



OUR SACRED LADY OF SMUT

by Heather Riley

Jan Hanson began working at the publishing house, Taschen, in 2001 after an extended courtship. She had already been a pornographer for over 25 years, during which she learned to titillate, turn on, tease and satiate men of all tastes. Her first magazine was *Puritan*, which she co-founded in 1976. Later, Hanson continued editing adult magazines including *Oui*, *Bust Out*, *Juggs* and *Leg Show*. Her work with *Leg Show* propelled the magazine's readership, creating what some consider the greatest fetish rag ever, and this is most likely what sparked Benedikt Taschen's interest.

Three years earlier, a colleague told Hanson the young publisher wished to meet her. Having been warned that he was "bored and decadent," Hanson arranged dinner at Lucky Chang's, a Manhattan eatery staffed entirely by Asian transsexuals, in an effort to impress him. The dinner was a disaster until Taschen suggested they go somewhere he could smoke a cigar. At a small Mexican restaurant down the street, the publisher opened up. As Hanson puts it, "it turns out he's not decadent, he's not bored—he's shy. He's young, he's shy and we became friends."

Over the next few years, Hanson met Taschen a few times annually, always picking "terrible restaurants...trying to impress him." She didn't have to worry. He clearly already respected her. Many of the regular *Leg Show* photographers, like Eric Kroll, Roy Stuart and Richard Kern, had already been collected in Taschen books. Benedikt Taschen is considered a tastemaker—one Hanson says while not mainstream manages to strike a lot of public interest with his projects. This is not dissimilar to the work Hanson does analyzing sexual desires and making them palatable for men. Both people deal with esoteric images and bring them into the public sphere.

Hanson wrote the introductions to a few of Taschen's books, but always declined doing an entire book, telling him, "Hey, I'm a pornographer. I like being a pornographer." However, after her publisher at *Juggs* and *Leg Show* passed away,

leaving the business to some extremely unsavory people, Hanson went to work for Taschen.

Hanson took to her job as Sexy Book Editor at Taschen extremely well. Her experience managing three monthly magazines taught her the value of hard work and multitasking, which was incredibly useful, as Benedikt Taschen likes people to work on many projects at once. Hanson's first book with the publisher was *Naked as a Jaybird*, a survey of a nudist magazine from the 1960s and 1970s. The book was neither a dry history lesson about the nudists, nor a salacious recount of the magazine. Instead, it treated *Jaybird* as it was: bacchanalian and liberated. She went on to produce the six volume *History of Men's Magazines*, which was lauded for its scope and for Hanson's brilliant ability to place sex and sexual imagery in the context of history.

Don't assume Hanson has given up being a pornographer, though. She is quick to point out how Taschen differs from other art book publishers. "Taschen has a long history of making sexually oriented books for heterosexual men, and if that sounds like, 'duh' you know...when you think about other art book companies they generally make books that [are more politically correct]. It's a very brave thing to actually make sex books for straight men."

The books Taschen produces are often oversized and beautiful anthologies. They are coffee-table books. They are books to be shared and displayed. These books are made for the public, unlike the mostly private and intimate functions of many of the publications Hanson had worked on previously. " ...The whole point of making sexual books and making them beautiful and high quality, wrapping them in the high production values that we do... [is] we make something that is perhaps as arousing as what's in the magazines but we help you to come out of the closet with it. [So] that you don't have to hide it, that you feel comfortable with it. We make it acceptable without sanitizing it."

Need an example? Her upcoming book, *The Big Book of Breasts*, celebrates America's fondest mammaries from the fifties, sixties and seventies. This oversized book collects 400 photographs of some of the most famous breasts, including Virginia Bell, Candy Kane, Norma Stitz (Get it? Enormous tits!) and Kitten Natividad. The book also features interviews with breast icons like Tempest Storm and Candy Barr. "Many women are not aware that

men still love and care about these women. But if you go on eBay and type in any of these names you'll find...[the photographs] are very expensive, very collectible."

