’...An overall commitment to porn and sex work as a politically and socially grounded practice.’

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16 mm film frame from Dyketactics (1974) by Barbara Hammer

This weekend marks the inaugural New York City Porn Film Festival (NYC PFF). From Friday through Sunday, Bushwick’s Secret Project Robot will play host to screenings, programs and parties that “aim to support independent, experimental, low or non-budget productions, to place sexuality and porn in context and recognize it as a medium and an industry within the arts, and to display all diversity regarding sexuality, gender expression, body culture, class, fetishism and race, with a focus on dynamic genders and sexualities, and to create a discussion on the social and cultural impact of pornography.”

Visual AIDS spoke with Simon Leahy and Richard John Jones, two of the NYC PFF coordinators, about their vision for the weekend, highlighted programs, and the place of HIV/AIDS within the events.

Tickets for screenings and events can be purchased here.

NYC PFF Facebook

NYC PFF “Documenting Sex” talks and programs Facebook

What was the inspiration behind the NYC PFF, and what do you hope to achieve this first year of programming?
The aim of the festival was to celebrate and screen films which would otherwise go unnoticed--to show this hidden part of our culture. The programs are mostly from open submissions but include curated programs by people we feel are opening new discussions around porn, sex and filmmaking. There is a whole spectrum of works on view, and the program is going beyond the normal sexual categorizations of porn, instead finding affinities between film styles, politics, and more conceptual ideas that emerge form the work. We also really wanted to balance the film

program with a thematic talks program (which we think might be a first for an erotic/porn festival). The talks program, “Documenting Sex,” is bridging porn with experimental film and trying to introduce the ideas of porn as a social document into the festival format. Of course, it was also important to have some industry presence, the generous support of PornHub.com, and other events by Cindy Gallop for example, will hopefully create a new model bringing together otherwise disparate strands. The inspiration is to really expand on what has been done before in other international porn film festivals around the world and create something new in New York.

What are some of the screenings and public programs that you are particularly excited about?
We are excited about all of the programs--they are each unique, provocative and refreshing. But if you were to push us, we think that the “Little Joe Presents…” screening will be excellent. The program will include Robert Blanchon’s film Let’s just kiss and say goodbye, which features a re-edit of multiple porn gay porn films where the sex is cut out. Aiming to look at the “politics in the room” around the porn film in general and in this case particularly the AIDS crisis--we think the film is quite a good metaphor for the festival as a whole. Along this vein, the panel discussion “Documenting Sex: Passionate Collections” will feature Marvin Taylor from the Fales Library and Karl McCool and other researchers and librarians to discuss issues around porn’s preservation, its value as a social document and what the archive may reveal or conceal through the often troubling categorization of porn. There is also an amazing program titled “United Beats” by the filmmaker Julian Curico, and also “Nosebleed City,” a whole program of Yaoi anime. Plus there’s Barbara Hammer discussing her earlier films and the ideas of erotica versus porn, there is Alfred Bruyas’s “Ulterior Pornography” program--there is so much and it’s really all excellent!

How do dialogues around HIV/AIDS make their way into this years screenings and programming, either explicitly or otherwise?
The program is a mix of current and archival films, which is also reflected in the talks program. There is also a fair amount of queer, gay and ’post-porn’ work represented. Certain films refer to HIV/AIDS explicitly, such as Blanchon’s, but it is interesting to compare this to how HIV/AIDS is still being referred to in a completely contemporary way by a filmmaker such as Vincent Chevalier, whose film Breeden will be screened at the festival. There is no explicit program about HIV/AIDS as an “issue,” but it remains as a strong theme throughout in terms of the works and their overall commitment to porn and sex work as a politically and socially grounded practice.

How have new technologies, like live streaming and broader dissemination of camera equipment, affected the porn industry and the artistry of porn?
Wow--it has completely transformed the porn industry! Having said that, porn has always found itself at the forefront of new mass technologies, such as the invention of photography, of VHS and home camera equipment. One product of streaming is that there is now an ever-increasing emphasis on “real sex” and “authenticity.” It would be wise to unpack these terms, especially considering that they are also used as marketing hooks to sell more videos. This is related to artistry--for example, how is the “real” constructed--but is a much wider issue than just porn: It comes down to how people document and distribute themselves and their social relations. The talks program “Documenting Sex” intends to dig deeper into these issues, looking at porn’s historical position as a document yet also at how contemporary filmmakers are working with these

ideas. The final event of the festival, “Narrating Our Sexual Selves,” will be an opportunity to explore some of these ideas and also to review what we can learn about this from this year’s festival program as a whole.

Promotional materials detail that you plan to transform Secret Project Robot, the venue for the NYC PFF, into a “42nd street 1980s cinema experience.” Can you describe this festival backdrop, and also discuss how NYC and Secret Project Robot are fitting contexts for a porn film festival?
As it will be featured in the “Passionate Collections” event, ’70s and ’80s New York saw an intimate connection between porn, experimental film and the art world. It is something of a tribute to this history but also a way to address how, although these practices seemed to have parted ways in the ’90s, they are in fact still as interrelated as ever before at a grassroots level of production and distribution. As we said at the beginning, the festival is aiming to reveal something that is usually hidden: It’s all already there--we just needed something special like the NYC Porn Film Festival to bring it all together!

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