PORNOGRAPHY FEMALE

BY **ELISA MENCARELLI**

Mid-2000s. MTV, Britney Spears, summer festivals, low-rise jeans, advertisement and the Internet: a fertile ground, still waiting to be explored. Those were the years when we early teenagers eagerly admired from TV to WWW, discovering a whole new universe with endless constellations of free-to-download content. Afternoons went by in relentless search of multimedia. Then, after an exhausting wait, the film I craved so much was finally there, waiting for me. I savored the thrill, feeling like a pirate in the web. I clicked "play". The first porn movie I ever saw started. It took only a few seconds for the magic to vanish. Caught between curiosity and despair, I kept watching with one question in my head: "Why?" As a thirteen-year-old, born and raised in the Italian countryside, I simply didn't get it. What was supposed to be exciting about that? Why should that turn me on? A mix of embarrassment and disgust annihilated any stirring. Situations, positions, storylines, performances: it all seemed so mechanical to me. Almost boring. Full of doubts and perplexities, I came to the conclusion that pornography was not for me. And I wondered how many girls, women and teenagers had gone through my same experience. How many, like me, felt conflicting emotions as they watched images that seemed purely athletic, and which claimed to be hot but ended up being nothing but chauvinist projections.
I didn't know them, but I know now. And at least one woman had the same thought: Erika Lust. "I saw my first porn film when I was a teenager, and I remember feeling conflicted," she remembers. "Those videos urged me to have sex, yet at the same time were not engaging with my sexuality. I felt there was something wrong in truly enjoyable: I felt there was something wrong in their content: they were clearly not filmed for a possible female audience."
As a director, writer, screenwriter, entrepreneur and above all a woman, Erika Lust has courageously entered a deafening reality mainly made up of vulgar content. A sector made to satisfy market dynamics, devoid of any artistic or narrative sensitivity.
But while I matured a better awareness of my body and my sexuality over the years, strengthened by more than satisfactory experiences with the opposite sex, what happened to the porn industry? Many adult films are merely disposable content, but one emerging trend – to which Erika Lust adheres – strives to make erotism an expressive means, capable not only of provoking and arousing, but also of producing high-quality images, humor, stories, details and scenes. And more. Erika's goal is, first and foremost, to re-write the rules in which women are objects of male desire. The crucial difference between her movies and mainstream products lies exactly in how she defines her ideal audience: "It is usually assumed that it will be men, and that any women present are there only to fulfill their every wish; this generates a sort of self-consciousness in female viewers, and especially in younger ones, that makes them feel inadequate in their sexual performances. And so, gradually, I started thinking that something had to be done to make us feel more comfortable with porn. I never imagined I would be able to start my own production company and contribute to this change." Erika Lust's first source of inspiration was Linda Williams's book, *Hardcore: Power, Pleasure, and "The Frenzy of the Visible"*, in which the author claims porn is a way to communicate specific ideas on gender and sex, none of them actually reflecting truth. From this point of view, hardcore films are much more than sex scenes: it's not just

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about penises and vaginas. They are at the center of a much wider and more complex debate, touching on sensitive issues such as gender theory, inequality between the sexes and the male gaze. So, is a different kind of porn possible?
After studying film direction, Lust moved to Barcelona and realized she wanted to devote herself to cinema. "When I was asked to write a short, I immediately thought of an adult film! I wanted to create something different: a movie according to my tastes, which could express my values and show the importance of female pleasure."
That's how *The Good Girl* was born: a humorous reinterpretation of the classic pizza delivery guy porn. "I wasn't expecting any particular reaction. Then I realized I reached over two million downloads in less than two months! I got emails from people all over the world, telling me they loved the movie and asking me when the next one was coming out. That's when I realized many others were looking for alternatives to the "usual" online porn."
It was the beginning of Erika's mission: to democratize pornography. "It's particularly important for us to have women, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) and LGBTQIA+ people in front and behind the camera, on set and in our offices. We represent a vision of sex as a natural part of life." Today, Erika steers X Confessions, founded in 2013, with a virtual headquarters (xconfessions.com) that puts the audience front and center as regular people, including Erika, see their confessions and pleasure turn into erotic short films. The website has developed into a community of directors, artists and viewers in search of all kinds of erotic experiences. It is part of a new wave of ethical adult cinema production: its supporters help challenge the dictatorship of "traditional" mass-produced pornography, and encourage awareness in consumers interested in adult entertainment.
"I want the camera to follow the details that are part of the sexual act or anticipate it, the sensations, the chemistry between the performers, their bodies touching and the evolution of their perceptions during sex. How do they seduce each other and how do they ignite each other's instincts? What does touching a specific part of the body cause in the other person?"
Female-friendly porn has no tolerance for scenes of abuse, violence or coercive acts: everything happens with respect and ethics, highlighting any desire – even the most transgressive. "For me, porn is empowerment. It helped me explore my sexuality, and become more responsible. I admire various women directors, including Candida Royalle. She was the first, with her Femme Productions, to recognize women as a legitimate audience for porn. She challenged the stereotypes and misogynous predictability of porn meant for men. Then, in the 1980s, queer women started to talk about lesbian eroticism: it had been produced exclusively by men until Fatale Video, the first lesbian porn video company, soon followed by SIR (Sex, Indulgence, and Rock 'n' Roll) Productions. They were the first to show how women could actually orgasm on their own, instead of being objects of male desire. In addition, they showed sexual practices that were almost unknown up until then, such as female ejaculation and other ways to feel physical pleasure. 'Perverations' included."

In this new interpretation, pornography can – and has to be – a tool to discover and explore oneself, portraying with elegance the infinite ways we can love and feel pleasure, and showing women in all of their complexity. Think about directors such as Lars von Trier, Pedro Almodóvar, Sam Taylor-Johnson. Acclaimed by both critics and audiences, their works are not considered porn movies but examples of erotic auteur cinema. Yet the point of view is still the same, and it belongs to men. These are movies by men and for men. But in a world that clamors for inclusion, other women screenwriters – Anna Span, Tristan Taormino, Cwiddle, to mention but a few – have committed to finding new codes to free the female image from stereotypes. No trout pouts, fake tits and firm asses. Bodies are finally back to being bodies. The sexual act is made up of gestures, caresses, sighs, looks. Anatomy is poetry. Movies have a story, dialogues are more articulated and sexual pleasure is reciprocal. The keyword is: credibility. Anyone can see themselves reflected in the scenes – no super silicone dolls nor scenes of grotesque exasperation allowed. That's why we need porn and porn needs us.
Now, sit back and let us Erika Lust film carry you away. "Imagine a scene. A different scene. I see an attractive man driving fast across the city, on wet roads. He is going to see a woman he met at a party. It was a fun, naughty evening... they locked at each other, barely touched and... Out!"