

Moore, Anne Elizabeth

Interviewed by Liz Mason

Lumpen asks our favorite renaissance woman a few questions to keep us on track

What projects are you involved in right now?

Right now I'm finishing a book called UNMARKETABLE: BRANDALISM, COPYFIGHTING, MOCKETING, AND THE EROSION OF INTEGRITY for The New Press. It's a book that investigates the current corporate usurpation of underground activist and artistic media techniques into marketing strategies and it is really really freaky. What's most crazy to me, of course, is not the corporate imperative to co-opt — we all know that's how the world works — it's the underground's willingness to do the deal. Or worse: broker the deal. The line between independent and corporate owned has become so fuzzy lately, it's really a bummer to me that those who "should know" how to operate outside of corporate structures don't have any desire to uphold those remaining boundaries, much less make them

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any clearer. But, you know, the kids'll call me out of touch. It's been nothing but an amazing project to work on. I mean, I'll come across a STAR WARS marketing promotion that utilizes a riot grrrrl slogan, and I not only get to call up the STAR WARS team, but Allison Wolfe and Tobi Vail, who created the original RIOT GRRRL zine that started it all. And I get to say, hey, here are the exact individuals involved in using and changing this message. Why are they doing it? Why should we care? What should we do about it? I think the most damaging thing about the corporate structure is that it literally removes individual

responsibility. It eradicates integrity, purposefully. Being able to bring that back into the discussion and watch how fast it changes the dynamic is really rewarding. Also, I'm continuing to co-edit PUNK PLANET magazine and our books line. We've convinced another author to jump ship from her corporate press, which is exciting. More exciting is that she's one of my very favorite writers ever, Elizabeth Crane.

I'm also in the nitty-gritty of the next BEST AMERICAN COMICS volume with Chris Ware. Which means that the comics reading is done for the year, now it's just negotiating who of that goes in the book. Also, of course, I do occasional little articles and stuff, just to put new ideas out there, respond to what's going on in the world. Try to keep the kids from callin' me any more names.

In what way do you feel your work in independent publishing functions as activism?

Well, the easy answer is that at this point in our national development as a capitalistic system, anything that resists corporatizing and forwards individual voice over profit-making is, essentially, a political act. I wish it wasn't! But it's rare to find a space for noncommercial voice in our culture, and great efforts need to be made to create and secure it. More efforts than people can believe even. Because these are the only spaces for individuals who don't have access to traditional mainstream media — anyone under any kind of economic, racial, or sex- or gender-based oppression, for example — to carve out their concerns and begin to articulate their needs and demands. That's the ideal, at least. The romantic view of what I do, the way I get through the grueling hours and shitty pay and stupid fights with distributors. But on a more personal level, what I write and how I put it out there in the world is intended to change the minds of my readers. Gradually, and in as amusing a way as possible, but still to create a change in their views, critical engagement with the subject, or actual actions. And so that means that I have to sometimes rethink everything about the way print media works. How the pieces look and are designed — if they're in a book or a zine or an art project or scrawled on a wall — how they're distributed, who will be attracted to them, who the audience is and what they may be able and willing to grasp. So this applies to projects like OPERATION POCKET FULL OF WISHES, distributed within American Girl Place directly to kids and parents that I would



like to see rethink their non-critical engagement with branded feminine history, or INDEPENDENT ZINE, a story about Starbucks sprawl created with Starbucks funding and distributed in Starbucks stores. (Although also now available at Quimbys.) But it also applies to BEST AMERICAN COMICS, where the audience is going to be very very general, and big, but willing to view media slightly differently than, say, the reader of an all-text literary anthology. I actually had someone come up to me on the BAC tour in October that had read my intro to the book and was just really, really excited about self-publishing. I mean, that's subversion, as opposed to radicalizing — putting something in a major publishing house book that drives the reader to want to go out and make their own thing, or at the very least to be more aware that the major publishing house book isn't the only publishing option for brilliant, vibrant work. But there's room for subversion, too. It's just less interesting than radicalizing work, work that places actual tools for rethinking and recreating our culture in the hands of those that participate in it.

Comics have traditionally been a male-dominated field. How does a woman affect and your thoughts on gender/sexuality affect your work and publishing in general?

Comics have a long way to go to catch up to, say, traditional radio or only literature or radio, in terms of gender equity. And so, yeah, women are really just starting to be recognized as major contributors to the field, even though tons of revisionism has gone into digging up those early female participants in comics, like people like Trina Robbins. But even that work is marginal, and so we have this incredibly wonky situation now where we can have a whole "Masters of American Comics" exhibition that doesn't include a single woman — although strangely, it does include a German man. Before that show mounted, John Martin, one of the organizers, and I discussed who was going in

it, and I was shocked by how quickly he dispelled my assertion that, at the very least, Lynda Barry needed to be in that show. Although I did suggest about 10 others too. And I realized that thing, AGAIN, where even though the person I am talking to is rational, sane, even brilliant, there are so many crazy conditions that go into how people decide what "the best" of anything is that are actually social constructs! We're conditioned to like what we can buy! And we're only offered so much available for sale! And what's even made available for sale is limited by all those capitalist things like who owns the press, how did he get the press, who is the best friend of who owns the press, who's sleeping with who owns the press, and does the person who owns the press make any deliberate attempts to seek work outside of their own comfort zone? Because most people don't. Anyway, I put a lot of these ideas into a comic I did with Christa Donner for TIN HOUSE that's been reprinted in a couple other places already. And so, you know, I've worked through these issues, I've thought about them, written about them, and then I go out on tour and I see that, well, nobody reads anymore. Social comfort still guides comics — meaning the guys that own the presses publish their drinkin' buddies, and their drinkin' buddies' best friends. Not all the time, for sure, but more than in most other media, except maybe film. At one point on my tour I was sitting watching the only female creator there — one of, by far, the best discoveries in the BAC book, Esther Pearl Watson — literally get pushed away from the table we were all signing at, because she was smaller, and quieter, and more giggly — in other words, she presents herself in very traditionally feminine ways. I kind of went ballistic on the male creator responsible. And, I mean, comics' inability to deal with gender and sexual diversity is just a tiny tiny fraction of its inability to deal with other issues of diversity, including racial and economic, but also including diversity of subject matter. And that's kept the whole medium from developing.