

# CITY IS FUNDING PORN DISPLAY IN DUMBO SHOW

## ‘Generous’ Support For Soft-Core Exhibit

By **JACOB GERSHMAN** Staff Reporter of the Sun

If you're just crazy about tennis legend Bjorn Borg and have a soft spot for vintage pornography, then you likely didn't miss the newest taxpayer-funded art exhibit at Smack Mellon in the Dumbo section of Brooklyn.

On the other hand, if your idea of an afternoon well spent wouldn't involve leafing through 25-year-old Playboys while watching a 58-minute video of Mr. Borg playing tennis with a crossdressing Borg look-alike, then you probably skipped the art exhibit at Smack Mellon.

The New York City government may have had the first group in mind when it gave "generous" funding through the Department of Cultural Affairs to Smack Mellon, which featured the "Bjorn Again" video installation for more than a month.

The exhibition, called "Multiplex" — of which "Bjorn Again" is one of the main attractions — ended yesterday. But on its last day, dozens of New Yorkers ambled about the three-level complex and looked curiously at the video of Mr. Borg and his feminine Doppelgänger.

The "Bjorn Again" screening room near the back of the gallery resembled a shabby basement den fixed up with a musty green carpet and cushy mustard-colored couch on which visitors are encouraged to sit. Most of those who sat down eventually peeked through the small stack of Playboys from the late 1970s and early 1980s that rested on a drab wicker table.

One magazine featured "TV's sexiest sportscaster" Jayne Kennedy on the cover while Farrah Fawcett posed on the cover of a Gala Christmas issue.

"It's really cool," said Gaorav Gupta, 24. "It's nice to sit down on a couch and read vintage porn magazines."

Sitting next to him, Hawa Allan, 25, said she wasn't sure of the point of the exhibit. "It has a strange obsession with Bjorn Borg." Taking up the left side on the couch, a woman intently pored over one of the Playboys for several minutes.

Color posters of Farrah Fawcett and Bo Derek and illustrations of Borg and naked women are tacked onto a green wall to the right of a couch.

The video was created by artist Chris Sollars, who took an ESPN Classic broadcast of a Borg U.S. Open championship match and spliced images of himself on a tennis court pretending to be Borg's opponent. The artist with his thick blond mane and headband resembles Mr. Borg, but is dressed in a skirt and is supposed to represent the tennis legend's feminine side.

The female version of Borg, who occasionally tugs at his groin and lifts up his shorts to reveal his black underwear, beats the real Borg.

Earlier, another couple who sat down said they were a little confused about the intent of "Bjorn Again," but liked it anyway. "It's very nostalgic. It's very well done," said Fernando Laszlo, a Cobble Hill resident.

"I don't know what he's trying to do, but what I feel is a regression of time," said Gabi Bernd, reclining next to him.

Other screening rooms at the Smack Mellon exhibit included a television showing shots of Bethlehem in 2003, a video created by artist Ayreen Anastas. A description of the video said, "Views include streets during times of curfew,

a refugee camp, an encroaching Israeli settlement, and signs posted on olive trees warning that land will soon be confiscated.”

In another part of the exhibit, a huge image is projected on a wall showing an artist squished in a hole in a ceiling, wedged between a hallway and his studio. “The video presents a situation of occupying two social spaces at once,” read the description on the wall.

Toward the front of the exhibit is another giant projection, Katarzyna Kozyra’s “Punishment and Crime,” a video of screaming men on a field shooting machine guns and blowing up cars. The display “explores the darker side of male behavior,” reads the wall text description. “The faces of the participants are camouflaged with masks representing faces of actress, pin-up girls, or Playboy models.”

The amount of money the Department of Cultural Affairs gave to Smack Mellon was not immediately known. But the Web site of the studio said it receives “generous support” from the agency, the New York State Council on the Arts, a state agency, and the National Endowment for the Arts.

“To me, the thought that there is one less cop on the streets somewhere because somebody wants to spend money on something like “Bjorn Again” is unconscionable,” said E.J. McMahon, a senior fellow at the conservative thinktank Manhattan Institute.

He said the problem with the Department of Cultural Affairs is not “the review process but the amount of money it makes available.”

A spokesman for the Department of Cultural Affairs was not available for comment yesterday.

Mr. McMahon said the budget of the Department of Cultural Affairs peaked at \$133.5 million in fiscal year 2001 and has dropped to \$120 million in the last couple of years. In 1993, the budget was \$81.5 million. Most of the money goes to support New York City’s major cityowned museums.



**'IT'S REALLY COOL'** The video installation 'Bjorn Again' (2003), by Chris Sollars, at Smack Mellon Gallery in Dumbo.  
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