



WHY ARE EXPLICIT IMAGES  
CALLED PORNOGRAPHIC IN  
COTEXT OF ART,  
BUT NOT IN  
ADVERTISING?







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Growing up in Lithuania, which has Christian traditions and is influenced by the Soviet Union, I was taught that art is supposed to provide aesthetic experiences, to comment on an aspect of society or on politics, to address personal psychology, to illustrate another discipline, to sell a product (commercial arts), or simply to be a form of communication. The nude figure in Lithuanian art is still traditional. The nudes are used to express ideals of male and female beauty and to show it in the most elegant position. Judgments of taste about art are not entirely subjective, but include criteria of skill and craftsmanship in the creation of objects, communication of complex and non-trivial messages and creativity. Art works considered as high quality are most of the time academic art.



Sexually provocative nudity, unexpected ways of showing a body and sex act images are considered inappropriate, pornographic and it's a sin looking at them. Studying in art school in Holland I learned new ways of looking and judging an art work.

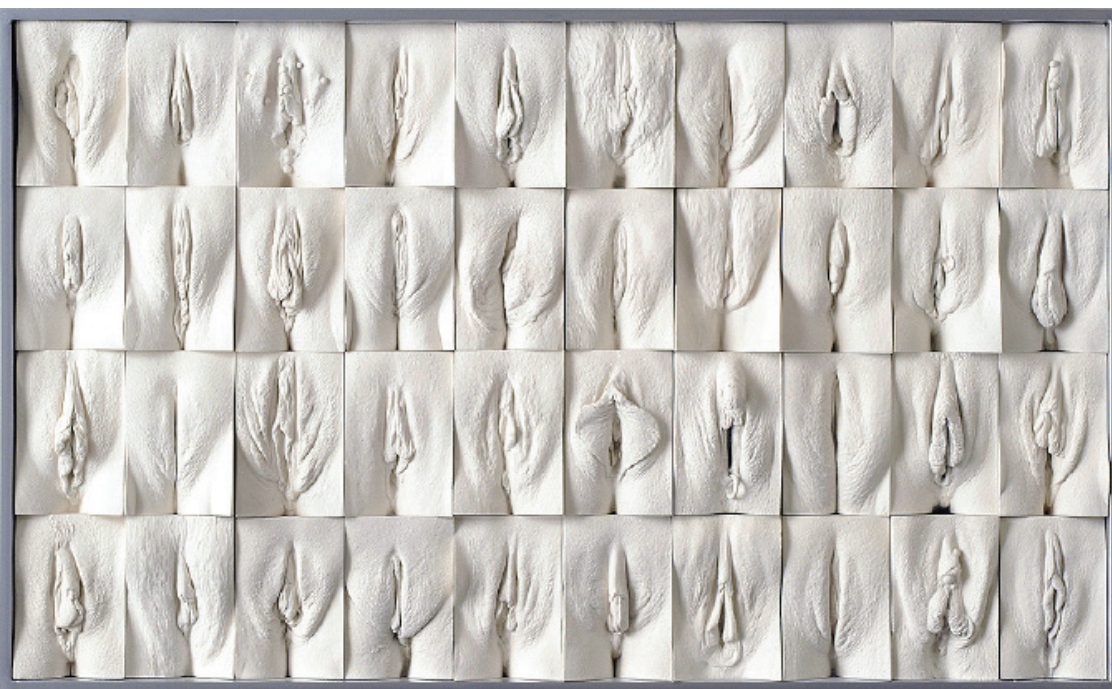
### Sexually explicit

Sexually explicit images are not always pornography. Sexually explicit material (video, photography, creative writing) presents sexual content without deliberately obscuring or censoring it. The term 'sexually explicit' is often used as euphemism for pornography. It includes non-simulated sex acts, sexual intercourse and uncovered genitalia. Anatomy textbooks for medical students are sexually explicit; they expose genitalia but are rarely viewed or considered as pornography. Sexual explicitness may be a necessary condition for material to count as pornographic, but it does not seem to be sufficient. While some observers often label all sexually explicit material as pornography, this is not generally accepted, as it does not examine the intent behind the material. For example, sexual intercourse may be shown to illustrate principles of safe sex and as such be a component of sex education, or in a film it may be a part of a complex story and be viewed to contribute to the overall plot development. An explicit rape scene may in a fact have the purpose of negative conditioning and most of the time is called pornography.

