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Pin-Up Grrrls: Feminism, Sexuality, Popular Culture



Synopsis

Subverting stereotypical images of women, a new generation of feminist artists is remaking the pin-up, much as Annie Sprinkle, Cindy Sherman, and others did in the 1970s and 1980s. As shocking as contemporary feminist pin-ups are intended to be, perhaps more surprising is that the pin-up has been appropriated by women for their own empowerment since its inception more than a century ago. *Pin-Up Grrrls* tells the history of the pin-up from its birth, revealing how its development is intimately connected to the history of feminism. Maria Elena Buszek documents the genre's 150-year history with more than 100 illustrations, many never before published. Beginning with the pin-up's origins in mid-nineteenth-century carte-de-visite photographs of burlesque performers, Buszek explores how female sex symbols, including Adah Isaacs Menken and Lydia Thompson, fought to exert control over their own images. Buszek analyzes the evolution of the pin-up through the advent of the New Woman, the suffrage movement, fanzine photographs of early film stars, the Varga Girl illustrations that appeared in *Esquire* during World War II, the early years of *Playboy* magazine, and the recent revival of the genre in appropriations by third-wave feminist artists. A fascinating combination of art history and cultural history, *Pin-Up Grrrls* is the story of how women have publicly defined and represented their sexuality since the 1860s.

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review. Weaving commentary from academia with testimony from such sources as Salt N Pepa and sex worker Annie Sprinkle, Buszek's authorial debut shows how the evolution of the pin-up is inextricably tied to the feminists movement, for better and worse, providing formal and (as she demonstrates) well-deserved appreciation to an art form that's rarely given much respect. The term "pin-up girl," though popularly associated with a particular time period (pre- and post-WWII) and image (buxom and half-naked with a come-hither expression), had its first incarnation in the early days of photography. In using burlesque performers as subjects, pioneering photographers subverted the straightforward portrait form in the 19th century, well aware-along with their subjects-that they had the power to challenge ideas of what it means to be a woman. Drawing on a large body of research and commentary, Buszek smartly focusing on individual contributions and landmarks rather than sweeping claims. An academic, Buschek isn't afraid to dig deep into her subject, but she tempers her treatise with healthy doses of wit, grace and rhythm, and rarely falters. 103 photos. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

“Pin-Up Grrrls is a funny, sexy, political take on the pin-up. In this book, women flaunt their sexuality, use images of themselves to their own ends, and remake the pin-up genre in endlessly creative ways.” •Susie Bright, author of Mommy’s Little Girl: On Sex, Motherhood, Porn, and Cherry Pie “Pin-ups that women love? That they create? Yes! In her brilliantly vibrant debut book, Maria Elena Buszek gives a lucid, rich, and thorough account of a nineteenth- and twentieth-century history in which women employ the power of erotic imagery to celebrate themselves. From the writing to the reproductions, Pin-up Grrrls is eye-opening.” •Joanna Frueh, performance artist and author of Swooning Beauty: A Memoir of Pleasure “Pin-Up Grrrls is ultimately a tale of the feminist reclamation of female sexuality as much as it is the story of the pin-up. With great historical consciousness and painstaking research—and without falling back on tired old stereotypes of pro- or antiporn feminists—Buszek stakes a thoroughly convincing claim that feminism is a political movement that has always championed women’s sexual agency and that is sure to appeal to grrrls and womyn alike.” (Rachel Fudge, Women’s Review of Books) “Buszek’s academic background in art history allows her to convincingly dispute the notion of the pin-up as merely objectifying women, and her selection of archival images is a feast for the eyes. . . . BUST readers will still no doubt devour this intergenerational exposé of how strong women asserted themselves, their whole selves—including those lovely legs,

bodacious busts, and devilish derrières. (Amanda McCorquodale BUST Magazine) “In Pin-Up Grrrls, feminist art scholar Buszek optimistically traces the development of feminism and the assertion of female sexuality in the public sphere through a well-illustrated focus on a 150-year history of the female pin-up. . . . Through meticulous research, presented in a chronological narrative structure, Buszek demonstrates the complex interaction between the pin-up and the historical contexts in which it articulates female sexuality. (Hillegonda C. Rietveld Feminist Review) “Using the pin-up as an interpretative lens for probing complicated issues of women’s sexual agency, Buszek offers a fascinating and lively . . . history of the American women’s movement and its engagement with popular culture. Pin-Up Grrrls features ninety-four figures, many of which appear for the first time in print and provide ample visual support for her argument. . . . Buszek has tackled an enormous subject here, and her book should interest anyone looking for an overview of historical developments in feminist thought and female representation. (Marlis Schweitzer American Quarterly) “With Pin-Up Grrrls, Buszek provides a unique blend of art, cultural, and women’s histories that will engage a wide and diverse audience. (Rachel Epp Buller Woman’s Art Journal)

The book is a really exciting, amazingly thorough history of the pin-up genre from the feminist point-of-view. Both as a feminist philosopher and model photographer I found it and extraordinarily useful. Of course, if you decide to read this book, you have to prepare yourself for a vast intellectual challenge. It is a complex weave of very different thoughts; the chapters are regularly cross-references so you have to keep many things in mind. It could have been made a bit even more enjoyable with two things. First of all, there are several dozens of pages at the end of the book -- at this quantity, these would have been much more useful as footnotes. Secondly, much more pictures would have been much better. Paragraph-long description of pin-up pictures would be unnecessary if the reader could see the pictures itself.

OK, technically this is a book of feminism, starting in the 19th Century and following the history all the way up to the 21st Century. What do Pin-Ups have to do with it? Well, Pin-Ups were created about the time women’s rights started to become an issue. In other words Pin-Ups and suffrage developed side by side. And Pin-Ups became a mirror to reflect America’s, and the world’s, ideas and images of women. Sometimes good, sometimes bad, Pin-Ups became a way to measure how far women had come. Or how far they still had to go. Maria Elena Buszek has made a book that is a must for anybody interested in history, culture, or Pin-Ups.

Amazing book

as soon as i seen this book i knew it was for me. starting to get into learning more about womens rights and i think this is just wonderful.

For anyone who doubts what a study of pin-ups might have to offer, prepare to be convinced otherwise! Buszek has composed a rich analysis of her subject, which while full of original ideas on the topic never loses sight of the fact that it's a book about pin-ups, images created to titilate and delight. The author's subtlety in interpreting the history of the pin-up, which turns out to be much longer than we might have thought, enables her to extract a number of fascinating threads which connect the genre to contemporary feminist art. It is a compelling and novel approach on a fascinating, under-researched topic. Buszek leaves her reader with a deeper understanding of the pin-up as a genre and of the feminist movement overall. A must-read for anyone interested in either topic, not to mention pop culture in general.

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