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(on the cover) Martha Rosler,
Red and White Shades
(*Baghdad Burning*) (2004),
photomontage, from
Bringing the War Home:
House Beautiful, new series.
© Martha Rosler.

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This issue of *WAJ* features articles on contemporary artists exclusively. Five are U.S. artists whose works are steeped in feminism, at the same time reflecting universal concerns such as war and peace, religion, and our natural and built environments. In “Martha Rosler and Mary Kelly: Materializing Blame,” author Elizabeth Richards suggests that as a result of both these artists’ concern “with politics and the female experience,” they have demonstrated a strong conscience for the suffering of women during wartime. Rosler became known for “Bringing the War Home,” her 1960s series of “seamlessly collaged photographs of civilians and landscapes from Vietnam cut out of *Life* magazine into idealized domestic scenes from *House Beautiful*.” By juxtaposing images of human suffering with familiar scenes of middle-class American home life, she intended to reveal our passive acceptance and tacit approval of a war that was far removed from our daily lives. Vietnam was the first “living room war” that U.S. viewers could experience at home—watching live-action footage from the battlefields on the TV evening news. Rosler reprised her series to address the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, as seen in our cover image, Rosler’s 2004 photocollage *Red and White, Baghdad Burning*. Through the window of a well-appointed interior, one sees bombs falling as fire engulfs the city of Baghdad; inside, a fashion model wears a provocative costume that hints of Eastern sources, while a woman in full chador is pictured on a bed pillow. By comparison, Mary Kelly’s *Mea Culpa* is non-representational, writes Richards. Kelly’s unusual medium—pounds of dryer lint—and the stories it forms “literally materialize the experiences of ... female protagonists as she documents five separate politically motivated acts of violence.”

Jan Riley’s retrospective view of more than four decades of sculptural installations by Donna Dennis is a welcome study of this artist whose work helps people “find beauty in places they might have overlooked or dismissed.” Dennis’s enchantment with our built environment takes us from her imaginary “brick” walls with sky views and exotic hotel environments, to solitary tourist cabins, to multimedia installations that bring together the steel girders of tunnels, bridges, and subway stations with dramatic lighting and natural sounds. As one critic wrote, “What really sets Dennis’s work apart is the way it draws its inspiration from the real world, rather than from art theory, and the way it speaks to the heart rather than the intellect.”

For multimedia artist Nina Yankowitz, art is about ideas, and science and technology can be successful partners in the creation of conceptual projects, writes author Joyce Beckenstein. A member of the “‘mother’ collective that formed the groundbreaking magazine *Heresies*,” Yankowitz gained early recognition with the inclusion of her works in major exhibitions such as the 1973 Whitney Biennial. Beginning with her antiwar activism in the 1960s, Yankowitz has continued to address issues of culture and politics, today in works such as *Crossings*, her 2009 installation that “uses technology as a reasoning tool to bridge multicultural divides by cross-referencing scriptural texts to illustrate the similarities that unite most faiths.”

Carol Hamoy’s feminist works take on complex Jewish themes as well as secular issues related to women’s history in her multimedia collages, constructions, and installations. Writes author Matthew Baigell, “At times, her sources lie exclusively in the Hebrew Bible, at other times in modern women’s history. Often she acknowledges both

sources simultaneously.” Noting that “Jewish women’s historical importance is not emphasized in our tradition,” Hamoy has made it her cause to “change that tradition” by making the unnamed wives and daughters of Israel visible. Similarly, in secular works such as *Welcome to America* and *Portraits of the Artists as Young Girls*, Hamoy has evoked the spirits and identities of immigrants who worked in the garment industry (including her own family) and unsung women artists.

Hamoy’s themes related to the Hebrew Bible cross over into “The Fertile Crescent, Gender Art and Society,” a program organized by Rutgers University’s Institute for Women and Art to spotlight women artists and writers of the Middle East, including Jewish artists. *WAJ*’s participation in this initiative also extends to our fifth article in this issue: Turkish scholar Gülsüm Baydar’s comparison of two museum bedroom installations—the Turkish artist and opera singer Semiha Berksoy’s and that of British artist Tracey Emin. Baydar describes both in terms of “excess”—“messy, full of ‘stuff’ that is too personal to be offered to the public gaze.” Also included in the “Fertile Crescent” program are two articles from our Spring/Summer 2012 issue, featuring Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian and Mandana Moghaddam, contemporary Iranian artists both currently living in Tehran.

The review section—ranging far and wide, as usual—includes an account of an unusual pairing of artist and “Fertile Crescent” nation: an exhibition catalog of Louise Bourgeois sponsored by the Qatar Museums Authority. Also reviewed is a recent monograph on the Egyptian-born Ghada Amer, whose work at times “addresses ideals of femininity in non-Western cultures and texts,” writes reviewer Mary Trent. Two reviews on the eccentric Japanese Yayoi Kusama—one of her autobiography *Infinity Net*, the other of the catalog of her current exhibition—examine her long, extraordinary career. Reviewer Judith Rodenbeck calls Kusama “an artist for today: transnational, political if elliptical, project- rather than medium-oriented.”

A number of individual women artists working during the period between World Wars I and II in Great Britain and France have been the subjects of books or articles, but their contributions to the history of modernism have yet to be written, a situation whose remedy is the goal of studies by Katy Deepwell and Paula J. Birnbaum, respectively, also reviewed here. Rounding out this section are reviews of recent books on Agnes Martin and Eileen Gray as well as a history of “painted women” and cosmetics; catalogs from museum exhibitions of Surrealist women and women artists in French national collections; and collections of essays on representations of the New Woman and contemporary crafts.

This month, the Museum of Modern Art, New York, will open Martha Rosler’s “Meta-Monumental Garage Sale,” an “exhibition” of donated and art objects, all for sale. If you’re in New York, stop by for this unusual event.

Joan Marter and Margaret Barlow,
Editors, Woman's Art Journal

MATERIALIZING BLAME

MARTHA ROSLER AND MARY KELLY

By Elizabeth Richards

Perhaps because both Martha Rosler and Mary Kelly were active in the women's movement, their works have been concerned with politics and the female experience. Although Rosler was dealing with politics and war beginning in the 1960s, Kelly was involved with other feminist issues at that time and turned to the subject of war and violence much later. Using starkly different artistic styles, they present parallel statements bringing to light the suffering and trauma experienced during wartime, as represented and caused by public media agencies. In these works, such as Martha Rosler's *Bringing the War Home: House Beautiful* series (1966–72) and Mary Kelly's *Mea Culpa* (1999), the artists explore how images of violence, especially war, when presented in private, domestic spaces through the media, affect civilians.

The domestic interior and the innocent bystander are typically associated with the female experience and play a pivotal role in the work of these artists. Rosler and Kelly explore the effects of violent images in the domestic sphere, specifically those relayed by the news media through television and magazines. Both artists show their personal response to the trauma as witnesses to war through the media: Rosler responding to media coverage of the Vietnam War, and Kelly dealing more universally with the experience of civilians during wartime. However, both express themselves subversively by using nontraditional techniques and imagery. Working with non-mainstream art materials, both have rebelled against the traditional art world: Kelly's fiber medium is indelibly tied to the domestic environment, whereas Rosler's collages that subvert popular magazine images can be linked with earlier political art. Although Kelly's choice of fiber might be seen as stemming from her background in the women's movement, as a connection with women's artistic heritage, her technique relates only conceptually to traditional women's work in the home.

Rosler and Kelly turn a critical eye and use their media as much as their imagery to take a stance against violence and war. It is worth noting, however, that not all art about war is negative. Laura Brandon, in her book *Art and War*, defines various types of art about war, including art that is commissioned and thus officially sanctioned, and antiwar art. Because commissioned art goes through an approval process and may thus be censored, the integrity of the art to supply an authentic message must be questioned.¹ Antiwar art, which



Fig. 1. Martha Rosler, *Bringing the War Home: House Beautiful (Balloons)* (1966–72), photomontage. © Martha Rosler.

rebels against the official, government-sanctioned movements, denies censorship. According to Brandon, war art gains an emotional response from viewers from two different approaches: spectacle or meditation. In the first, the artist may represent the conflict as a spectacle with powerful visual impact, often emphasizing violence or destruction; alternatively, what Brandon refers to as "reflective outrage" is more abstractly concerned with grief and mourning.² Although



Fig. 2. Martha Rosler, *Bringing the War Home: House Beautiful (Cleaning the Drapes)* (1966–72), photomontage. © Martha Rosler.

Rosler and Kelly both use sensationalism to create an intense reaction in their antiwar art, Rosler's images embrace the visual spectacle, whereas Kelly's muted abstractions are meant for contemplation beyond their first reading.

In *Bringing the War Home: House Beautiful*, a series of approximately twenty powerful photomontages, Rosler combined images from *Life* and *House Beautiful* magazines. As in *Balloons* (1966–72; Fig. 1), she seamlessly collaged photographs of civilians and landscapes from Vietnam cut out of *Life* into idealized domestic scenes from *House Beautiful*. Here, a pristine modern interior setting with its white walls, spacious cathedral ceiling, and abundance of natural light filtering in through enormous windows hosts two out of place figures. The horror of the Vietnamese woman carrying a limp child intrudes upon the peaceful interior. Rosler's carefully chosen images match proportionally, at first making the intrusion appear factual, although the difference in color tone denies a seamless collaboration of images. The brutality of the wartime image is shocking, heightened further by its juxtaposition with a scene of an American home. At the same time, Rosler's combinations are a reminder that all images in the media, whether of a brutal war or pleasing domestic furnishings, are presented to the American viewer for consumption as spectacle. American advertising has long promoted such idealized imagery for consumers, who have learned to covet the new and expensive consumer goods in an

attempt to emulate the corresponding lifestyle.

The presentation of idealized images for popular consumption has also been an issue for feminists, who identified popular media stereotypes sexualizing women as a major hurdle for equal rights. Images like those Rosler selected from *House Beautiful* often show beautiful, fashionably dressed women participating in the culturally acceptable activities of cleaning and caring for the family. In *Cleaning the Drapes* (1966–72; Fig. 2), for example, a stylish young homemaker vacuums luxurious damask curtains that frame the photomontage as they appear to frame her picture window. Unlike in *Balloons*, where the window shed light on a wartime trauma and, surreptitiously, on the contrast between "us" and "them," this window acts like a television screen, looking into the lives of American soldiers at the front as if they were just on the other side of the windowpane. Rosler's contrast between color and black and white photography also heightens the contrast between us and them: color images represent an ideal America, whereas the black and white photographs from Vietnam reflect harsh reality in a journalistic and documentary vision.

During 1966 to 1972, American homes were being inundated by media showing both idealizing images like the *House Beautiful* layouts and, at the same time, images of wartime violence. Viewers witnessing these brutalities, especially on television news, often were traumatized by them.



Fig. 3. Mary Kelly, *Mea Culpa* (1999), compressed lint, five panels, each 17" x 235" x 2". Installation, Postmasters, New York.

Rosler herself recounted in a 1991 interview with Laura Cottingham that when faced with bloody, violent images of suffering, she experienced "frustration with the images we saw in television and print media, even with anti-war flyers and posters. The images we saw were always very far away, in a place we couldn't imagine."³ Her frustration led her to make concrete what she felt the mass media were doing on a daily basis: bringing violence into the American home.

By comparison, while *Mea Culpa* is non-representational, Mary Kelly's medium and narratives literally materialize the experiences of her female protagonists as she documents five separate politically motivated acts of violence. Kelly began this project like all of her series, with the archiving of stories. She collected narratives that were politically motivated and involved human rights actions by the International War Crimes Tribunal; she then narrowed her selection to cases that went to trial. The narratives had to involve women and children and show symptoms or effects of trauma.⁴ Kelly was concerned that direct representation of the events would become more about the spectacle than a conscientious look at the lives of women during wartime.⁵ Thus, as can be seen from the gallery view of *Mea Culpa* (Fig. 3), she avoids the visual representation of the human form, removing the narratives from their media and entertainment counterparts, and forcing the viewer to participate in the grieving that accompanies a comprehension of these crimes. *Mea Culpa* consists of five panels, each approximately twenty feet long and visually divided into curved pieces of compressed dryer lint. Each long panel contains one narrative relating to the effects war has on women from a different war zone: Phnom Phen (1975), Buenos Aires (1976), Beirut (1982), Sarajevo (1992), and Johannesburg (1997). To create the texts, Kelly attached vinyl letters to the lint screen of her clothes dryer, and then proceeded to wash white fabric, followed by many loads of black fabric, thus creating an imprint of each text on her sheets of lint, which became readable as the white lint lightened the areas without text. The

artist (washed and) dried approximately 4,000 pounds of fabric to create this unusual intaglio text.

To read the lengthy text panels of *Mea Culpa*, it is necessary for viewers to circumambulate the gallery, creating a ritual-like procession. Erika Doss, writing about ways in which Americans memorialize their dead, points out that many memorials in Western culture require a "kinesthetic element," movement through and around a monument or object, which activates the space and gives the observer a feeling of connection to the memorial.⁶ Kelly has emphasized this meditative aspect by creating such an experience in *Mea Culpa*, making the viewer an active participant and encouraging grieving. According to Doss, the way Americans grieve has changed over time, from a private experience to one that is largely public. She attributes this shift partly to the rise in media attention to traumatic events, to the point that the viewer assumes an emotional attachment to the event and recognizes grief as an appropriate public emotion.⁷ Kelly's work emphasizes this relationship through narratives that present the private traumas of women from other countries at the same time they reflect the trauma of the universal human experience. She shows how stories of life, love, and death have been exposed to the public domain through the media. The private experience of each woman becomes part of the public memory of the event and is experienced by viewers as their own trauma.

Doss also identified the importance of material and visual culture within the mourning experience, including funerary practices and other traditions related to death. According to Doss, Americans in particular often place importance in material objects to help them "negotiate complex moments and events, such as traumatic death," which often results in spontaneous memorials involving symbolic objects like flowers, cards, and religious articles.⁸ Such spontaneous memorials sprung up at the sites of the Oklahoma City bombing, the Columbine shootings, and the World Trade

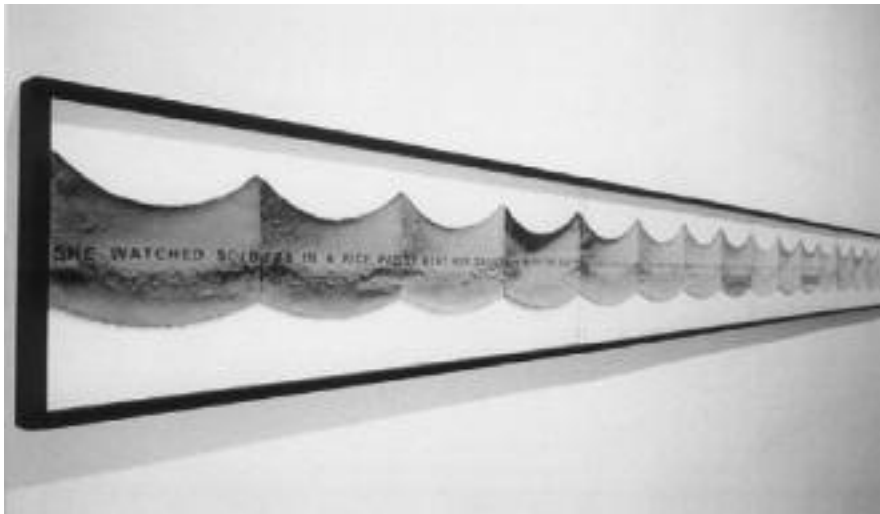


Fig. 4. Mary Kelly, *Mea Culpa (Phnom Phen, 1975)* (1999), compressed lint, detail 17" x 235" x 2". Installation, Postmasters, New York.

Center towers, for example, to commemorate the dead but also as a show of public support from those who reacted to the events with a kindred grief. Likewise, the NAMES Project AIDS Quilt, begun during the mid-1980s and still ongoing, is both domestic and symbolic in nature, and has helped build a community of mourners while promoting AIDS awareness.⁹ Kelly's *Mea Culpa* acts similarly, being made from domestic materials while raising awareness about victims of war.

