

Different strokes

Dian Hanson has spent a lifetime picture editing porn; **Bruno Ceschel** is launching an art magazine devoted to eroticism, so we asked them to go head to head.

Interview by Bruno Ceschel

When I was at university I earned the moniker pornocrat for devoting an issue of the student magazine to sex. I'm currently working on an art magazine called *Stroke* that aims at stimulating readers' genitals as well as their brains. But my experience pales in comparison with Dian Hanson, whose lifelong career in pornographic print started in 1976 with the New York title *Puritan*. She went on to edit two of America's most famous fetish magazines, *Juggs* and *Leg Show*, which, as the names suggest, showed women with extremely large breasts and women in nylons, corsets, pantyhose, stockings and high heels. She worked on them for 15 years, making them both commercially successful and highly respected. Then the internet came along and her company changed, so she left to become the erotic titles commissioning editor for **Taschen**.

'It's extremely sad that porn magazines are dying out', she tells me on the phone from LA. 'In around 1997, when the internet became ubiquitous, sales started going down, by 10% a year at first. Now only people who are sentimentally attached to porn magazines still buy them. At one time people would pay anything to get their hands on pornography because it was so unattainable; now everyone expects to get porn for free.'

Free for all

I remember the power of porn magazines very well – when I was a child, my friends and I would steal them from the village shop, then cycle to a remote place in the fields to look at them. The images disclosed a world we found as scary as exciting, and which we knew nothing about. But Hanson, who has been the queen of pornogra-

phy for decades, knows it well, and knows the damage currently being wreaked on it. 'I know lots of porn performers and they are all suffering, all looking for side jobs now,' Hanson says. 'Their websites are losing money. Even Vanessa Del Rio [a star of 1970s porn] has been affected by the recent economic crash. It's so sad.'

And, she says, the performers aren't the only ones suffering – the quality of the photography is also in decline. 'Good material is drying out because the paying outlet for the photos is drying out,' she says. 'In the past the photographer would work for magazines and that would fund his daily life and give him money to work on his own projects. Now, as is the case in the music industry, photographers are expected to do their most interesting work for free, which of course doesn't really happen.'

As a result there are fewer photographers doing interesting erotic stills these days, and those who do generally get their money from somewhere else. Terry Richardson, for example, has managed to combine fashion and porn in his career, combining elements of both in many of his shots. 'I like his work,' says Hanson.

'I looked through his entire archive when I was working on his book [*Terryworld*] – I loved seeing the beautiful young aspiring model coming into his studio to get her shot taken for her portfolio, and then Terry showing up in the picture naked. Suddenly the two of them are down on the floor, with her sucking Terry's huge dick, and then you see her after with her hair messed up and her make up smirked and cum all over her dress, you can't get better than that. Unfortu-

nately most of these picture don't have releases, so they can't be published.' Some of these more personal photos are published in a book called *Kinosh* (Damiani, 2005).

'I also like Ellen Von Unwerth's work,' says Hanson. 'She is a tortured Helmut Newton. Because she is a woman and she work in fashion she has access to beautiful faces, and can put them into erotic situations. To me the faces are really what count. The faces are always going to trump the bodies. It doesn't matter how good the body is, if the face is not appealing it cuts down the erotic impact. People like to think, "Who is too good to be naked, to be in an erotic situation?" It is always the people with good-looking faces. It's far more transgressive and arousing to see a good-looking person being defiled.'

Sexual revolution

I agree with Hanson – there are far fewer interesting photographers working in the field now, which is why I've been working on *Stroke* with art director Tony DeLuca. We want to re-establish the relationship between artists and arousal, and are asking five photographers per issue to produce a sexually provocative body of work. Most of them have never shot this kind of image before and we consider the magazine an intellectual exercise, rather than a straightforward porn title. And that's where my work differs from Hanson's, because her mission is to understand and empathise with an audience's sexual desires and fantasies, then provide the best photographic material to meet them.

Hanson a great and sophisticated editor, but she's also at the service of her readers' desires. Currently she's editing *The Big Book of Butts* (part of a series of over-sized books on male and female body parts that has previously focused on penises, breasts and legs), and has a photograph of a nice big butt as her screen saver – she's totally immersing

herself in the world of men who like big butts, trying to understand who they are and what they like.

To me what's interesting about arousing material is its power to unsettle, to break the norm and to provoke, and I want to educate people about one of our most basic needs. I believe that we only learn what we like when it's offered to us, so I'm including male and female, straight and queer work to give men and women the tools to explore their desires, just as the internet allows them to do. Hanson agrees, but she also warns me that many people will find it off-putting.

