Tribeca Gallery apexart Prepares Porn Exhibition; Porn Stars to Attend Opening

The non-profit gallery apexart has carved out a niche for thoughtfully engaging topics conventionally thought to be incompatible with art in its exhibition program — from last month’s show on North Korea, to a terrific Simon Critchley-curated show two summers ago about World Cup soccer — and this week it confronts perhaps its most slippery subject yet: pornography. The exhibition “Consent,” curated by porn critic Lynsey G and opening at the Church Street space on Wednesday, features interviews with participants at every level of the porn industry, from actors and producers down to critics and, of course, consumers.

And, as Lynsey G states clearly and continually in her terrific curator’s essay, the boundaries we conventionally maintain between sectors of the adult entertainment industry are illusory:

Whether we make porn, watch porn, love porn, or hate porn, we are all enmeshed in it. An industry that makes billions more than America’s largest sports industries, that has produced an estimated 370 million videos that now exist on the Internet, that dominates a solid quarter of our web searches, surely ties us together more tightly than religion, politics, activism, or — it’s true — art. The sheer numbers tell the story of our involvement. More of us watch porn than any other form of entertainment, and we are all taking something away from it, whether it be orgasm or our entire understanding of sex.

Accordingly, many of the industry’s performers and producers will be in attendance at tomorrow’s opening — as will many of its customers.

As part of the exhibition, apexart will also hold a double-feature screening on April 4 of both the 1967 Mike Nichols film “The Graduate” and the 2011 film, “The Graduate XXX: A Paul Thomas Parody.” Thomas and producer Dan Reilly will be in attendance.

For those suspicious of the show’s seriousness, this passage from Lynsey G’s essay is especially sharp:

Porn isn’t usually trying to make a statement in the way that art is. But that doesn’t mean a statement isn’t being made. Let’s be honest: for many of us — myself included — porn is a companion during some very vulnerable moments: it sees us in all our pared-down perversity, naked, trembling, wide-eyed, and alone. We show it our most hidden sensibilities and allow it to fill in the blanks of our fantasies. We are sometimes more honest with pornography than with our intimate partners: we tell it what we really desire without fear of judgment. And that is a powerful connection; the accommodating offerings of smut that we watch during our defenseless moments must have some impact on our ideas about ourselves, our bodies, and our sex. But we let its impact go unremarked upon more often than not.

“Consent” opens at apexart tomorrow (reception 6–8pm) and continues through May 12.

— Benjamin Sutton