Dian Hanson knows breasts. From what men like, to the boob's place in history, she has tits covered. Hanson points out in *The Big Book of Breasts* that the modern fascination with breasts had a part in the French Revolution. Prior to the revolution, French society had been divided up into the nursing class and the wet-nursing class. "It was just absolutely low-brow to ever give suck to your own child." Hanson states about 90% of Parisian women did not nurse. It was a topic in artistic and literary circles: Eugene Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People* depicts Liberty, dress dropped far below her bosom, in homage to the renewed fascination with the breast. "She is prepared to feed the nation with her breast bared." In *Emile*, the highly influential Jean-Jacques Rousseau advocated maternal breastfeeding as a return to nature. "[Rousseau] was fascinated with the idea of breast-feeding and it became a sort of fad among nation."

According to Hanson, though, this book isn't a history lesson. "*The Big Book of Breasts* is about big breasts. And it shocks me that there has never been a book like this before. There have been a number of books on breasts, but they have been primarily aimed at women, and sort of covered the breast in all of its guises." Hanson made this book specifically for men who love abundance. And without shame. The photos selected glorify the breast, showcasing them at every angle, in black and white and in color. "Always the driving force for me has been to find my audience and fine tune the product and get it just right for them. And that's my satisfaction. Are they going to look at it and turn bright red and their eyes are going to bulge? And that's what they do, just looking at the pictures that we have here. It's been very effective. Guys come in and they go, 'what are you working on?' and I go, 'oh, there's a mini-print of *The Big Book of Breasts*.' And they turn red. You know, 'You like that, do ya?'"

Many attribute Hanson's successful reworking of *Leg Show* to her attentiveness to her audience. She actually read their letters in an effort to understand what readers wanted. In a time when pornography was frowned upon, she treated fans of her magazines with respect and sensitivity. "I saw what people were thinking about pornography, about the people who read pornography, and then I saw the reality. I saw that the people...making these charges were wrong."



Her voice softens as she speaks of her readers. "And that men, for the most part, want what we do, want what women do. They want to fall in love, they want to be loved back, they want to be understood."

Considering Hanson's gentle view of its aficionados, it's strange that modern porn has become so extreme. Hanson blames competition within the relatively small pornographic community rather than consumer taste. "The broad mass of sexual consumers, let's call them 'men' for lack of a better word, really want something fairly simple

and garden-variety. They want to see attractive people fucking and sucking. Or, in magazines, they want to see good-looking women there, naked or wearing lingerie. Not that much has changed, but in order to get notoriety, to get the curiosity—you know: buy, sell—a lot of pornographers are just pushing, pushing, pushing.”

Hanson believes that while most people are curious about extremity, the more extreme the content the smaller the audience. She’s mostly joking when she asks me, “How many men do you know who you think want to see a woman choke while she’s giving a blowjob?” but her meaning is clear: not many. “It’s a low percentage. It really is. Personally, I don’t think the worse of men...like most human beings they want to be loved and they like to see sexual activity. But most people are not extremists and most men don’t hate women.”

Unlike Hanson, many pornographers have not taken the time to consider what their viewers even want, nor can they. “They don’t get feedback. They just say, ‘well that one’s sold.’ But it’s very hard for them to know exactly why it sold. So yeah, they keep pushing and pushing and pushing, and competing with each other. What really bothers me about it is that they’re getting women, particularly, to do things that aren’t healthy...risking their health, and their lives.”

Despite feeling as if many pornographers mistreat the women involved, Dian Hanson believes “it’s a really positive thing for women to recognize that their youth and their beauty and their sexuality does have a market value and to exploit themselves.” She’s found that many women rejected nude modeling because they felt ashamed only to have children and feel they wasted their looks. “I’ve heard so many women say, ‘if I had known [what would happen] I would have done some nude modeling when I was young and beautiful, so that I could have used what I had. I could have taken advantage of this gift.’”

She mentions Project_ISM (check out www.ishotmyself.com for more) as an example of how women are taking control. The website features self-portraits sent in by young women interested in sharing their bodies. The photographs, a combination of porn and art, show how many women are intrigued by the sex world.

According to Hanson, the sex industry being a “boy’s network” is yet another misconception. Many photo shoots

that Hanson directed were entirely staffed with females. The way she describes it, they sound like an old fashioned quilting party. “It would be a female photographer, and I would be there directing and dressing them, and a female make-up artist, and female model and we’d be laughing and thinking of ways to make money from turning on men.”

She insists a sexually mixed community has always been in the best interests of employees and employers. “Even when I got into it in 1976, publishers had the idea that women were good things, that it would be good to have a female editor, that it would be good to have a female designer, that it was good to have a female photographer because they, supposedly, understood male sexuality.”

