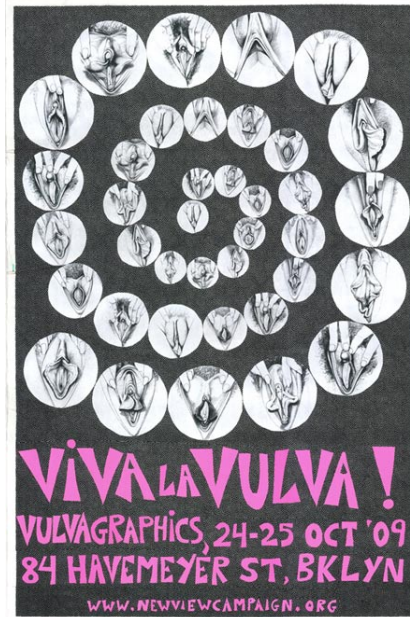


VULVAGRAPHICS
2009
FINAL REPORT

PART I: BACKGROUND
AND
PREPARATION



Background

Since 1999 the New View Campaign has challenged the medicalization of women's sexuality largely by focusing on how the PHARMACEUTICAL INDUSTRY constructs new sexual standards and problems and promotes for-profit solutions. This project continues as Big Pharma and its friends show no let-up in their claims about what women want and need and promote new assessments and treatments. New drugs are produced and marketed all the time and we must be vigilant wherever there is pseudoscience and exploitation.

However, in 2007 we began to learn about a new form of medicalization - "genital cosmetic surgery" - and about how women's appreciation of their bodies and sexual organs is manipulated by franchise-oriented surgeons and sensational media. We published academic articles and collaborated with scholars in New Zealand (Ginny Braun) and London (Lih-Mei Liao) whose critiques and empirical studies have appeared in medical, feminist, and social science publications.

In November, 2008, we organized a well-attended street protest in front of the Manhattan office of a cosmetic genital surgeon. We walked in a circle for 2 hours, displaying colorful signs ("Stop marketing discontent" "Genital surgery - satisfaction not guaranteed")

and chanting appropriate slogans (“Long live long labia” “More research, less marketing”). We also performed a piece of guerrilla theater called “Dr. IFFA and the 2 vulvas” highlighting the interest-free-financing-available (IFFA) aspect of the surgery business. We uploaded [photos](#) of that demonstration to our new view website.

Preparing for the 2008 protest included developing a resource [webpage](#) and studying relevant professional and governmental organizations and academic literature. Our protest attracted [national media](#) attention, we were invited to speak about it on college campuses and international conferences, and we were strongly encouraged to continue our activism and analysis.

Planning the 2009 Event

The 2008 event protested the erasure of female sexual diversity by media and new medical industries. This year we elected to focus on *celebrating* those who support and encourage female sexual diversity - namely, artists. We designed an art-gallery-cum-activist event that would include explicit genital diversity depictions by contemporary artists. The event would also include a discussion with invited panelists, an activist component, a display of books that show a range of female genitals, an informative [webpage](#), and outreach to sexuality blogs and websites.

The Artists

It was not difficult to find contemporary artists who had created representations of diverse female vulvas, reinforcing our belief that the world of art is more friendly to explicit sexual images than the worlds of health and science. We contacted artists in the New York area who could bring their work to our [Brooklyn event space](#), and all our wonderful contributing artists and their websites are listed on our VULVAGRAPHICS [webpage](#). They include photographers, videographers, and crafts-artists. We also included one beautiful historic painting, [Gustave Courbet's "Origin of the World"](#), because its long history of censorship and condemnation symbolizes the difficulty society has with the explicit depiction of the female vulva.

We displayed two groups of crafted vulvas, including the work of an [International Vulva Knitting Circle](#) which was formed specifically following our 2008 protest event. In addition, members of our

planning group created a graphic structure called “The Fitting Room” which satirized genital cosmetic surgeons’ websites by allowing visitors to first be tempted by reading the outsized claims of the surgeons, then to look through a selection of “after” images, and finally to “try one on” in front of a mirror.

The Activism

We considered varied types of activism for the genital diversity event: petitions at the front table demanding that professional and governmental groups support monitoring and mandatory research on genital surgeries, letters to legislatures encouraging explicit imagery in sex education, etc. There was no shortage of ideas.

Ultimately, we chose action in the spirit of the artist-celebration heart of the event: an opportunity for participants to create artistic diverse vulvas themselves. We first printed copies of [Betty Dodson's vulva drawings](#) on one side of a piece of paper. The reverse side was an invitation for the letter’s recipient to help organize local activism (e.g., a film screening, health education panel, brown bag lecture, knitting circle, etc) to further celebrate female genital diversity. We gave volunteers crayons and asked them to color in one or more of the vulvas and indicate the name of a college or university to receive their vulva drawing/letter.



PART II:
VULVAGRAPHICS
Event
OCT 24-25

Day One: Saturday Evening Celebration

The event space was set up throughout Saturday by a team of volunteers working with the artists, and we opened at 6PM (a few came at 5:30 and were sent away to have pizza!). To our delight and, to be frank, a bit of surprise, the Saturday evening 6-9PM celebration of female genital diversity was a jam-packed, 4+ hour packed-to-the-rafters party. It exceeded our expectations, to be sure, though not our hopes!