According to Freud, trauma is a psychological symptom caused by a shock of such violence that the subject is unable to fully experience the event. Trauma, then, is the result of psychic violence, and, as Kelly emphasizes, can be experienced whether the trauma-inducing event is witnessed firsthand or through secondary media accounts. Since, by this definition, trauma is overwhelming and cannot be fully experienced by the subject, it is fitting that both Kelly and Rosler deal with images and materials as fragments. Rosler fragments her images, taking only a single figure or a sliver of devastated landscape to represent the horrifying situation in Vietnam. Her piecing together of these images tells a much more complex story than would any of the images in their entirety. Kelly, too, enhances her work by telling only pieces of complex narratives. Her texts are mere glimpses into the lives of women impacted by acts of war or violence, for example, from *Mea Culpa: Phnom Phen, 1975* (Fig. 4):

She watched soldiers in a rice paddy beat her daughter with the butts of their rifles until she was dead. Then she had headaches and trouble with her eyes. To distract herself, she worked at the bridge of her nose with a knife. When the pain subsided, she could no longer see.

In an interview with Juli Carson for *Art Journal*, Kelly stated, "Following Freud's contention that it isn't the real event, but the psychic effect that produces trauma, I started to think about the impact that atrocities have even when they are received second hand through the media."¹⁰ *Mea Culpa* began with Kelly's own reception of information from the media—her own

trauma. The project started, she said, when she heard a comment on the evening news about a family photograph found inside the home of war victims in Sarajevo. That made her think about the effects of war on families and their home life as well as the ways in which media contribute to the formation of thoughts about war for those outside the sites of war.¹¹

By bringing global narratives into the home, the media break down boundaries between the public and private spheres. Kelly further deconstructs the distancing of public versus private in these traumatic events by emphasizing family and the domestic in her work. Dealing with trauma and war was a daunting prospect for Kelly, and she was exceedingly sensitive to the fact that a work dealing with trauma and

women's experiences as victims of war crimes could easily tend toward an obsessive activism or an overly emotional reading. "*Mea Culpa*," she stated, "was my attempt to deal with the victims of war crimes. It was the most difficult project I've ever undertaken because it just seemed so difficult to pull off without seeming either megalomaniacal or hysterical."¹² Kelly's avoidance of representation supported her cause. The viewer is not confronted with horrific images but is instead given a narrative. Kelly's interest in written text and theory is clear when looking at a survey of her work. Like many conceptual artists, she embraced the presence of texts in her work as a primary mode of communication. Mara Witzling identified the importance of texts for feminists in the 1970s and 1980s as a means to avoid issues related to images of women's bodies.¹³ Kelly sustains this idea by explaining that she was concerned with issues of spectatorship and representation surrounding images of women's bodies and so embraced text as one way to avoid the figure.¹⁴ In *Mea Culpa*, the female presence is strong, with women either as protagonists or narrators; however, they are only available through text, not through any visual representation.

The title itself, *Mea Culpa*, translates as "assuming guilt," or more directly "I am guilty." The art historian Alexander Alberro has written that Kelly is holding her viewers accountable for these atrocities, as viewers had likely witnessed traumatic events on TV or other media and took no action against these events.¹⁵ This fits with Kelly's analysis; whether her intention is to present guilt as the experience of the artist herself or for the viewer to appropriate is inconsequential, as guilt is a natural response to trauma. Trauma-related guilt is a common emotion for people who have experienced a traumatic event and believe that they could have done something to affect its outcome. While Kelly is relating the viewer to the traumatic events through her printed narratives, the result is traumatic for the viewer: there is a violent shock from the new information, which is only understood through detachment from the events. We can only process these events and be moved by them because we have

not experienced them firsthand. It is this impact that Kelly wishes to capture in her audience.¹⁶ Rosler's work also stirs up trauma-related guilt through her pairings of idealized American domestic scenes with war images. The viewer cannot help but identify the cultural implications of focusing on superficial concerns and ignoring global atrocities, something the viewer likely has been guilty of at some time.

Rosler's insertion of images from Vietnam into the American domestic environment breaks down the boundaries of us and them and here and there that are so easily manifested by the media.¹⁷ In his book on how war is televised, Andrew Hoskins deals with the divergent experiences and memories that are created in our media age. He discusses the variety of forms of memory, from individual memory, which is rarely reliable, to social memory, which is molded by sanitized language and images of events and often includes the spin of contemporary analysis of past events. Through the media, we are able to sustain a powerful record of events; but the stock images that are repeated to represent those events are filtered and censored to represent a certain perception of the event.¹⁸ In the past, Hoskins notes, newspapers, television, and other news media presented information in a past-tense format, thus separating the viewer and the reported event. This distancing encouraged the viewer to understand the event without feeling emotionally affected by it. Hoskins points out that the mass media have attempted to circulate a myth that war, or at least wars fought by Americans, can be cleanly and precisely carried out.¹⁹ These filtered, sanitized social memories of war do little to honor the loss of human lives or to reflect the realities of those directly affected by war. But instead of the emotional distancing that would normally occur from seeing an image of unknown figures in a foreign landscape, the viewer of Rosler's *House Beautiful* collages is confronted by idealized Americans inserted into war torn panoramas, or war victims inserted into spaces much like the viewers' own. Moreover, either scenario would seem surreal to the American viewer, as most American wars are fought on foreign soil. The family in *Beauty Rest* (Fig. 5), for example, suggests this transfer into the realm portrayed in the media. A young family is spending time together relaxing and playing on a bed in their pajamas. The mother reclines on her side as she reads a book or magazine (possibly *House Beautiful*) while father and son play with a toy airplane (most likely a war game). Like the mental transference of the *Life* reader or TV viewer, this family unit has been visually transferred into a war ravaged home interior, a juxtaposition all the more disturbing since Americans are indoctrinated to deny the possibility of a war in America. Additionally, according to Hoskins, the media's unfolding of live news stories from the Vietnam war was akin to the viewers' being direct witnesses to these events,²⁰ and as witnesses, the types of images being put forth affected them differently. Hoskins notes that, although images of the catastrophes of war might seem more memorable because of their shock value, because of contemporary viewers' familiarity with images of death and destruction in the entertainment industry, such images have become mundane; so it is only within a broader context that such images become difficult.²¹ Hoskins recognizes that one of the principal



Fig. 5. Martha Rosler, *Bringing the War Home: House Beautiful (Beauty Rest)* (1966–72), photomontage. © Martha Rosler.

arguments for publishing images deemed disturbing is to function as a visual aid in a history lesson; but in the words of Susan Sontag, "Harrowing photographs do not inevitably lose their power to shock. But they are not much help if the task is to understand. Narratives can make us understand. Photographs do something else: they haunt us."²² Thus it follows that news images of brutality and violence do not help us to heal from the trauma they present, nor do they enable us to learn from those experiences. It is only through manipulating such images in new contexts as Rosler has done, or by avoiding representation altogether as Kelly has done, that viewers are guided to contemplate the events and learn from them.

In each of these artworks, the artist has chosen a nontraditional technique to emphasize the subversive nature of her work. *Mea Culpa* may seem to refer to the mundane domestic sphere in Kelly's choice of material—in this case, compressed dryer lint—but the process is part of the artist's intent. By using a repetitious domestic chore, Kelly refers to the home, the realm of womanhood, and the private sphere.²³ The material also holds symbolic references: the lint itself is merely dust and can be seen as a memento mori, a meditation on death ("from dust to dust"), and certainly its ephemeral quality cannot go unnoticed by the viewer. Dryer lint may also disturb viewers because of its composition's reference to abjection. Julia Kristeva defines abjection as that which creates an inner revolt, partially resulting from a desire, which is then rejected; it is a vortex of desire and repulsion. The object always has a relationship with the body, and so always recalls the self. It represents the site of a physical boundary that defines the frontier between living being and corpse, between self and other. The object is what does not

respect this boundary: it is the objects of in-between, boundary-crossing objects, that heighten the display of human fragility.²⁴ The reference to the body through the abject is perhaps challenging for some to find in the materials of Kelly's *Mea Culpa*, as seen in a detail from the segment *Johannesburg 1997* (Fig. 6). The work has the simplicity of color and form that is the aesthetic inheritance of Minimalism and Conceptualism, two movements to which Kelly's work is closely connected. She has channeled the visual presence of Robert Morris's felt works, but with structure and political purpose. Yet the knowledge that this gray matter is in fact compressed dryer lint creates the same reaction that is described by Kristeva, a curiosity and tactile appeal that suggests desire while generating repulsion. Who hasn't felt disgust, maybe even nausea, when emptying out the dryer lint trap? After all, it contains the debris of the body, the sloughed off skin cells and expelled hairs that had previously clung to clothing, clear examples of the types of boundary-crossing matter Kristeva describes. Kelly's dryer lint, by comparison, is pristine, as it was created from repeatedly washed unused fabrics that had no physical contact with the body; nevertheless, we automatically associate her material with our own knowledge of dryer lint. If we then accept that the dryer lint is a memento mori, what more appropriate material could Kelly use in this public memorial?

Kelly's process also is related to performative acts in the ritual of housework: the washing of 4,000 pounds of laundry seems tedious, and yet laundry is a never-ending household chore, a task that is almost a daily necessity in households with children. Many of Kelly's works deal with women's lives as mothers, like her *Post-Partum Document* (1973-79), or women's lives after motherhood, as in her series *Interim* (1984-89), which looks at the time in a woman's life when she is in-between the cultural stereotypes of womanhood (sexual object, mother, grandmother). So it is not surprising to find that Kelly has included references to motherhood in this series. In fact, *Mea Culpa* makes several references to motherhood, from the domestic ritual of the process to the stories told in the texts. The four stories are either about or by women, and three of them refer to mothers and their children. For example, from *Mea Culpa: Beirut, 1982*:

No running water / She washed the dishes ... Rockeye cluster bombs / dispersed their submunitions ... 200,000 shrapnel fragments / armed with aluminum pan / four unmatched plates / two glasses / three spoons / and a kitchen knife / she held her child and waited.

Kelly's choice to use domestic processes in creating this piece and her choice of stories that detail women's experiences with war prompted Kathy Battista's reading of *Mea Culpa* as dealing with the mother-child relationship when involved in trauma, or at least the experiences of women (often mothers) in the trauma of war. Battista, in her article on *Mea Culpa*, outlined the series as a clear trajectory from Kelly's earlier work dealing with motherhood, but here approaching motherhood from the viewpoint of horrific realities.²⁵



Fig. 6. Mary Kelly, *Mea Culpa (Johannesburg, 1997)* (1999), compressed lint, detail 17" x 235" x 2". Installation, Postmasters, New York.

Alternately, Rosler chose a technique that has a history of political use. Collage and photomontage, specifically, were used by Dada artists to protest the irrationality of war during World War I. For example, in her famous photomontage *Cut with the Kitchen Knife* (1919), Hannah Höch used newspaper and magazine clippings, materials that were intended for visual pleasure, to create absurd images, often with unexpected juxtapositions, such as mixing human forms with machine parts or male heads with female bodies. Likewise, Rosler wished to disrupt the intended visual pleasure of consumer magazines and advertising with the unexpected combination of politics within the sphere of domesticity that was stereotypically associated with docility.²⁶ Despite its prior use, Rosler felt that photo-collage, in the 1960s, continued to be marginalized by the art establishment. Rosler told an interviewer,

Photography was, the art world told us, of a lesser order, mired in temporality as opposed to the transcendent world of painting. So you could deal with it as a practice less mediated, more immediate, than the one the art world had mulled over so intensively. It was accessible and vernacular, and it was low key.²⁷

Rosler and other artists wanted to disengage from the conventional art world and the privileging of certain media.²⁸ The 1960s was an emancipatory time that gave artists a sense of freedom to work in a variety of media and to create "happenings" that we today refer to as installations or performance art.²⁹ A technique such as photo-collage was fitting for an artist who actively participated in anti-war demonstrations. Rosler had moved to San Diego in 1968 and immediately became immersed in the strong political currents there, the anti-war as well as the women's movement.³⁰ Alberro noted that for Rosler, all of these political struggles were linked together as civil rights,³¹ and she initially created the photomontages for political demonstrations.³² Rosler printed several of the *House Beautiful* works in local, underground newspapers and disseminated others through hand-distributed flyers.³³ And underground they remained for some time. Since she felt they were too radical, Rosler refused to show the *House Beautiful* series in an art world setting until the first Gulf War in the early 1990s, when she agreed to have them appear in a feature article in *Art in America*.³⁴

In 2004, Rosler created a new series of *Bringing the War Home: House Beautiful* photomontages with scenarios from

the Iraq War. The series shows equally oblivious American women surrounded by scenes of war and destruction. One titled *Saddam's Palace* (Febreze) layers collaged stills of a housewife using a cleaning product with images from Saddam Hussein's destroyed palace and the prisoners of Abu Ghraib. The new series is harder for the viewer to identify with since the "American" references are more frequently models than idealized housewives and do not relate to viewers' everyday reality.³⁵ For example, *Red and White* (Baghdad Burning) (2004; front cover) criticizes American ignorance of the Iraq War and blind appropriation of culture. In it a model struts through the middle of what seems to be a serene domestic scene, wearing a skirt patterned to imitate a sari, though one altered for Western fashion consumption. Other imagery appears around her: the city burns behind her, images of soldiers and Iraqi women are captured on the throw pillows, and the furnishings include an exotic looking ottoman, all references to the Middle East. The central figure, however, remains focused on her runway, unaware of the relationship between her global fashion appropriation and the violence happening all around her. Despite new technologies now available, Rosler again used her original cut-and-paste photo-collage process, reminding the viewer of the photos' origins in the popular press.³⁶

Martha Rosler's art as well as her politics, beginning in the 1960s, extended beyond taking a stance against war, to encompass the women's movement. Her *Body Beautiful* series from 1965 (Fig. 7) (also known as *Beauty Knows No Pain*) was also a photomontage series disseminated in underground newspapers, mainly feminist ones. *Body Beautiful* featured women cut from advertisements and placed into out-of-context settings, causing the viewer to consider the contradiction found in stereotypes of women, such as being domestic and docile while also sexual and objectified.³⁷ The status of women in the 1960s consumer society was likewise contradictory, according to Linda Nochlin, who noted that women were the primary agents of consumerism and yet were frequently objectified in popular culture as if to be consumed.³⁸ Rosler's criticism of consumerism in both series connects her to the broader Pop art movement, as does her use of mass culture imagery to appeal to a wider audience; however, most Pop artists mirrored—not opposed—the patriarchal values found in the media.³⁹ They pillaged the domestic space for commercial imagery only. Lucy Lippard quipped that if women like Rosler had emerged as Pop artists first, critics would have dismissed the movement as imagery merely reflective of the women's movement.⁴⁰

Mary Kelly documents women's experiences in formats previously considered contradictory to those experiences. Her rational analysis of motherhood in her earlier work, *Post-Partum Document* (1973–79), comprises a series of objects that record her experience as a new mother through the archiving of her son's growth and employ various Lacanian methods of analysis. Kelly's representation of motherhood avoids images of the figure, thus avoiding feminist concerns about spectatorship, while at the same time applying a stereotypically male analytical process, Lacanian analysis, from the viewpoint of women's experiences. Instead of the figure, she uses texts and charts and everyday objects to represent women's



Fig. 7. Martha Rosler, *Body Beautiful or Beauty Knows No Pain* (Hot Meat) (1965), photomontage. © Martha Rosler.

experiences. *Post-Partum Document* is often cited for its unconventional use of materials; Kelly memorialized the growth of her son and more generally a child's separation from its mother by recording seemingly mundane daily events like the before and after records of her son's mealtimes: in texts (as "before" archives) printed on his dirty diapers (as "after" archives). In this way, she avoided the sexualizing male gaze while representing the female experience.

Globalization and technology have forced Americans to rethink our everyday experiences and to constantly redefine the public and private sectors. Not so long ago, the only public and worldly infringement into the private or domestic sector was the newspaper. Today, we are more likely to seek news on television and the internet, updated to the minute, often witnessing events "live." It is difficult to go a whole day without glimpsing world news in some format. As it enters our reality, the global, public realm becomes a part of our private experience, and it is so commonplace that we often overlook how events in the global theater, and especially violent or traumatic events, affect us as viewers. Through the work of artists such as Rosler and Kelly, with its focus on the potency of the media, we must confront and engage with the daily traumatic events of the global theater. •

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Finding Afghanistan

A Book of Red Flowers: In Search of My Afghanistan
By Heidi Pitlor
New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008, 304 pp., \$25.00, paperback.

Reviewed by Jessica Durrant

It's 1979, the year that the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. Heidi Pitlor, a poet and novelist, was in Afghanistan at the time. She was a young woman, a poet, and a journalist. She was there for a year, and she wrote about it. She wrote about the war, the politics, the culture, the people. She wrote about the love she found there. She wrote about the loss she found there. She wrote about the war, the politics, the culture, the people. She wrote about the love she found there. She wrote about the loss she found there.