In fact, many women who start out as models and actresses become producers and photographers. Eric Kroll, another editor at Taschen’s “World of Sex” department, and Hanson recently completed a book of erotic photography that features the work of ex-playmate Lisa Boyle. Like other models-turned-photographers, Lisa started out simply watching the photographer and learning how they directed the shoot. In a way, modeling is an apprenticeship for many of these young women.

Pornography nurtures in strange ways. For Hanson, who began working in the industry at the age of 24, it has only cultivated her curiosity for sex. And in her 30 years, she still hasn’t tired of sex and sexual imagery. “I’ve never gotten burned out...I’ve heard a lot of people say, ‘oh, you burn out and you don’t want to have sex anymore.’ That never happened to me. I feel like I’m a person who is just...curious about it. I do kinda credit porn with giving me positive feelings about men.”

These positive feelings are a result of reading men’s letters to the magazines. Figuring out what really turned them on gave Hanson a profound insight into male sexuality and desire. Of looking at porn with men, she says, “Most men are not used to getting to look at sexual material with a woman...When men look at sex materials in front of a woman they are afraid. If the woman is happy with it and treats him well they’re usually very very happy, but it doesn’t mean they’re not still nervous.”

While this may not seem groundbreaking, it says something about Hanson that she is constantly aware of men’s level of comfort, whether distress or desire. Her understanding suggests just how in tune she is with male sexuality.



when *Playboy* debuted, was devoted to typically masculine activities—camping, fishing, racecars and the like. “Then Hefner comes along in his shiny silk charmeuse pajamas, and tells guys, ‘you can get chicks by buying the right products.’ You know—you buy a good stereo, you buy a good wine, you buy some jazz records, you read a little bit, you learn good conversation. You become an urbanite and you can get chicks.”

While the rabbit was the official emblem of *Playboy*, Hefner was the real symbol. Publishers had always hidden behind pseudonyms. In being upfront, Hefner let his readers know that enjoying these kind of magazines was part of being a modern man. It must have been a relief for every man in America, but especially for “all the schmucks out there who, you know, are not big brawny he-men...And it wasn’t a bad thing for women, either, to posit a new kind of man who would actually be more feminine.”

When asked if *Jiggs* ever featured women with small breasts she laughs. “There are many many men who prefer small breasts but they are not [obsessed]. The men who are obsessed with the breast as the favorite part of the female anatomy are usually not. Men who like small breasts are usually looking at an overall package, an overall look. And very often they’re men who like youthful women...Men kinda imagine that women’s breasts just keep growing...so that here she is, she’s 18 years old, and her breasts are little because they’re just growing.” It’s remarkable how Hanson compares the specific fetish to its opposite, not only recognizing the difference between the two but also the reason why. Hanson’s understanding of specific desires sets her apart from many of her colleagues.

Hugh Hefner also went beyond the standards set in his day. “You can’t say anything against Hugh Hefner. He invented the men’s lifestyle magazine.” Hefner wasn’t the first man to put nudes in a men’s magazine, Hanson says, but he was the first to make it intellectual as well. *Modern Man*, the leading men’s magazine in America

This more feminine man often becomes like a child when it comes to the sexualized female body. While discussing an upcoming project with Richard Kern, called *Action*, the photographer went gaga talking about what would be on the accompanying DVD. “He said to me ‘you know, I had this girl with kind of big floppy boobs jump rope and I could have watched her jump rope for ten minutes.’” It’s this sort of giddiness that makes Hanson exclaim, “He’s like the eternal 14-year-old boy when it comes to women!”

Almost any man who comes into contact with the projects Hanson works on will be reduced to a similar state. The next such project is a forthcoming book on Vanessa del Rio. Del Rio was one of the first porn actresses of color with a huge following. Vanessa del Rio “was the most enthusiastic porn star ever...[She had a] huge following of grateful men who were just able to see that she genuinely liked sex.”

Dian Hanson is like del Rio in that way. There are thousands upon thousands of men who have jacked off to, who have dreamed of and who have fallen in love with the women Hanson laid out in the pages of her books and magazines. The world is a far sexier place because of her.

All photos courtesy Taschen and A.R.S./yesgirls.