

# The porn identity

The world appears to be starved of feminist pornography. Reactions to documentary filmmaker Mia Engberg's underground project *Dirty Diaries* have flooded in from all corners of the globe. Even American talk show host Conan O'Brien has joined the debate.

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## FACTS DIRTY DIARIES

Can you make feminist porn? That was the question Mia Engberg asked herself when, with funding from the Swedish Film Institute, she gave 12 women directors the task of creating an erotic film based on their own preferences and personalities. The result is a collection of various interpretations of the genre from the soft and sensual to hardcore, hetero and homo, mixing humour with seriousness.

Many of the films play with pornographic stereotypes, such as Joanna Rytel's *Flasher Girl*, in which she exposes herself in a variety of public settings.



"I'm still shocked over the amount of attention we've attracted," says Mia Engberg. "I've always regarded *Dirty Diaries* as a minor underground project, but now distributors and journalists from all over the world are getting in touch. My own distributor is currently negotiating with five or six different countries, including the US. And every article that gets written generates hundreds of blog responses. You can work on some films as much as you like without anyone writing about them. But this is the exact opposite: it feels like a snowball that just keeps on getting bigger."

**PRODUCER AND DOCUMENTARY** filmmaker Mia Engberg seems truly bewildered by the way her mail box has been inundated with both praise and condemnation since the premiere of *Dirty Diaries*. Interest in the twelve pornography films directed by women filmmakers seems boundless. Even Conan O'Brien's talk show on America's NBC has joined the debate.

"That's almost the coolest thing that's happened to me in my whole career. The fact that they've acknowledged our little project with films made on mobile phones on such a massive show is quite amazing. Not only that, they made their own Dirty Diary, where a woman's highest pleasure is getting her feet massaged while she watches Oprah Winfrey!"

An established Swedish documentary maker, Mia Engberg began wondering a few years ago about the way sex is depicted on film. The upshot was her lesbian erotic film *Selma & Sofie* (2001). Re-



turning to the theme in *Dirty Diaries*, she has opted instead to be the producer, and to bring other directors and artists onboard.

"I wanted a range of voices and viewpoints. If you're going to bite off a subject like feminist porn, a project needs diversity. My task has been to help my directors to realise their ideas, and many of them have made films that I might not have dared to make myself."

**Do you think that attitudes to feminist porn have changed since you made *Selma & Sofie*?**

"We made that film with strict guidelines as to what it shouldn't contain: no exploitation, no breast





***“It feels like a snowball that just keeps on getting bigger”***

implants, no erect penises. But in the end there was nothing left. Fear and caution don't exactly encourage creativity. Sexuality comes from another source: you have to be allowed to tear down the bar-

riers and taboos. So this time round I said: 'just dig out all the things that turn you on and let them run free'."

**Do you yourself find the films a turn-on?**

"I have to think back to when I first saw them, because now I've been sitting for hours with the technical crew working on things like the right shade of red for a vagina. But, yes... there are several of the films I find a turn-on, even though most of them are more thought-provoking and provocative than erotic. All of them are based on a cinematic or conceptual idea. That's part of the experiment. Can you make an interesting film about sex?" ■

#### **FACTS MIA ENGBERG**

**Born:** 1970 in Stockholm.

**Background:** Has worked as a documentary filmmaker since the mid 90s. Her films often feature those on the edge of society: gays, skinheads, vegans, gender-benders and street children. Hit the headlines with her lesbian love film *Selma & Sofie* (2002).

**Currently:** She has produced *Dirty Diaries*, a collection of feminist pornography shorts by 12 filmmakers.