Suite For Eleanor

POETRY
By Eleanor Tilton
New York: Old City Publishing, 2008, 100 pp., \$15.00, paperback.

Reviewed by Eleanor Tilton

Eleanor Tilton's poetry is a collection of poems that are both personal and universal. She writes about love, loss, and the human condition. Her poems are simple, yet powerful. They are a testament to the human spirit and the power of love.

Pulp and Cir

ESSAY
By Cir Pulp
New York: Old City Publishing, 2008, 100 pp., \$15.00, paperback.

Reviewed by Cir Pulp

Cir Pulp's essay is a collection of poems that are both personal and universal. She writes about love, loss, and the human condition. Her poems are simple, yet powerful. They are a testament to the human spirit and the power of love.

THE DOUBLE VISION OF KAREN DAVIS

PHOTOGRAPHY
By Karen Davis
New York: Old City Publishing, 2008, 100 pp., \$15.00, paperback.

Reviewed by Karen Davis

Karen Davis's photography is a collection of photos that are both personal and universal. She writes about love, loss, and the human condition. Her photos are simple, yet powerful. They are a testament to the human spirit and the power of love.

DONNA DENNIS

RE-IMAGINING AN AMERICAN VERNACULAR

By Jan Riley

As the newly appointed assistant curator at the Contemporary Arts Center in Cincinnati in 1987, one of my first assignments was to write the wall texts for “Standing Ground: Sculpture by American Women.” Donna Dennis was one of the fifty artists included in the exhibition. When her *Skowhegan Stairway* (1982–83; Fig. 1) arrived at the gallery, it looked like a demolished shed. There were no directions for its assembly, and it took our entire crew to install it. As our preparator cursed the day “some idiot gave this woman a saw and the idea that she could build anything,” I charged him to find someone with traditional skills who could build something so beautiful. He asked me to remind him about that when it fell on me. *Skowhegan Stairway* never fell, and I visited it every day. I would sit against the wall opposite the piece, listen to the crickets that sounded from its hidden tape player, and be glad that Dennis had had the courage to build it.

Donna Dennis was born in 1942 in her maternal grandparents’ house in Springfield, Ohio, the eldest of four girls. She attended public schools there and in Washington, D.C., until her family moved to Rye, New York, in 1949. Dennis’s parents and grandparents were Scots Irish Protestant, and in their home there was no drinking, smoking, or card playing, and Sundays were devoted to reading: the Bible, John Milton’s “Paradise Lost” (which Dennis remembers, “luckily was illustrated by Gustave Doré”), or *National Geographic* articles about missionaries.

As a child, Dennis loved to draw and was naturally inventive. In the first grade, she remembers drawing a house, cropped so that half of it was “invisible.” When her teacher objected, telling her, “You can’t draw half a house,” Dennis felt both disdain and “a kind of pity” for her teacher. Of course she could draw half a house. Why not? Dennis found her first mentor in her high school art teacher, Mabel D’Amico, whose husband, Victor, had founded the Art Education program at MoMA, and who herself made Cornell-style boxes. (The D’Amicos had a summer place in Amagansett and knew Jackson Pollock.) With D’Amico’s encouragement, Dennis created sets for several student productions and was recognized in her senior yearbook as “our poet and artist.” Dennis’s parents opposed their daughter’s career choice, warning her that “if you persist in being an artist you will die lonely and poor.” They also believed it was “a selfish life,” asking “What are you going to do to make the world a better place?”



Fig. 1. Donna Dennis, *Skowhegan Stairway* (1982–83), various materials, with sound, 138" x 140" x 37". Photo: D. James Dee

At Carleton College in Minnesota, the arts program run by a Scottish Social Realist painter felt discouraging and frustrating to Dennis. Finally, however, during her senior year, the requirement of creating a senior thesis painting based on either Shakespeare or the Bible was lifted. The painting Dennis created, of a tree with raised branches, signaled her feeling of freedom.

Dennis’s grandfather, who had invested money for her education, died just as she was entering college. As she was finishing her undergraduate degree, Dennis saw an



Fig. 2. Donna Dennis, *Rats* (1965), acrylic on canvas, 39" x 32".

announcement for Roger Barr's program at the American Center in Paris, and rather than go to graduate school, she used the rest of her college money to join her classmate, the painter Martha Diamond, in heading for Paris. Dennis was painting abstractions but felt that she "never knew when a painting was finished." Barr told her, "Never do something just because you *think* you should do it." Out of frustration, from her imagination, she made a painting of a big, ugly, fat prostitute. She knew exactly when it was finished, and it felt right. Barr liked it, too. Dennis began a series of "ugly women" that ended with a self-portrait titled *Rats* (1965; Fig. 2) in which she depicted herself screaming (with a green tongue) and the word RATS scrawled in red across her face. Finally, it felt like she knew what she was doing.

When she returned to the United States, she moved to New York City, where she worked as a secretary at the Whitney Museum of American Art in the fundraising department. At night, she studied painting with Stephen Greene at the Art Students League, doing figurative pieces. Peter Schjeldahl, a classmate at Carleton who also was in Paris the previous year, introduced her to his circle of friends in the Poetry Project at Saint Mark's Church. Among them was Ted Berrigan, soon to become an art critic for the *Village Voice*, whom she later came to think of as her mentor.

In Paris, Dennis had loved wandering among the old buildings. The city still carried the damage from World War II, with layers of building and re-building, including old and new paint, clearly visible. Back in New York, Dennis started looking at black-and-white photography: Jacques Henri Lartigue, Eugene Atget, Berenice Abbott, and Walker Evans were favorites.

She recalled a visit to Boston when she was seven or eight, and seeing the Old North Church, where Paul Revere had hung



Fig. 3. Donna Dennis, *Untitled* (1967), acrylic on canvas, 50" x 38".

his lantern. "I felt sorry for it," she said, because it was in a bad neighborhood and appeared neglected and abandoned. She began painting in black and white, enlivening the starkness by mixing colors into the blacks and whites and then placing a white against its contrasting black, so they would vibrate together. The last paintings she did were of cars. "I realized that the cars were me, were self-portraits," she said, "and when I made the last painting showing a car driving straight at you [1967; Fig. 3], I knew I was ready to get off the canvas and into the room. I wanted to knock people's socks off and didn't think I knew how to do it with painting."

Dennis left the Art Students League and rented a studio with Martha Diamond, "a real loft," with enough space to work on a large scale. In late 1966 or early 1967, Dennis made a ten-foot-tall painting that consisted of a purple sky with long horizontal clouds moving across the top and a gray triangular shape at the bottom. In front of the painting, on the floor, she placed a Plexiglas® box, its interior sprayed lavender to match the sky. A silver pipe, bent at a right angle, crossed the interior of the box, and a dark plastic "puddle" spread out on the floor in front of it. Dennis imagined that "the clouds would be able to drain down, through the dark funnel into the box, and by way of the pipe, out onto the floor in front." As a final touch, she placed a square mirror, the size and shape of the box, directly behind it on the surface of the painting. The mirror caught the image of the box, reflecting it, so that, "if the box got scared being out on the floor by itself, it could climb back into the painting." When Berrigan (whom she was dating) saw this large new work, he laughed and teased Dennis, pointing out what "box" meant in slang and how the box related to the triangular shape behind it and the long horizontal clouds in the sky. Dennis was a little embarrassed, but also delighted, and never again doubted her ability to use her intuition to reveal her interior life.

For her next work, *Wall #1 for Imaginary Landscape* (1968; Fig. 4), she divided a large canvas vertically into three identical parts—like film stills. In each part, beneath a cut-off fragment of a pyramid was a vertical brick "wall" created by wallpaper patterned with photographed bricks. Running up the center of each wall was a slit-thin mirror, suggesting a narrow opening. At the bottom was a square black-and-white photographic close-up of a cloud formation. Dennis thought of the mirrors as not only entrances but also shafts of light connecting the pyramids, with clouds buried in chambers below. The thin pieces of mirror rewarded the viewer moving around the piece by shifting and reflecting light. The mirrors also represented three places: the surface, the reflection, and the space behind the mirror. She was



Fig. 4. Donna Dennis, *Wall #1 for Imaginary Landscape* (1968), acrylic, wallpaper, mirror, mounted photo on canvas, 120" x 84".

trying to make a false entrance, or allude to a hidden space. "You couldn't see in, you couldn't get in, but there was the suggestion that there was more to see, more to find."

The early 1970s were a time of turmoil and growth for Dennis. She and Berrigan broke up, and she moved out of the shared loft into her own studio. She also realized that she missed painting, and "having her hand in" her work. She returned to making little collages with paint as a way to ground and renew herself and find her way forward. She started keeping journals and consciously gave herself permission to let her ideas flow uncensored, struggling to find her way back to the ease she knew as a child when creating something. Riding the bus one day, she saw workers digging a hole and remembered one of her favorite childhood activities: making shelters. She recalled making tree houses, making houses out of boxes and even out of raked leaves. Especially inspiring was a snapshot of her mother as a child standing at the door of an igloo made by her uncle after an Ohio snowstorm.

She got out her childhood blocks and when she went to see the Tomb of Perneb at the Metropolitan Museum, was strongly drawn to that mastaba. She saw that the architecture of the structure led to an entryway, which led to a corridor, which in



Fig. 5. Donna Dennis, *False Front in Jungle Setting* (1972), acrylic on canvas, wood, mirror, cheesecloth, 80" x 75".

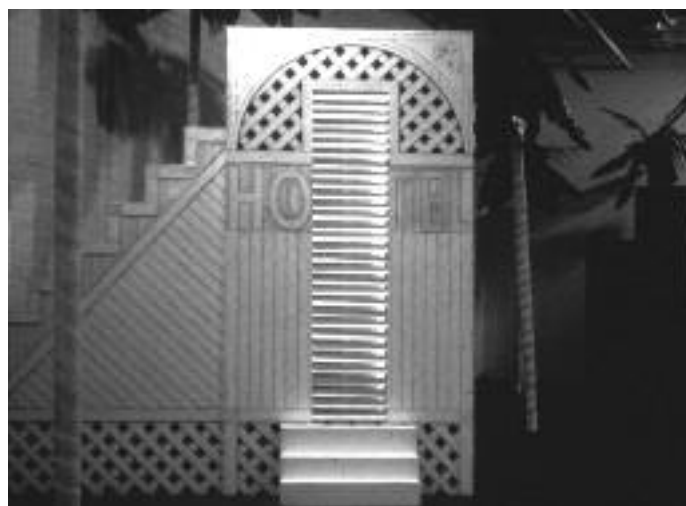


Fig. 6. Donna Dennis, *Hotel Pacifica* (1972), graphite and acrylic on Masonite®, wood, mirror, fluorescent light, sandbag, 68 1/2" x 70" x 18".

turn led to a false door. Now employed by *Encyclopedia Americana* as a picture researcher, with access to images from many cultures, Dennis recognized the false door as a type of spirit door separating the worlds of the living and the dead. The only way to get through the door was via one's imagination.

Dennis's journal pages from that time show the black-and-white checkerboard pattern from her childhood Mother Goose book, patterns from her bathroom tiles, the book jacket of Carlos Castaneda's *A Separate Reality* (1971), narrow doors, false fronts, ziggurats, palm trees. She studied Joseph Cornell, especially his "hotel" works. Riding the bus to work, she noticed entrances to the seedy Bowery hotels that were shallow, tiled hallways with stairs going straight up from the street, and began a series of drawings of imaginary, false-front hotels with narrow openings and checkerboard facades. She decided to build one, thinking of it as a shaped canvas, which meant learning carpentry. At first, her lack of skill was frustrating, but she persevered and worked out a number of things that she has kept with her, including the scale of the piece.



Fig. 7. Donna Dennis, "Hotels" at West Broadway Gallery (1973), l. to r., *Hotel Pacifica*, *Egyptian Hotel*, *Bird Hotel*, *Dark Hotel*, installation with light and sound.

For *False Front in Jungle Setting* (1972; Fig. 5), Dennis built four layers of stretchers for shaped canvases to create a facade and a stepped-back opening for a mirror. It brought her back into painting, and while it included imagery from her earlier work (checkerboard patterning, the mastaba shape, and a false entrance), it added new influences. The complex stage sets for Robert Wilson's *Deafman Glance* (1971) and Ed Ruscha's artist's book, *A Few Palm Trees* (1971) inspired her to create palm trees and stand them next to *False Front* to create a small environment.

The women's movement was just beginning, and one of Dennis's responses was to question why she was making ten-foot canvases, realizing that scale was her way of "trying to emulate the men." Before adding the rectangle on top, *False Front in Jungle Setting* was around her height, 5 feet, 8-1/2 inches, and almost every piece she has made since then is based on that measurement. Dennis also recognized that: "So much has been lost to the world in dismissing the gifts of, and the voices of, women. I wanted to be a part of discovering and bringing that voice to the fore and making sure it would never again be lost or silenced.... My work is a lot about getting people to find beauty in places they might have overlooked or dismissed, just as women's lives have been overlooked and dismissed." With that commitment, she would overcome her parents' objections to her becoming an artist: She would not have a selfish life, but rather would work to make the world a better place—by discovering her own, unique female voice, letting it be heard, and unearthing and listening to the voices of other women. She discovered that, as young women, both her grandmother and mother had painted briefly. She read as many books by women as she could, and found Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* deeply moving. It was 1972, and Dennis was about to turn thirty.

From Minimalism, which was everywhere, she got the idea of "rewarding" the viewer for moving around her new piece, *Egyptian Hotel* (1972; Pl. 1), where the colors of the layered step-backs surrounding the mirror were only visible if viewers changed their point of view. With *Egyptian Hotel*, she was "thumbing my nose at Minimalism" (and taking a certain

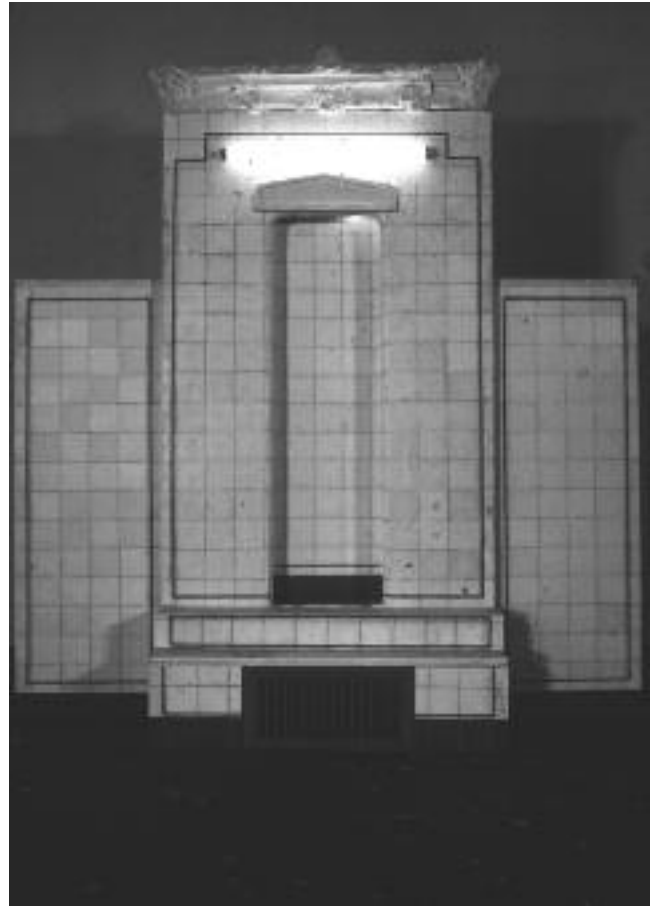


Fig. 8. Donna Dennis, *Station Hotel* (1973–74), various materials, 75" x 72" x 13 1/2".

pleasure in it), by creating a recognizable object and decorating it. She was not interested in the austerity that was part of the Minimalists' credo, as presented by its male practitioners.

The next group of works Dennis embarked upon owed much to her reading of *Two Serious Ladies* by Jane Bowles. Published in 1943 (Bowles's only novel), it became a modernist cult classic. In it, the two female characters, Christina Goering and Frieda Copperfield, abandon their families and their places in society. Mrs. Copperfield, accompanying her husband on a cruise to Panama, falls in love with a female prostitute and is swallowed up by the world of bars and bordellos. *Hotel Pacifica* (1972; Fig. 6), named for the prostitute, recreates the front of a seedy tropical hotel, lit from behind by a fluorescent light, with trompe l'oeil wooden siding and a louvered door. It was the first time Dennis had used an electric light and she taught herself how to do electrical wiring. (The idea of the fluorescent light came from Dan Flavin's work, she said.)

