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She’s a new mum with a part-time job as a film lecturer at Swinburne. But in some circles Anna Brownfield is better known as an award-winning director of feminist erotica, writes **Konrad Marshall.**

Melbourne’s best-known director of feminist erotica is wearing moccasins and sitting on a couch in the cosiest of suburban living rooms, with family photos on the sideboard and a Swiss ball in the corner. Her six-week-old son, Royce, furiously sucks air through his nostrils and milk from his mother’s left breast. “He’s the world’s noisiest feeder,” coos Anna Brownfield with that new mum smile. “Now, where were we?”

We were actually in the midst of discussing what it was like to film a piece of Australian-made “new wave erotica” (as Brownfield calls her work), including exactly how it feels to stand on a closed set staring at a couple mid-coitus through the lens of a Panasonic video camera having just shouted, “Action!”

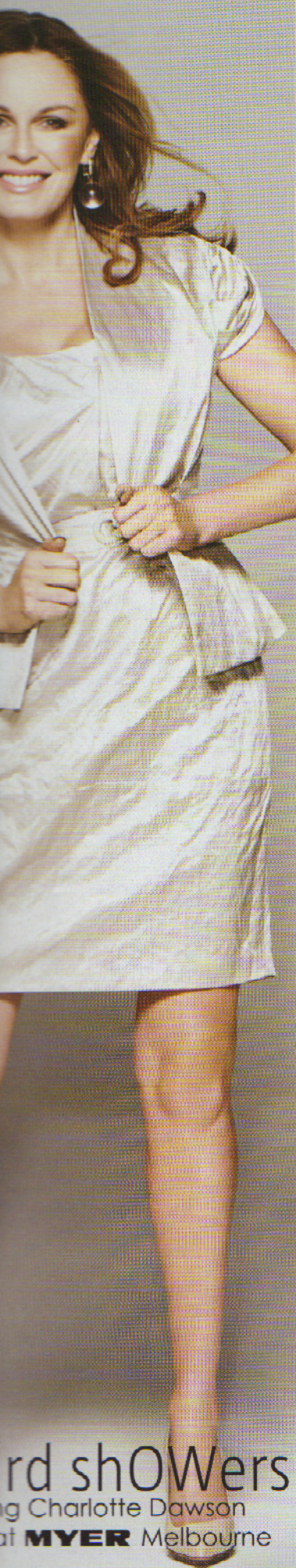
“A lot of people ask me if I get turned on by it. The answer is no. You’re generally disconnected from what’s going on,” Brownfield explains. “I do remember one time, though, when we did one sex scene and I looked up and one of the actors was actually staring at me and it was like, ‘Oh, that’s right. There are two people in this room having sex in front of me. OK.’ And then I went back to the monitor.”

There are a lot of things to keep track of when you’re trying to construct explicit scenes that are confronting, amusing, fantastic and realistic – but that was the goal of Brownfield’s award-winning 2009 film, *The Band*, which features the gratuitous carnality required, according to the definition of Italian philosopher Umberto Eco, to →

Photography **Julian Kingma**

Anna Brownfield, feminist pornography filmmaker, with baby Royce at home in Melbourne's eastern suburbs. "A lot of people ask me if I get turned on by it. The answer is no."





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make it pornography not art; yet is completely removed from "traditional" pornography by virtue of a few choice departures from typical erotica. The differences, she explains, are everything.

The sets are gritty and elaborate. The female characters are assertive. There is a story – and not a bad one, either – with conflicts resolved and challenges met and epiphanies had. The saucy parts are varied, sometimes true to life, and often tender. Condoms are used and even integrated into the dialogue. Not every actress is waxed within an inch of pre-pubesence, and there is not one pair of silicone implants among them.

Brownfield says most of the film was shot in Melbourne, with the naughty bits filmed in Canberra – the only place in Australia where such scenes can legally be filmed for DVD release. "But it goes on everywhere in Australia," she adds. "There are a couple of companies that shoot up in Sydney. As long as you're not doing it in public, I think most people aren't going to object to it."

