

# Opening a Window on Truth in (Sex) Advertising

**LOVE FOR SALE—FREE CONDOMS INSIDE.** A collaboration between Gran Fury and PONY. New Museum of Contemporary Art. 583 Broadway. (212) 219-1222.

by Linda Yablonskaya

One of a New Yorker's most essential pleasures is window-shopping, and, happily, the *vitrine* of the moment is a pro-active one. The installation *Love for Sale—Free Condoms Inside* is the result of a unique collaboration between Gran Fury, an AIDS-activist collective, and PONY, or Prostitutes of New York, a sex-workers advocacy group.

Placed in the New Museum's window on Broadway, the work confronts passersby with the world's first "Love-O-Meter"—a hot-pink wheel-of-fortune complete with phallus- and breast-spokes, spermoid bulb illuminations and inscriptions detailing "A Day in the Life of a Pro."

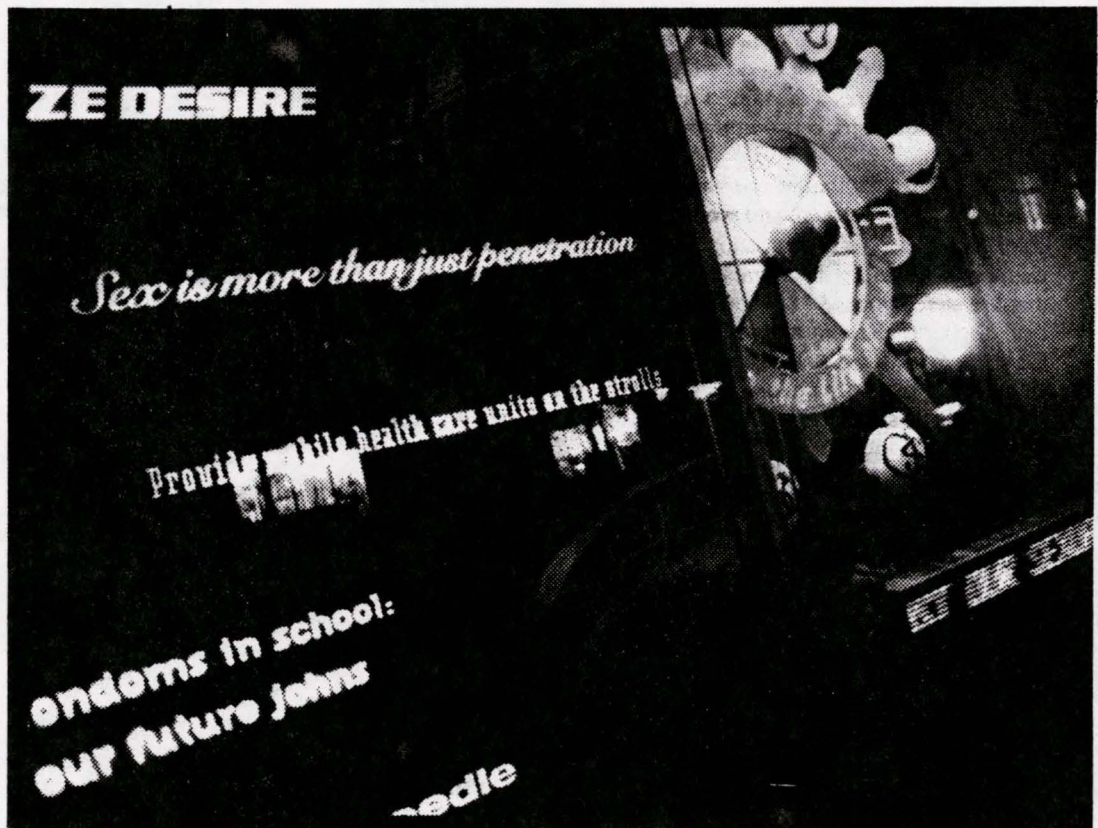
Though the sex-for-money business remains brisk, popular mythology continues to picture prostitutes as "agents of death," carriers of the HIV virus. The truth, Gran Fury and PONY say, in a joint statement that accompanies the work, is that sex work is an esteemable occupation and that its professionals form a "vanguard of responsible sexual practice." An LED sign at the base of the window publicizes their call for the decriminalization of prostitution with politically helpful hints like "Prostitutes don't spread AIDS; amateurs do," and "Keep your church out of my crotch."