With *Hotel Pacifica* and the other hotels that would follow—*Egyptian Hotel*, *Bird Hotel* (1973) and *Dark Hotel* (1973)—Dennis was developing the idea that she (and all women) needed to build their own interior spaces and lives. Lisa Lyons, writing in the catalog for the Walker Art Center's 1977 exhibition, "Scale and Environment: Ten Sculptors," noted that, "Dennis, a feminist, ... views the hotel as a metaphor for a personal, introspective journey."¹



Fig. 9. Donna Dennis, *Subway with Yellow and Blue* (1975), various materials, 79" x 49" x 65 1/2". Collection Neue Galerie-Sammlung Ludwig, Aachen, Germany. Photo: Bevan Davies.

Dennis was creating human-scale environments with lights and sounds, unlike the more austere, silent Minimalist pieces, deliberately purged of metaphor and self-expression. She recognized these "shrines or temples" were her version of "women's houses": celebrating the power of women just as traditional native men's houses encapsulated male domination and societal influence. As Richard Marshall wrote in the catalog for the Whitney Museum's 1981 exhibition "Developments in Recent Sculpture,"

In the early 1970s, Dennis decided to break with Minimalist and Conceptualist work and turn toward a more personal direction and subject matter. This shift coincided with her involvement in the feminist movement and her desire to make work that related to her life, but was at the same time concerned with color, craft and surface texture.²

Many women artists at the time were investigating forms of art-making that were considered to be "feminine" such as including sewing and weaving, or using forms such as circles and ovals, and colors like pinks and pastel shades. Their investigations and imagery generally ran counter to the established art world that was firmly centered on Minimalism.



Fig. 10. Donna Dennis, *Tourist Cabin Porch (Maine)* (1976), various materials, 78 1/2" x 82" x 26 1/2". Collection Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College. Photo: Bevan Davies.

Dennis and her friend Denise Green (with the help of the painter Joan Snyder), began their own consciousness-raising group, centered on the girlfriends and wives of poets they knew. The group process of working out issues such as familial relationships was illuminating for Dennis, although her imagery remained more personal, not heavily influenced by feminist symbols and theory.

In the spring of 1973, Dennis's first one-person exhibition, "Hotels," opened at the co-op West Broadway Gallery (Fig. 7). She showed four Hotels in a cohesive environment that included the recorded sounds of jungle birds and theatrical lighting. Gerrit Henry, writing in *Art News*, called "Hotels" "an unadulterated poetic experience, a profoundly charming dreamland that had the imaginative authenticity of its allusions."³ She thought she would be doing hotels forever. But when she moved into a new studio on Duane Street (where she still works), she suddenly felt lost: "I couldn't do the hotels anymore."

While waiting for the subway one day, she noticed a doorway on the opposite platform that opened onto a tiled wall. The contrast between the warm incandescent light inside the doorway and the cool fluorescent light around it was arresting. She crossed over to investigate. The doorway, above which she now saw the word "Women" written in mosaic tiles, led to a short hall that contained two more doors. Dennis was elated; she had found a new subject. She started a new series of hotel drawings now incorporating things she saw in the subway stations and in her new neighborhood: open doors, stairs and stairwells, louvered vents for basement spaces, and lights glowing through glass circles set in sidewalks.

Station Hotel (1973–74; Fig. 8), which echoed that subway door, would be Dennis's last false-front hotel. She used two



Fig. 11. Donna Dennis, *Deep Station* (1981–85), various materials, 144" x 240" x 288". Photo: Peter Mauss/ESTO.



Fig. 12. Donna Dennis, *BLUE BRIDGE/red shift* (In memory of Helen Hogue Dennis) (1991–93), various materials, 144" x 168" x 288". Photo: Peter Mauss/ESTO.

different color lights: a fluorescent tube directly over the door and an incandescent light inside. She submitted it for and won a New York Creative Artists Public Service (CAPS) grant—in the category of painting. Continuing to look at subway stations, Dennis became intrigued by the columns and rivets. She wanted to build in the round. For the first time, she built a model to help her visualize and build the finished piece: *Subway with Lighted Interior* (1974), a small freestanding building. The drawn and painted tiled-brick front carries four riveted columns flanking a narrow entrance into a tiled interior lit by a hidden incandescent light. The building stands at the top of three steps. The louvered grid of an industrial industrial vent, meant to bring light and air into an implied underground tunnel, pierces the lower step. Even more complete as a structure is *Subway with Yellow and Blue* (1975; Fig. 9), about which Dennis wrote:

I began with the idea of making a stairway that went up in the front but was blocked off at the top, and, on the same diagonal, a stairway that went down in the back and seemed to go somewhere. As I worked on the piece I became aware that it bore a resemblance to small mausoleums, especially those I saw in a cemetery in New Orleans. I began to think of it as a dream house, with a basement, hidden passageways, secret rooms, and a subterranean life. The feeling grew in me that what I was making was the small, visible surfacing of something vast, hidden, unknown, and perhaps powerful.⁴

The complexity of the structure also challenged Dennis's carpentry abilities. She wanted to make round columns but found some hollow metal tubes on Canal Street that she was able to cover and paint. "I always thought I needed to figure out [carpentry and building techniques] for myself and by myself," she says.

In the mid-1970s, remembering family summer road trips, Dennis headed to Maine. She photographed tourist cabins and used her photographs along with some by Walker Evans as the source material for a new group of works. *Tourist Cabin Porch (Maine)* (1976; Fig.10) is a small cabin with a peaked roof, wooden siding, and a screened-in porch. Visible through the screen are a door into the house and a window curtained with flowered fabric. The porch light illuminates the tiny space. That there is no cabin for the door to open into is not immediately noticeable. What is seen, and felt, is the time of day (early evening) and the long summer days of a season that is too brief. Deborah Everett wrote that the work:

recalls a time before the average American could afford hotel stays. Dennis has remarked that the piece's origin lies in her childhood memories of family vacations and the small houses that were rented out to tourists as more Americans took to the road.... During this period, Dennis

was intensely moved by Walker Evans's roadside photographs of clapboard buildings in the country's heartland.... Deceptively simple and unaffected, it embodies the classic qualities of the American disposition—a forthrightness linked to the common man, a sense of working-class practicality and abstention, and a solidity connoting strength and self-reliance... The cabin's pared-down style connotes pragmatism and frugality and refutes quality of life issues; stripped of decoration and comforts, it is a modern-day descendant of America's roots in Puritanism.⁵

As Dennis was making her hotels, Holly Solomon was becoming well-known as an art collector. (In 1969, Solomon and her husband, Horace, had opened their 98 Greene Street Loft, one of the first alternative spaces in New York, and though it lasted just three years, they gave early exposure to such talents as Laurie Anderson, Robert Mapplethorpe, Robert Kushner and Gordon Matta-Clark.) Denise Green brought the Solomons to Dennis's studio when they were looking for a piece for their home. Solomon was quietly getting ready to make the controversial leap from private collector to gallerist, and one Sunday evening, as Dennis was hosting a figure-drawing session for artist friends, the phone rang, and Solomon told her, "Donna, I'm starting a gallery and I want you to be in it."

In 1975, the Holly Solomon Gallery opened at 392 West Broadway in Soho. The following year Dennis debuted "Tourist Cabins and Subway Stations" there. She envisioned her exhibition as an installation, complete with lighting and recorded sounds, and arranged the four structures so they forced the viewer to move through the space. Although Solomon was distressed that viewers would not be able to see all of the works from one vantage point, and that she couldn't see them all from her desk, she didn't require Dennis to make changes. With this exposure, Dennis's work became more widely known. She exhibited at the Walker Art Center in 1977, and in 1979, she was included in the Whitney Biennial as well as in Washington, D.C., in the Hirshhorn's "Directions" exhibition.

Two Stories with Porch (for Robert Cobuzio) (1977–79; Pl. 2) had two specific sources as described by Dennis:

one, a small building, probably built as a toll booth, which stood at the entrance to the Holland Tunnel, the other, a bay-windowed row house in Phillipsburg, New Jersey, photographed by George Tice.⁶ In each structure I liked the way you could look up and into a window, across an interior space, and out again through another window. In the course of the two years I spent making *Two Stories with Porch*, a close friend [Cobuzio], an artist who had grown up in New Jersey, died ... the work came to be ... about our friendship, severed, and a tribute to him, and (my) decisions about many of the details were guided by this. The room on the second floor with a light is meant as a resting place for him and the house's appearance as a building under renovation as a symbol of rebirth.⁷

Two Stories with Porch was included in the 1979 Whitney Biennial.

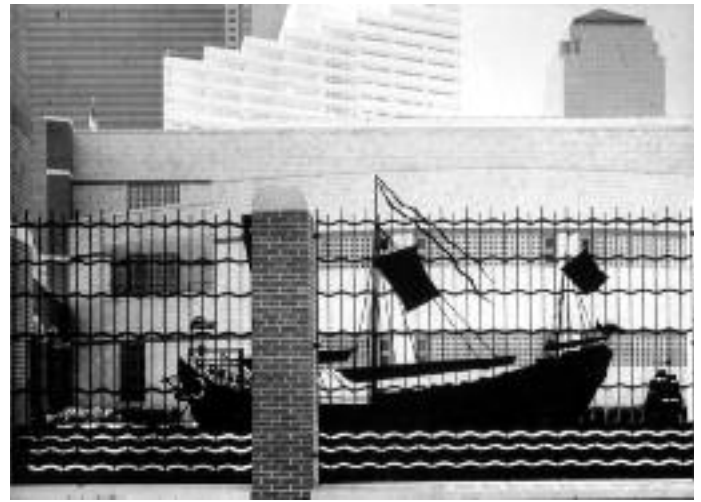


Fig. 13. Donna Dennis, *Dreaming of Faraway Places: The Ships Come to Washington Market* (1988), cut and welded steel, hand-glazed ceramic medallions, 14 panels, each 120" x 168". Collection Board of Education of the City of New York. Photo: Jeff Goldberg/ESTO.

Tunnel Tower (1979–80; Pl. 3) also was inspired by the Holland Tunnel, in this case the scaffolding on the tunnel building. "My problem was how to make a one-story structure feel like a tower: tower as secret space, as signal-sender, as look-out, as dungeon." (Again, a photograph by Tice, this time, *White Castle, Route #1, Rahway, New Jersey* [1973], provided the answer.) Dennis's 1980 exhibition at Holly Solomon's, titled "New York and New Jersey," included both *Tunnel Tower* and *Two Stories with Porch*. This was the first time Dennis asked for the gallery walls be painted a dark gray, something she has required of every exhibition space since. Little red lights blinked on and off (the unexpected result of the rewiring of Christmas lights) above the neon in the scaffolding of *Tunnel Tower*. She wrote, "I saw the scaffolding as rising up out of the fortress and its electricity as a fragile and complex nervous system...its appearance marked a public celebration of private fantasy and feelings."⁸

The following year, Dennis used a version of *Tunnel Tower* in her first site-specific outdoor piece, *Mad River Tunnel: Entrance and Exit*, created for the City Beautiful program in Dayton, Ohio. Given only two weeks to complete the piece, she made it using "real materials": concrete blocks, tiles, etc. It was sited on two sides of the Mad River (there was no actual tunnel): the "entrance" was at Deed's Point and the "exit" on the opposite bank. (Vandals almost immediately destroyed the piece, and all that remains is a photograph.)

For the 1982 Venice Biennale, Solomon wanted Dennis to show a work she had begun only months before. Solomon hired a crew to help Dennis complete *Subway with Silver Girders* (1981–82) in time, also enabling her to advance her work in directions she had only dreamed of. Dennis wrote:

I thought of the platform as being public and male, and the track as being private and female.... I saw the track as a ... flowing river ... full of life and un-harnessed potential, ... underestimated and possibly dangerous....



Fig. 14. Donna Dennis, *Tourist Cabins on Park Avenue* (2007), various materials, two cabins, each 78" x 52 1/4" x 72". Median between 52nd and 53rd Streets, New York City.

The station, with its platform and tower, is the City of Night on the edge of the river. This city, which appears at first to be ordered and rational, is on closer inspection found to be locked, congested, full of obstacles, and in the end nightmarish and irrational.⁹

Dennis felt that in this piece she had been able to use all the things she had learned up to this point: "All the lights were turned on."

At the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, where Dennis taught during the summer of 1982, she was inspired by "a covered stairway that went up the side of a two-story frame building.... What attracted me was the windowed landing at the top and the oddly slanted roof, made of pieced-together metal sheeting. I imagined taking the stairs away from the structure ... so that they would stand on their own as a self-sufficient ... sliver of a building." *Skowhegan Stairway* (Fig.1) "became my escape route, my private entrance to the heavens. One side became bright, reflective silver brick and the other

side, sealed up when the building was removed, a black and tarry scar."¹⁰

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Dennis showed her work nationally and internationally, including at the Tate Gallery in London and the Ludwig Forum für Internationale Kunst, in Aachen, Germany. In 1984, after installing *Skowhegan Stairway* in the Venice Biennale, Dennis stopped in Rome, where she was struck by the ongoing excavation and how parts of the Forum were still buried and awaiting discovery. The sight helped her finish *Deep Station* (1981-85; Fig. 11 and Pl. 4). Her last subway work, "*Deep Station* is meant to be the subway station at the bottom of the world ... hence all the columns and rivets holding up enormous weight. I think of the track area as a kind of subterranean river and the platform as an ancient city on the banks of that river."¹¹

Carey Lovelace wrote in *Arts Magazine* that

[T]he piece can be seen as an elaboration in space of the places of the self: the hidden passageways to which one is refused entrance, lights that provide places of clarity, or offer forth areas that are "presentable." The I-beams themselves point to subjectivity, while the tower with its electric clock is a place of control and surveillance—the mind and heart together. It is the tower, with its illuminated windows, that provides the place of most intimacy.¹²

Drawbridges with little houses nesting within their structures also attracted Dennis, and with the help of the painter Rackstraw Downes, she got permission to get up on a rail drawbridge over the Hackensack River in New Jersey. Dennis climbed all over, taking photographs, and was invited into one of the bridge tender's houses to look at it closely. While she was making *BLUE BRIDGE/red shift* (1991-93; Fig. 12 and Pl. 5), Dennis's mother died, and she put much of her sorrow and feelings of loss into this piece. Their relationship had been loving, but complicated. Dennis came to see herself as the little green house along the track with all the dials and lights—the controller—and her mother as the house over the track. Dennis created many conduits and wires between the two houses and added the sounds of a single tug boat and a foghorn calling to each other: "It was two voices only, representing my mother and me."

When the work was shown at the Sculpture Center in New York City, George Melrod wrote in *Art in America*,

What really sets Dennis's work apart is the way it draws its inspiration from the real world, rather than from art theory, and the way it speaks to the heart rather than the intellect. *BLUE BRIDGE/red shift*, Dennis's richest work to date, is all the more appealing for its lack of esthetic narcissism. It dares the viewer to interact with it on a variety of levels and repays that attention every step of the way.¹³

In the late 1980s and the 1990s, Dennis also completed large-scale permanent public art commissions in New York and Boston. *Dreaming of Faraway Places: The Ships Come to Washington Market* (1988; Fig.13), created from metal fencing and ceramic medallions, was designed for New York's P.S. 234, on Greenwich Street. Dennis saw the fence, with its rhythmic, black-line and silhouette images of waterfront commerce, as an imaginary panorama. The sailing ships, tugboats, and barges were a story-telling frieze that flowed back and forth across the permanent buildings. She loved the versatility of that flowing black line and silhouette imagery, and used it to great advantage in her later public art commissions, culminating in *Traveling by Air*, created for Terminal One at JFK in 2001.

For *Tourist Cabins on Park Avenue* (2007; Fig. 14) Dennis was invited to place "tourist cabins" (similar to those done earlier) down the landscaped divide that separates north- and southbound Park Avenue. The tiny pastel board-and-batten structures offered a sharp contrast to the stately apartment buildings and rushing traffic, calling viewers back to bygone summers and humble pleasures. Dennis has characterized her work as being "drawn from the American vernacular, inspired by buildings shaped not by architects but by ordinary people. My installations are about buildings as repositories for, and the expressions of, memories, feelings, spiritual power. I like buildings that bear witness to those who have lived there, worked there, passed through."

