

The power of Pitt

November 04, 2014 8:45 AM Fran Simon

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A recently published collection of essays about actor Brad Pitt written by 13 different academics throughout the U.S. and U.K. reveals American views of celebrity. In addition to Thomas Bayer's chapter about his campaign promoting "Brad Pitt for Mayor" of New Orleans, chapters include "Brangelina" by [Michele White](#), associate professor of communication at Tulane, "Romantic Hero," "Becoming Brad" and "Art Muse." (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

Thomas Bayer has gone from art historian to spearheading a "Brad Pitt for Mayor" campaign to penning a chapter in a book, [Deconstructing Brad Pitt](#). Proof, he said, that academics frequently don't know where their curiosity and lines of inquiry will lead.

“There is a very strong correlation between celebrity in film and celebrity in art,” said Bayer, who has taught art history at Tulane University as an adjunct faculty member. “Celebrity translates into money; it is quantifiable. Yet there is still the intangible. The response of the crowd is fickle.”

When Bayer launched the [“Brad Pitt for Mayor” campaign](#) in 2009, he viewed it as political satire. Four years after Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans was looking for hope. Surprised by how the campaign resonated with so many people, Bayer began to see the power in packaging celebrity.

The campaign garnered the attention of 1.3 million media outlets, Bayer said, and the sale of T-shirts raised about \$40,000 for Pitt's [Make It Right organization](#).

Pitt, currently starring in *Fury* and headliner in *Legends of the Fall* and *Fight Club*, is remembered fondly by New Orleanians for his films shot locally, including *Interview With the Vampire* and *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, as well as for his other roles in social justice.

The book “evaluates ideas we project onto Pitt, whether these are notions of masculinity, power or sexuality,” said co-editor Chris Schaberg of Loyola University New Orleans.

“It's also a reality check on our culture. What are the things we invest in Pitt and why?”

A portion of sales from the book will be donated to the [Make It Right Foundation](#).

What is Bayer's next academic endeavor? After publishing a [book](#) with John Page, associate professor in the [A. B. Freeman School of Business](#) at Tulane, about the economics of the art market, they are working on the third paper in a series on the same topic.

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