



**CAUGHT**

a b o o k r e v i e w  
b y S a m a n t h a  
B r e n n a n

# LOOKING

government's proposed new law would be) were used to seize *Caught Looking* at the B.C. border.

The strength of *Caught Looking* isn't so much in the content of the material presented as it is

**There's very little here that's violent hateful or menacing**



in the context. Around, beside, between, sometimes even on top of every inch of copy are pictures of pornography. By including hundred of examples of porn in its various forms, the editors have made it impossible to think about the issue without seeing exactly what's at stake.

The photos range from soft commercial porn to art, and from the usual straight male stuff to work created by those interested in sexuality outside the mainstream. There are women alone, women with women, women with men, men with men, even women with cucumbers and men with whips. What these photographs and drawing have in common is that they challenge the traditional stereotypes of pornography. There's very little here that's violent, hateful, or menacing. Instead, there's playfulness, mischief, and a lot of just plain funny poses. Most of the pictures are from private collections. Some of the best photos can be found in the lower right-hand corner of each page, representing 100 years of pornography from 1890 on.

In the scrapbook's introduc-

tion, the editors explain that the purpose of including pornography is to take some of the control of sexually explicit material away from men. It is because men have controlled the medium, they argue, that few women — even feminists involved in the anti-porn movement — have had much exposure to the material. They write: "For many of us, the porn exhibited in various anti-porn slide shows, together with one or two dirty books or girlie magazines passed around in our high school classes, constitutes the only pornography we've come into contact with."

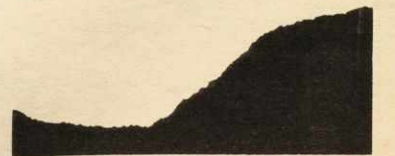
Unfortunately, the editors of *Caught Looking* will have a hard time getting people who have been frightened away from pornography to look at their book. There's no soft-peddling of the material here. It's pretty clear from the cover what you're buying. But for men and women who want increased exposure to various kinds of pornography but aren't really sure what's available or where to look, *Caught Looking* is a visual feast. And these kinds of books provide an opportunity for women to talk more about what we do like, rather than complaining about what we don't. For feminists embarrassed about explicit material, the political analysis in the *Caught Looking* essays offers the perfect excuse to buy. Just say you're reading it for the articles.

No review would be complete without some mention of the controversy surrounding *Caught Looking's* entry into Canada. Canada Customs' treatment of the book helps make the editors' point about how the state uses censorship laws to stifle alternative expressions of sexuality. In June, organizers of a women's centres conference in British Columbia ordered copies of *Caught Looking* to be sold at the site. *Caught Looking* and *Sex Work*, an anthology of writings

by women in the sex trade, weren't allowed into the country. Only after an appeal by the Vancouver Women's Bookstore was *Caught Looking* released. Customs officials decided the book was of educational value. It would teach what was pornography and what wasn't.

In Halifax, copies of *Caught Looking* arrived from the United States without a hitch. The local alternative bookstore, Red Herring, received the books as ordered, but store workers weren't quite sure what to do with them. *Caught Looking* was on the shelves for a short while, but a staff member decided the book was offensive, and copies were moved back to the storeroom. After an exchange of notes in the staff log, *Caught Looking* was

**before we close the gates, and our minds too soon**



returned to the shelves. These two incidents of state censorship and community censorship show the need for continued debate about pornography before we close the gates, and our minds, too soon.

*Caught Looking* was produced by Hannah Alderfer, Beth Jaker, Marybeth Nelson, Kate Ellis, Nan D. Hunter, Barbara O'Dair, and Abby Tallmer. Its three designers — Alderfer, Jaker and Nelson — have worked on a number of sex-related projects together. They produced the special sex issue of *Heresies*, a journal about feminism and culture, and designed the cover of Carol Vance's book *Pleasure and Danger*.

**C***ought Looking* is not the sort of text in feminist theory you'll ever be assigned to read for a university course. But if you are interested in the debate between feminists about pornography and censorship, *Caught Looking* comes as a welcome relief from the piles of oh-so-serious articles and editorials on the subject. The magazine's stance is both feminist and anti-censorship, its style glossy. And the softcover magazine is crammed full of black-and-white smutty photographs. The articles appeal to the intellectual, but *Caught Looking* is really trying to convince the reader through pictures.

The collection contains essays by Pat Califia, Kate Ellis, Lisa Duggan, Carol Vance, and others. But the articles, their authors and the arguments are standard fare. If you're at all familiar with the debate within feminism surrounding pornography and censorship, you'll have heard it before. Tradition-

ally, feminists have argued that pornography is at the root of oppression and that censorship is necessary to end violence against women. But many feminists, especially lesbians and artists, have sounded a note of caution. They fear legislation designed to control pornography

**crammed full of black and white smutty photographs**



will be used by the state to control alternative visions of sexuality. Indeed, Canada's existing obscenity laws (never mind what the effects of the