

exposed

There will be a more explicit cover for DVD sales in sex shops

FABIAN BURSTEIN UNVEILS

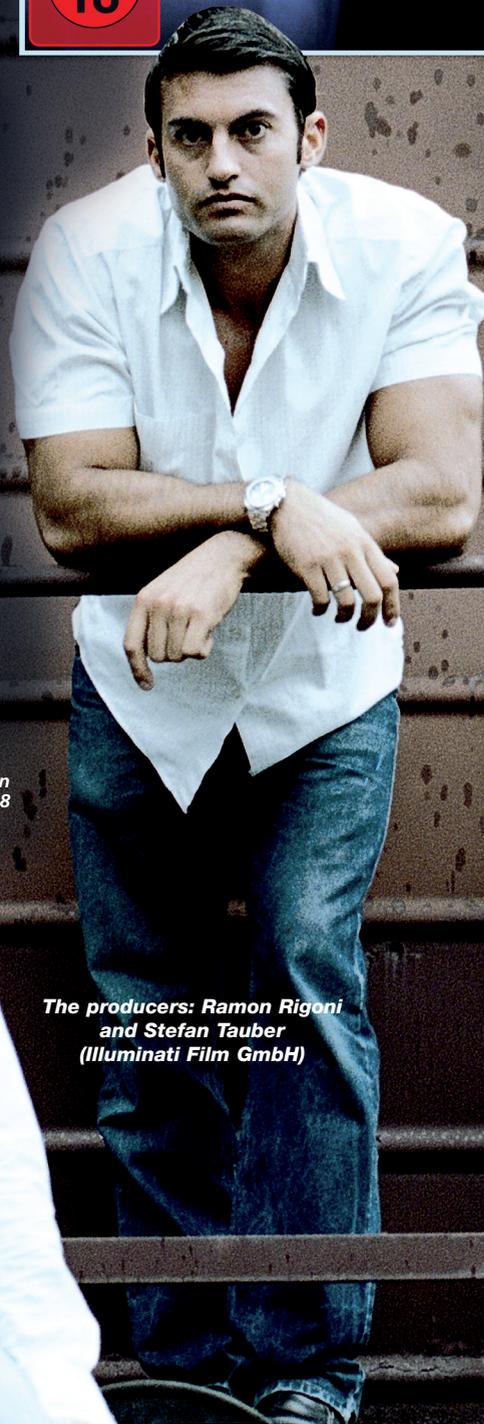
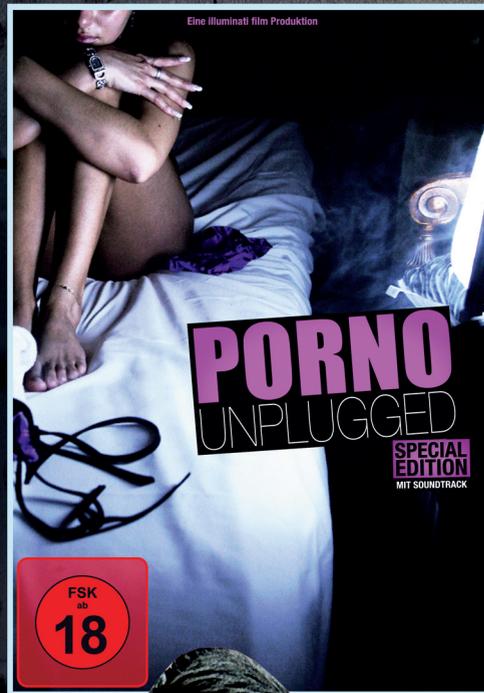
"The business as it really is"

Porno Unplugged is a documentary on the porn industry, produced in Austria and released in March. It is also a story of the people who work in this industry. And without raising an accusing finger, it leaves plenty of room for critical reflection

Fabian Burstein is what we would call an all-rounder. He is a journalist, an editor, an author and a filmmaker. His contributions and reports have been published in cultural economic and media journals; he has written a biography on the Austrian singer and actor Hansi Lang and has worked for many years as a creative director and layout designer in the advertising sector, where he came into contact with the media, film. He has spent the past two and a half years accompanying three people from the porn industry with his camera: Renee Pornero, international and well-known porn actress, who ended her career in front of the lens to become a producer; Mick Blue, an actor who enjoyed success in the US and who now produces his own series and the ÖKM director, Thomas Janisch, who manages and runs an erotic empire of magazines, sex shops and online services. The fact that all three protagonists are Austrian is not just because *Porno Unplugged* is an Austrian production but Burstein wanted to create a bracket in which he portrayed with these three key figures of the Alpine republic that even a small country such as Austria has its own porn scene with an international focus. "Bringing this hidden side of our society to the surface certainly had its appeal. We all know about the adult scenes in other countries," says Burstein on his decision to keep it local. His adventurous journey behind the scenes took him from Budapest to Las Vegas. He is always there with his camera, never leaving his three characters, be it during shooting, at events and parties, in swinger clubs or in their private lives. And the