By the mid-1990s Dennis felt that the women's movement had accomplished many of the goals it had set out for itself. Art made by women was everywhere, in every conceivable medium, answering old questions, asking new ones, and generally proceeding as though there was no reason to be concerned with gender differences at all. Dennis felt like she had lost her direction. The art world, it seemed to her, no longer welcomed "symbolic objects created by artists out of remembered emotions." Even so, in the catalog for the Cue Foundation's 2010 exhibition "That Is Then, This Is Now," Robert Storr wrote that "Donna Dennis decided that invoking places that exist in the imagination was a kind of conjuring trick that could be performed.... The results have a kind of dream fascination that irony subtly reinforces rather than undermines."¹⁴

The attack on 9/11 and the events that followed it had helped bring Dennis back to herself. From her studio near Ground Zero, she literally felt the destruction. Realizing how close a witness she had been to this terrible act, she felt a responsibility to do and to say something about her city. The artist's job, she believes, is to be a witness—to "create the echo of what it feels like to be human and to live through the time allotted to you—the time that will become history for the people who come after you." Dennis resumed working on *Coney Night Maze* (1997-2009; Pl. 6), a five-year-old but unfinished work inspired by the entrance to the legendary Cyclone roller coaster at Coney Island, a New York icon. "I was most attracted to the maze and then the two little buildings within it," she said, "to the whole complex of ad hoc buildings found at the entrance to the coaster." With renewed

effort, she completed this major piece, and it will be shown at the Neuberger Museum in the spring of 2013.

The impact of Dennis's four decades of work was summed up by Deborah Everett, writing in *Sculpture* magazine:

Aside from the formal achievements of Dennis's work, it has another appeal now—that of elucidating our identity at a time when the concepts of patriotism and Americanism are stirring public and private debates. All art, to some extent, reflects its culture of origin, but Dennis's work goes beyond that to reveal our secluded, self-absorbed inclinations. When we frequently find ourselves at odds with the world community—the embattled loner more than the good neighbor—our commitment to democracy and majority rule begs review. Dennis's vernacular architecture reveals the isolationism behind our individualism, posing timely questions about our capacity for social contracts, while offering a challenge to the courage of our convictions.¹⁵ •

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NOTES

This article is based on my conversations with Donna Dennis that took place in her studio on April 17, April 23, August 8, and September 4, 2011. All quotations not otherwise cited are from these conversations

1. Lisa Lyons, *Scale and Environment: Ten Sculptors* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1972), 39.
2. Richard Marshall, *Developments in Recent Sculpture* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1981), 16.
3. Gerrit Henry "Reviews and Previews," *Art News*, 72 (June 1973): 93.
4. Quoted from unpublished notes by Donna Dennis.
5. Deborah Everett, "Donna Dennis: Home Away from Home," *Sculpture* (June 2008): 46.
6. George Tice is a New Jersey photographer whose work she had recently discovered. The *New York Times* reviewer, Benjamin Genocchio, said of Tice, "The combination of grim earnestness and dreamy pathos is entirely true to life," something that might be said of Dennis's work as well. See Benjamin Genocchio, "Art Review: Finding the Romantic Side of the Vistas in New Jersey," *New York Times* (August 2003).
7. Quoted from unpublished notes by Donna Dennis.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Carey Lovelace, "Donna Dennis: Intimate Immensity," *Arts Magazine* (June 1988): 91.
13. George Melrod, "Donna Dennis at the Sculpture Center," *Art in America*, 81 (October 1993):126.
14. Robert Storr, *That Is Then, This Is Now* (New York: Cue Art Foundation, 2010), 5.
15. Deborah Everett, "Donna Dennis, Home Away From Home," 49.

NINA YANKOWITZ

RE-RIGHTS/RE-WRITES

By Joyce Beckenstein

Nina Yankowitz, a pioneer feminist artist, takes the word as her vehicle and drives it from its most abstract, primal form through an expansive contemporary lexicon of databases. Cutting a zigzag path through her own shifting perspectives, she steers her message through traditional media—painting, mosaic, and sculpture—then, without missing a stop, through performances, high-tech installation art, and cyberspace. But high- or low-tech, she refuses to stick an emblematic stamp on her work. In fact, she recalls the lament of one curator, who in 1985 quipped, “You just don’t fit into any slot.”¹ Yankowitz is happy to keep it that way.

Her process, consistent albeit eclectic, reaches its apotheosis in *Crossings* (2009; Figs. 1 and Pl. 7) an installation/game that premiered at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Thessaloniki, Greece.² Religious texts provide the thematic armature for this project, but the work is not “religious” in its intent. *Crossings*, instead, takes religious scriptures as an organizing principle to underscore how tangled cultural values blur the intent of words as they appear in the texts of the world’s five major religions. In it, Yankowitz asks: “Are world religions really different? Or, are the same ideas and values pitched to each flock from a different set of agendas?” Taking as her premise that the world’s religions preach essentially the same core values, she concurs with Lucy Lippard’s observation that ethnocentric differences account for narrow-mindedness, and that “Everyone is ethnocentric to some degree...It’s not easy to reach across cultures.”³

Crossings uses technology as a reasoning tool to bridge multicultural divides by cross-referencing scriptural texts to illustrate the similarities that unite most faiths. Yankowitz makes this conceptual exercise easy for new-millennium audiences by presenting her message as an intriguing electronic, interactive game. Players entering *Crossings* find themselves in a virtual temple representing the world’s five major faiths: Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism. A schematic projection of composite religious architecture, symbolizing the unifying principles of all faiths, slowly rotates on an entrance wall. Entering the installation’s inner sanctum, the player stands on a floor projection of iconic mosaics—quatrefoils, stars, arabesques, and circles. An electronically woven soundtrack plays a chorus of voices simultaneously reading scriptures from Old and New Testaments, Buddhist and Hindu texts, and the Qur’an. They speak many tongues in a multitude of cadences and dialects, including Arabic, English, German, Hebrew, and Italian.

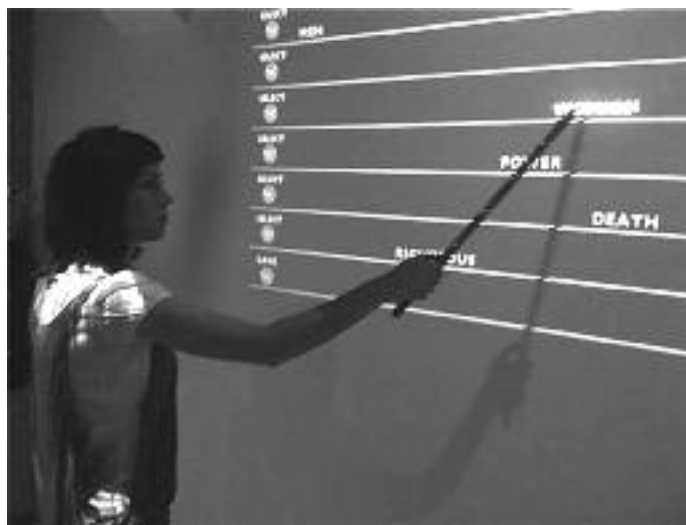


Fig. 1. Nina Yankowitz, *Crossings* (2009), interactive installation with computers, infrared tracking wiimote, projectors, metal wand, variable size. Photo: Mauri Kaipainen.

A player activates the “game” with a hand-held infrared wand. Tapping the wall with it lights up the dark space with illuminated words that suggest narrative gospel shining through stained glass windows. On one wall, bright red words, randomly selected from a database of thousands, emerge along six horizontal lines. Using the wand, the player selects one word per line and slides that word from left to right, assigning it a relative weight. Placing a word to the far left ascribes it a low weighting or value, way to the right, the highest weighting. These word placements trigger a search engine to locate scriptures that attribute similar emphasis to the chosen word(s). The results appear simultaneously on an adjacent wall, now color coded in LED light, hues orange, blue, green, yellow, and purple, a different color assigned to each of the five represented faiths.⁴ Comparative scriptures about death, for example, uniformly agree that death is a given, but that it arrives in different forms. Three examples allocating a high weighting to the word “death” produced these examples:

“Death even to the well-fed man comes...in varied shape.”⁵

“And what is death? The parting and vanishing of beings out of this or that order of being.”⁶

“And every man shall be put to death for his own sins.”⁷

The curious, seduced by the game, may ask: “Will scriptures vary when “death” is given a lower weighting? How are less emotionally charged words such as “if,” “should,” or “want” treated? They can find out by reweighting the words and/or choosing others with a wand tap. Players don’t, however, learn the color-coded religious sources of their choices until they finish the game and press a SAVE button to retrieve a printout.

The lure of the “game” deflects the often-prickly issues undermining cross-cultural conversations about faith, so it is with a sense of play that one enters the *Crossings* sanctuary. Further easing the dialog, players are usually surprised to find that, for all the wand waving, the scriptures hardly vary. But the endgame becomes problematic as those leaving the sanctum, self-edited “bible” in hand, stop to ponder the choices they’ve made. It becomes clear that during the moment spent as an anointed wizard in high-tech Oz, the wielded wand took the mercurial temperature of their personal biases. That prompts the sober question: “What are the consequences when an individual or single institution assigns values to these words and interprets them to sway human attitudes?” Yankowitz’s wand here cuts a wide and deep swath, from self-reflection to global value systems, making clear that individuals, not scriptural texts, drive human interactions. If her premise is correct, then information technology (the one thing in our global universe that all seem to worship) may presage an effective means of fostering greater understanding. *Crossings* points the way.

Computers and information technology are for today’s artists what marble was for Michelangelo and pocket-sized tubes of paint were for Monet. Microchips and software are the new tools informing today’s visual language. From its onset, artists have found in the electronic age a riveting way to engage audiences more directly, and to navigate art’s dead zone—that space between the viewer and what hangs on the wall or sits on a pedestal. In 1967, Robert Rauschenberg, working with Billy Klüver, a research scientist at Bell Labs, and then joined by Robert Whitman and Fred Waldhauer, formed Experiments in Art and Technology (E.A.T.), “an organization devoted to facilitating interaction between artists and engineers in order to address the technical challenges of realizing artistic concepts.”⁸

Now, almost fifty years later, technology makes possible art that is intensely complex in its logistics but remarkably user-friendly for the viewer/participant. Such art most often requires collaborations between the artist, who provides the conceptual blueprint for the work, and the technology experts who make the art happen. For *Crossings*, Dr. Mauri Kaipainen a professor of media technology at Södertörn University (Sweden), who holds a PhD in musicology and cognitive science, recalls it this way:

I got to know Nina in Rovaniemi, Finland in 2008 at the eMobilArt meeting of artists and scientists. I was impressed with her sketches for the Cathedral project

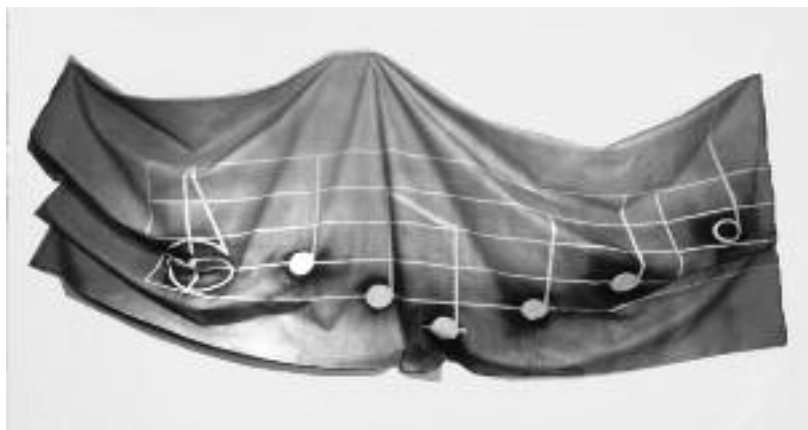


Fig. 2. Nina Yankowitz, *Oh Say Can You See – A Draped Sound Painting* (1967-68), latex paint on cotton duck, audio by Phil Harmonic a.k.a. Ken Werner, 4'x10'x 6". Photo: Jay Cantor.

[*Crossings*] as well as her ... enthusiasm. We focused on the issue of (religion and) mutual understanding ... elaborating the idea cross the seas in an endless number of skype calls ... always enjoyable as creative brainstorming, but never systematic and organized. During the fall of 2008 and winter, 2009, the idea matured to something that would combine the intellectual challenge with an interesting and beautiful interface.⁹

Kaipainen says it was his role “to define the automated means to annotate the massive amounts of religious text so that the computer would always be able to find the related topics from the database in which they were stored.” He credits Peter Kroger, who came aboard later in the project, as the “tech hero,” who made everything work, with very short warning.”

Some of Yankowitz’s earliest works were collaborative efforts; they weave a thread throughout her story that unfolds against the backdrop of the feminist revolution, Vietnam War, civil rights movement, and a reinvention of the art object. She’s also embraced technology in her many incarnations of the word as musical notation, abstract sign, automatic scrawl, relief, minimal glyph, narrative text, and bar code. After a quick start out of the gate as a feisty young artist, she faded into the background for awhile, as did many women artists who came of age in the 1960s. Now she’s again hit her stride, this time using high-tech art on a global interactive stage.

Yankowitz was a student at The School of Visual Arts in New York City in 1968, a time when “the rebellion initiated in the fifties by the Beats, on the one hand, and civil rights activism on the other, exploded into a full-fledged counterculture.”¹⁰ She spent that summer with Group 212 in Woodstock, New York,¹¹ befriending other young artists and performers. Most of them, enraged by the Vietnam War and emboldened by the nascent cries of civil rights and feminist activists, were finding their voices in protest. Baby boomer artists who teathed on Warhol’s Brillo boxes bit into more iconoclastic forms, and musicians, most notably Bob Dylan, wrote “complex lyrical songs that ranged from powerful social commentary to symbolic tales with profound poetic imagery.”¹²

In Woodstock, Yankowitz recalls, "I met Ken Werner¹³ Sunny Murray, Dave Burrell and Juma Sultan, who made drums for Bob Dylan. I met Juma at Dylan's house ... Dylan let me in. I was so intimidated." She performed, danced, and draped bolts of patterned lounge chair fabric through the trees. The dalliance of youth? On the contrary. This intuitive experimentation that August produced a seminal work, *Oh Say Can You See—A Draped Sound Painting* (1968; Fig. 2). Yankowitz here painted the music score of the first bar of the national anthem on a stretch of cloth then attached it to a wall like a haphazardly hung curtain. Wanting to protest the Vietnam War, she asked Kenneth Werner to use a synthesizer to distort the anthem to match the comically droopy swag of the piece. This young artist, already adept at blurring distinctions between images and sound, could also play a subversive hand, here casting a patriotic icon and its heroic song in the less honorable light of an ill-conceived war.

Such anti-war activism paralleled a formal art movement that reconsidered traditional forms and stretched the boundaries for making art. By 1971, "sculpture" might well have passed as an answer to the question "What is a painting?" Robert R. Littman made that the point of his 1971 exhibition, "Hanging/Leaning," which left it up to the artwork to decide its identity. He wrote in the catalog introduction, "Matter and gravity, not structure or space, were primary considerations ... a renewed freedom existed—letting the material 'make itself' instead of order being imposed."¹⁴ Yankowitz's *Untitled* (1969), a painted canvas, falling in folds and pleats similar to those of *Oh Say Can You See*, hung in sync with its gravitational pull, more sculptural than painterly in its disdain for the flat wall. Yankowitz and Eva Hesse were the only women in this show, which included art by Robert Morris, Joel Shapiro, and Keith Sonnier.

In 1973, The Whitney Museum formally acknowledged the obsolescence of conventional definitions for new genres by merging their annual exhibitions—one year painting alternating with one year sculpture—into biennial extravaganzas. Yankowitz exhibited *Painted Thread Readings* (1973), a work made of duck binding that she stripped down to threads, then coated with red paint, reweaving, twisting, and braiding the fibers into a richly textured hanging scroll. With nubbed pigment forming text-like "reading paths" down its surface, the painting was so ambiguous as to be singled out by John Perreault, in the *Village Voice*, as an example of "notable sculpture!"¹⁵

In a subsequent series of works, *Dilated Grain Readings* (1972–74; Fig. 3), Yankowitz linked the run-on visual rhythms seen in her Whitney piece with the idea of rhythmic sound. "When I hear sound I see color, and when I see color I hear sound," she says. There are some physical bases for these connections, but Rudolf Arnheim has distinguished between science and synesthesia. "Some people see colors when they hear sounds," he writes.¹⁶ Yankowitz's sensations are of the synesthetic variety, but she explores them with Newtonian zeal. Her densely textured *Dilated Grain Readings* read like

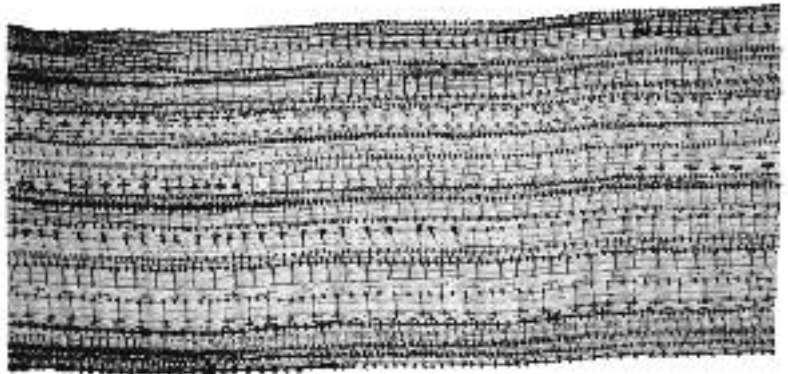


Fig. 3. Nina Yankowitz, *Dilated Grain Readings* (1972–74), extruded acrylic/flash paint on linen, 109" x 49". Photo: Alan Nyssola.

prehistoric glyphs, a Ur Song, in Braille, done on linen. From a distance these colorful notations resemble musical scores. Up close, beads and bubbles of color squeezed straight from the tube look more like a primitive tapestry.

