

CALL FOR ART — *Sex/Labor*

On Film and The Hartnett Gallery at the University of Rochester (NY) are now accepting submissions for the group exhibition *Sex/Labor* that will take place between November 2024—January 2025.

We seek moving-image artwork that addresses topics which include (but are not limited to):

- Any kind of sex work / aspect of the industry (stripping, pole dancing, escorting, sugaring, peep shows, camming (+ other forms of online sex work), pornographic film and video, phone sex, etc.)
- How the industry has changed / is changing since the COVID-19 pandemic
- Sex work & everyday life
- Memoirs, poetry, and other creative writing by sex workers
- Histories of sex worker activism and unionization efforts
- Representations of sex work in popular culture

We are primarily interested in moving-image artwork, but we will consider submissions that are in other mediums. This is because the **exhibition will coincide with a screening series** (co-hosted by On Film and The Little Theatre in Rochester, NY) **of the independent filmmaker Lizzie Borden's three films: *Regrouping* (1976), *Born in Flames* (1983), and *Working Girls* (1986).**

Regrouping and *Born in Flames* will be screened at The Little Theatre on Wednesday, November 20th, 2024 as part of their High Falls Women in Film series.

On Thursday, November 21st, 2024 the opening of *Sex/Labor* will be paired with a screening of *Working Girls* on the University of Rochester campus. The screening will be followed by a conversation with Lizzie Borden that places the film and exhibition into conversation with one another. *Working Girls*, a narrative film, depicts a day in the lives of sex workers. The majority of the film takes place in a single room, where a group of women gossip, eat, fight, and hang out before and after their appointments with clients.

We invite artists whose work is included in the exhibition to attend this event with Lizzie Borden. Unfortunately, we are unable to provide financial compensation for travel to and accommodations in Rochester. Artists whose work is accepted for the exhibition will receive a \$300 stipend.

ABOUT THE TOPIC:

Popular culture has seen a resurged interest in—and desire to represent—sex work. Films and television shows such as *Poor Things* (2023), *Good Luck to You, Leo Grande* (2022), *Jezebel* (2019), *Hustlers* (2019), *P-Valley* (2020-present), and *Pose* (2018-2021) have all sought to present their audiences with nuanced, dynamic stories about the lives of people who work in the industry.

Even though representation in popular culture is not an end in itself, it remains significant—in part because full-service sex work has yet to be decriminalized in the United States (except for a number of counties in Nevada). Activist organizations such as Decriminalize Sex Work and Strippers United seek to decriminalize sex work and de-stigmatize the profession, in order to support the health and safety of workers.¹ In addition, the successful unionization of strippers working at The Star Garden Topless Dive Bar in North Hollywood, in the spring of 2023, represents a recent and notable victory in labor struggles—one that sets a precedent for workers to unionize in and outside of the industry.²

Given the uptick in representations of sex work in popular culture, and these recent gains in workers' efforts to unionize, we might ask: how do representations of sex work in visual culture ask us to reconsider how we think about sex, intimacy, care, cash, activism, and the workplace? What do representations of the industry indicate about our fantasies, desires, and relationship to work under late-capitalism?³

WHO CAN SUBMIT?

Professional and non-professional artists alike!

We invite artists who work or have worked in the sex industry, as well as community-allies, to display their artwork in conversation with one another.

HOW TO SUBMIT ARTWORK:

Please fill out this Google Form: <https://forms.gle/3e7GnH7mwugBRPLn9>

EXHIBITION DATES

Submission Portal Opens: April 22nd, 2024

Submission Deadline: July 15th, 2024

Exhibition Opens: November 21st, 2024

¹ <https://www.strippersunited.org/know-your-rights> and <https://decriminalizesex.work/about/mission-statement/>

² See articles written by the New York Times and NPR:

<https://www.npr.org/2023/05/16/1134667170/strippers-union-los-angeles-dancers-star-garden>;

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/05/16/business/strippers-union-labor.html>

³ Heather Berg, "Reading Sex Work." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 120, no. 3 (July 1, 2021): 485–91.

<https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-9154856>. In the introduction to this special issue of SAQ, Berg describes how the issue and its contributors' focus on sex work's reception and interpretation in wider society, rather than assuming it can become knowable or familiar through academic research: "[...], this special issue of South Atlantic Quarterly turns away from the impulse to know more about sex workers and toward a focus on what discursive encounters with sex work reveal about civilian life. The articles that follow turn a sex work lens outward rather than a critic's gaze in. Contributors took the invitation to consider how stories about sex work and sex workers circulate and what they say about knowledge production, classed struggle, consent, brittle masculinity, and the politics of cash." p. 486-7.

ABOUT ON FILM

On Film is a film screening project founded in 2009 by the graduate students in the Visual and Cultural Studies Program at the University of Rochester. Since then, On Film's collective programmers have maintained an ongoing commitment to screening rarely seen and important works of cinema from around the world in 16mm and 35mm formats. Our events have traditionally been free and open to the broader Rochester public. On Film frequently collaborates with both local and visiting scholars and artists.