



Onsite [at] OCAD U

2013

Ads for People: Selling Ethics in the Digital Age [Exhibition Catalogue]

Smith, Lisa Deanne

Suggested citation:

Smith, Lisa Deanne (2013) Ads for People: Selling Ethics in the Digital Age [Exhibition Catalogue]. Onsite Gallery at OCAD University. Available at <http://openresearch.ocadu.ca/id/eprint/456/>

Open Research is a publicly accessible, curated repository for the preservation and dissemination of scholarly and creative output of the OCAD University community. Material in Open Research is open access and made available via the consent of the author and/or rights holder on a non-exclusive basis.

The OCAD University Library is committed to accessibility as outlined in the [Ontario Human Rights Code](#) and the [Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act \(AODA\)](#) and is working to improve accessibility of the Open Research Repository collection. If you require an accessible version of a repository item contact us at repository@ocadu.ca.



“As online communities show, our desires focus less on things than on engaging with each other, online and in real life, to improve our world.”

— LISA DEANNE SMITH, MFA, AOCA, CURATOR, ADS FOR PEOPLE



Left: *A Voice for the Voiceless for The Zimbabwean* by TBWA \ HUNT \ LASCARIS SOUTH AFRICA, 2011

Exhibitors

Organizations and Agencies in the exhibition:

AIDS ACTION NOW!, Cancer Patient Aid Association, Center for Coping Skills Training, Telephone Counseling for Persons in Suicidal Crisis, Clemenger BBDO, College Humor, Columbian Ministry of Defense, DDB New York, Dogwood Initiative, Fundacion Michou Mau, Jewish Council for Education and Research, John St., Keep a Child Alive (KCA), Leo Burnett Detroit, Live Action, McCann Melbourne, McCann Belgrade, Metro Trains Melbourne, Nanhi Kali, Nazca Saatchi & Saatchi, New Zealand Government, Ogilvy & Mather Mumbai, Rethink, Rethink Breast Cancer, StrawberryFrog, Students Teaching About Racism in Society (s.t.a.r.s.), TBWA\CHAIT\DAY NEW YORK, TBWA \ HUNT \ LASCARIS SOUTH AFRICA, United Nations Information Centre in Mexico, WATERisLIFE, Y&R Mexico, The Zimbabwean

Events

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 6

Talk by Scott Goodson, Founder and CEO of StrawberryFrog. 6:30 p.m. OCAD University Auditorium, Room 190, 100 McCaul Street

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 6

Opening reception. 8 to 10 p.m. 230 Richmond Street West

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 13

Insite Curator's Tour with Lisa Deanne Smith. 6:30 p.m. 230 Richmond Street West

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 3

Insite Exhibition Tour with Carl Jones, Faculty of Design. 6:30 p.m. 230 Richmond Street West

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to Carl Jones, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Design (Advertising) at OCAD University for his vital recommendations, support and expertise; Scott Goodson, Founder and CEO of StrawberryFrog; Media Strategist Luke Moore; Charles Reeve; and Jeff Crews.

Research Assistants: Rouzbeh Akhbari, Rose Ho, Erin Smithies, Pallavi Thampi, Benjamin Verdicchio.

Design by Marketing and Communications, 2013. Printed by Somerset Graphics using UV inks and full interdeck technology.

ADS FOR PEOPLE

Selling Ethics in the Digital Age

FEBRUARY 7 TO MAY 25, 2013

ON SITE AT OCAD U

Onsite [at] OCAD U
230 Richmond Street W.
Toronto ON
(416) 977 6000 x 265
onsite@ocadu.ca
www.ocadu.ca/onsite

Gallery Hours
Tuesday to Friday, 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.
Saturday, noon to 6 p.m.

Admission to the gallery and all related events is free.

ADS FOR PEOPLE

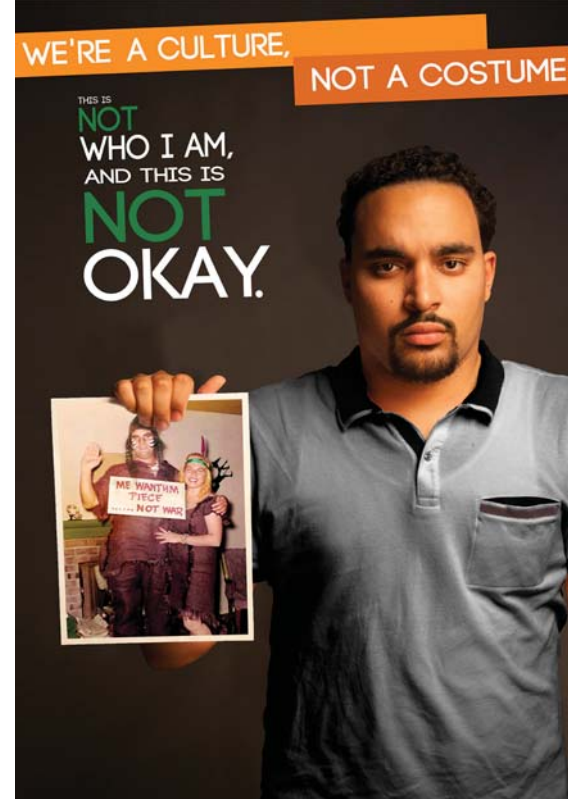
Selling Ethics in the Digital Age

Onsite [at] OCAD University
February 7 to May 25, 2013

Unrealistic desires, we all have them. To some degree, we always have and always will, even if — in these media-savvy times — most of us know that advertisements try to sell us things by shaping our desires.