Years later, Yankowitz began to write free-form verse, straddling the words with automatic writing in the form of black and white scribbles. Then she elaborated her idea of text-as-scribbled-notations in a two-act opera, *Scenario Sounds/Personae Mimickings or Voices From The Piano* (1979; Fig. 4). Conjugating her "libretto" into a score of red, blue, and green scrawls, she now added sound—guttural groans and falsetto trills—that she interpretively sang with French, German and Italian inflections in a 1980 performance for the 12th International Poetry Festival in New York.¹⁷ Joyce Kozloff's introduction to the limited-edition, hand-signed artist's book with audio cassette (1981) offers a keen understanding to Yankowitz's uninhibited but serious vision:

I found my friend Nina ... who ... never studied ... (foreign language or music) ... at the piano, bursting into "opera" ... a bizarre range of sounds suggesting personalities, emotions, dialects, all juxtaposed in a cacophonous collage.... The audience took the proceedings quite seriously. I ... felt ... amusement at Nina's sheerchutzpah.¹⁸

Yankowitz later recorded a *Scenario Sounds* CD.¹⁹ This not-so-easy-to-listen-to avant-garde recording commingled sound and voice the way her dilated thread paintings wove color and texture. The montage of dialects also points to the orchestration of tongues that inform several later works, including *Crossings*. As Kozloff summed it up, "Nina transformed visual art into a temporal and aural experience ... her ideas accessible in a new way."²⁰

For a woman artist in the 1970s, Yankowitz had an amazing start, being included in the first Whitney Biennial and in exhibitions at the few New York galleries then featuring women artists. She recalls: "Jill Kornblee, who exhibited Dan Flavin and Malcolm Morley, initially said she didn't show women artists, but ultimately added many to her stable, including Janet Fish and me." Kornblee held three solo exhibitions of Yankowitz's works between 1969 and 1971. James R. Mellow, in a *New York Times* review, referred to Yankowitz's "second one-man show"

at Kornblee. He described the work as “tasteful, like a decorative wall hanging ... seductive ... between old-fashioned easel painting and some new species of handcraft.”²¹ “Can Women Have ‘One-Man’ Shows?,” cried Cindy Nemser in her op-ed response to the review. “Mellow still has not caught on... women are not ashamed of their sex and resent being mistaken for men.”²²

About the same time, Yankowitz personally faced a number of conflicting feminist issues. “I felt two-faced exhibiting my art while others were unfairly ignored. I was included in the ‘73 Whitney Biennial, where I had previously marched in protest of their disproportionate representation of women.” It is interesting to note the similarities between Yankowitz’s feminist experiences and those of Louise Bourgeois, one of feminism’s greatest heroes and role models, who despite her stature still experienced feminist conflict as late as the 1990s. In their documentary film, *Louise Bourgeois: The Spider, the Mistress and the Tangerine*, filmmakers Amei Wallach and Marion Cajori capture Bourgeois’s solidarity with women trumping her artist persona. When the Guggenheim Museum launched its SoHo space with the 1992 exhibition, “From Brancusi to Bourgeois,” Bourgeois joins ranks with activists protesting the museum’s token nod to all women by including her as the only woman in that show. But “feminism established Bourgeois’s reputation,” says Wallach,²³ voicing a fact of life for most every woman who crested on the wave of the feminist revolution.

Though Yankowitz was an active participant in the feminist movement—a member of the “mother” collective that formed the groundbreaking magazine *Heresies*, and interviewed by Joan Braderman, whose documentary, *Heretics*,²⁴ chronicles that publication’s evolution, she was later side-stepped. She was, for example, unmentioned in retrospectives such as *Global Feminisms*, which “included artists with a more a direct feminist agenda as well as ones who do not proclaim themselves as feminists but definitely raise feminist and gender issues in their work.”²⁵ Yankowitz acknowledges viewing the movement’s purpose differently from many of her sister activists, and says: “I didn’t believe you had to reference female issues using female-specific imagery to be a feminist.... I thought of the movement more as a way to end the divisions between male-female-gay-heterosexual genres. Now, looking back, I recognize the importance then of projecting a unified voice through that inherent female imagery.”

She claims no specific seat along the feminist spectrum, but the movement infiltrates Yankowitz’s sensibility as it does the consciousness of anyone—male or female—who lived through those formative years, or who has since reaped its rewards. More specifically, few women artists can deny the direct or indirect influence of gender-focused artists, such as Judy Chicago, whose *The Dinner Party* (1974–79), celebrating the achievements of well- and lesser known women throughout history, also raised craft to the level of high art.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the Pattern and Decoration (P&D) movement countered the tenets of formalism with crafts and craft-inspired art, including folk art, fabric designs, quilts, embroidery, and tile art. While Yankowitz was not a direct participant in that movement (though she says she was



Fig. 4. Nina Yankowitz, *Scenario Sounds/Personae Mimickings or Voices From The Piano* (1979), page from 1/6 limited edition silkscreen print books, 8 1/2" x 11". Photo: Nina Yankowitz.

invited to participate), many of her colleagues and friends—Joyce Kozloff and Miriam Shapiro included—were among the movers and shakers of this celebratory craft revival. “Where convinced modernists saw Minimalism’s aloof stillness, silence, and simplicity as potent with rarefied meaning, others could comprehend only a void,” writes H. H. Arnason, in his discussion about P&D.²⁶ Concurrent with the movement, Yankowitz created many tile installations, including two ceramic murals for New Jersey schools for the blind and hearing impaired.²⁷ Incorporating her use of abstract glyphs as “text” into ceramic, she used clay slip oozed from ketchup bottles onto handmade tiles, approximating “Braille” for the deaf to “hear” and the blind to “see.” These tile works anticipate her later narrative works and interactive installations.

For *Hell’s Breath – A Vision of Sound Falling* (1982; Fig. 5), curated by William Hellerman for P.S. 1, Queens, New York,²⁸ Yankowitz again integrated sound as she had in her draped works and opera, and as she would do later with *Crossings*’s sacred voiceovers. But this scenario played more like “Hell – The Musical.” It consisted of an impressive room-size “stage set,” comprising eight red, white, and black ceramic tile panels surrounded by a frieze. High-relief images of devils with gaping mouths, and snakes set the stage for a sound experience: a wafting cacophony of metallic groaning church organs and fallen souls echoing remorseful wails. The vibrations, experienced as the sensation one feels in the groin when an



Fig. 5. Nina Yankowitz, *Hell's Breath – The Sounds of Falling* (1982), ceramic relief panels with frieze, 5' x 37' x 3". Photo: Barry Holden.

elevator drops, vividly captured the idea of falling from grace.

"I didn't want to be known as a tile artist," Yankowitz says almost as abruptly as her flirtation with craft looked elsewhere. There's this wrecking ball in *Sphere* (1990), a fresco-secco painting made on canvas panels abutting one another like tiles, that indeed sounds the death knell. Included in "The Technological Muse: Affirmation and Ambivalence in American Machine Imagery (1840-1990)," the 1990 inaugural exhibition for the Katonah Museum of Art, *Sphere* consists of a cannon-like ball, powered by an electric train motor, hurtling along a track in front of an abstract cityscape painting, a commotion of abstract ovals, circles, and triangles. The ball disappears and reappears through two black spiky blast holes puncturing the work. Yankowitz describes the piece as a study of layered perspectives. Compositionally, she teases the viewer's sense of center as the eye follows the moving ball. Thematically, the ball as bullet train suggests the speed of travel through time and space. And politically, in keeping with the exhibition's theme, the machine-made wonders facilitating life portend a descent into some dark and dangerous abyss. Her thoughtful analysis of these multiple perspectives dissects her sensibilities, which then barrel headlong into issues of gender, bias, ecology, and faith.

An important travelling group exhibition in 1993, "Ciphers of Identity,"²⁹ dealt with racism, sexism, homophobia, and subjugation. It included Yankowitz's *Dog on Beam* (1993; Fig. 6), a sculpture of a copper dog stuck in place on a balance bar, unable to reach its ball, without falling. Maurice Berger wrote that: "the perilously perched animal... recalls our own struggle against the destabilizing forces of society.... A... (humiliating) balancing act that continually undermines any stable sense of center."³⁰

cent of both the gibberish of *Scenario Sounds* and the sacred echoes in *Crossings*.

But it is with a series of glasshouses, created between 2002 and 2009, that Yankowitz's interests—with themes, text-base imagery, and technology—coalesce into a mature body of signature works. Yankowitz loves to play with tension, and these glass architectural structures, shielding all they expose, make sturdy but vulnerable homes for both her didactic tableaux and her implied narratives, particularly her ecological themes. They also provide a neat wrap for her fascination with oddball multimedia combinations, as evidenced in *Femme Fatale* (2003; Fig. 7). As close as Yankowitz to that date came to gender specific imagery, it contains a model F-15 suspended upside down over a pile of fluffy white feathers that Lilly Wei referred to "as an ironic equation of war machines with the female body."³¹ Teeming with subversive contrasts—strong/weak, male/female, war/peace, nature/machine—the work was included in "Outside/In," an exhibition Joyce Kozloff curated for Wooster Arts Space.

For later glasshouses (prototypes for the schematic



Fig. 6. Nina Yankowitz, *Dog on Beam* (shown with *Empowered*) (1992), copper, aluminum ball, leather, 5' x 11'. Courtesy Ronald Feldman Fine Arts/ University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMBC).

Crossings temple), Yankowitz mined computer databases for a series of text-based installations, as she would again do on an exponentially larger scale for *Crossings*. Downloading prodigious amounts of information from the Internet for *Kiosk.edu* (2002–04; Fig. 8), she searched for short quotes by visual and performing artists and architects that condensed the essence of their visions into short, pithy prose: “Color is my day-long obsession—joy and torment,” wrote Claude Monet. “Writing about music is like dancing about architecture,” said Laurie Anderson. “We can’t destroy the past...it’s gone,” exclaimed John Cage.

Yankowitz projected these quotes with hundreds of others on the surface of *Kiosk.edu*. At night, the bold red, white, and black texts appear to float like twitters from cyber-heaven. *Kiosk.edu* shelters an enormous glut of information, but there is irony here that tells in her title that shorts “education.” One wonders, “Does the blind person running a hand over Yankowitz’s tile mural, or the reader attempting to “sing” the color scrawls of her *Scenario Sounds*, experience more “felt” knowledge about the power to communicate than someone searching Wikipedia.com?” As she later did with *Crossings*, Yankowitz here uses the allure of technology to plumb a daunting universe for its words and texts. But then she slows the viewer down, making a few choice words by selected individuals speak volumes. Knowledge, instantly accessible, is easily forgotten, she suggests. Hence the need to entomb but reveal it in glass, especially when it relates to the contributions of those unrecognized in their lifetimes. Though similar to Barbara Kruger and Jenny Holzer’s use of text-as-image, Yankowitz uses words to inform, not to inflame. She says, “I want to re-right/re-write history, especially about women.”

Buried Treasures/Secrets in the Sciences (2006; Pl. 8), a particularly ambitious installation dedicated to women in science, does just that. Protective as it is suffocating, and surreal as it is enlightening, this glasshouse acts as a physical and virtual vitrine for histories of women whose contributions have long been stuffed away in time’s storage bin. An oversized chemistry tube sitting on a laboratory table inside the glass container drips virtual chemicals. The drops form puddles of comic-book-like word balloons divulging little known facts—who knew that the actress Hedy Lamarr, remembered as a Hollywood sex siren, was the co-inventor of a frequency hopping technology that ultimately led to secure military communications, even cell phone technology? Her story quivers in a globule on the floor, just long enough to be read, before slithering away in the wake of the next elucidating bubble about another woman in science.

Concurrent with her use of text within glasshouses, Yankowitz produced a number of ecological installations. Using the inside/out metaphor to illustrate the threat of climate change she created *Cloud House* (2004; Pl. 9), a glass and aluminum enclosure that squeezes



Fig. 7. Nina Yankowitz, *Femme Fatale* (2003), aluminum, glass, fiberglass, feathers, 8'4" x 6'4" x 7'2". Photo: Barry Holden.

weather into a confined interior space. A generator producing ultrasound vibrations creates a cold mist that forms clouds within the structure that wanes pale grey by day, and waxes hot red to violet LED light by night. A beautiful sight that sucks in the viewer with the attention-getting hook of a looming tornado, *Cloud House* omens the extinction of the generic home as a consequence of eco-carelessness. As an algorithmic projection above the house unfolds phases of an origami-like moon, it is for the viewer to decide whether some hidden cosmic order will override human folly.

Exponentially raising this eco-apocalyptic bar at the Museum Quarter in Vienna, Austria, in December 2011, Yankowitz appropriated the venue’s entire glass-walled space to create her site-specific installation *Global Warming Schauram Bursting Seams* (Fig. 9). Imagine hearing water, faintly gurgling, then dripping, rushing and gushing; then watching water—



Fig. 8. Nina Yankowitz, *Kiosk.edu* (2002–04), aluminum, glass, LED light, digital texts, 12'4" x 6" 4" x 7'2". Photo: Barry Holden.



Fig. 9. Nina Yankowitz, *Global Warming Schauram Bursting Seams* (2011), projectors, computers, P. Kroger mappings, 250 sq. feet. Photo: RGB Klein.

weeping, seeping, and cascading through moldings, crevices, and within glass walls. A virtual window projected onto an actual window bears witness to an onslaught of typhoons, tornadoes, and scorching sun announcing the arrival of global Armageddon. The viewer gazes at the devastation helplessly, from behind the glass wall. What is one to do?

Make a cell phone call. That, at least, is an option handed the audience facing a crisis of another sort—global terrorism—in *“The Third Woman” Interactive Performance and Film-Game* (2011; Fig 10), an international collaborative effort involving conceptual, electronic, performance and design artists.³² The work pivots on *The Third Woman*, a ten-minute film conceived and produced by Martin Rieser and Pia Tikka that riffs on Carol Reed’s 1949 spy thriller, *The Third Man*. *The Third Woman* follows the misadventures of Lara Line as she becomes embroiled in a saga about modern-day terrorists trafficking in bio-hazardous materials. The film is the centerpiece for a series of separately orchestrated installations, to date exhibited in several venues: New York City; Vienna, Austria; Bath, England; and Xian, China.

Yankowitz is credited with producing the movie’s teaser and a separate, related documentary. She also directed and organized a 2011 exhibition unique to Galapagos Space in Brooklyn, New York. Here, as the audience sat cabaret style in small groups viewing Yankowitz’s trailer scenes, women performers

dressed in outfits printed with Margarete Jahrmann’s scannable barcode designs, shimmied about, asking audience member-players to aim their cell phones at the coded frocks to download a series of directorial options. The audience never saw the original Rieser/Tikka film. They instead viewed it in sequential segments on a large screen and on their cell phones. When the film paused, players texted their directorial decisions to such questions as: Should Lara say

A.” She was not supposed to get so nosy.”

B. “I love him, but they’re on my tail.”

C.” Should I kill her too?”

Their cell phone responses connected via WiFi to computer techs, who tallied the vote and edited the movie to reflect the audience’s majority opinions. The event ended with a viewing of the audience-(re)directed film.

Hardly intended to author a community action plan for dealing with bioterrorism, this “U-vote the plot movie” created a film more “dada” than anything else. However, just as *Crossings* enabled individuals using options to edit their



Fig. 10. Nina Yankowitz, *“The Third Woman” Interactive Performance and Film-Game* (2011), “The Algorithmics” performers, computers, projectors, audio, projection screen, water projections, 2500 sq. ft. Galapagos Theatre. Photo Composite: Martin Rieser.

own “bibles,” so did *The Third Woman* installation at Galapagos underscore the potential for individuals harnessing technology to impact life’s big picture.