Not so long ago, Brownfield was just a Ballarat girl obsessed with acting, specifically musical theatre, performing in two shows a year from the time she was 10 until her early 20s – everything from Gilbert and Sullivan to *Bye Bye Birdie*. A high-school interest in photography led her to explore filmmaking. She moved to Melbourne, and a degree in media arts at RMIT confirmed that her ideas worked better

uses her real name, unlike, say, American pornographer Candida Royalle.) Her next erotic project was *The Money Shot*, an R-rated comedy-drama that won several prizes in the 2005 Melbourne Underground Film Festival. Made through her production company, Poison Apple Productions, it focused on male bodies. Stripping men bare is a hallmark of her films and something she takes even further in *The Band*.

"I don't know what it is, but something, this power of the phallus, makes people go quite funny about male nudity. I think there's still something about the penis and it being a very shrouded thing. Even though it's an external organ that's quite obviously there, I think a lot of people find that quite confronting to see," she says. "That's why I say, 'More penises on screen, please!'"

She started looking for financing for *The Band* in 2004, and formed a new production company, Hungry Films. They shot the film in 2006 after a private investor stepped in, but casting was a challenge. Eager men weren't hard to find but most could not perform as required when required. "You tend to find that most guys think it's the ultimate fantasy to be in a porn film. But it's interesting how many men – when it came to the crunch – couldn't do it or really questioned themselves

Many of the women who auditioned were ruled out, too, on Brownfield's stipulation for all-natural bodies. Others were initially keen but unable to take the final step. "For women, it still seemed very much a taboo to have such control of their sexuality. I had one actress who was very

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as moving images than stills. Living in the Fitzroy area for almost two decades and working as a "door bitch" at the Tote Hotel supplied a good measure of inspiration for characters and events portrayed in *The Band*. But Brownfield's main gig was lecturing in film and television at Swinburne University of Technology and she still teaches one class a semester there, mostly in film editing. Throughout it all, she produced roughly 20 films of her own. Making one with explicit sex seemed almost like "a natural step for me".

"I had been interested in creating something that was more aimed toward female viewpoints and female fantasies, and challenging the ideas and the formulas that are in place in pornography." Her work is basically a correction – a counterpoint to porn's new millennium march toward all things extreme, violent and artificial. "Sex is meant to be a loving consensual activity, but a lot of it doesn't seem that way."

Brownfield had in mind a movie shot with the grainy quality of a Duane Michals photograph, the comedy of a Russ Meyers film, and her own strong feminist perspective. "Originally, when I started looking at doing it, we were calling it 'chick porn', but then everyone thought we were making lesbian films."

One of her first forays into erotica, *Object*, was a short experimental film about the objectification of women. Then came the 1997 movie *Tainted Eden*, a narrative feature that objectified men. After that, Brownfield took meetings with a handful of producers who wanted her to direct explicit sex films for the porn marketplace. One Queensland investor – a stripping agency manager – asked her to churn out one or two films a month, but Brownfield was more interested in making something she could be proud of. (She points out that she is one of the few female producers of erotica who

excited to be involved, but in the end went, 'No, I don't think I can do this,' via text message."

When the movie was released late last year, Brownfield had overwhelmingly positive reactions (apart from a few threatening emails from a religious fundamentalist, which were duly reported to the police). Since then, *The Band* has opened the Berlin Porn Film Festival, and won Hottest Film at the fifth annual Feminist Porn Awards in Toronto. (Brownfield had to tape an acceptance speech because she was too far along in her pregnancy to fly to Canada.) Despite the gongs, the film is still trying to recoup its cost – a figure that Brownfield keeps close, saying only that the budget was "small, but larger than most adult films". The film has been sold in France, Germany and South Korea and in the United States and Canada, Breaking Glass Pictures distributes it as an uncut, unrated art house film marketed as "erotic drama". But she doubts it will ever be released in Australia ("No one is brave enough!").

Brownfield's latest completed project is *Making it Handmade*, a documentary about the re-rise of craft – specifically about four Melbourne women taking traditional craft techniques and subverting them – which premiered in August at the Melbourne International Film Festival. She is also working on a documentary exploring a posse of local skateboarders, writing a female buddy movie called *The Mole Manifesto*, and putting pen to "a telemarketing musical, which is actually a lesbian love story".

"There are a lot of things I do, and I don't want to be restricted or simply known for one particular type of filmmaking," Brownfield says. "But at the same time, I'm not ashamed of what I've chosen to do, and I don't feel the need to hide." (m)