text which accompanies my reproduction of an illustration in the book from the section on 19th century erotic paintings is:

"A unique erotic painting from 19th century China uses exaggeration to make its humorous point - that not even

travel should interfere with sexual pleasure."(12)

The social reality behind this painting, which Smith falsely interprets as 'humorous' was that the woman whose feet were utterly deformed and mutilated by the custom of Chinese foot binding, was unable to support herself, could not walk or stand with dignity and had to be carried everywhere. I feel it would have been unlikely that Smith was unaware of this custom, practiced in China for over a thousand years which would have influenced profoundly any relationship between the sexes and consequently any representation of such. This example is just one instance of falsification and ignorance of any, even superficial, inquiry into social or political reality. His text on 20th century works makes no reference to any contemporary sociopolitical background or attitudes regarding sexuality, the rise of feminism, the preponderance of pornographic representation, all of which would have presumably informed many 20th century artists and their work.

To refer back to 'EROTIC ART OF THE MASTERS' there is an interesting discrepancy to be found between the section on 20th century work and the chapters which deal with earlier images. Out of 75 illustrations in the former section, 54 of these are solely representations of the female body, the female nude, whereas in the earlier sections there is an equal balance between depictions of men and women involved in sexual acts. Is this

situation to be read as an accurate reflection of a process of 'regression' within our culture, to re-view the female body as the vessel, container of sexuality, the personification of the erotic or is it merely a statement on the particular delectation of the editor? I believe that the choice of the editor, mediated by his culture amounts to a sum of external influences. No choice or decision process exists within a vacuum and the inclusion of a 'master' clause, that the book is a collection of the work of the 'greatest' artists informs the editor in his choice presumably more than his own preference. Ultimately a preponderance of female nudes points to the preference of the great masters of the 20th century. While viewing these illustrations one is made well aware of the present dominant cultural representations of sexuality, that of woman as generic sexual object, that our particular roles as women are as assigned and fixed as ever they were. Woman, throughout the fine art tradition to the present day, defined as 'The Sex' object, in relation to the male artist's subjectivity, the object through which his sexuality is constructed and represented. The introduction of the book is written by Henry Miller, I quote:

"Perhaps because of male domination, perhaps not, women have apparently contributed little or nothing in the domain of erotic art. It is only in the last half century that we have any evidence of women producing such work, and what they have produced is

negligible... If thus far women have been primarily the muse and inspiration for men, one wonders how and what they will contribute as equals."(13)

Here Miller is expressing directly both the undercurrent of misogynistic dismissiveness regarding the cultural production of women and the basic premise underlying the book and contents, that of woman as erotic object, couched in the terms "muse" and "inspiration". In the relegation of woman to the status of object, female production has been confined by menial labour and by deceptively glorified subservient social activities resulting in the "little or nothing" women have contributed to male culture. The two are inextricably linked and form the basis upon which the exploitation and reduction of woman to the status of object has been rendered normative.

As I pointed out earlier, the majority of images reproduced in the section on twentieth century erotic works represent women alone, available, posing isolated for the male gaze or simply the display of female body parts. Woman is presented as the embodiment of all that is other, all that is within the grasp of man and all that is beyond his grasp. From Andre Masson's woman as landscape, Gadal's woman as lotus fruit, Reiss's woman as cat, woman as fish, phallus, sphinx, underwater plant, through the whole spectrum and back again to Picasso's woman as artist's model. Magritte's "The Rape" presents woman as dehumanized object,

utterly reduced to her sexual function, her sexual body. In "The Guitar Lesson" by Balthus, we witness the rape of a young girl by an older woman. Both figures are presented frontally, their bodies arranged and directed towards the spectator, their expressions registering sexual abandon, although the child's hair is being pulled and her body twisted unnaturally. When one accepts the universal gender of the spectator as being male, this painting may be interpreted as feeding directly into the male 'pornographic' fantasy while conveniently shifting the blame back onto woman; she is the token rapist, a strategy which standard pornographic representation regularly employs. My final example is Graham Ovenden's untitled painting. Smith's text announces:

"considered the most erotic artist now painting by some critics, Graham Ovenden specializes in the lolita image. Here he shows budding sensuality in two panels leaving the third - the future - to the viewer's imagination."⁽¹⁴⁾

Here we are presented with the image of a young child, termed 'lolita image' to obscure the message behind the representation and to divert attention away from the child's young age. She is positioned frontally, her body arranged towards the spectator. Her posture is sexually submissive, her glance coy and fearful, her arms and legs are bound, tied up, she invites penetration. She assumes the classic pornographic pose, genitals displayed

and exposed, solely for the titillation of the male spectator at the cost of her evacuated humanity, her victim and object status.