'In the 1970s, after the sexual revolution, porn publishers thought that men would all become bisexual and started publishing magazines catering for them,' she says. 'They all were a huge failure. If you get turned on by women wearing stockings and you buy a book with photos of legs you might be fine with girls wearing undies, but find that anything else breaks the arousal flow.'

Hanson has a near-scientific approach and it's undoubtedly successful – Taschen's mass-market erotic books are best sellers. 'At the moment I'm working on a book about photographs of black women for men who fetishise their big butts,' she says. 'Most of the photos emphasise the exceptional size of the women's butts and are Photoshopped to make them even bigger, rounder and more perfect. The book designer wanted to have 30 pages of colour in a book of 288 pages, playing off the colours of the images. I told him we would have an enraged audience if he did it, because if people don't get a photograph on every single page of their sex material, they feel ripped off.'

'I edit Richard Kern's publications and when we left few black pages in one of them, people called us saying that there was

something wrong with their book. It's because they link black pages with art books, they don't link it to porn. People who buy a Taschen book might not buy porn magazines, they might think of themselves as having sophisticated tastes, but they still buy it to get off.'

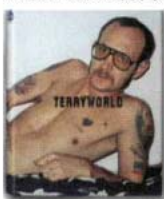
Environmental issues

The context in which we consume arousing material is clearly very important. Personally I consume mine online, where most of the work is amateur photography and video. I've even started an online project where I 'borrow' images from Facebook accounts and re-contextualise them with an erotic charge. Hanson's interested in the project, but says it's a commercial non-starter. 'We all love amateur photography, don't we? But it's very difficult to use it

in publishing because you can't clear the copyright.' She has a point – that's exactly why my online project is unofficial.

Plus, she adds, people's pornographic preferences are often informed by their earliest experiences. 'I'm now in my late fifties and I find that the things that stimulated me in my youth are still the most arousing,' she says. 'Most people like to go back to things for nostalgic reasons. It's easy to find images of double penetration on the internet, but if I look at the first shot I ever saw of double-penetration, it will take me back to the shock and arousal I experienced the first time.'

It's an interesting and unexpectedly sweet point to end on – after decades of empathetically listening to and providing for readers' sexual desires, for Hanson the first time is still the most explosive. *BJP*



In print

Bob's World: The Life and Boys of AMG's Bob Mizer (ISBN: 978-3-8365-1230-5).

The Big Book of Legs (ISBN: 978-3-8365-0188-0).

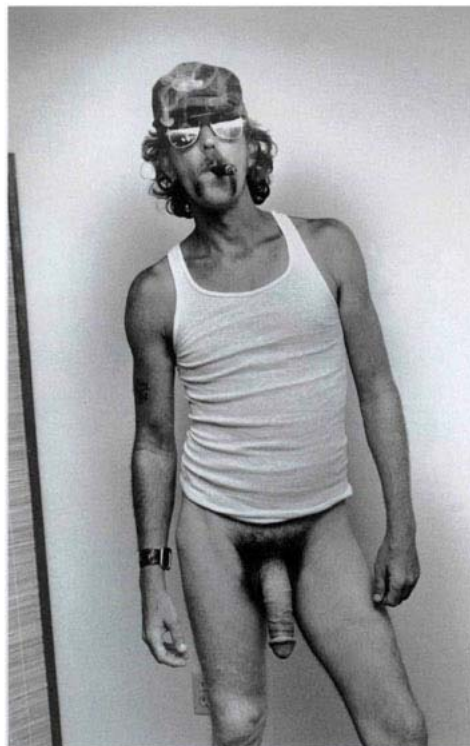
The Big Penis Book (ISBN: 978-3-8365-0213-9)

Vanessa del Rio (ISBN: 978-3-8365-2109-3). All of the above are priced £35 and published by Taschen.

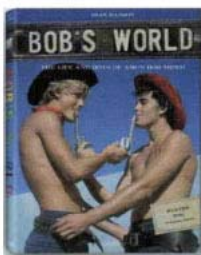
Terryworld (ISBN: 978-3-8365-0191-0) is priced £13, and is published by Taschen. Taschen.com

Stroke will launch its first online project in March, and its first print edition in summer.

stroke-magazine.com.



'It's far more transgressive and arousing to see a good-looking person being defiled.'



Opposite: Chris Dickerson and Bunker by Bob Mizer. From *Bob's World*, edited by Dian Hanson.

Left: A date with Vanessa, courtesy of LBO Entertainment. From *Vanessa del Rio*, edited by Dian Hanson.



Below: A tale of two front covers – the different approaches of Dian Hanson and Bruno Ceschel can be seen in the front covers of their erotic magazines. Left, a dummy for Ceschel's forthcoming title, *Stroke*, image © JH Engstrom. Right, *Leg Show*, edited by Hanson from January 1998.