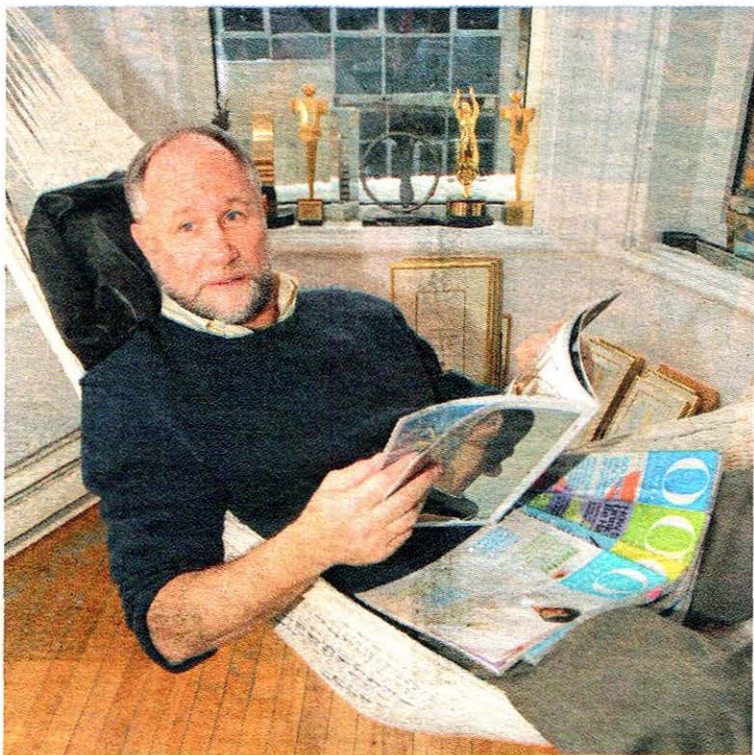


NOISEMAKERS

2008

Good reading

Documentary filmmaker Abbey Neidik peers *Inside the Great Magazines*



RACHEL GRANOFFSKY

MAG MAN: Neidik

by MATTHEW HAYS

Fit­tingly, Abbey Neidik must interrupt a read­ing ses­sion to grant this in­ter­view. He's right in the middle of read­ing a sci­ence mag­a­zine: One of my great in­ter­ests, along with re­li­gion," he ex­plains. "I read a lot of mag­a­zines on those topics, as well as gen­eral in­ter­est ones."

Neidik's in­ter­est in mag­a­zines has led the film­maker to co-direct and pro­duce (with his part­ner Irene An­gelico) *Inside the Great Maga-*

zines, an ex­haus­tive, three-part doc­u­men­tary mi­ni­se­ries about a vast ar­ray of fa­mous mag­a­zines. With titles as di­ver­gent as *Ebony*, *Vanity Fair*, *Rolling Stone*, *Ms.*, *National Geo­graphic*, *The New Yorker*, *Life* and *The Advo­cate*—to name but a few—Neidik had his or­ganizational work cut out for him.

The doc se­ries be­gins by go­ing back to the be­gin­nings of the print press, and the con­nec­tion that print­ing had to do with the ad­vance­ment both of democ­racy

and cap­i­tal­ism. But the mi­ni­se­ries, which will air on Global this spring, then delves into the spe­cific in­di­vid­ual sto­ries of mag­a­zines and their be­gin­nings. The con­nec­tion be­tween the Afri­can-Amer­i­can civil rights strug­gle and *Ebony* mag­a­zine is a high­light, while the femi­nist move­ment and the gay lib­er­ation move­ment are also rep­re­sented by *Ms.* and *The Advo­cate*, re­spectively.

"We tried to focus on those mag­a­zines that were turn­ing points in terms of so­cial, po­lit­i­cal or cul­tural his­tory," says Neidik. There were also gen­eral turn­ing points for the mag­a­zine in­dus­try, like when pho­to­graph­y could be read­ily re­pro­duced in their pages.

Neidik says he also found some of the com­pet­ing nar­ra­tives and ideol­ogies of mag­a­zines fas­ci­nat­ing. While *Cosmo­poli­tan* was tout­ing the phi­losophies of Helen Gurley Brown's ground­break­ing book *Sex and the Single Girl*, *Playboy* was pro­mot­ing Hugh Hefner's con­cept of sexual lib­er­ation. Gloria Steinem, found­er of *Ms.*, de­nounces them both as any­thing but femi­nist. Gurley Brown is given the chance to re­but Steinem's claims: "She's full of S-H-I-T," says the maverick, too po­lite to ac­tu­ally utter the word.

Neidik says that as their re­search con­tinued and they be­gan piec­ing the doc­u­men­tary to­gether, other larger shifts in the na­ture of mag­a­zines be­came ap­parent. "Mag­a­zines often re­flected who peo­ple were, or what the world was to them. But with ad­ver­tis­ing pres­sures, mag­a­zines be­gan to tell you who you should be."

As well, the ef­fects of cor­po­rate own­ership are also ex­amined. "The strength of mag­a­zines are their editors, writers, pho­to­graphers and re­searchers. Cor­po­rate own­ers don't al­ways re­cog­nize that, and re­al­ize there are often sim­pler ways of grab­bing read­ers' at­ten­tion, by sim­ply put­ting a celeb­rity on their cover." ★