

TILLOU FINE ART

VILLAGE VOICE - June 2002
December 10th, 2005

"Bosom Maximus"
Russ Meyer at Feigen Contemporary
by Jerry Saltz

"There will be scarcely a sequence in this film that won't have tits. No way. I like women who are epically built, bounteous, super-abundant; who have humongous, conical, sleek, blue-veined giganzos accessorized by protuberant nipples surrounded by aureoles double the circumference of a silver dollar! Bosom Maximus!" These are the criteria Russ Meyer, now 80, and the closest thing America has produced to Rabelais, says he will use to cast an upcoming movie to be called either *The Bra of God* or *Beyond the Valley of Pulp a Go-Go*. "Why big tits?" he asks. "Easy. It makes the dick hard."

These and many other declarations can be found in *A Clean Breast! The Life and Loves of Russ Meyer, The rural Fellini . . . his films, fantasies und Fräuleins*, his self-published, 1213-page, three-volume autobiography—"a fuck and tell book," he calls it (\$250 on Meyer's Web site, www.rmfilms.com). In addition to detailed recountings of numerous couplings, this tome contains hundreds of pictures of well-endowed women and boffo captions like "A voluptua with dimensions not unlike an Etruscan sculpture," "Stunning big-balconied beauty," "Oversized dairying facilities," and "Majestic melons barbarously savaging a 48 double-E cup."

Variouly dubbed "King Leer," "Hollywood primitive," "trash master," and "dirty old man," this self-proclaimed "King of the Nudies" and "glandscape artist" not only defined the sexploitation genre, he practically invented it. In 1959 he made *The Immoral Mr. Teas*, the story of a man who can see through women's clothing. Shot in four days for \$24,000, the film grossed more than a million. Since then, Meyer has directed 23 films—most of them moneymakers—and become a legend. His 1965 classic, *Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill!*, the story of three go-go dancers who set off on a killing spree, was deemed "the worst film ever made" by the *San Francisco Chronicle*. John Waters, on the other hand, asserts it's "beyond a doubt, the best movie ever made. . . . possibly better than any film that will ever be made in the future."

Best or worst, Meyer, who lives in Hollywood Hills, is currently having his first New York gallery show. The exhibition, a display of 21 black-and-white and color photographs—some of them stills from movie productions, most studio shots—is a batty mix of cheesiness, camp, chasteness ("I don't consider what I do pornography. I call it 'tittie boo' "), and over-the-top (and I do mean top) voluptuousness. "I start to get interested at about a D cup," Meyer has said. "Anything smaller than that is just too small for me. It doesn't matter to me if the boobs are real or fake as long as they're huge."

Meyer is an American original in the all-male mold of Al Capp, Terry Southern, Hugh Hefner, P.T. Barnum, and Henry Darger. He knew what he liked and did as he pleased. He always told the females who auditioned for him, "I can't promise you a role, you're gonna have to take your clothes off, and I may ask of your pleasures." "I think it's important," he says, "to have sex with the women I work with. I like the idea of filming someone and then being able to jump into bed afterwards and manipulate their kazoos." Several of these woman, some among his most famous starlets, are featured in the Feigen show.

Start with Eve because Meyer did. He married Eve Turner after photographing her for the June 1955 Playboy centerfold. A more rustic, more stacked Marilyn Monroe type, Turner is pictured topless in *Eve With Seal*. Her arms are crossed demurely in front of her ample chest; her hands rest on a weird stuffed animal. She's a Freudian Mother Goose. Elsewhere, Eve lies on a bed, legs up in the air, ankles modestly crossed, head thrown back, mouth seductively open. She wears one of the custom bras Meyer had fabricated. In *Eve in a Blue Sweater*, Mrs. M. is posed in three-quarter view, her blue cashmere sweater unbuttoned to reveal the profile of her breast. In *Eve in Front of Fireplace*, she's clad in an open nightie. With two glasses of wine set in front of her on a shag rug, the photo is proto-Austin Powers. Curiously, and in spite of the fact that Meyer has been called "sleazeball" more often than anyone in Hollywood history, in none of these shots do we ever actually see an entire breast—which may be what Meyer means by "tittie boo."

The photographs are simple, bawdy, and sweet. Lighting is vivid, hues super-saturated, the sex a tease. Meyer is a throwback—closer to burlesque than porn. There's more attitude than anatomy in his pictures, and the attitude is innocent, seductive, and fun. "Americans take sex too seriously," Meyer says. Which may explain why several of his films have been banned.

The black-and-white picture titled *Three Standing in Front of Porsche* features a trio of statuesque women posed with a sports car. The girls are the heroines of *Faster Pussycat*, the first film ever made in which a female kills a man with her bare hands. "The women in my films are always strong," Meyer says. "The men are klutzes." From left to right we see Haji, Tura Satana, and Lori Williams, whose combined bust measurement, Meyer boasts, is a "a scrotum-busting 135 inches!" But still no boobs.

For that, see *Breakfast in Bed*, a cute, ridiculous picture of Meyer's third wife, the bountiful Kitten Natividad, posed in bed and offering us a cup of coffee. In his autobiography, Meyer recounts how this "nymphomaniacal" woman used to "toy delicately and provocatively with her well-coifed, hairy attractor, drawing the moviemaker's spring-steel schlong inexorably to the sexy housewife's magnetic field." Notice the "housewife" bit. As with Hefner, many of Meyer's scenarios are irrevocably middle-class.

The rest, as Meyer says, "is all boobs." Don't miss the picture of Letha Weapons, she of the 36H bra. Or the three endearing shots of Lorna Maitland, the star of *Lorna and Mudhoney*. (Three rock groups have named themselves after Meyer films, including *Mudhoney*, *Vixen*, and *Faster Pussycat*, although a case could be made for a fourth with the *Smashing Pumpkins*.) Although Meyer will certainly be remembered more for his films than his photographs, these 21 pictures remind us that every artist is, at the end of the day, an outsider artist.

Meyer's autobiography reads like a flat-footed version of Lolita. More than 150 pages into that novel's crazed mania, narrator Humbert Humbert stops and asks, "Did I mention that I loved her?" Similarly, though not as devastatingly, Meyer, after more than 1000 pages of rhapsodizing about bodacious tatas, turns his attention to Pandora Peaks, whose breasts truly are the size of soccer balls. He begins, "An extraordinary extravagant even inimitable Bosomania extra. Breast-bludgeoning. Numbing. Stunning. Anesthetizing. Equipoise. Equilibrium. Equanimity. Cleavage. Fissure. Bifidity. Rotundity. Globularity. Orbicularity and Globosity. Surging. Quivering. Heaving. Swaying. Intoxicating." This goes on for 10 more pages. As Meyer once said, "I push everything to the brink."