To summarize, throughout the book and its contents, the female body has been objectified, fetishized, she has been consigned to the status of other, to contradictory roles, her experience and sexuality has been posited in male/phallic terms. Male power has manifested itself in the power of naming, defining female experience, the power of owning, of wealth and property, as I discussed earlier, is central to the concept of fine art works. The powers of force and sexuality are embodied within many of the images, whether subtly or overtly as in Ovenden's work, and constitute the foundation upon which the history of sexual representation has been built. As I pointed out earlier, there are exceptions to the rule, but my interest has been primarily in discovering and exposing structures inclusive in the range of pornographic intent, to expose instances of the objectification of woman and manifestations within erotic representation of male power strategies.

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CONCLUSION.

My review of these works from a feminist perspective has indicated how similar the two forms of representation, the 'pornographic' and the 'erotic' are, particularly with regard to the treatment of women's bodies which are consistently objectified, fetishized and constructed in such a way as to cater directly for the male fantasy and the male spectator's gratification. Many of these paintings are almost indistinguishable, message and content wise, from pornographic imaging. Fundamentally however, it has been the fine art tradition which has informed contemporary cultural representation and the common language employed by both is the language of patriarchy. The image is made in the image of its maker and the history of representation has been the history of the male gender representing itself to itself.

Within patriarchy, value is placed on our differences as individuals rather than our similarities as a species. The subject - object relation is at the core of this dominant way of seeing. The individualistic perspective of our culture (reaffirmed within capitalist ideology) has focused on the necessity of this pair, denying any capacity of the human individual for collectivity and inter subjectivity. I believe this individualistic ideology is the basic axiom of the justification of inequality, dominance

and power. The images I have discussed in this thesis could have no existence without a cultural ideology which has rendered this male gendered dominance and power over women's bodies normative. The sexual regime perpetuated within our society, through the pornographic intent visible in many forms of cultural representation, has been informed by the primacy of the male, the secondary/otherness status of the female and a consequent repressive sexual climate characterized by an obsession with the female body and a singular male sexual gratification. How could an expression, through image or otherwise, of sexual relations created within and informed by this cultural heritage have any relevance or meaning with regard to the realities of human sexuality, the complexity and diversity of which has been defined and delineated in narrow, limiting and essentially oppressive terms for both sexes? To illustrate this tragedy within our culture, and to conclude, I quote Ron Martin, producer of a live sex show in New York. Does he think he degrades women for profit?

"I know I do. So does the New York Times. I have one girl who felt degraded every time she stepped outside. She came here because she was constantly getting hit up by men anyway. So why not get paid? Is working here any more degrading than walking down the street?"(15).

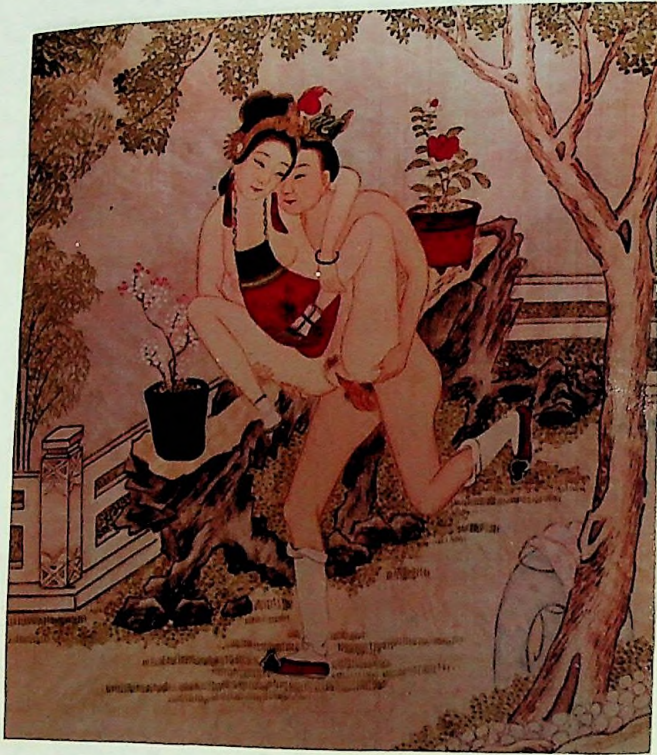
FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER 2 AND CONCLUSION.