## Pornography

A judge from the U.S. named Justine Stewart (1964) once said "I can't define pornography, but I know it when I see it". The word 'pornography' comes from the Greek for writing about prostitutes. However, the etymology of the term is not much of a guide to its current usage, since many of the things commonly called 'pornography' nowadays are neither literally written nor literal about prostitutes. Here is a first definition: pornography is any material (either pictures or words) that is sexually explicit.

What is viewed as sexually explicit can vary from culture to culture and over time. For instance in culture I grow up exposed body parts like vagina in art won't be possible to show in any gallery, newspaper or television. While English artist Jamie McCartney showed his work "the great wall of vagina" in Milan and couple of cities in England. The "sexually explicit" image has certain effects or breaks certain taboos in different contexts and cultures. However, some material seems clearly to count as sexually explicit in many contexts today.



Jamie McCartney  
The Great Wall of Vagina Panel1  
2013

Here is a second definition. Pornography is sexually explicit material (verbal or pictorial) that is primarily designed to produce sexual arousal in viewers. Indeed, the definition is one that is frequently employed (or presupposed) in discussions of pornography and censorship. Of course, it is important to distinguish here between sexually explicit material that has the only aim to produce sexual arousal, and material whose aim is to do this in order to make some other artistic or political point.

But how can we see the difference between images that looks almost the same? In this case it is really important to know the history of that time to be able to understand the aim of the work. There are a lot of contemporary artists whose work shows sexually explicit images and they questioned whether it is art or pornography. One of the first and most important contemporary artist in history whose work shows exposed sex acts was Robert Mapplethorpe.

Robert Mapplethorpe  
Self-Portrait  
1978





## Sex revolution

Before the sexual revolution, homosexuality in art was generally limited, yet subversive intentions were still present. Erotic art was one of the few ways artists could use their work for aesthetic and political purpose. In the 1960's, the sexual revolution, also known as a time of sexual liberation, started in America. It was a social movement that challenged the traditional codes of behavior related to sexuality. The term "sexual revolution" has been used at least since the late 1910s. Some early commentators believed the sexual revolution of 1960-1980 was in fact the second revolution in America, they believe that the first revolution was after World War I and it includes the writers F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway. However, the age of changes in perception and practices of sexuality that developed from around 1960 was to reach mainstream, middle class, even middle age America as well as most of Western Europe. Sexual liberation included increased acceptance of sex outside of the traditional heterosexual, the normalization of premarital sex, homosexuality and alternative forms of sexuality. Contraception and the pill, the legalization of abortion and public nudity all followed.

### Sexual revolution and gay artists

Art, and especially photography, became much more free. Artists were expressing themselves and spreading the new ideas, reacting to what was happening in society and challenging standards of what can or cannot be shown because it is too sexual. That also included gay artists using their work for aesthetic and political purpose- visual art used to influence public perception and faster gradual acceptance of homosexuality. Although lesbian communities had been established in urban centers for roughly fifty years, in the early days of sexual revolution, they remained as marginalized as ever before. Determining the appropriate techniques to represent lesbians and lesbian sexuality was a key issue during this time.

It was difficult to find a right way to represent images of women together that would not merely be seen by men as soft pornography for their own pleasure. Lesbian artists needed to decide individually if their work was intended for one audience or the other. If a lesbian artist decided to broadcast images concerning her sexuality and desire to the latter, it was necessary to reduce sexual context otherwise her artwork would only indulge heterosexual men's fantasies.

As Cooper Emmanuel goes on to explain in his book 'The sexual perspective: homosexuality and art in the last 100 years? in the West': "Female erotica is less likely to objectify and exploit woman, who are not shown as helpless and passive victims. Woman artists are creating images of women making love or openly showing affection for one another." Before the sexual revolution lesbian artists did create vibrant, and sometimes erotic work, which was usually intended to be for their own audience and could not interact in mainstream discourse about sexuality. Instead, lesbian artists completely erased the element of sexuality from their work or identified themselves with another growing movement- feminism and its messages used to fight gender-based oppression as opposed to sexuality-based.

### Robert Mapplethorpe

America at that time for young artists like Robert Mapplethorpe was a perfect place to be. Not just because he was a gay male but also because a large amount of galleries provided moral as well as financial support: dealers were encouraging young artist and developing an audience.