There is another side to all this that speaks to a new, egalitarian age for art. Works such as *Crossings* and more so *The Third Woman*, share ownership of the creation with a brigade of collaborators, viewers included, all of whom are messengers of the message they helped craft. The artist suffering self-effacement here does so willingly, with the hope that all involved in the art process will see in art a call to arms for the betterment of living.

Nina Yankowitz harvests her near-half-century process with such installations. They morph her abstract notations into barcodes and allow the word as image and idea to fly through cyberspace. She steps from center stage—where she once sang her falsetto *Scenario Sounds*—into the crowd. Bowing to her public as protagonist in her process, she continues to trade up her text-based messenger tools to present multiple views of the world in media that communicate in the vernacular of the day. Her art is thus as ever changing as life. •

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NOTES

- All artist quotes based on my interview with Nina Yankowitz, June 2, 2011.
- Crossings* (2006–09), an art installation conceived by Nina Yankowitz, done in collaboration with Mauri Kaipainen, Barry Holden, Pia Tikka, Peter Kroger and Scott Fitzgerald; e-MobilArt, European Mobile Lab for Interactive media Artists, funded by The European Union. See www2.media.uoa.gr/~charitos/emobilart/exhibition_crossings.html.
- Lucy Lippard, *Mixed Blessings, New Art in Multicultural America*; (New York: Pantheon, 1990), 10.
- The color coding of the texts as they appear in *Crossings* are as follows: blue for Old Testament, yellow/gold for New Testament, purple for Hindu Rig-Veda, orange/red for Buddhist, and green for Qu’ran.
- This passage is from the Rig-Veda, one of the four Vedas or primary texts of Hinduism, dating from 1500 B.C. It is from Hymn CXVII, Liberality (purple).
- These were the words of Buddha, c. 500 B.C. (The Eightfold Path) (orange-red).
- This passage is found in Deuteronomy 24:16:07, the fifth book of the Hebrew bible (Old Testament) (blue).
- Susan Davidson, *Robert Rauschenberg, A Retrospective* (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publ., 1998), 290.
- This and the following quotes are from an email exchange with Dr. Mauri Kaipainen, June 12, 2012.
- Lisa Phillips, *The American Century, Art & Culture, 1950-2000*, (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art and W.W. Norton, 1999), 173.
- Group 212 was the name given to the community of artists who gathered in the environs of New York State’s Ulster County, between Woodstock and Saugerties, along State Highway, Route 212 in the late 1960s.
- John Carlin, “Pop Apotheosis: Rock Music Rules,” in Phillips, *The American Century, Art & Culture, 1950-2000*, 179.
- Kenneth Werner, aka Phil Harmonic, was an electronic musician and multimedia artist who provided the musical accompaniment for Yankowitz’s multi-media work, *Oh Say Can You See*” (1968).
- Robert Littman, *Hanging/ Leaning* (Hempstead, NY: The Emily Lowe Gallery, Hofstra University, 1970), introduction.
- John Perreault, “Two Seasons Stacked for Baling,” *The Village Voice* (Feb. 1, 1973).
- Rudolf Arnheim, *New Essays on the Psychology of Art*, (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1986), 205–07. Synesthesia is a sensation produced in one modality when a stimulus is applied to another modality, as when the hearing of a certain sound induces the visualization of a certain color, see <http://dictionary.reference.com>.
- Other venues for *Scenario Sounds/Personae Mimickings or Voices from the Piano* included Cal Arts University, Valencia, and Leah Levy Gallery, San Francisco, both 1981.
- Joyce Kozloff, introduction to Nina Yankowitz, *Scenario Sounds/Personae Mimickings or Voices from the Piano* (New York: Street Editions, 1981), a limited edition hand-signed artist’s book and audiotape, hereafter *Scenario Sounds*.
- Yankowitz, *Scenario Sounds*; a CD version was issued by NY Art Projects, LLC in 2007. The publication is in the Franklin Furnace Archive, currently housed in the Museum of Modern Art, New York City.
- Kozloff, *Scenario Sounds*, introduction.
- James R. Mellow, “Cheops Would Approve,” *New York Times* (Dec. 5, 1971). Mellow incorrectly referred to the December 1971 exhibition as the “second one-man show,” while, in fact, it was Yankowitz’s third solo show at Kornblee.
- Cindy Nemser, “Can Women Have One-Man Shows?,” *New York Times* (Jan. 9, 1972), Letter to the Editor.
- Amei Wallach, from my Dec. 15, 2011, interview with her about her 2008 film, *Louise Bourgeois: The Spider, the Mistress and the Tangerine*, directed by Wallach and Marion Cajori.
- Heretics*, Written and directed by Joan Braderman, produced by Joan Braderman and Crescent Diamond Productions, 2009.
- Maura Reilly and Linda Nochlin, *Global Feminisms* (London: Merrell, 2007), 11; catalog for the “Global Feminisms” exhibition organized by the Brooklyn Museum.
- H.H. Arnason, *History of Modern Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1986), 615.
- Yankowitz created two tile relief walls (each 4’x12’) in 1980, sponsored by the New Jersey Council for the Arts, for the School for the Blind and Hearing Impaired, Jersey City, and School for the Blind and Hearing Impaired, Newark.
- Bill Hellermann, a composer, guitarist, and experimental musician launched the first exhibitions of sound sculpture and audio art, bringing into usage the term “Soundart”; see www.issueprojectroom.org.
- “Ciphers of Identity,” curated by Maurice Berger, opened at the Fine Arts Gallery, University of Maryland Baltimore County, November 1993, and traveled to multiple venues including Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York, N.Y., 1994.
- Maurice Berger, *Ciphers of Identity* (Baltimore: Fine Arts Gallery, Univ. of Maryland Baltimore County, 1993), 28.
- Lilly Wei, “Outside In,” *Art News* (March 2004): 134.
- www2.media.uoa.gr/charitos/emobilart/exhibition_gr/third_woman.html, “The Third Woman” and Interactive installation with film material created and produced by Martin Rieser and Pia Tikka. Other participating artists include Anna Dumitru, Cilona Harney, Margarete Jahrmann, Barry Roshto, Nita Tandon, and Nina Yankowitz; e-MobilArt, funded by The European Union.

BEDROOMS IN EXCESS

FEMINIST STRATEGIES USED BY TRACEY EMIN AND SEMIHA BERKSOY

By Gülsüm Baydar

Two years apart, the British artist Tracey Emin and Turkish artist and opera singer Semiha Berksoy exhibited their bedrooms at internationally acclaimed galleries.¹ Both displays were personal statements with intimate biographical connections. Emin is known to have survived a deprived childhood ridden in misery and poverty in a small English town. Her discontinuous education and broken family life was further marred by instances of violent sex and alcoholism.² Yet she received a formal art education in the 1980s and has been recognized as a leading artist since the 1990s.³ Her artwork predominantly consists of autobiographical elements and addresses sexually loaded themes in very personal and unusual ways. Berksoy, on the other hand, was born to an educated Istanbul family. She was brought up in the modernist enthusiasm of the early years of the Turkish Republic and was in close contact with the leading Turkish intellectuals of the time.⁴ Also raised in a broken family due to the death of her mother at a young age, Berksoy completed her art and music education in Istanbul and Berlin. Broadly acknowledged as the first female Turkish opera singer, she performed internationally at renowned opera stages including Berlin, Porto and New York.⁵ Love, death and sex appear as recurrent themes in her paintings.

In 1998, at Sagacho Exhibition Hall, Tokyo, Tracey Emin (b. 1963) exhibited her bedroom (Fig. 1 and Pl. 10) as it was when she remained there for several days due to a depression caused by relationship problems. The installation included a matted bed frame, wrinkled and stained bed sheets and pillows. Spread across the mattress and the carpet were dirty stockings, a towel, vodka bottles, slippers, underwear with menstrual stains, cigarette butts, birth control pills, a used condom, Polaroid portraits, and a white stuffed toy.

At the Bonn Museum's Millennium 2000 exhibition, Semiha Berksoy (1910–2004) exhibited her bedroom (1994; Fig. 2 and Pl. 11) that she used in the rear of her Istanbul apartment. The room was filled with objects accumulated throughout her colorful life, including her bed and piano, gifts received over the years, her paintings, eccentric clothes of her own design, jewelry,



Fig. 1. Tracey Emin, *My Bed* (1998), mattress, linens, pillows, various objects, 31" x 83" x 92". Photo: The Saatchi Gallery.

glamorous hats, and memorabilia including earth from the Moscow grave of the renowned Turkish poet Nazım Hikmet, with whom she once had a love affair.

These two bedroom displays are highly provocative at a number of levels. First, it is simply not commonplace to enter into the bedroom of someone you don't know. Furthermore, as bedrooms of single women, these spaces do not fit the standard image of the master bedroom in the idealized bourgeois family home. This public image, with its neatly made bed, creaseless sheets, and matching furniture contains no trace of sexuality or the materiality of the body; rather, it suppresses the private reality of the space that it represents. It is the image of the master, indeed, where discipline and control dominate. The bedrooms of Emin and Berksoy are messy, full of "stuff" that is too personal to be offered to the public gaze. Excess is the term that immediately comes to mind.

Excess is a theoretical term that is associated with the unassemblable residue that finds no stable place in orderly systems. The cultural theorist Elizabeth Grosz states that, often associated with the feminine, this residue "is not simply super-added but also undermines and problematizes" the system in question.⁶ Indeed, Emin's and Berksoy's excessive settings crit-

ically exploit the cultural conventions that separate the public from the private and art from life. They also undermine the socially constructed duality between the public image of the master bedroom and the private reality of the lived space. By bringing the messiness of everyday life out of the closet, these artists make powerful statements about the fragility of the lines that divide art from life and public from private.

But how alike are these displays beyond their similarities in authorship and subject matter? With all its messiness, Emin's bed lies in the midst of a conventional and rather sterile museum setting. As such, it has the characteristic of an object to be looked at. Berksoy, on the other hand, invites us to a separate space that one enters through the larger exhibition area. Her bedspace is less to be looked at than to be dwelled in. Indeed, Berksoy's bed cannot be isolated from its spatial surroundings. Here the hardness of the walls is mitigated by the excessive amount of paintings and fabric, and somewhat dematerialized by the dramatic light effect produced by a bedside lamp. Another source of difference is the color scheme of the two displays. While Emin's is predominantly white, with the exception of the blue rug and the brown bedside table, Berksoy's overflows with colors of every tone and shade. Finally, the contents of these settings are clearly quite different in nature.

As far as what to make of these differences between Emin's and Berksoy's bedroom displays, I find Grosz's emphasis on two different identifications of excess very helpful. Associating both with femininity, and tracing their origins to the work of Georges Bataille and Luce Irigaray, respectively, Grosz relates excess to the excremental on one side, and to the plenitude of the maternal-feminine on the other.⁷ In understanding the former, excess involves the destruction of system, order, and authority. It can be represented in bestiality and bodily waste. This conceptualization evokes the psychoanalytical approach to feminism, where femininity is associated with wounds, blood, loss, and castration, i.e., lack.⁸ For the latter meaning, femininity points to an irreducible element that cannot be exhausted in the masculine and the patriarchal. It is conceptualized as a means of transition from one existence to another and is symbolized as plenitude rather than lack. This understanding relates to the feminist interpretations of the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze, which contests the binary opposition of presence vs. lack, and celebrates difference as multiplicity.⁹

These two approaches have radically different implications for feminist thinking and its artistic manifestations. While the former (excremental) approach understands desire on the basis of lack and subjectivity in dualist terms, the latter (excess of



Fig. 2. Semiha Berksoy, *Bedroom* (1994), bed, piano, various objects, size unspecified. Photo: Istanbul Museum of Painting and Sculpture Archive.

femininity) emphasizes the positivity and performability of desire and the power of the feminine to redefine the symbolic.¹⁰ I contend that the key to understanding the significance of the difference between the works of Emin and Berksoy lies in the two different conceptualizations of excess.

Before expanding on the theoretical implications of the two bedroom displays, an explanation of the larger context of Emin's and Berksoy's work in relation to subjectivity and language is in order. Almost every work of these artists bears traces of their intimate relationship to their bodies. Besides their own bedrooms, their artistic repertoire includes photography, self-portraits, sounds, and words; yet their work



Fig. 3. Tracey Emin, *I've Got It All* (2000), ink-jet print, 19 3/16" x 16 7/8". Photo: The Saatchi Gallery.



Fig. 4. Tracey Emin, *Everyone I have Ever Slept With 1963-1995* (1995), appliqued tent, mattress, and light, 48" x 96 1/2" x 84 1/2". Photo: Courtesy Jay Jopling, White Cube.

ranges beyond the contained and often unproductive boundaries of self-indulgence.

In one of her most forceful works (2000; Fig. 3), Emin is frontally photographed sitting on a bare floor that is sprinkled with banknotes and coins. Head bent down, she holds a handful of the banknotes against her body between her naked legs that are spread wide apart. The title, *I've Got It All*, adds both power and irony to the image, which is an explicit critique of the value of femininity in the patriarchal symbolic order.

Words are an inseparable component of Emin's work. The installation that brought her to fame, *Everyone I have Ever Slept With* (1995; Fig. 4), is a tent appliqued with 102 embroidered names of the people the artist had slept with. "Sleeping with" is a term commonly associated with sex. Knowing Emin's self-declared promiscuous background, the title is highly suggestive. However, as the artist explains, "Some I'd had a shag with in bed or against a wall some I had just slept with, like my grandma. I used to lay in her bed and hold her hand. We used to listen to the radio together and nod off to sleep. You don't do that with someone you don't love and don't care about."¹¹ Besides past lovers, the names on the tent include friends, family, drinking partners and two numbered fetuses. With Emin's explanation, the immediate identification of "sleeping with" and sex is unsettled at once. The viewer's perceptual frame begins to wander freely across the signifying chain that crosses over a range of delicate implications of the terms sex, intimacy, love, and care.

Much of Emin's work contains written inscriptions that relate to her thoughts and feelings. Frequently, these are expressed as framed neon signs or embroidered panels. The signs include such phrases as, "You Forgot to Kiss my Soul" (2001), "I KNOW ~~I KNOW~~ I KNOW" (2007), and "Some Crazy Fucked Up Dog Like Hell; That's How it Feels to Live without LOVE" (2009). In *Everyone I have Ever Slept With*, the phrase, "With myself, always myself, never forgetting" is embroidered on the floor of the tent. At first sight, the repetitive assertion of selfhood in words can be linked to the poststructuralist contention

that the subject is produced by and within the signifying chain. At that level, Emin's work manifests a continuous effort to confirm her subjectivity in the symbolic realm. However, Emin also consistently reminds her audience that any identity category is always already based on lack, and that the feminine subject has limited agency in the symbolic realm. She does this not only by virtue of her gender, but also by a number of strategic moves embedded in the works themselves.

In terms of content, Emin's words and phrases invariably indicate a deeply felt lack. Her aphorisms are about absences. They point to needs, desires, and memories. Even the undeniably assertive tone of "I KNOW ~~I KNOW~~ I KNOW" is undermined by the line that strikes through the middle phrase. Furthermore, many of her neon signs are written in pink and/or inscribed in heart-shaped frames, both assigned by popular culture to the feminine realm. Hence their use leaves little doubt about the gender of the enunciation. Emin's use of embroidery, a typically feminine occupation, plays a similar role. Finally, the artist is well known for her spelling mistakes, which she generously incorporates into her artwork. These are inadvertent reminders that the symbolic realm can never adequately represent feminine subjectivity and that woman's representation is always already incomplete. In Emin's work femininity is clearly associated with loss.

If words are inseparable components of Emin's work, Berksoy's world consists of music—for her, a metaphor for life—and colors. Reportedly, every day she would sit at her piano and say, "I still have a voice, so I am still alive," and once said, "I sounded C; I conquered death."¹² Wondering and wandering at the threshold of life and death, language, and music, Berksoy mobilized the power of song both literally as a singer and metaphorically as a way of life.

It is interesting that the contemporary philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari privilege music as the ultimate force of deterritorialization—a term they associate with undoing established structures and decoding systems that organize our bodies, identities, and words. Opposing music to words, they say that "music is a deterritorialization of the voice, which becomes less and less tied to language, just as painting is a deterritorialization of the face."¹³ Following their line, Elizabeth Grosz has stated that music is giving sound to what has not been heard before.¹⁴ These philosophers argue that music generates new sites of becoming and leads to the opening up and exploration of the cosmic plenitude, which cannot be limited to known systems, structures, and concepts. My own reading of most of Berksoy's work is as a musical celebration of alternative worlds, the starting point of which is her own body and life.

