

# The Feminist Pornographer

**Vivid Entertainment director in Albuquerque to talk pleasure positivity at the Pornotopia film festival**

BY MARISA DEMARCO

Tristan Taormino is trying to take a deep breath. When we speak, she's about to embark on a four-week tour and is using the day to read books. The titles are telling: *When Things Fall Apart* by Pema Chödrön, an ordained Buddhist nun, and *Wide Open: On Living With Purpose and Passion* by Dawna Markova, described on Amazon.com as teaching "how to live with heart and mind wide open to all life's possibilities."

Taormino didn't know she was going to become a pornographer. She went to Wesleyan University where she majored in American Studies. She had good grades and great recommendations. Aside from her just-average LSAT scores, her application to law school looked great—or so everyone said. "In the spring of my senior year, I got rejected from every single law school I applied to, except for two, where I was wait-listed." Her plan had jumped the rails, and that was the only plan she really had.

Her adviser bent her ear and blew her mind with this observation: "Tristan, I don't think you want to go to law school, and I don't think you want to be a lawyer. I think you want to write about sex." She said this because Taormino's senior thesis focused on lesbian sexual identity. It was 1993, she was 22, and she didn't think writing about sex could actually be a career. "There were certainly people doing amazing work in sex, but most of them had other jobs. And there was no such thing as a sex expert. Besides Dr. Ruth."

That was then. Taormino has just completed her sixth book, *The Big Book of Sex Toys*. She's finished editing an erotic anthology for Cleis Press called *Sometimes She Lets Me*. And she's working on three new movies for Vivid, the largest adult video producer on the planet, according to *Forbes*. "It's hard for me to sort of stop working," Taormino says from her home in New York state's Hudson Valley. "I'm working on stopping working."

She's got no problem reconciling feminism and adult films and says that ease may be generational. "Some of the very first porn that I saw was feminist porn," she says. "I grew up when the sex wars of the '80s were already over, and there were already these voices within feminism that said not all porn is bad, and porn can actually be a good thing." If Taormino was born 10 or 15 years earlier, she estimates, the idea of feminist porn would be a lot harder to grapple with. "A lot of critical thinking and writing was done on it, so I didn't feel like, Oh my god, if I'm a pornographer, I'm going to be objectifying women."

Her first book was *The Ultimate Guide to Anal Sex for Women*, published by Cleis Press. When it came out, she started teaching a workshop based on the guide at stores and conferences. Participants often asked when the video was coming out. Most of the sex-ed

videos Taormino remembers seeing at that point, "they were certainly educational." She knew she could do it better. "I wanted my video to be instructional but also to have hardcore sex in it and be really hot." She produced it herself, got friends to work for free and borrowed equipment. But she wanted to hit the mainstream and so shopped the project to the big adult studios. And just like with law school, all of them turned her down. Except John Stagliano of Evil Angel production company. "I felt like although a lot of good stuff had been produced, there still weren't enough female voices behind the camera, and there certainly weren't enough feminists," Taormino says.

She says she likes working for Vivid because the company gives her complete creative control, even when push comes to shove. She hasn't been censored by Steven Hirsch, who heads the company. "He believes in me enough to see my ideas all the way through," she says. "I have this tremendous freedom there, although sometimes they sort of cock their heads like, Huh? What?" For instance, when she decided to make the *Expert Guide to Oral Sex: Cunnilingus*, she wanted her film to be focused entirely on that—without dissolving, as other films do, into average, heterosexual porno-intercourse.

Identifying as a feminist pornographer, she's tinkered with the process of making a film. Her goal is to create working environments that are safe, fair, respectful and positive. She collaborates with performers on what they're going to do. "I want them to be part of the images and share a part of their sexuality—whatever part they want—with the viewer." Her sets are atypical because she wants the sex to be as organic as possible. "If I feel like the energy's there and the connection between the performers is good and they're really getting into it—but, oh my god, there's a cable in the middle of the floor—I'm just going to quietly have someone grab that out of the shot rather than stop them or try to reposition them."

The best part of her job, she says, is getting to know porn stars. A diverse crowd, porn stars



Tristan Taormino

## Pornotopia Schedule

**THURSDAY, NOV. 5,** at Self Serve (3904 Central SE)

**6 p.m.** Self Serve's Pornotopia kickoff party with free Marble beer. Learn about the movies and bid in the sexy silent auction. RSVP by calling 265-5815.

**FRIDAY, NOV. 6,** at Guild Cinema (3405 Central NE)

**6:30 p.m.** *Headshot*, a film that answers the question "Can a sex scene be hot, even if you can't see the sex?" And *The New Romantic*, a profile of six exhibitionist women questing after sexual empowerment.