Most of the people know him for his controversial large-scale, highly stylized black and white photography but his work featured an array of subjects. Robert's early work reflected the influence of Andy Warhol whose films also brought sex and sexuality to the foreground of public consciousness. He started with making collages, mixed media objects and Polaroid snapshots that built his career as an artist and developed his aesthetic vision. As Mapplethorpe committed to photography, he began to explore subjects to which he would return throughout his career- portraits, self-portraits, still-life images of flowers and, most important, nudes that were closely related with Robert's own homosexuality in his personal life.

In one of the works X Portfolio he is showing the underground bondage and sadomasochistic BDSM scene in the late 1960 and early 1970s of New York. The book was published in 1978. Also in 1978 and 1981 he published the Y and Z portfolios continuing working on the same topic.

When I saw couple of photos of these series in Tate modern I couldn't say I was shocked but more surprised and I experienced being uncomfortable while looking at the images. It almost felt not right seeing them but at the same time it was intriguing.



In one photo a man standing with a cigarette and looking straight into the camera. With one of his hand grabbing a man's genitalia, who is bound in ropes like Jesus Christ on the cross but then upside down. A part of these pictures that makes them so brilliant is truthfulness. The people, who were photographed, including Mapplethorpe himself, were not actors but they wanted to be photographed, so he did. Robert doesn't look down on his subjects and he doesn't look up. He looks at them. Perhaps it is the easiest to see just how directly he does this in his portraits, which of all pictures are the least likely to distract the viewer with other issues.



Robert Mapplethorpe  
X Portfolio  
1978

### Explicit religious images

Robert Mapplethorpe uses elements that are representing clichés like the man in the picture who is being punished like Jesus Christ. Using symbols of religion in art that makes headline becomes controversial and shocks viewers. But that is often the most superficial kind of shock – something that people choose to be offended by because it violates their principles of faith or politics or whatever ideological system they use to give order to the world.





Andres Serrano  
Piss Christ  
1987

A good example would be Andres Serrano's work "Piss Christ". It was exhibited in 1987 at the Stux Gallery in New York and was favorably received. Later when it was exhibited in 1989 the piece caused scandals, which are continuing till now. The photograph is of a small plastic crucifix submerged in what appears to be a yellow liquid. The artist has described the substance being his own urine in a glass. The photograph was one of a series of photographs that Serrano had made that involved classical statuettes submerged in various fluids- milk, blood, and urine.

The title of work- Piss Christ(size 152x126), the photograph is glossy, colors are deeply saturated and including constellation of tiny bubbles. Without Serrano specifying the substance to be urine and without the title referring to urine by another name, the viewer would not necessarily be able to differentiate between the stated medium of urine and medium of similar appearance, such as amber or polyurethane. In one of his interviews Serrano said that his art is not intended to shock or to denounce religion, it alludes to a perceived commercializing or cheapening of Christian icons in contemporary culture. Also the formal values of the image should be regarded separately from other meanings. The work itself is a beautiful photographic image. It feels like the crucifix floats in a deep rosy glow. While I look at the work I give a romantic and dreamy feeling to it. People often aren't responding to the work of art itself but... Despite that, the artist did not intend to shock. Serrano is Christian artist making a religious work of art based on his relationship with Christ and the Church.

Robert Mapplethorpe also had connection and influence of Christian religion. He was from six children family. "I was Catholic boy, I went to church every Sunday. A church has a certain magic and mystery for child. It still shows in how I arrange things. It's always little altars. It's always been this way-whenver I'd put something together I'd notice it was symmetrical". His autobiographical information gives a certain feel to his artistic style. The hunger makes us want to see that God keeps us away from and insist us not to look at.

Some of his pictures that go beyond what is considered representable are viewed as reprehensible, sexually explicit or better to say as dirty secrets because they have to do with sex. After the topic of sex has been so censored because sexual secret become epic, it was made to seem so dirty. That which Mapplethorpe is sharing could be for others

a secret and it is really intimate and personal and can make others feel very unsettled.

When these pictures first appeared people most of the time turned away or had difficulties seeing them, myself included. But they always stayed in the back of my mind and after seeing them more often I want to look more and more in to them. They are still difficult to see for some people but they are masterpieces. Mapplethorpe was a major cultural figure during a period of tumultuous change who contributed to shaping not only the art of photography but the larger social landscape. His revolt against the idea of the sexual secret is epic. And from the point of view today, they still provoke that old punitive system ruled by the gods. Each person can decide for themselves to do with their body and what is right or wrong.