But it wasn't always that way. 120 years ago, ads mainly described products with factual texts and truthful illustrations, giving consumers a choice about what to buy. That situation changed forever, though, when Pears soap, against the wishes of artist John Millais (who had sold the painting's copyright), added a bar of soap to the foreground of *Bubbles*, an idyllic painting of a boy blowing bubbles.¹ This ad was the first to appeal to us emotionally, and marked the start of branding.

Since the 1980s ads have been widely analyzed. We know they create wants, which they turn into needs. Knowing this about ads apparently gives us a choice — the choice to ignore them if we like. But that really isn't the case. Neurologists study how to trigger positive purchasing responses, advising advertisers how to affect the areas in our brains that respond to rewards, decision-making, motivation, emotion and our sense of self. In "The Hidden Power of Advertising," Robert Heath shows that most advertising works emotionally, not rationally, a phenomenon he calls "The Low Attention Processing Model."² Low attention processing is learning that happens without you realizing it. Information enters your brain and



“A brand can identify, crystallize, curate, spark and sponsor a mass movement. Once you have a cultural movement you can do anything in a fragmenting media environment.”

— SCOTT GOODSON, CEO OF STRAWBERRYFROG

Left: *We're a Culture, Not a Costume* by Students Teaching About Racism in Society (S.T.A.R.S.), 2011 & 2012

told him, “Don't you know you will never make a difference? There are too many starfish washed up on the beach.” The little boy looked at the old man and then reached down, picked up another starfish and threw it into the water and said, “It made a difference to that one.”⁴

Surritte's point, of course, is that a small change is still a change. Moreover, to link this idea directly to the role of digital technology, a lot of little changes can add up to something big — as the case of Asmaa Mahfouz shows.

Mahfouz is the Egyptian credited with sparking the mass uprising in Tahrir Square on January 25, 2011 though a video blog she posted online. In it she urges Egyptians to “Go down to the street, send SMS's, post it on the 'net, make people aware... Your presence with us will make a difference.”⁵

In one way, Mahfouz's idea that broadcasting a message could affect positive social change goes back to the First and Second World Wars, both of which saw upturns in the number of public service announcements and propaganda campaigns that appealed to us politically. The Internet's cost-effectiveness has led many more international not-for-profit organizations to produce advertising campaigns online, adding new voices to discussions of ethics, safety, the environment, poverty and health. Moreover, individuals and groups not affiliated with not-for-profit or political organizations create content on YouTube and blogs to voice opinions on a diverse range of issues. One example in this exhibition, *Gay Men Will Marry Your Girlfriends* (a pro-marriage equality video from College Humour) has received over 3,428,000 views on YouTube since being posted on November 20, 2012.⁶

The rise of such advocacy makes it exciting to think about advertisements that do more than sell products. Recently, some commercial companies have gotten in on the act. For instance, TOMS shoes created the One for One Movement through which, in over forty countries, a pair of shoes is given to a child in need for every pair purchased. Of course, this initiative makes TOMS look good. But when a company finds a cause that fits and puts that cause first, it finds that everyone wins. Beyond being good in itself, this engagement creates fulfilment in the company's employees and



Left: *The Girl Epidemic* by StrawberryFrog for Nanhi Kali, 2012

respect in their customers. As Scott Goodson, CEO of StrawberryFrog and author of *Uprising: How to Build a Brand — and Change the World*, states, “A brand can identify, crystallize, curate, spark and sponsor a mass movement. Once you have a cultural movement you can do anything in a fragmenting media environment.”⁷ But the movement has to come first, not the company. As when a company makes a token gift to charity, as is often the case, the media-savvy public sees through it.

In 2007 São Paulo, the world's fourth largest city, enacted the Clean City Law, banning almost all advertising in public spaces. Fifteen thousand billboards were taken down, as were all ads on buses, taxis and trains. Only small, less conspicuous signs are allowed in store windows, and even pamphleteering is illegal. More than 70 percent of the city's residents supported the bill.⁸ Once a city with advertising gone wild, São Paulo has been cleaned up. Whether or not we think this solution suits our public spaces — and it is an important question to ask — ads continue to flood our homes.

Still, the São Paulo example encourages us to imagine a city, a country, a world with fewer ads — far fewer ads. Now, imagine that the remaining ads are less about promoting commercial interests than they are about driving conversation and debate about ways to improve our world — ads that influence our ethics and respond to our desires. The ads in this show belong to a movement to make that imagined world our next reality.

— Lisa Deanne Smith

Endnotes:

¹ National Museums Liverpool, Lady Level Art Gallery <http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/picture-of-month/displaypicture.asp?venue=7&id=299>

² R. G. Heath, “The Hidden Power of Advertising,” *Admap* Monograph 7, 2001.

³ Louise Story, “Anywhere the Eye Can See, It's Likely to See an Ad,” *New York Times*, January 15, 2007 http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/15/business/media/15everywhere.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

⁴ Ken Surritte, WATERisLIFE website, <http://waterislife.com/about/the-founder/>

⁵ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SgijgMdsEuk>

⁶ <http://www.collegehumor.com/video/6846855/gay-men-will-marry-your-girlfriends>. The video has prompted numerous responses, including “Straight Guys Respond to ‘Gay Men Will Marry Your Girlfriends’” (“You guys really would be doing us a huge solid here.”), “Gay Women Will Marry Your Boyfriends” and “Gay Women Will Marry/Bang Your Girlfriends” <http://www.craveonline.com/comedy/articles/200575-gay-men-will-marry-your-girlfriends-and-4-response-videos>.

⁷ Goodson, Scott, Email to Lisa Deanne Smith, January 8, 2013.

⁸ David Evan Harris, “São Paulo: A City Without Ads,” *Adbusters*, August 03, 2007.



Above: *The Girl Store* by StrawberryFrog for Nanhi Kali, 2011