

Artist gets even after Borat hoax

By Ian Youngs

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An artist who was duped into appearing in the Borat film has got her revenge on the hoaxer by giving him a starring role in her new set of sculptures.

New York artist Linda Stein was among a group of feminists who were taken in by comedian Sacha Baron Cohen's character.

Her part in the film inspired her to create a new series of artworks, including one featuring Borat.

In it, she has drawn a small penis on his thong. Ms Stein said: "I felt there should be some exposure on his part."

Ms Stein is known for her statues "knights", which represent female protection.

She has paired three sculptures with figures from the entertainment world - Borat, Marilyn Monroe and Wonder Woman - for a new exhibition.

The artist was interviewed by Borat in her studio after being told he was a third-world reporter making a film about women's rights.

But it was a spoof, and Borat started talking about women walking three steps behind men, pulling the plough and having smaller brains than men.

The film was a runaway box office success, winning Baron Cohen a Golden Globe for best comedy performance and earning an Oscar nomination for best adapted screenplay.

Baron Cohen said his character was "a tool" to expose and challenge racism, homophobia and sexism.

"He may do better with homophobia and racism, but he just didn't do very well with sexism,"

Ms Stein tells the BBC News website.

In the film's aftermath, the artist received thousands of e-mails.

"Borat's excessive woman-bashing is being taken the wrong way by the audience"

Linda Stein

Most were from men criticising her attitude, with some saying: "What's the matter with you, don't you have any sense of humour about misogyny?"

"I have those words in an e-mail," Ms Stein says. "Borat's excessive woman-bashing is being taken the wrong way by the audience.

"He's getting too many guys to chuckle with him. He didn't show any of the parts that made him really look foolish."

Ms Stein drew the small penis on Borat's thong because, she says, "as he exposed people, he should be able to take what he gives".



And she is anticipating another surge of angry e-mails in response.

"You'll miss the point that if he has the right to expose and say what he says about women,

and say that it's in the name of exposing bigotry, then I could say the same thing," she says.

"The phallus on Borat is in the name of exploring what manhood is, and if a man thinks having a big phallus is manhood, the point is misplaced. That's not what it's about."

Borat is now featured in Ms Stein's work titled Anti-hero/Hero - with Borat the anti-hero - which will be shown in an exhibition, Eccentric Bodies, from Thursday.

The show takes place at Rutgers University, New Jersey - which was at the centre of controversy when radio host Don Imus called the university's female basketball team "nappy-headed hos".

The Borat interview and the Imus affair reminded Ms Stein of other battles for equality in her life, and spurred her on to tackle the subject in her art, she says.

"Though I find Sacha Baron Cohen a brilliant man, people must realise that a one-hour interview with him was actually very painful.

"If Borat started a dialogue on feminism with his movie, I'm now continuing it and taking it a step further"

Linda Stein

"Even though he was this bumbling idiot, the words and the tone and the look on his face weren't so different from what I had heard all my life.

"Though it was painful for me to be in the movie, I think something very good has come out of it for me because it's energised me to address sexism more than ever before."

As well as the Rutgers exhibition, which also features six other feminist artists, Ms Stein's knights have been chosen as the central sculpture commission for the \$4m (£2m) Walk of the Heroines at Portland State University in Oregon.

"If Borat started a dialogue on feminism with his movie, I'm now continuing it and taking it a step further," Ms Stein says.

"I'm asking that some of those men who e-mailed me to realise that I wasn't in on the joke and that women are in a very vulnerable situation throughout the world."