Every period of time has many images and objects that are capturing the moment's essence. Most of them fade away with years but some stay in our imagination and represent a certain period. American art historian George Kubler calls this "the shape of time". You can see that with artist like the Cubists at the beginning of the century- their dissolution of perspective and the breaking apart of old views. Robber Mapplethorpe was one of these artists whose works are defining the past two decades, which have changed as well. But right now, at the end of our century, some of his work is viewed differently because of the changed times. And it often feels like our anxiety-for example, our current fear of sex-encourage the return to archaic views. Today we look at explicit images through the death-AIDS.

#### Before and after AIDS

Before HIV/AIDS, sexually it was much more carefree in the late 1960's, and throughout the 1970's than today. The release of the Deep Throat movie. In one of the scenes a man is telling a woman that her clitoris in her mouth. It's shocking if I think that this movie was showing in the cinemas back in the days. This movie launched a perfect platform for other movies to come. Also, sexual photography became a perfect business to make money and it was pushing the boundaries. People want to live a life that isn't based on materialistic values but yet the system of America is based on profit and selfishness. It started with an erotic Play Boy magazine, which was so successful, over 5million men bought it every month in America, other magazines started showing up. But to get the viewers attention they needed to be much more aggressively



erotic and dirty. It was a big competition who was going to sell more so magazines became more and more explicit.

Hustler was one of the most uncompromising magazines ever. It was vulgar to the extreme. The film and photography industry were using marketing strategies that led many viewers to believe that the film and photography were showing real images, but they were not. Women were reacting on what was happening and feminists were judging pornography for vulgar depictions of women in a way that degraded their image. In June 1978 Hustler magazine published a magazine with a cover of woman's legs with the rest of the body fed into a meat grinder. The image serves to prove the overarching theme of the publication from a feminist perspective: that the female body was irrelevant, worthless, and for the mere pleasure of the men.



Hustler Magazine  
Issue June  
1978



The title on the left side on the magazine says "we will no longer hang women up like pieces of meat" The Hustler sarcastically criticizing on feminist protests against pornography and wanted to show that they are different than other magazines because they didn't want to be closed or lose their clients, which means money.

For the women in the feminist movement, pornography represented an unhealthy society. In order to be human and equal to each other government laws needed to be changed. Feminists wanted to persuade people that their religions had failed, that porn is bad and that it objectifies people. But for the government it was difficult to find one structure that could manipulate and manage society and to make a decision that would be relevant for both men and woman that wouldn't affect people's freedom. So to forbid pornography and set new rules they needed more evidence why the extreme sexual freedom would be bad and could harm women.

But the problem was not just women's protests about pornography but all of society. What the sexual revolution brought was a new self. People wanted to be themselves and to be able to express themselves. It was new in a society, so they needed to find a way to be free and not limit another person's freedom. Also the new self was not behaving as predictable consumers. Example: you buy life insurance, you sacrifice for future, but if you live in present you don't need life insurance. The ability to express themselves was new. So the problem was not just for government but for big business corporations as well.

At the same time AIDS started spreading around really fast and changed everything. In America AIDS was not illness but deterrent of judgment, especially for Catholics. They used it as proof for their ideas. AIDS was punishment for gays from God. The government didn't give any funds or support. The United States president and rest of the politicians were not talking about it. The silence seemed complicit with a religious moral condemnation of homosexuality.

In 1987 president Ronald Reagan first mentioned AIDS when he saw that not just certain groups of people were dying and that it could affect all of us. Eventually over 25,000 people were dead already. The reaction of people changed. Personal transformation and social transformation was perfect time for government to start controlling sexual revolution and the new self. Sigmund Freud's ideas were used to develop techniques to read inner desires of individuals and then fulfill them by

product at the age of democracy.

### Sigmund Freud

Sigmund Freud was the founder of psychoanalysis. He thought that underneath all human beings there was a hidden irrational self, which is driven by primitive animal instinct and which needed to be controlled, both for the good of individuals and the sustainability for society. Uncontrolled, aggressive, war like, raging inferno of emotions and that is a way originally human being distance to be. By repressing these emotions will come new strong human being for a better society.

But that infect emerge from Freud's ideas and sex revolution, was in fact really opposite - an isolated, vulnerable and greedy self, far more open for business and politics. Freud's nephew Edward L. Bernays used his ideas to practice with believes that to let masses to control their own minds is too dangerous.