result of this endurance is his documentary 'Porno Unplugged', which takes the viewer to the roots of the business with its multi-coloured facets. "Once again, the human portrait was the appeal," he explains. "And it seemed logical to portray those people with the same medium that made the famous, i.e. film." Of course, Burstein had to accept allegations of voyeurism and the hostilities from the Austrian cultural scenes. Critics might be disturbed by the fact that the film allows the viewer to form his own opinion on the characters involved. Whatever, there is never a raised finger or reprimanding voice in *Porno Unplugged*. "It's not about vilifying the industry or passing judgement on its members," he says. "It's merely about showing the lives and stories of these people." His documentary contradicts objections that he is not critical of pornography just as much as it avoids being too puritanical. "I merely want to provide a fundamental proportion to critical discus-

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The producers: Ramon Rigoni and Stefan Tauber (Illuminati Film GmbH)


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sions on pornography." Before starting this project, Burstein had no previous contact to the porn industry other than the handful of obligatory porn films watched in adolescent years. But when he began working on the actor portfolios for a film magazine his interest in the business grew and took on a professional nature as he ascertained that film, for example, is an integral part of these actors' lives. So how did he approach an industry that is primarily concerned with its image? "I soon managed to build up confidence and trust between us. Seeing as I didn't just want to blatantly display the characters, I was able to immerse totally into their lives. It was actually far easier than I had imagined." This submergence, he recalls, often put him in situations that both shocked him and affected him emotionally or that even evoked feelings of alienation. "I was even disillusioned sometimes. I was catapulted into spheres that were so sleazy. Swinger clubs and small erotic fairs are unpleasant and are by no means glamorous. Las Vegas and the AVN Expo is entirely different. The US industry is highly professional." He and his team felt continually pulled between two poles: from the social dregs to professional entertainment. "It was striking to witness two parallel worlds: The porn world is parallel to the normal world and parallel per se. There is the hard and often unpleasant work on the one hand and the fast-lane entertainment on the other." His documentary is a cinematic experiment, one that left the crew totally numbed and indifferent after two and a half years because stimulation levels change dramatically. Burstein tackles a sensitive subject as the actors are also subject to these changes in their levels of stimulation. "They become indifferent, obviously, otherwise they wouldn't be able to do this. And rough sex is never pleasant for a woman. They submit to their roles and develop their own mechanism in order to cope. This applies to Renee as she featured in extremely rough films. The documentary shows what these people become." So why do people do it? In his two and a half years at the side of these characters, Fabian Burstein finds some explanations to this question. Mick Blue is stereotypical for many men in the industry. Men who feel defined by their libido and turn their sex drive into cash. "The si-

tuation is more complex where Renee is concerned. She comes from a middle-class background, was a wall-flower at school with a conservative education and upbringing. Pornography for her meant sexual freedom. She wanted to do everything possible without being restrained by social boundaries and values. There's something self-destructive in this behaviour and this has nothing to do with sex. It also shows that porn is not just a business but is a reflection of personal stories and autobiographies." Janisch is a completely different story. He entered a family business that happened to earn its income with the porn business. His focus is purely commercial and not emotional. Janisch has come to terms with his role but still has a burden to bear, albeit lighter than that of the actors. "They can never be rid of their past, caught on film on millions of DVDs. You just can't forget that," Burstein emphasizes and points out that this material is now ubiquitous on the Internet and can never be deleted. "There is no simple formula for the personal-emotional aspect but how does this job affect our own desire and trust?" Burstein adds that this is something that primarily affects the women in the business as men don't tend to be so complex when it comes to dealing with their profession. For many of them, sex with different women is fulfilling a fantasy. As antagonist to his three leading characters, Burstein features Martin Humer in *Porno Unplugged*. Humer is a determined anti-porn lobbyist and strict Catholic in Austria and since 1970 has been fighting an eager and private battle against pornography, sexual education in school and homosexuality. He has re-

ceived public and media attention for his destruction of works of art in the course of his battle. He has been convicted on 22 counts for damage to property. "His radical behaviour has actually turned him into a member of this industry. His statements are so ridiculous and without any resemblance to reality, they are contradictions par excellence," Burstein continues. "My films should be a human portrayal and I could have included a feminist opinion or criticism that society is becoming to attuned to pornography but I didn't want to start on too many building sites." He reiterates that he has avoided passing moral judgement on the industry although he feels it is important that critics, i.e. youth protection authorities or femi-

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 Renee Pornero has since finished her acting career