1. Paula Webster: Pornography Section:
"A FEMINIST DICTIONARY".
2. Kenneth Clarke: Page 322; Kenneth Clarke:
"THE NUDE."
3. Kenneth Clarke: Page 322; Kenneth Clarke:
"THE NUDE."
4. Kenneth Clarke: Page 65; Kenneth Clarke:
"THE NUDE."
5. Simone De Beauvoir: Page 229; Simone De Beauvoir:
"THE SECOND SEX."
6. John Berger: Page 50; John Berger:
"WAYS OF SEEING."
7. John Berger: Page 56; John Berger:
"WAYS OF SEEING."
8. Robert Sobieszek: Page 75; S. Kent: The Erotic Male Nude.
"WOMEN'S IMAGES OF MEN".
9. Andrea Dworkin: Page 57; Andrea Dworkin:
"PORNOGRAPHY, MEN POSSESSING WOMEN."
10. Bradley Smith: Page 106; Bradley Smith:
"EROTIC ART OF THE MASTERS."
11. Bradley Smith: Page 110; Bradley Smith:
"EROTIC ART OF THE MASTERS."

FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER 2 AND CONCLUSION (CONTD.).

12. Bradley Smith: Page 86; Bradley Smith:
"EROTIC ART OF THE MASTERS."
13. Henry Miller: Page XIV; Bradley Smith:
"EROTIC ART OF THE MASTERS."
14. Bradley Smith: Page 175; Bradley Smith:
"EROTIC ART OF THE MASTERS."
15. Ron Martin: Page 61; Susanne Kappler:
"THE PORNOGRAPHY OF REPRESENTATION."

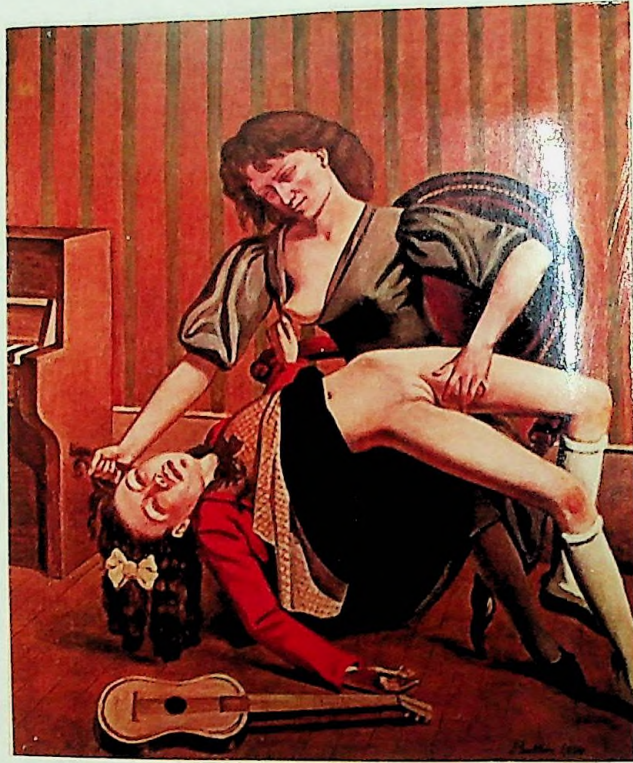
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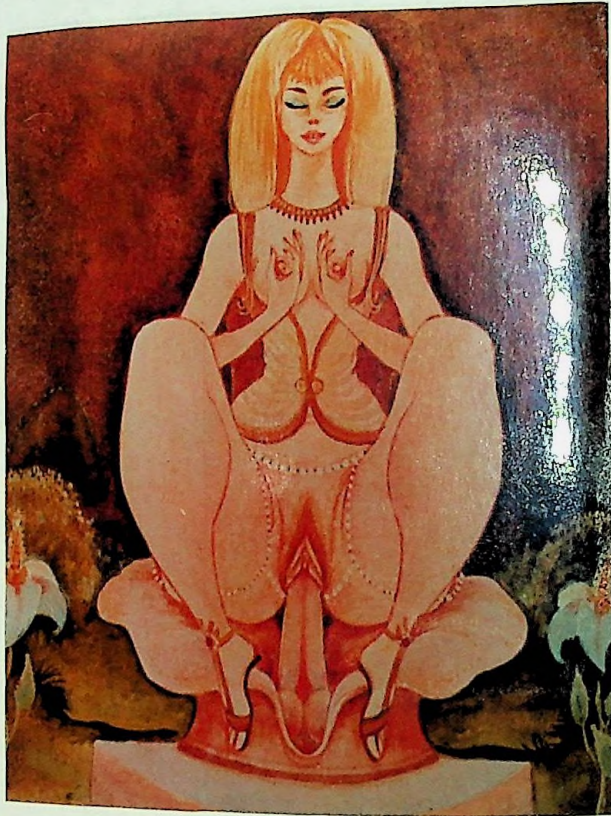
(ill. No. 1.) - 19th Century Chinese Painting.