The New Museum window is not the only evidence of Gran Fury's single-issue campaign to provoke an end to the AIDS crisis. The *Kissing Doesn't Kill* poster rides subways and buses in New York, Chicago, San Francisco and Los Angeles. Another poster decorating

city bus shelters pictures beauty contestants under type that reads "Women Don't Get AIDS/They Just Die From It"—a reference to the Centers for Dis-

taining—results.

New Museum spokesperson Robert Blanchon reports that the institution has give out 7,750 condoms so



**IF YOU WANT TO BUY MY WARES—***The Gran Fury/PONY installation*

ease Control's exclusion of the opportunistic infections most common to HIV-positive women from its definition of an AIDS diagnosis.

Equally sensitive to its own composition as predominantly gay, white and male, Gran Fury has for some time been seeking a way to share their access to public forums with other concerned organizations. Because gays and lesbians are discriminated against in ways strikingly similar to those of sex workers, the collaboration with PONY was a natural one, with effective—even enter-

far (about 500 per day). (The mint-flavored ones are especially popular.) The Museum has also placed on the street outside the window a blank book in which window-shoppers can write their responses.

The range of remarks includes: the poignant ("I felt ashamed....I used to be a john. Shame going away. Display helped"), the colloquial ("Way to go! I am a sex feen [sic], and I believe in safe[r]-sex"), the bored ("Yawn!"), the critical ("When will your commercialism ever stop!") and the jokey ("More sex, less art. I want to

# ART

Photo: T. L. Litt



see something really dirty!") Two of the books have been stolen.

"Tornado," the *nom de guerre* of one PONY member, reports that two passing policemen spotted the *Love for Sale* installation, parked their car (a standard Plymouth Gran Fury—from which the collective derives its name) and came into the museum during the opening "grinning from ear to ear and saying it was one of the best things they'd seen....They came in to congratulate us."

By and large, Gran Fury's work has been met with a warm reception. Since 1987, when it came into existence with another New Museum installation called *Let the Record Show*, this group of a dozen ACT UP members has achieved celebrity-like status in the art world, where enthusiasm for its efforts has led to support for a window at the Whitney Museum and an invitation to participate in the 1990 Venice Biennale.

"I think people are desperate to get some kind of representation of the reality of AIDS," Loring McAlpin of Gran Fury says. "Especially if it includes the reality of our sexuality. I think the art world recognizes it's important work, and if they don't fund

it, no one will."

Last summer, in Chicago, the *Kissing Doesn't Kill* campaign generated such a great furor that the mayor asked his transit authority to put up less-explicit ads. In Venice, according to Gran Fury's Michael Noeslein, the group was condemned as "blasphemous" by the archbishop there, while the Biennale director tried to censor the work—only to see the text of a piece criticizing the Catholic church's position on condoms and clean needles quoted at length in the Italian press. "So our ideas were disseminated all the further," Noeslein says, laughing.

Gran Fury's future plans call for a collaboration with five community-based service organizations on a series of billboards. Even with wide support, adequate funding is still difficult to come by, partly because of recent state-budget cuts, and partly because the AIDS crisis reaches so deeply into a grab-bag of politically hot social ills like homophobia, racism, homelessness and addiction. "That's why," McAlpin says, "it's gotten so out of control. If in 1981, or even in 1983, the government had taken the AIDS crisis seriously, it could have been dramatically different right now....a very different picture."