Daniel Ward, partner of one of our planning group, DJ-ed with 2 turntables and a laptop. The music made it festive but not too loud to talk. We went through 3 cases of wine, and plenty of olives, cheese and crackers. The weather was ghastly - torrential rain. It was like the special effects from a 1930s movie. The plastic-lined umbrellas basket near the front door overflowed. It got hotter and hotter in the gallery even though we opened both the front door and a back window. Yet, somehow, it didn't really matter. You can see photos from the party [here](#).

People loved the art and stood around discussing it and photographing themselves and each other. Dozens and dozens of vulvas were drawn with crayons at the activism table and a few VULVAGRAPHICS posters and "LOVE YOUR VULVA" buttons were sold. Repeatedly, we observed a person walk in the door, say, "oh, wow, what is that" and 1/4-1/2 hour later say, "well, what's wrong with that, anyway?" or even "that is amazing, they [the vulvas] are so beautiful."

Midway in the evening, we held a little ceremony to introduce the planning group, thank the volunteers, and welcome the attenders. We wanted especially to honor graphic artist and sex coach Betty Dodson to whom we gave a certificate reading, "*The New View Campaign honors Betty Dodson for her invaluable contributions to women's sexual emancipation through the artistic celebration of female genital diversity.*" Betty made a few remarks about how her orgasms and sex life were still going strong at 80!! She also commented that her website, and particularly the page we were so pleased with, "The Genital Art Gallery," were currently subject to censorship by new federal regulations requiring a photocopy of a drivers' license from anyone whose genitalia appear online! Here's the webpage with the Department of Justice [regulations](#). It provides a

window into some of the political issues surrounding the celebration of genital diversity in this country.

The party continued long after the announced closing time!!

Day Two: Sunday -- Exhibit + Brunch Salon



We set up the room on Sunday with a large table with bagels, cream cheese and fruit in the center. From about 1:30-3:30PM we held a “brunch salon” which turns out to be speakers, Q&A, interactive discussion, and eating. Who knew?

The first speaker was Leonore Tiefer, convenor of the New View Campaign, who reviewed the history of the Campaign’s involvement with Female Genital Cosmetic Surgery (FGCS) and how the new FGCS industry exemplified many discreditable aspects of the medicalization of women’s sexuality. She introduced the other organizers of the event and described the intellectual and political thought and effort that went into creating VULVAGRAPHICS.

Dr. Tiefer then introduced Jon Knowles, Director of Public Information of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America (PPFA). He spoke about how printed PPFA materials about puberty do not emphasize genital diversity, although there is a clever *online* graphic (based on the ubiquitous drawings of Betty Dodson!) that does illustrate genital variety. He said he was inspired by our event to

initiate a new brochure called “You and Your Vulva.” That could be a major outcome of Vulvagraphics!

Then, National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC) Arts Program Director Svetlana Mintcheva discussed arts censorship around the country. Depictions of women’s genitals are illegal to show in public, she emphasized to the surprised group, because of the complex current legal definition of “obscenity.” Even pictures of flowers can be and have been removed from a public space if someone complains that they are “suggestive” and “offensive.”

Meika Loe, Associate Professor of Sociology and Women's Studies at Colgate University, a participant in New View Campaign activities from their beginning in 1999, then facilitated the discussion. Dr. Loe had arranged for a busload of Colgate students from her women’s studies class to visit the event, and the students clearly enjoyed the exhibits, the activism of making vulva drawings, and the brunch salon.

The rest of the day saw groups, couples, and individuals coming in to check out the event. *Many* women whose vulvas were part of Alexandra Jacoby’s photo exhibit came by with their friends! The activism table was a hub of activity, with people delighted to participate in the event by making their own artistic contribution. Ultimately, over 100 vulvas were crayoned and letters addressed. At about 4PM six donated pizzas from [Kenny’s Trattoria](#) in the neighborhood arrived! It was nice to have something warm and tasty to eat while we dismantled the whole kit and caboodle. By 8PM the gallery was emptied out and reset to its original spartan appearance.

Preliminary Assessment

The event was successful by many measures: size and enthusiasm of the turnout, diversity of attendees, participation at the activism table, feedback to the organizers, lack of any difficulties or hassles. People wanted to know when was the next event and would we be taking the exhibits on the road.

We sold fewer posters and buttons than we had hoped, but they will continue to be available through a special page on our [website](#). We collected \$171 at the front table, and have also received \$880 in donations and poster sales through the mail (New View Campaign □ POB 1845 □ New York, NY 10159-1845 □ USA). The total expenses for the event, including rental, webpage, food (coffee, wine,

cheese, bagels, fruit, and paper goods), printing, Dodson gift, activism materials, art-hanging materials, posters, and buttons, added up to about \$1950. So we need to sell more posters and buttons and to get more donations!

[Photos](#) of the event are on the New View website and a video featuring interviews with participants and organizers will appear soon. Just for the record, the project took just about 2 months to plan and execute, with weekly meetings of our all-volunteer feminist team.

The Planning Committee:

Silvia Fernandez
Amber Hui
Michelle Leve (missing from photo below)
Rachel Liebert
Leonore Tiefer