(ill. No. 2.) - "The Rape".



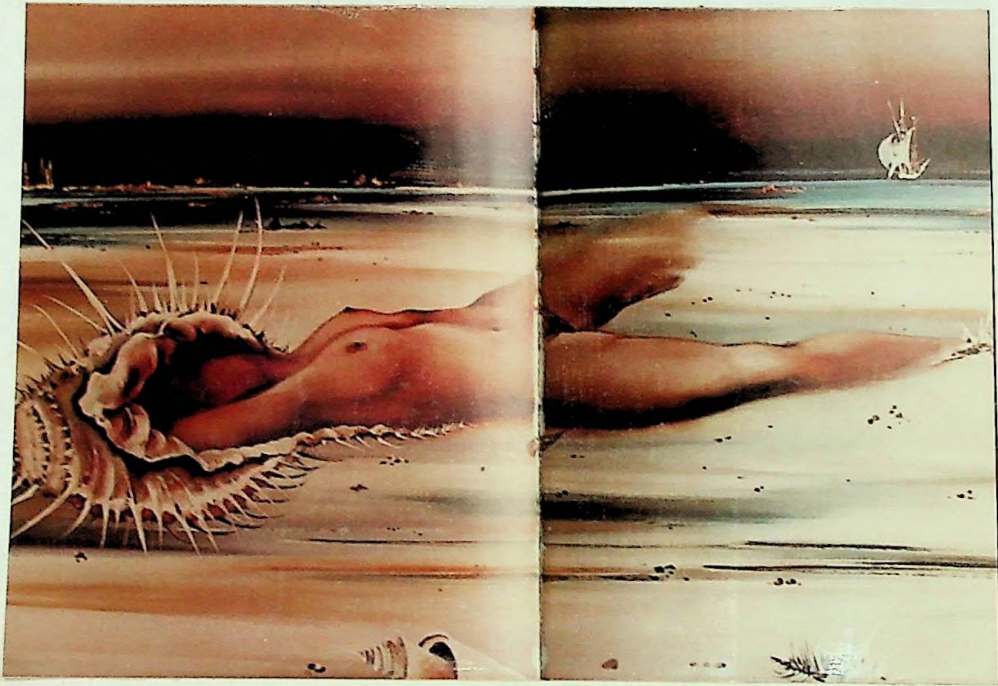
(ill. No. 3.) - "The Guitar Lesson".



(ill. No. 4.) - Untitled.