**8 p.m.** A Q&A with Tristan Taormino and selections from her videos.

**10:30 p.m.** Retro skin flicks, and live drag and burlesque.

**SATURDAY, NOV. 7,** at Guild Cinema (3405 Central NE)

**1:30 p.m.** Interviews with indie porn makers and Matie Fricker, Pornotopia festival director. Featuring scenes from *Made in Secret*, a documentary about an anarcho-feminist porn collective, *Headshot* (see above), and *Coming Out Spanko*, the video diary of Tanya Bezreh finding her place in the world of kink.

**3:30 p.m.** Bondage and sadomasochism movies, including *The Naughty Garden*, a short that blurs reality and fantasy, and *Bride of Sin*, starring Madison Young as a bondage connoisseur who is about to be wed but gets it on with her maid of honor.

**5 p.m.** Male sexuality explored through *Howie*, the tale of one man's liberation, *Dog Eat Dog*, a look at puppy parties (a gay fetish that has nothing to do with animals), and *Walter & Nikolaj*, a documentary about street punks in love.

**6:30 p.m.** Lesbian porn with *Champion*, which is almost an indie film with lots of sex in it, and *No Fauxxx Roulette*, made by Courtney Trouble, winner of the Feminist Porn Awards for Most Diverse Cast.

**8 p.m.** Instructional porn videos by Tristan Taormino followed by a Q&A.

**10:30 p.m.** Retro skin flicks, live drag and burlesque.

**SUNDAY, NOV. 8,** at Guild Cinema (3405 Central NE)

**3:30 p.m.** Transgender people open up with *Enough Man*, a documentary about nine female-to-male transmen and their partners, and *Doing It Ourselves: The Trans Woman Porn Project*, assembled by a crew of transwomen tired of their portrayal in porn.

**5:30 p.m.** Bike porn is what it sounds like. Take in a series of shorts titled *Bike Smut 3* and a live performance by the Bike Smut crew.

**8 p.m.** *Positions for Lovers* shows three couples in Jamaica in more than 100 positions.

**MONDAY, NOV. 9,** at Self Serve (3904 Central SE)

**7:30 p.m.** A workshop on anal pleasure brought to you by Tristan Taormino. Tickets are \$30 and space is limited. Reserve a seat by calling 265-5815 or going to [selfservetoy.com](http://selfservetoy.com).




have each had a different path to this profession. "They've had this amazing life experience being porn performers that is unmatched by anyone else," she says. "I think they have a lot to teach us." That's why she includes interviews in her films. "We don't, as a culture, let porn performers speak for themselves enough."

When she casts people, she asks them who they want to work with. "The focus really is on the connection and also on them doing stuff they want to do." That translates to the screen, she says, because viewers can see people are genuinely having a good time. "The pleasure is mutual, and there's a lot of female orgasms in my movies." That's different than what she calls "bad porn," which caters only to men. Still, there's no pat way to make porn appeal to women, Taormino adds. "The first thing you have to do is abandon all hope

that you'll be able to speak to all women," she says. "I've spoken to thousands of women about what they want to see, what kinds of porn they like, what kinds of porn they don't like, and there is no single female viewer."

Taormino wrote a sex column in the *Village Voice* for nine years. She has also written a Q&A advice column for *Taboo Magazine* for a decade. The kinds of questions she's received have made her pretty intimate with American sexuality. "People are getting more sexually savvy and sophisticated," she says. "Just the kinds of discussions that we're having and the ways in which we're having them have definitely shifted." ☺

**Keep up with Tristan Taormino at her website: [puckerup.com](http://puckerup.com)**

Comment on this article at [alibi.com](http://alibi.com) 



presents two hotly  
des—the Holiday Gift  
Minute Gift Guide. Our  
be unwrapping the best  
s in one convenient and

plus\* readers know about  
tackle their holiday  
serve your ad today.

de  
NOVEMBER 19  
NOVEMBER 13

t Guide  
DECEMBER 10  
E. DECEMBER 4

alibi  
VERIFIED

ENTION!  
MEXICO MAKERS

WEARABLE, USABLE OR  
WANT TO BE ADMIRER, IF  
ITEMS AVAILABLE FOR  
LOCALLY, WE WANT TO  
YOUR NATIVE GOODS  
BE INCLUDED IN OUR  
HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE.  
Y SENDING AN E-MAIL TO:

MAKERS@ALIBI.COM

WEEKLY ALIBI

# So Long and Thanks for All the Paper Cuts

BY CHRISTIE CHISHOLM

I remember my first byline in the *Alibi*. It was attached to an article on Albuquerque's brand-new rapid transit bus system, called the Rapid Ride. I sought out that precious byline at the paper's little blue box outside the Co-op in Nob Hill. White Christmas lights had already been draped around nearby trees. It was a Wednesday around 6 p.m., the time my editor had told me papers would start showing up in that part of town. The issue was the Holiday Film Guide. When I flipped through it, I found my story on page 14. I jumped a little.

