

Erotica expo fails to arouse

It's a balmy late winter afternoon in Epsom, and the Auckland Showgrounds is groaning, splitting at its PVC seams with an unholy alliance of sex and commerce. The sixth annual erotica lifestyles expo has just opened for business.

A few staff dot the foyer, all forced smiles and awkward posture, dressed in dated, poorly made flares and platforms, some faux-bondage chains with tastefully exposed butt-cheeks.

To escape this unpleasantness you have three choices: the erotic world of "intriguing displays and exhibits", the "exceptional products and services" and the "glamorous entertainers" and their "fantastic stage shows"?

The products and services win out. There is something quite fantastically surreal about the first stall you encounter being the SPCA, though few seemed to be doing more than shuffling past, eyes averted (*the mode of transport for the erotica crowd*). The cavernous hall is home to dozens of sex shops, (like Condom Kingdom, Happy Horny Herbs and Nipple Huggers), and a few more mainstream businesses (Woosh Wireless, 42 Below and Abe's Real Bagels).

The SPCA wasn't the only charity to attempt to snag the "adult" dollar; The NZ Veteran's Trust had staked out a prime spot, directly opposite the official erotica lifestyles store. The bare stall stood incongruous in its surrounds, with a couple of old rifles mounted on the wall, a glum, listless digger slouched in one corner and a small, powerfully built man remonstrating aggressively with the disinterested passers-by about their lack of generosity. It's a surprisingly ineffective tactic.

Upstairs at the Pornotopia, the international pornstar playground, the atmosphere was much less convivial. The surprisingly cramped space's centrepiece was a silk sheeted bed, upon which perched four female porn "stars", with caked-on make-up being baked on by a number of heat lamps dotted around the room.

The only bonafide star in the room though, was Ron Jeremy. Jeremy is an icon whose name transcends pornography. He's appeared in anywhere between 1700 and 10,000 movies, depending on who you believe, and looks a lifeless husk in the flesh. His hair is about two months past its due date for a dye job, his grey jowls hang limply from him, and he is shorter and more rotund than he appears on camera.

The crowd seem predominantly concerned with the female porn stars, but then the crowd is the true star at erotica.

Weekends purportedly bring a more cosmopolitan audience through the doors, but only the eagerest of beavers are present and correct for the doors opening on Friday afternoon. Swarms of

pimpley teenage virgins congregate in corners, while older men, occasionally in pairs, linger longer than is strictly necessary over the markedly unperturbed porn stars. The "sensual couples" who are supposedly the core audience of the expo are notably absent on this day.

The main stage area is home to a number of unconvincing amateur cabaret acts, livin' the cliché to endless *Grease* medleys, and the bar swiftly beckons.

The crowd within is transfixed by a faux-lesbian scene being enacted in one corner. Only the bar-staff speak and the music seems to fade off into the distance as a hundred brains try desperately to retain as much of the scene as possible for later recall.

It seems to sum up the entire atmosphere of erotica, surrounded by people but attempting to block their presence out. It is a very private ceremony conducted in public.

Getting a view of the jelly wrestling proves virtually impossible, though it does provide the chance to become reacquainted with one of the precious few highs of the event.

Evan Stone, sporting zebra-print underwear with a truly stupendous bulge out front, seems to be the only performer to truly revel in the rank absurdities that his industry throws up. He MCs the jelly wrestling, but his best moment is a sports-style commentary of a film screening in the Pornotopia.

Unspeakably tawdry, it is also a frequently hilarious and brutally honest description of the physical mechanics of the scene playing out before us. The 'actors' wriggle uncomfortably either side of him while he describes the physical contortions they perform on screen. Stone is a whistleblower from inside the ranks, breaking down the pain and precious little pleasure that is involved. He is refreshing in his honesty if utterly unnerving in many other respects.

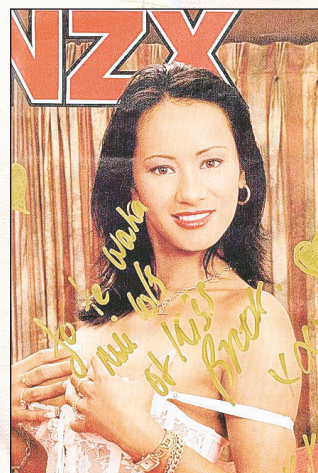
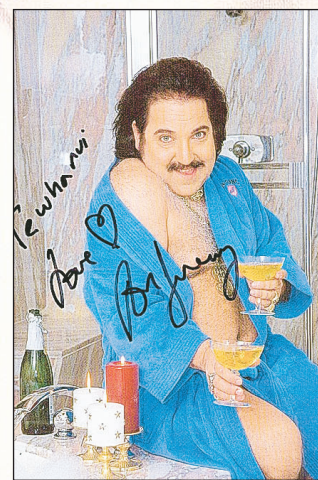
Stone is cool, but little else is worth commending about erotica. It is all genitalia and no pubic hair; everything is explicit, violent; gender roles are proscribed and immutable. Homosexuality exists only for women, and then only to please men. Women are toned and pained, men can look however the hell they like.