His influence of the society was use to opened to manipulation for those who in power: business and politics, to control self not by repressing but by using unconscious mind to feed humans infinite desires.

Bernays thought that by understanding the group mind it would be possible to manipulate people's behaviors without their even realizing it. That would sell, make people feel a need to have certain product even if they don't need them. Of all the underlying desires, an appeal to sex is probably the most potent. Sexuality in order to sell everyday products became advertising game-changer. Having sexual advertisement can easily sell every day product even if they are not related with sex, our unconscious mind feels a desire to sex and if it's a product related with sex- to have that product is in a way fulfilling desire of sex. The humans were made to believe that product can let express ourselves but while people felt liberated, they become much more depending of their identity on business.

The same idea of selling to get satisfaction of product was used in politics as well. The individuals own unique happiness, a purely emotional being that has unconscious needs and desires. The rule of the marketer or somebody selling something, including politicians, is to appeal at people's unconscious desires. The politicians make society believe in them by promises and creating an illusion by giving a freedom and to make individuals more secure in their chosen lifestyle. For politics it became a key for wining power. It was America which focuses on day to day concerns, should I stop smoking? Should I wear seat belts?

Also preventing people from AIDS was perfect for manipulating mass society.

Advertisements and posters about sexual transmitted diseases were all over the city. Government made us to be aware about what was happening and scared us that a sexual freedom we want can affect and kill us. As well made us believe that having new laws is our own choice, which will secure us from disaster-death, prevent kids from watching pornography and violence in society. The new system was effective. In 80's people start spending more time in health clubs, disco and in a meanwhile government start shutting down all "Free clubs" and begin investigating in pornography. Furthermore, new laws gave impact in art world as well.



Sex education poster  
80's

When some of Mapplethorpe's more controversial works- X Portfolio was exhibited at The Contemporary Arts Centre in Washington in 1988, the museum was closed and director Dennis Barrie got arrested because the images were too sexually and similar to pornography. Which is ironical because in beginning of the 70's his work was never considered as pornographic but due to AIDS, that also effected Robert and

caused his death in 1989 everything changed. In the late 1980's and early 1990s, Robert Mapplethorpe's work emerged at the center of cultural war over the use of public money to support art that some deemed obscene or blasphemous. It was questioning artist freedom and censorship what is can be showing and what is not. Not all the material contained explicit images that caused sexual violence or offence to people but still it was called pornographic. People could not define pornography. Anxiety and fear was in people's minds and tradition values were brought up as a "cure" against all these dangers.

Robert Mapplethorpe  
Milton White  
1983



Free sex that was a part of idealistic culture was over but the sexual revolution actually didn't stop, it just got different forms. A part of the sexual revolution was to say we all do these things but is it bad to say that? However, AIDS changed our view about free sex. People stopped talking about this in public, not having it in books, or TV. Pornography industry became something scary but still made huge profits every year. People are against it but at the same time they watch it and masturbate. The sex revolution also changed laws, people's behaviors and attitudes. Women became much more comfortable with their own sexuality. The bad side of it was that women were made to look as much as possible like porn stars in advertisements in order to sell. The pornography that should not be seen is actually everywhere around us, manipulating our unconscious mind.

Advertisements and commercials become a glamour business promoting products and celebrities by using sex as a power to sell, the same strategies as in Hustler magazine just in another way, you could say less explicit. To infuriate celebrities in an editorial of a newspaper. That would be an exclusive interview with the celebrity and mentioning certain products was erasing of business. Individuals became center of society (also in Britain).

