

mad
women

also by jane maas

Adventures of an Advertising Woman

How to Advertise (with Kenneth Roman)

Christmas in Wales: A Homecoming (with Michael Maas)

mad women

THE **OTHER** SIDE OF LIFE ON MADISON AVENUE
IN THE '60S AND BEYOND

jane maas

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Author's Note: The names and identifying characteristics of some people have been changed.

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It took National, with its 1971 “Fly Me” campaign, to create a backlash by women. The commercials featured sexy actresses dressed as National stewardesses looking directly at the camera and saying, “I’m Cheryl.” (Or Nancy, Margie, or Barbara.) “Fly me.” The airlines painted the women’s names on the noses of the planes in the style of World War II bombers, and passed out “Fly me” buttons for the hostesses to wear. Some of them refused. Others urged the Federal Communications Commission to take the campaign off the air. NOW thundered. And National passengers increased by 23 percent, twice that of any other airline.

In 1966, everybody was talking about the suggestive spot for Noxzema shaving cream. A man shaved to striptease music while a sexy female urged, “Take it off. Take it *all* off.” The commercial ended with a kind of “bump and grind” musical riff as the shaver flicked off the last dabs of Noxzema the way a stripper would shed her last bits of clothing.

Another Noxzema spot, also for shaving cream, caused an even greater stir. It opened with a close-up of Joe Namath saying, “I’m so excited. I’m going to get creamed.” Farrah Fawcett-Majors then smoothed on the Noxzema. Namath, cuddling with her at the end of the commercial, confided, “You’ve got a great pair of hands.” Racy stuff.

The sexiest, most notorious commercial of the decade was written by a woman, Lois Geraci Ernst, founder of an agency called Advertising to Women. She created the “Aviance Night” for Aviance perfume, and struck right at the heart of Betty Friedan’s “problem that has no name.” The Aviance commercial

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shows the sweet little housewife changing from her floor-scrubbing garb into a negligee and spraying herself all over with Aviance. The music and lyrics that accompanied this scene were “I’ve been sweet and I’ve been good, I’ve had a whole day of motherhood, but I’m going to have an Aviance night.” The newly seductive haus frau stations herself at the front door, her husband enters, BLACKOUT.

Print advertising was more lenient than television about sex. The network watchdogs would allow a slightly suggestive commercial like the striptease shave, but they drew the line at true sexual innuendo. Nudity was unheard of. You couldn’t even show a woman wearing a bra. The famous “I dreamed I (DID WHATEVER) in my Maidenform bra” was a print campaign that ran from 1949 to 1969. The ads, showing women wearing only a bra above the waist, invited women to fantasize all kinds of activities, from attending the opera to going on a tiger hunt.

It wasn’t until 1987 that television allowed a woman to appear in a bra. Previously, the bra makers had to parade their wares on a mannequin or on a model wearing the bra over a leotard.

The irrepressible George Lois, one of the 1960s bad boys in the agency business, created many covers for *Esquire* while he was a consultant to the magazine. One of his most controversial was for an issue themed “The New American Woman—through at 21.” The cover photo Lois created was a nude young beauty dumped into a trash can. In his book *The Big Idea*, Lois confesses that his inspiration for this visual came from an old dirty joke. A young housewife is hanging her laundry on the rooftop of her apartment building. She trips and falls

headfirst into a garbage can below. A Chinese laundryman passes by, admires her legs and nether parts, and says to himself, “Americans very funny people. In China, good for ten years yet.”

George told me recently that the idea for one of his wittiest covers came from his wife. She was walking down Broadway a few weeks before the premiere of *Cleopatra*, the movie that had riveted the attention of the world because of the Elizabeth Taylor–Richard Burton love affair. Mrs. Lois knew that George was working on a cover idea for an upcoming *Esquire* piece on the movie. When she spotted two billboard painters working on an enormous Times Square poster of the lovers, she immediately called George. “Get down here right away. It’s your cover photo!” He did, and knew he had his cover shot. The painters had just begun work on Taylor’s breasts, each one nearly as large as the man painting it.

Lois came back the next day with a photographer. The painters had moved on past the breasts, but he gave them twenty dollars each to, as he says, “revisit the tits.” It was another memorable George Lois cover.

Ogilvy & Mather in the 1960s was not a big proponent of sex in advertising. The most daring campaign we created was for Ban deodorant. We used semi-nude Greek statues as a way of showing armpits without showing armpits. The camera revolved around the statues while a “voice of God” announcer revealed solemnly that “in the adult male and in the adult female,” there are certain glands that secrete sweat. Ban was the solution to these marmoreal outpourings. All of us at the agency were really proud of what we considered avant-garde advertising.

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When sex did come to Ogilvy, it came with a bang. The cause was a series of print ads so sexy that they turned the agency into warring factions. It took David Ogilvy himself to make peace.

The first Ogilvy print ad for Paco Rabanne men's cologne showed a man in bed, clearly nude beneath sheets that just reached his hips. Morning light fills the room; an empty wine bottle stands on a chest at the foot of the bed. He is just answering the telephone. There is no headline and the copy is entirely a dialogue between the man and his lover of the night before.

Hello?

You snore.

And you steal all the covers. What time did you leave?

Six-thirty. You looked like a toppled Greek statue lying there.

Only some tourist had swiped your fig leaf.

The lover says she (we assume she is a she, although some advertising critics believe the copywriter leaves this intentionally ambiguous) has taken his Paco Rabanne cologne. She is going to rub it on her body when she goes to bed and remember every little thing about their night together. The dialogue ends as her flight is called, and she asks what she should bring him from California. "My Paco Rabanne," he says. "And a fig leaf."

The new president of Ogilvy & Mather, Ken Roman, thought the ad was not in keeping with the agency's image. Chairman Jock Elliott agreed with him. They took the matter to the newly installed executive creative director, who re-

minded them that he had been promised complete creative freedom. The battle escalated to Touffou, where David Ogilvy was living in semi-retirement. He didn't like the ad, either, but he was chiefly offended by the fact that it had no headline, and therefore broke one of his most cherished rules: "Put the message in the headline." But even D.O. honored the "hands off the creative" commitment to the creative head.

There were several more ads in the series. Each one featured an evocative photo, erotic dialogue, and a missing bottle of the cologne. None of them had headlines. The campaign won the first Kelly Award from the Magazine Publishers Association for best print advertising of the year. More important, it created renewed buzz for Ogilvy & Mather as an exciting, creative advertising agency.

A year or so later, the creative director of the campaign, Jay Jasper, ran into David Ogilvy at the agency's Paris office. David confessed that he was using the Paco Rabanne ads in his new book *Ogilvy on Advertising* as an example of creative brilliance. He said, "You know, Jay, I'm eating a lot of crow in my book because of your campaign." The elevator doors opened and Ogilvy got on, just as Jasper said, "*Bon appétit*, David." Ogilvy smiled and the elevator doors closed.

In our book *How to Advertise*, first published in 1976 and still in print, Ken Roman and I offer some guidelines about the use of sex in advertising. "Sex may make the world go round," we say, "but it doesn't sell many products." We advise that sex works to sell sexy products, but not much else. We've been proved dead wrong. Sex has sold and continues to sell every product imaginable, from trucks to chewing gum.

It's my turn to eat crow.