Your \$20 gives you the right to be sold to, in a blatant and faintly desperate way. All smiles are forced, eyes are never met and you shrink from every accidental brush with another.

Walking out into the crisp air and sunlight feels like re-birth, like an affirmation of reality, and for all erotica's spin about it being the "naughtiest" of expos, it really just feels like the cheapest.

— Duncan Greive

Te Waha Nui goes undercover at the erotica lifestyles expo and finds it all surreal. CLAIRE MCMAHON, NICOLE STANLEY and DUNCAN GREIVE give their gender-centric takes on the event.



Shayla La Veaux's husky American drawl tells us how "Nuu Zealanders are so much more liberal when it comes to sex than in the States". Her enviable figure is sexily clad in an above-the-knee, mint green sun dress, her elfin feet encased in 10 cm plastic high heels and her hairstyle is reminiscent of an 1980s pop princess.

Vibrant and open, she relays her experiences of exhibiting in Aotearoa so far. Kiwis are very sexual, according to this celebrity of the underworld. Noticeably older than many of the others, she gives the impression that she would take you under her wing, if a gal ever decided on a change of career.

At the conclusion of the interview, Ms La Veaux gives a hearty smile and presents an autographed poster of herself. It was signed, "lick it, suck it and oh please fuck it".

The reality of the erotica circus was pretty much reflected in the way it rolled into town and set up in the Auckland Showgrounds. Bare breasted porn stars cruising down Queen St on motorcycles and tanks with silicone flying and horns blaring signalled the start of the expo's strange juxtaposition between female hyper-sexuality and the typical male audience.

Punters strolled from sex toy stand to sex toy stand in the dim light and sultry heat. If they passed a table with free-for-all samples many would unabashedly grab a handful of candy resembling condom/lubricant duo packs.

Expo staff cheekily strutted around in their fishnet suspender stockings and booty-bearing vinyl uniforms.

The giant sex shop of the main "exhibition hall" featured DVDs, costumes and paraphernalia of every size and colour of the rainbow. Smutty? Yes. Intriguing? Sadly, no. There's a definite "seen it all before" quality here for anyone who has merely walked past the window of a sex shop before.

A replica of Miss Serenity's feet in the \$20 bargain bin of one stall caught our attention. The squishy, rubber, anatomically correct feet provided an interesting topic of conversation as we tried to work out what one would do with them.

As over-cologned adolescent teenage lads followed the trail of bare-bottomed females, gaggles of 30-something women can be heard shrieking with laughter at the sight of a dancing dildo, and couples can be seen clasping white plastic goody bags in one hand and their lover in the other.

However most surprising was how the expo was littered with an alarming number of elderly men. Had they told their wives that they were off for an afternoon of golf or bowls? And these fellows took in everything with cold, hard cataract stares.

Porn King Ron Jeremy's presence was still known but he was quiet in the background like a mighty silverback gorilla in danger of being usurped by more youthful and virile specimens. Those un-acquainted with Mr Jeremy's appearance could have mistaken him for a crew member.

Unlike his colleague Evan Stone he was not bouncing around in zebra-patterned, lycra knickers with a separate compartment for his manhood. This particular show stopper was volatile, vulgar and a dismal failure at humour.

And to add insult to injury his favourite pastime appeared to be swaying his hips from side to side at unfortunate punters, an action that caused another part of his anatomy to imitate a pendulum in a grandfather clock.

The main stage of the expo finally featured some entertainment "for the ladies". But the all male strip revue (available to be hired out for your next social function...) was disappointing. The three studs did their best to titillate the few females waiting in the crowd.

It might have been the MC Hammer-inspired dance moves or the hot-pants-up-the crack look, but at the end of the day it was the fact that they just weren't that hot that inspired us to move on.

Gratis porn flashed from every television screen. Body parts began to blur into one giant flesh-coloured mass. An overdose of porn is pretty much like an overdose of anything else. While effective at first in grabbing your attention, once you have been surrounded by such a large quantity of it, you slowly become numb and need to go into rehab.

Rehab for us was the bar. We decided to escape for a quiet drink and to indulge in some form of normal discussion not directly related to anything remotely sexual. It appears in this erotica-Disneyland that every area is themed.

The bar adequately displayed the "naked lesbians gyrating in a cage" theme. Although this theme was not particularly thought-provoking to us, the large audience of males staring silent and open-jawed with Woodstocks in hand, told us that others found it much more captivating.

The humidity of the marquee and the excess of sex combined to put us in the mood for a wholesome change of scene. Stumbling past the jelly wrestling towards the exit and fresh air, we saw Playboy model and Miss Personality's Vicky Lee poised on a podium. Slouching, she let out a giant yawn, clearly as unenthused as we were by the experience.

— Claire McMahon and Nicole Stanley