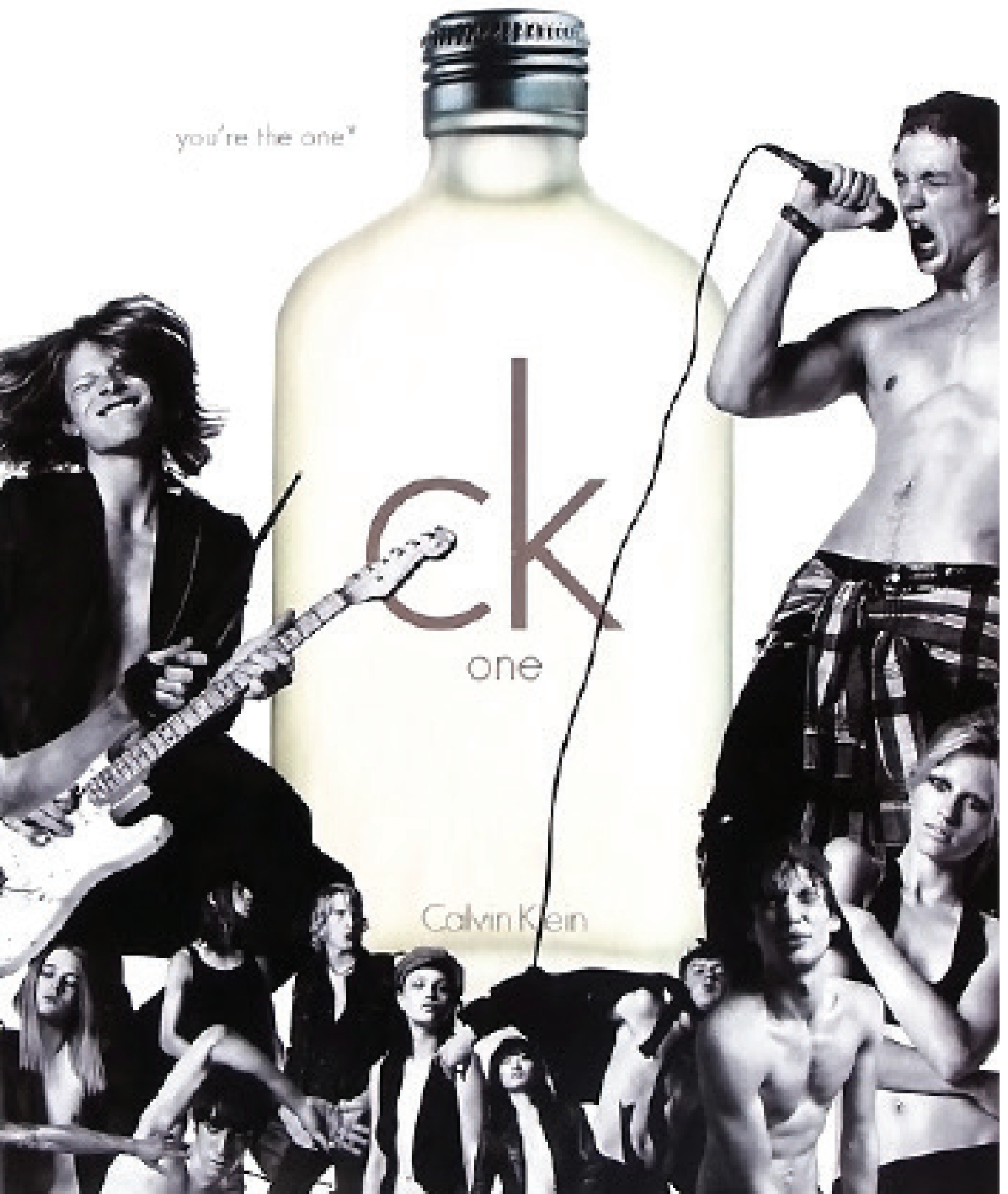
From 80's until now the main priority is the individual's own unique happiness. Manufacturers are creating loads of different product to express our individuality and are not dividing by social class but by individual needs. Everyone is able to get every product they want, not depending on quality, and that doesn't matter how wealthy person is. And due to huge amount of products advertisements are everywhere because business corporations are competing between each other, which will sell more.

Sexuality is used in almost every advertisement to sell a product because it's the most effective way, and it works so well in that role that the products themselves don't have to have anything to do with sex. Sex sells baking soda just as well as it sells underwear. It shows that there is nothing more but sex. Posters or commercials are treating people as a commodity or an object, without regard to their personality or dignity. Advertisements become legal pornography and consumerism is a way to give people an illusion of having control and continue managing society. And it is not like people are not unchanged, but their desires are.