It was November of 2004. George W. Bush had just won re-election. And I had just landed an internship at the *Alibi* after leaving a masters of architecture program that didn't quite fit.

Since that cold and gleeful night outside the Co-op, the *Alibi* has become my second home. It has seen me through victories and calamities; it has introduced me to lifelong friends as well as my fair share of vitriolic phone calls from vehement readers; it has seen me grow as I have seen it grow. And it has given me a place in our community.

By the time this issue hits stands, I will no longer be at the paper—or, that depends on how you define it. I am leaving my post as editor-in-chief to work as an independent journalist. So although I will no longer be stationed in the *Alibi* offices, you will see me again in the paper's pages.

In my stead, Laura Marrich, known to you with a triple-title role—managing editor, music editor and food editor—will take the

the ones mentioned above, along with Arts Editor Erin Adair-Hodges and Film Editor Devin D. O'Leary—are some of the most talented, dedicated, tireless and all-around finest people I've had the pleasure to know.

Realizing that I'll still be involved with the paper in one way or another doesn't make me any less nostalgic in these final days. Tomorrow (last Friday to all of you) I am tasked with cleaning out my office, and it's a chore I'm dreading more for emotional reasons than any other. All of this cleansing and purging floods my brain with memories and makes me think of all that I'll miss.

I'll miss the feeling of Wednesday mornings, when the paper is on its way to stands and countertops, and there is a moment of calm before the chase and the grind and the sweat starts all over again. I'll miss the letters. I'll miss the way Paul Sessa smiles when the editorial department actually makes its deadlines. I'll miss Jeff Drew's face. I'll miss the way Tom Nayder looks at me when I ask him to do something he doesn't want to. I'll miss the endless meetings that seem to multiply like rabbits—because although they are distracting, the people who contribute to them always have such interesting things to say. I'll miss 20-minute-long discussions over comma placement, and everything else, with Laura. I'll miss Jessica's music, Erin's offhand witticisms, and Marisa's fervent work ethic and grace. I'll miss the way Devin pretends not to hear a conversation you're having right behind him and then swivels around in his chair the moment you're at a loss in order to give you the precise answer to whatever random bit of information you're seeking. I'll miss Carl Petersen's yeti updates. I will miss my columnists and my freelancers and every intern I've had. I will miss every single other person at the paper, because they are all admirable and kind. I will miss saying that I'm the editor of the *Weekly Alibi*, because it's a paper I'm proud to have belonged to.

Thanks for staying with me through this drawn-out farewell, which is admittedly more for me than it is for anyone else. And thanks for the last five years. ☺

Comment on this article at [alibi.com](http://alibi.com)

## PROFILE continued from page 8

have each had a different path to this profession. "They've had this amazing life experience being porn performers that is unmatched by anyone else," she says. "I think they have a lot to teach us." That's why she includes interviews in her films. "We don't, as a culture, let porn performers speak for themselves enough."

When she casts people, she asks them who they want to work with. "The focus really is on the connection and also on them doing stuff they want to do." That translates to the screen, she says, because viewers can see people are genuinely having a good time. "The pleasure is mutual, and there's a lot of female orgasms in my movies." That's different than what she calls "bad porn," which caters only to men. Still, there's no pat way to make porn appeal to women, Taormino adds. "The first thing you have to do is abandon all hope

that you'll be able to speak to all women," she says. "I've spoken to thousands of women about what they want to see, what kinds of porn they like, what kinds of porn they don't like, and there is no single female viewer."

Taormino wrote a sex column in the *Village Voice* for nine years. She has also written a Q&A advice column for *Taboo Magazine* for a decade. The kinds of questions she's received have made her pretty intimate with American sexuality. "People are getting more sexually savvy and sophisticated," she says. "Just the kinds of discussions that we're having and the ways in which we're having them have definitely shifted." ☺

Keep up with Tristan Taormino at her website: [puckerup.com](http://puckerup.com)

Comment on this article at [alibi.com](http://alibi.com)