Title: What Fashion Owes to XXX
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Document Type: Article
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HOW quaint it now seems that only five years ago, the director John Waters could declare pornography the last cultural outlaw. Pornography was becoming hip, he was quoted as saying in The New York Times in March 1999, because it was "extreme behavior that's in on the joke."

Turns out the behavior was not that extreme, after all. The joke was viral. And as it happens, pornography's spike-heeled march across the cultural landscape was probably ordained a century and a half ago when Flaubert let out his famous war whoop against the bourgeoisie.

It does not take the pornography star Jenna Jameson's conquest of the best-seller lists this month to demonstrate that what is risibly termed the adult-entertainment industry has come to permeate many aspects of the culture. Fashion cottoned to the aesthetics of pornographic films even before art, video, music and Hollywood got in on the trend, infatuated with the genre's flat lighting, its affectless subjects, its pine-paneled rec rooms and atmosphere of ugly consumerism tempered by the poignancy of the little death.

But now erotic infatuation appears to have become obsession as both fashion photographers and art photographers -- who sometimes wade into fashion to make a dollar -- vie with each other to produce images that would have tantalized and, yes, even shocked a libertine like Flaubert.

Is it entirely coincidental that a spate of gallery shows and new books reveling in porn aesthetics are all bowing in during Fashion Week? What are the odds of that in a "Brown Bunny" world?

"Everything is penises, fur and caviar," said Alex Galan, communications director at Distributed Art Publishers, referring to "Louis XV" (Steidl, $70) a new book by the German photographer Juergen Teller distributed by Mr. Galan's company. In "Louis XV," Mr. Teller augments the coy images he shot of himself in bed with the actress Charlotte Rampling for a Marc Jacobs campaign.

And indeed, the book is replete with images of the photographer and the actress disporting themselves in the sort of five-star hotel room where fashion photographers always seem to lodge, naked and accessorized with sturgeon roe and mink. For once it is the woman in the pictures who is less revealed; Mr. Teller, on the other hand, exposes himself so brazenly that the results are too extreme to be published in even the most audacious indie fashion magazine.

Contrasted with the Teller book, Larry Sultan's pictures from pornographic-film sets in the San Fernando Valley, a show of which opened at the Janet Borden gallery on Wednesday, seem somehow chaste. The Sultan show, in SoHo, coincides with the release of a coffee-table book of sex industry studies titled "The Valley" (Scalo, $75.) What is curious about both book and show is that, far from being a huge conceptual leap from the narrative Mr. Sultan conjured in "Visiting Tennessee," a Kate Spade campaign that depicted a prosperous family on a road trip, the images in "The Valley" seem fully congruent with upper-middle-class life in a post-Cheever world.

If anything, they seem like the stuff various members of the imaginary Kate Spade clan might surreptitiously download from the Web. "Porn has become much more acceptable because of the Internet and fashion," said Timothy Greenfield-Sanders, the art portraitist and sometime fashion photographer whose pictures of pornography stars in "XXX" (Bulfinch, $35) -- "straight, gay, young, old, men, women, legends and obscurities," as the photographer explained -- will be released this month.

"Fashion has tremendous influence on how the culture changes," Mr. Greenfield-Sanders said. "And porn has had a tremendous influence on fashion, which you can see in the way that it has made it acceptable to dress more skimply, more outrageously, more sexily, although I don't think a single designer will ever admit that to you."

By miles, the most provocative show to open during Fashion Week is Terry Richardson's "Terry World" at
Deitch Projects gallery in SoHo, where scores of pictures are shown from two new books by Mr. Richardson, fashion photography's perennially favored enfant-terrible: "Terryworld" (Taschen, $59.99) and "Kibosh" (Damiani, $400.)

"The 'Kibosh' pictures are going to make a lot of people angry," said Jeffrey Deitch, the gallery owner, referring to the huge show and to the limited-edition and lushly produced volume, from an Italian prestige publisher.

"But what we're showing is clearly something that's resonating in our culture, when taboos about what is appropriate are dissolving," he added. "Look at Chloe Sevigny and how that scene in 'Brown Bunny,' instead of making her an outcast, is making her hotter. Even Paris Hilton's video took another socialite who wanted to make it and differentiated her."

That Mr. Richardson sees his work not as pornographic but as a wholesome record of some "spontaneous sexual situations" is not an opinion likely to be shared by many. Sure, some occupationally jaded types in the fashion business may not be shocked by his antics; after all, the photographer -- who has worked for Vogue, Harper's Bazaar, Gucci and Levi's -- is already well known to them for documenting his energetic couplings. But there are pictures in both "Kibosh" and "Terryworld" that would give anyone pause.

"Everyone has taken these pictures of themselves and posted them on the internet," Mr. Richardson said. "I'm just putting them out there and on a gallery wall."

It may seem a mite odd that this flurry of sexually explicit exhibitions and books arrives during a Fashion Week when the runways seem to be ratifying the great return to modesty begun last spring. What is one to make of all the naughtiness creeping in from the margins, as stores and mainstream magazines promote granny tweeds, Pat Nixon cloth coats and Donna Reed silhouettes? Is it an early harbinger of the next style wave, an inevitable slide back into the welcoming arms of sin?

As Mr. Greenfield-Sanders suggested, culturally conservative times always have a way of producing a counterreaction. "You push down thoughts about sex, and you push up interest in it," he said.

CAPTION(S):

Photos: WORN -- Juergen Teller and Charlotte Rampling in an extra image from a fashion shoot. (Photo by Juergen Teller, from "Louis XV" [Steidl]); IN FULL COSTUME -- A pornographic-film set in a photo by Larry Sultan. (Photo by Larry Sultan, courtesy Janet Borden Inc.)(pg. 14); WHAT TO WEAR? -- Terry Richardson, photographer and subject. (Photo by Christopher Smith for The New York Times)(pg. 1)

By Guy Trebay

Source Citation (MLA 7th Edition)

URL
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Gale Document Number: GALE|A121854567