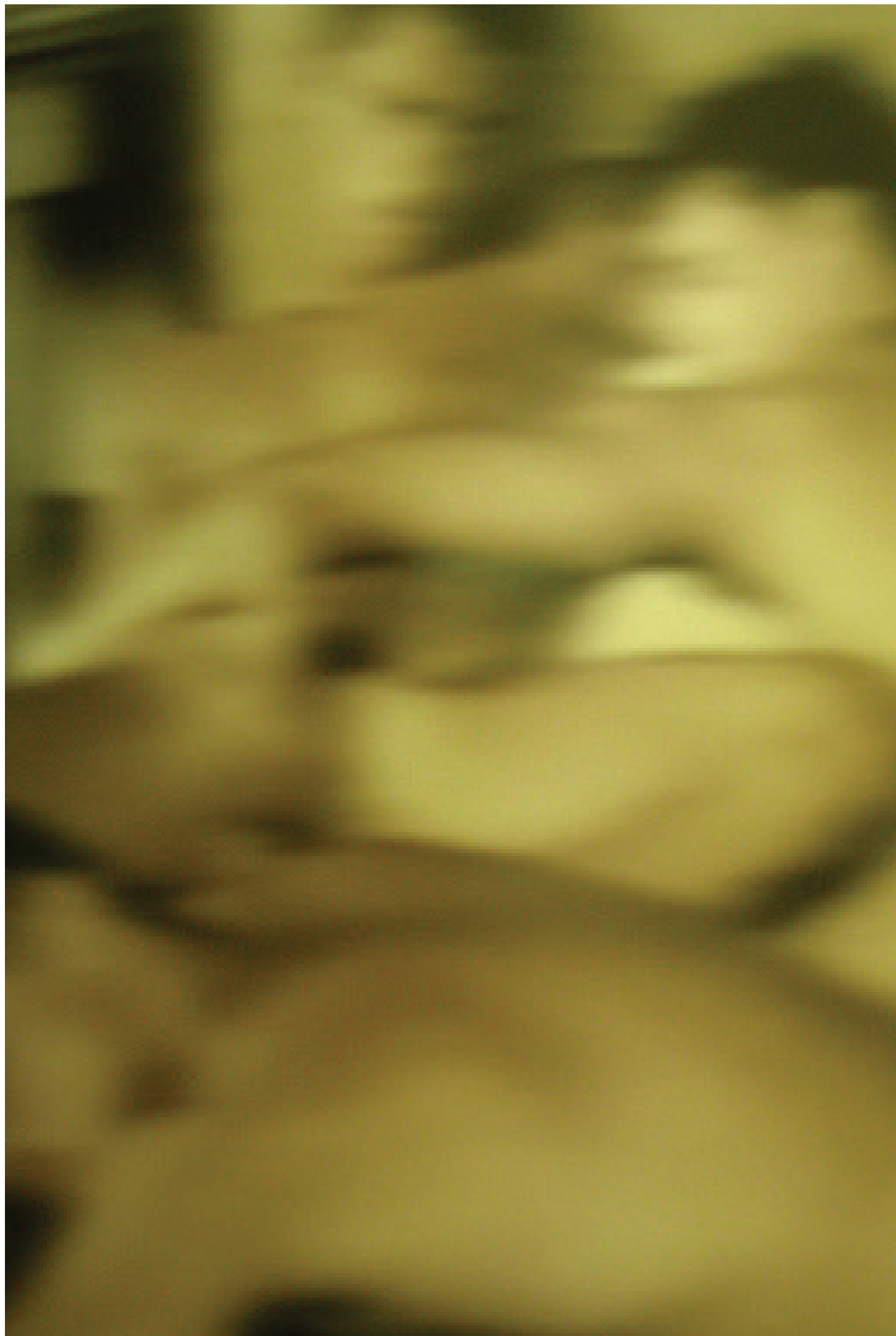


Calvin Klein 90'S Poster





Next page  
Thomas Ruff  
from series "Nudes"  
2001





## Thomas Ruff

Due to the development of technology, Internet, digital photography we are a pack of images. We are interpreting photographic images, even digital ones, as documentation and supposed "truth". Even though we know that the images are retouched or distorted reality we still view them as real. The photographic and especially sex images do not leave the viewer any space for interpretation rather than proceeding us truth, they are trying to affect us and send clear, unmistakable, messages, for example in advertisements, in order to make us buy the product. German artist Thomas Ruff is from a different time period then Robert Mapplethorpe. His work *Nudes* (1999) is commenting on the contemporary society, the effect of sexual revolution and question authorship.