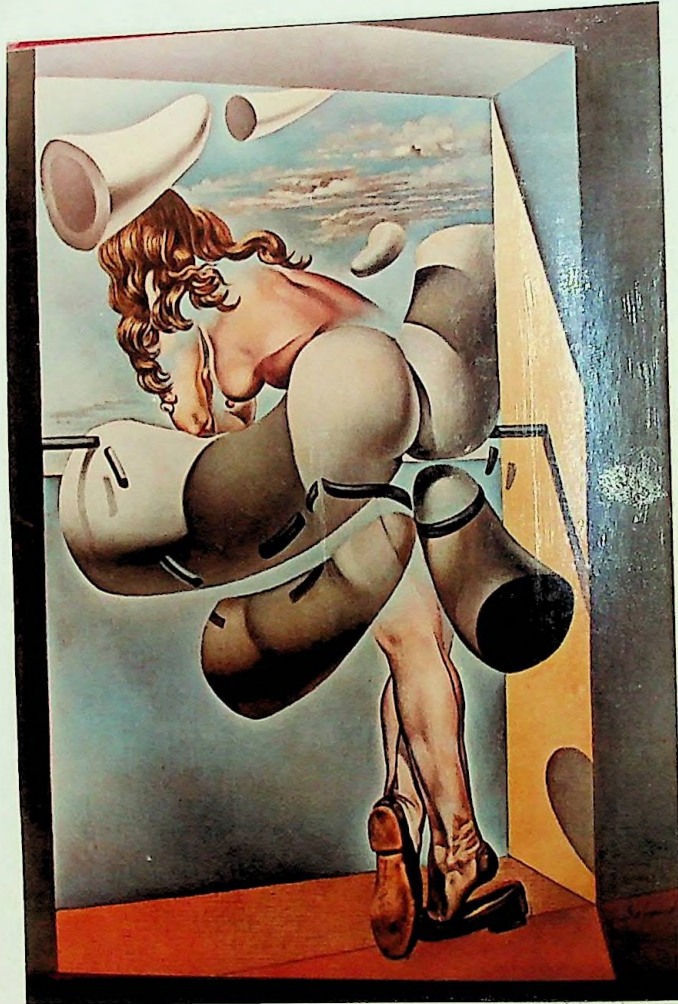
(ill. No. 5.) - "Encounter at Night".



(ill. No. 6.) - "Birth of Venus".



(ill. No. 7.) - "Le Poisson de Profondeurs".



(ill. No. 8.) - "Young Virgin Autosodomized by Her Own Chastity".



(ill. No. 9.) - Untitled.



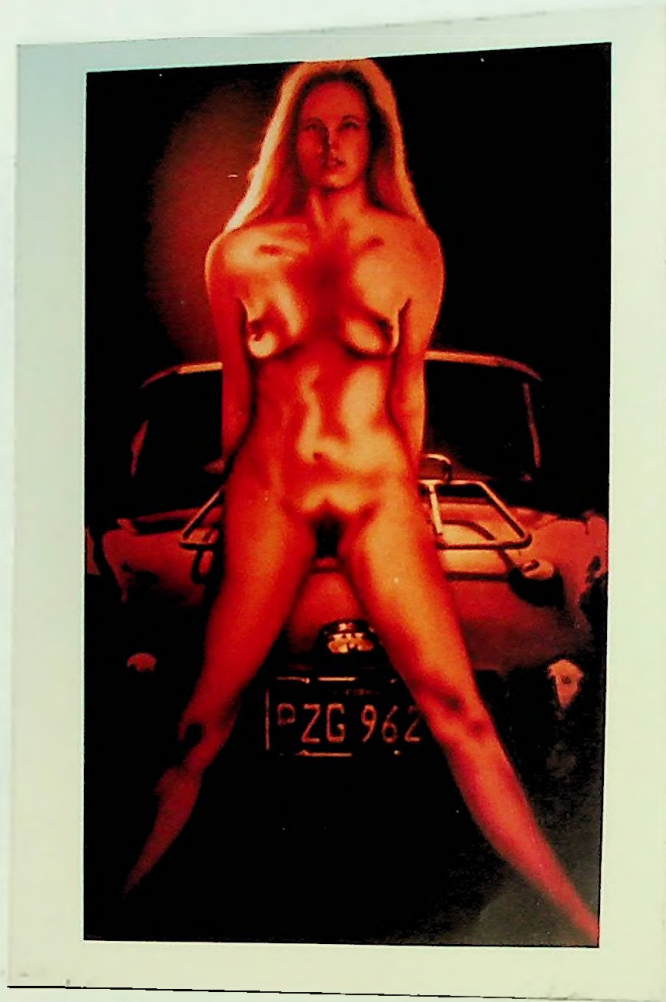
(ill. No. 10.) - "Sphinx."



(ill. No. 11.) - Untitled.



(ill. No. 12.) - "The Swallows First Morning".



(ill. No. 13.) - "Austin Healy Sprite, Etc.".



(ill. No. 14.) - "Touche Boucher".

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