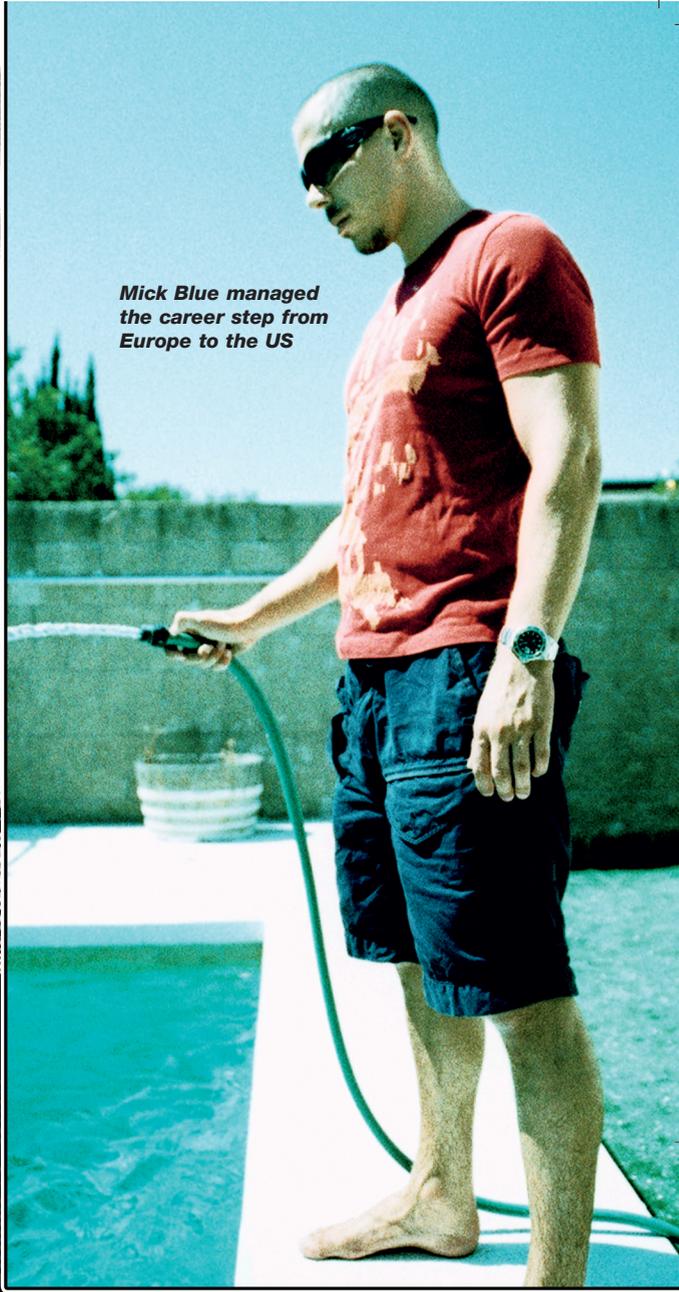

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Director,
Fabian Burstein
accompanied
three members
of the industry
for over two
years for his
documentary,
*Porno
Unplugged*



nists, take a closer look at pornography. "A discussion would help any my film is a part of this. Critics can concentrate on what they are good at and even if I don't always agree, their opinion is valuable and completes the whole picture." *Porno Unplugged* enables the viewer to pass revue on what happens in this industry. The film is certainly worth watching and its blatant truths distinguish it from all other documentaries, films and reports that raise a finger, just touch the surface or evoke sympathy like a grumbling 'director' did earlier this year on German television as he moaned about the alleged fall of the adult industry, forgetting that this is made up of more than just a handful of down-trodden Germany DVD producers and suppliers who overslept and missed the chance to catch the digital trend. *Porno Unplugged* portrays the people and after two and a half years in the midst of things he says what impressed him was the industry's continual effort to win public consent. "The permanent worrying about their image is dazzling. The entire industry works behind a mask in order to keep up the illusion of sex without boundaries and unrestrained lust. This is the capital used and needed to keep the consumers of porn." And this is why it so interesting to take a look behind



Mick Blue managed
the career step from
Europe to the US

the scenes and witness this industry without its mask. "There are extreme discrepancies between that what these people present and how they live. They all concentrate on their image, which has nothing to do with reality at all." And so what happens when the mask is removed? Fabian Burstein has found the answer: "The consumer would be shocked and put off. Perhaps a porn actress does feel passion, desire and attracted to her partner on set, but a porn scene has nothing to do with sexual attraction and desire. There are impressions on set that the consumer should simply not see otherwise this false image of desire and passion would dissolve. But it was our aim right from the beginning to film the business as it really is." The film has been on sale in Austria and Germany since mid March. *Porno Unplugged* was produced by the Austrian company, Illuminati Filmproduktion GmbH. For more information go to www.pornounplugged.com