Ruff uses already exiting photos. In "*Nudes*" the sources for images were downloaded from the Internet, re-photographed and then blurred. These images are photographs of photographs from which he wishes to remove his own interpretative presence. To this end, the only information he specifically provides regarding their content is a single word: '*Nudes*'. Thomas Ruff leaves the viewer freedom of interpretation. Even-  
tual recognition of the context might cause concern, shock or even a voyeuristic sense of pleasure. For others, the partially veiled nature of the images could render them more erotic. Ruff is specifically interested in just how far he can restrict immediate sexual association while still leaving the subject matter clear.

'What people see, eventually, is only what's already inside them'. Ruff renders sexual material somehow un-sexual, and to achieve this he employs a number of distancing devices- blurring it. The viewer is shocked or considers the image pornographic, not because it is sexually explicit but because of our own thoughts. '*Nudes*' images were published in the German magazine *GQ- Gentlemen Quarterly* in September 2002 issue. With the magazine already printed, the lobby group of publishers and wholesale distributors *Presse-grosso* utilized their force against the publication, as they considered the images to be a justification of pornography. They refused to distribute the magazine if some of Ruff's photographs were not first mutilated with black squares that hid the most explicit sexual acts and zones. Thomas Ruff said in one of his interviews for *Phaidon* "You need a fantasy to look at these images.

I admit I did pick images with a certain pictorial quality, so that the image itself is quite attractive, even when it is, let's say, a hardcore gay



sex image. But really they are all mirrors, so if you look at these, you look at yourself – if you have a dirty fantasy you see a lot, if you have a nice fantasy, I don't know what you see..."

Thomas Ruff does not want the viewer see his work as reality but more like a painting. But even if artists using images completely created in Photoshop or blur photos that are less concrete than porn, we still see it as a documentary image, supposed reality. The good example would be Marlene Dumas' work which is quite explicit but was never called pornographic like Thomas Ruff. Marlene Dumas' work was exhibited in London 1999. The artist presented a series of erotic paintings with a title MD-light, which merges the initial of Duma's name with the word delight, alludes to the lightness and frivolity that can go hand in hand with eroticism, a phenomenon fervently discussed by feminists in 1980s and 1990s. Dumas based these paintings on pornographic visual materials- photos or images from magazines. The exhibition didn't receive controversial reviews and images weren't viewed as pornography although paintings were in suggestive poses, the sexual act itself – either as solitary masturbation or with a partner. We view paintings as an artist's interpretation of the image, which can be real or not.



Marlene Dumas  
Handy  
1992

Thomas Ruff challenges the audience and their lonely imagination. Although 'Nudes' was called too explicit and pornographic, it was a good proof that his work is more than Pornography. The images are not concrete and give audience freedom for interpretation, while pornography does not leave viewer any space for fantasy. It elevates the mundane pornographic image to the level of high-art, while calling into sharp relief the question of authorship.

### Conclusion

We think we have freedom of speech, that we are sexually liberated and represented as individuals, but actually there are even more restrictions and rules. What we have now is artificial and is manipulated by our governments.

Government laws bring a lack of knowledge, which creates a misleading opinion, a way we think about pornography and what is considered the explicit image. In schools kids are not taught enough about our own body and sexually. Sex still a secret or topic that is not appropriate to speak about. If we will be afraid to talk about this, kids will create their opinion based on what they saw in media or Internet and most of the explicit images, especially in advertisements, are not showing reality but are assumed as real. When kid becomes adult he or she will see partner as an image from advertisements.

I think we live in a totally pornographic society, although we are afraid to talk about sex, which is everywhere around us. It's a tool using to sell products and by having them to feel liberated and be able to express our identity. Sigmund Freud's theory comes into play when I talk about advertising and art and how sex sells. The unconscious mind is where all our sexual thoughts come from, and sex does not appeal to a rational mind, so saying sex sells, which it does, needs some kind of proof or theory to back it up. So when we see sexually explicit advertisements we don't see it as a pornographic because sex in advertising can bypass the conscious mind.

From an art perspective Freud's theory is used in artworks to catch audience's attention because images are everywhere around us. Using sex as effective tool can make the viewer aware of what is happening in society. Explicit images can send us a message, which can shock us. The shock is good because even if we get angry or are disquieted about certain images at least we remember and think about them.

At the same time impact that explicit image in artwork gives becomes too much for a viewer because it is more exaggerated and it is not empty as advertising. Different thoughts that viewer gets from art work makes a person to think and deep inside we know that it's a mirror of ourselves.

We should be more concerned, not about these explicit images that are claimed to be pornography in art but about explicit imagery in advertisements that are manipulating and killing all of us.





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