Berksoy's many self-portraits are generally inscribed by a dark horizontal line that cuts across the canvas. She calls this "the line of fate," which represents for her the boundary between life and death.¹⁵ In *The Inevitable Line of Fate* (1972; Fig. 5), for example, the head and the body are separated by a thick black line, below which a disembodied hand, also outlined in black, reaches upward. The tip of the third finger touches the line strategically where it meets the throat. These two elements, the line and the hand, are perceived at an autonomous

plane layered over the female figure. It is as if they are imposed from elsewhere and not inherent to the integrity of the body. The backgrounds for the head and the body are rendered in blue and brown, respectively—while the head hovers in the sky, the naked body is buried in the earth. The facial expression appears perplexed and the body posture is stiff. Here the life/death, head/body equation can be effortlessly extended to such other binary divides as symbolic/real and language/unrepresentable. The figure of woman's body as the unrepresentable/death gestures towards psychoanalytical theory's association of the feminine with death.¹⁶

On one level, *The Inevitable Line of Fate* is similar to Emin's *I've Got It All*, as it lends itself to be read as a critique of the place of women in the symbolic realm. However, it only acts as a foil to most of Berksoy's work, which needs to be read against other auto-portraits that undermine the inevitability in question and point to alternative modes of existence.¹⁷ In fact, Berksoy plays with "the line of fate," multiplying and/or segmenting it and having it cross the canvas at different levels in a large number of her self-portraits. For example, in an untitled self-portrait, the line of fate hovers above the head (1972; Fig. 6). Although its trace is still evident in the light and dark colors that again form alternative backgrounds to the head and the body, the general tone of this painting is very different. Here a lively body, almost perceived as dancing, is partially veiled by a semi-transparent, colorful outfit. The breasts and the genitals are joyfully exaggerated, and the face bears a subtle smile. It is tempting to read this painting as a celebration of relief from the burden of the line of fate as a deadly blow to feminine subjectivity.

Unlike Emin's work, which is about the limits of feminine agency in the symbolic realm where femininity can only be represented as lack, Berksoy's is a manifestation of the plenitude that is repressed by the symbolic. As the untitled self-portrait shows, once the line of fate is lifted off of woman's neckline, her subjectivity comes alive in all its fullness. For Berksoy, femininity predominantly points to an irreducible and inexhaustible element that exceeds the symbolic realm.

Such difference between the two artists' work is most evident in their bedroom displays, in the way that each has been turned into a gallery/museum piece. Emin's bed and the objects that surround it were not the result of a self-conscious act of design but rather the by-products of an excessive lifestyle burdened with depression, alcohol, and relationship problems. Once taken out of the gallery context, Emin's is simply a dirty, untidy bed. In the gallery setting, the wasteful excess of everyday life is turned into public spectacle. Berksoy's display is quite the opposite. With her flamboyant personality and lively social presence, Berksoy can be said to have lived her entire life as a self-conscious act of performance. Her peculiar make-up, costumes, and hats were not specifically choreographed for spectacular shows, but were inseparable elements of her everyday life. The border between the privacy of everyday life and public spectacle was always fluid for Berksoy. As she diligently assembled the bedroom in her Istanbul apartment in 1994, where she spent most of her time and entertained her guests, she did not foresee its display



Fig. 5. Semiha Berksoy, *The Inevitable Line of Fate* (1972), oil on masonite, 15 1/2" x 10 7/8". Photo: S. Berksoy Opera Foundation Collection.

as a museum piece. However, three years later, she asked the renowned Turkish filmmaker Kutluğ Ataman to film her space,¹⁸ and in 1999, when the curators of the Millenium 2000 project saw her room during a casual visit, they immediately asked for its installation at Bonn.¹⁹ Unlike Emin, who turned the privacy of her daily life into public spectacle, Berksoy challenged the boundary between the public and the private by designing all aspects of her life as a spectacle.

The historical trajectory of the two displays followed similar lines of difference, which call for further theorization. Emin's bedspace, which generously displays dirt, stain, and bodily discharge like menstrual blood, is a literal manifestation of excess as waste. The scene is so provocative that Christine de Ville, a British housewife, brought cleaning utensils when she visited the exhibition. She explained:

I thought I would clean up this woman's life a bit. After I heard about it, I drove straight to London with a 500ml. bottle of Vanish. I had a go, but unfortunately I could not get to wash the sheets, just a pre-wash. In her video, she was bleating on about a lack of a love life. She will never get a boyfriend unless she tidies herself up.²⁰



Fig. 6. Semiha Berksoy, *Self Portrait* (1972), oil on masonite, 15 1/2" x 10 7/8". Photo: Private Collection.

Disgust is one of the most obvious feelings evoked at the sight of dirty stockings and underwear, stained sheets, and cigarette butts. These are objects of excess, which the clean body needs to get rid of in order to maintain a sense of "I." De Ville's call for a cleaning act is an embarrassingly obvious manifestation of society's intolerance for dirt and disorder as threats to the imagined integrity of the self.

The symbolic continuously strives to pacify, balance, or circumvent the efforts to fill the hole that emerges by the expulsion of any undesirable element. The excluded element is terrifying because it reveals the truth and the fragility of the system that inevitably relies on it. Another term for excess-as-waste, used by psychoanalytical theorist Julia Kristeva, is abject, which she defines as having "only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to I."²¹ What actually causes abjection is not lack of cleanliness or health but what threatens identity, system, and order. Kristeva writes:

If it be true that the abject simultaneously beseeches and pulverizes the subject, one can understand that it is experienced at the peak of its strength when that subject,

weary of fruitless attempts to identify with something on the outside, finds the impossible within; when it finds that the impossible constitutes its very *being*, that it is none other than abject.²²

This captures precisely what causes the viewers' sense of unease at the sight of Emin's installation. Hers is an intervention that outrages the audience by pointing to aspects of subjectivity that need to be suppressed to maintain a sense of "I." In short, de Ville's gesture bears testimony to the fantasy that a pure subject can emerge when bodily excess and (feminine) sexuality are made to vanish by a willful act of social control. Ironically, Emin's project to create a master bedroom out of the messy world of lived reality can never succeed. Taking de Ville's own words as a metaphor, the cleaning act is bound to remain a "pre-wash," never to be completed.

Berksoy, on the other hand, speaks from the plenitude of a world that cannot be limited to the codes of the symbolic. Her bedroom is much more than a utilitarian space defined by solid walls and functional furniture. Seemingly unrelated and haphazardly placed objects undermine the solidity of every surface. Paintings, masks, flamboyant hats, patterned spreads, antique dolls, and old photographs provide the room with texture, color, and a sense of time. The fifty-year-old, handcrafted console piano and the century-old Singer sewing machine are reminders of sound, rhythm, and creative human production. These are not objects commonly found in contemporary bedrooms. Unconventional, colorful, and beyond categorization, this space stirs the imagination by evoking a childlike sense of curiosity and discovery. Rather than revealing a lack in the symbolic order, the constituents of this space exceed what would be those boundaries. The participant/viewer is invited and inspired to form unprecedented relationships between the various components of this seeming disorder.

Deleuze and Guattari might say that, riding on a line of flight from given structures and systems of order, Berksoy deterritorializes and ridicules the power of normative unitary structures. In their work, the term "line of flight" parallels the concept of deterritorialization which signifies escape from the forces of repression and stratification. To explain these forces, they say:

You will organize, you will be an organism, you will articulate your body—otherwise you're just depraved. You will be a signifier and signified, interpreter and interpreted—otherwise you're just a deviant. You will be a subject, nailed down as one, a subject of enunciation recoiled into a subject of the statement—otherwise you're just a tramp.²³

To counter such labels of "depraved," "deviant," and "tramp"; to increase the expanse of thought and to free the imagination, Deleuze and Guattari advise conjugating with deterritorialized flows and relaying lines of flight. Berksoy's life and work follow this advice in a most liberating way.

If Emin rebels against the status-quo by undermining the

normative constructs of social propriety (i.e., transplanting the plane of excess-as-waste to the plane of art) Berksoy rejoices in the colorful world of proliferation by exceeding the norms of the symbolic. In other words, Emin's references come from within the symbolic as she tries to carve a place for her subjectivity based on lack. Her work, albeit critically, addresses the masculine gaze. Berksoy, on the other hand does not have a gendered addressee. In her work, sexuality does not manifest itself in the dual terms of masculine vs. feminine but as a desire for multiplicity. By first tearing apart elements of order and hierarchy and then re-combining them in unusual ways, she invites her audience into a wonder-world of joyful celebration. Her life's work is not about the dark alleys of (self-) consumption but about the adventurous path of production and the courageous discovery of difference.

Indeed, a comparison of Emin's and Berksoy's work cannot be reduced to a binary opposition of waste vs. difference, or consumption vs. production. Deleuze and Guattari remind us that forces of deterritorialization and lines of flight readily exist even in the most "arborescent" structures. They insist that all models are perpetually under construction, equally open to restrictive and liberating forces.²⁴ Neither art nor its related institutions are exceptions. For example, one can argue that the publication of a conventional book on Berksoy's work reterritorializes her unusual presence in the artworld. Possibilities of deterritorialization, on the other hand, are most strikingly exemplified during the exhibition of Emin's bed in the Tate Gallery, where, in October 1999, two Chinese men stripped off their shirts and had a pillow fight, jumping on the bed. "The bed was there. It was like an invitation," explained one of them, "We thought we'd make a new work, like theater."²⁵ By means of these men's act, the bed as the signifier of depressive self-consumption was transformed into a joyful playground. Both the artwork and the museum space were momentarily deterritorialized. Needless to say, their act was immediately followed by a severe intervention of reterritorialization, as both men were arrested by the police, and the exhibition was closed for the day. Emin herself saw the act as a criminal offense, as terrorism. Yet the two men's gesture is a powerful reminder of the inherent instability of any territory—even when it is set up as an act of protest, like Emin's bedspace.

Lines of flight know no limitation. In 2006, the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool opened an exhibition where child artists John Cake and Darren Neave created a mini-gallery complete with modern artworks, made entirely of Legos.²⁶ The exhibition contained replicas of Emin's bed among works by Joseph Beuys, Anselm Kiefer, and other contemporary artists. The bed had two figures jumping on it and Emin on the side with an angry face. This time, as the letters J and D on the figures indicate, the young artists depicted themselves as the two jumpers. Hence, as the actual crime is transformed into play, it is rendered totally void. The relatively long history of the bed, which began as a public display of a private everyday life, is mobilized towards becoming a site of mimicry and play, to the point where it is no longer recognizable as wasteful excess.

Emin's original display of her bedspace manifests a

rebellion against the status quo. It spectacularizes the death of the feminine subject in the symbolic realm, but hardly points to a way out from the given structures. At that level, the acts of the Chinese men and the child artists, which can be interpreted as challenges to death, embody the production and celebration of alternative worlds. Berksoy's entire oeuvre follows similar lines. Unlike Emin, who offers a powerful critique of given structures, Berksoy engages in an ongoing performance of deterritorializing the deadly forces of structures themselves in order to point to unforeseen possibilities towards radical difference.

These bedroom works of Emin and Berksoy contain significant implications for feminist theory and action in art and cultural politics. By mobilizing excess as a strategy, and by underscoring the tenuousness of the boundary between the private and the public, both artists make powerful statements about the agency of the body in the cultural realm. Their differences, on the other hand, reveal the limitations of an oppositional conception of femininity in terms of the symbolic divides between man/woman, presence/lack, subject/object, and mind/body. Once the notion of femininity is detached from its masculine other, feminist strategies may be mobilized not merely to critique, but also to take a line of flight from the very structures of domination and control. Ultimately, this is a call for an affirmative, mobile, and joyfully liberating understanding of subjectivity, celebrating both multiplicity and radical difference. ●

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NOTES

1. After their first displays in Tokyo and Bonn, respectively, both exhibits travelled internationally and attracted large numbers of audiences. Emin's bed was placed in the Tate Gallery a year later, as a candidate for the Turner prize. Later it was bought by Charles Saatchi for £150,000 and displayed as part of the first exhibition at the Saatchi Gallery's new premises at County Hall, London. Berksoy's room was included in the Istanbul Art and Sculpture Museum's permanent collection in 2003. In 2010, it was exhibited in the Kazım Taşkent art gallery in Istanbul as part of a larger exhibition to celebrate Berksoy's 100th birthday, which was entitled, "I Lived on Art, I Lived on Love."
2. Emin's autobiography provides a detailed account of her life, family, education and relationships. See: Tracey Emin, *Strangeland* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2005).
3. Emin graduated from the Maidstone College of Art in 1986, and received an MA in painting at the Royal College of Art in 1989. In 2007 she was awarded an Honorary Doctorate from the Royal College of Art, London. Her works have been exhibited internationally, including Amsterdam, Munich, New South Wales, Istanbul and Venice. For a condensed biography see her faculty page at The European Graduate School website: <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/tracey-emin/biography/>
4. The Turkish Republic was founded in 1923, taking the Western European nations as a model, with the aim of implementing modernism in every aspect of cultural and political life. For an extensive account of the reforms concerning women's status see Arat, "The project of modernity and women in Turkey," in Sibel

- Bozdoğan and Reşat Kasaba, *Rethinking Modernity and National Identity in Turkey* (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1997), 95–112.
5. For a chronological account of Berksoy's life see "Notes from My Life" in Mine Haydaroğlu, ed., *Semiha Berksoy: I Lived on Art, I Lived on Love* (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2010), 243–54.
 6. Elizabeth Grosz, *Architecture from the Outside: Essays on Virtual and Real Space* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 151.
 7. Grosz, *Architecture from the Outside*, 152.
 8. Referring to psychoanalytic feminism, Rosi Bradiotti states that the feminine "bears a privileged relation to lack, excess and displacement. By being posited as eccentric vis-à-vis the dominant mode, or as constantly off-center, the feminine marks the threshold between the human and its 'outside.'" See: "Teratologies" in Ian Buchanan and Claire Colebrook, eds., *Deleuze and Feminist Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2000), 166.
 9. Various aspects of the difficult relationship between feminist and Deleuzian thinking are explored in the excellent essays in Buchanan and Colebrook, *Deleuze and Feminist Theory*.
 10. Here, I refer to Lacanian psychoanalysis, which differentiates between the real, imaginary and symbolic realms. While the first is associated with the pre-language realm of the maternal plenitude, the second refers to the mirror phrase where the "I" differentiates itself, and the third is the realm of language, society and law. For an excellent feminist interpretation of these terms, see Margaret Whitford, *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine* (London: Routledge, 1991). Psychoanalytical theory also states that the symbolic realm both produces and depends on its very exclusions to perpetuate itself. In other words, lack is the precondition of any identity category. Feminist theorist Ellie Ragland-Sullivan explains that there is always a limit to signification, which is caused by the element of desire that is related to "the Real which blocks the smooth flow of communication." See: Ellie Ragland-Sullivan, "The Symbolic," in Elizabeth Wright ed., *Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 422.
 11. Barry Didcock, "THE E SPOT, Barry Didcock talks to Tracey Emin about sex, art, old age and her latest work... a DVD," *Sunday Herald* (Edinburgh), April 30, 2006.
 12. Melih Güneş, "a la Semiha" in Haydaroğlu, ed., *Semiha Berksoy, I Lived on Art, I Lived on Love*, 48.
 13. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1987), 302. Deleuze and Guattari do not limit music to the realm of human beings. They link its deterritorializing power to nature, animals, and ultimately to the cosmos. Face, for them, is associated with naming, defining and fixing.
 14. Elizabeth Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2008), 57.
 15. Melih Güneş, "a la Semiha" in Haydaroğlu, ed., *Semiha Berksoy, I Lived on Art, I Lived on Love*, 45.
 16. This is a recurrent theme of Freudian and Lacanian versions of psychoanalysis, feminist critiques of which are offered in the work of a range of theorists including Luce Irigaray, Judith Butler, Kaja Silverman, Julia Kristeva, Theresa de Lauretis and others. Their main argument is to secure an autonomous sphere for female subjectivity that is not based on the lack of the phallus. In a similar vein, Berksoy's gesture reminds us that while the life of one side of binary constructs depends on the death of the other, one can also not exist without the other. In other words, what is relegated to the sphere of the other is always already part of the self.
 17. I use the term foil in its literary meaning as "a character who serves as a contrast to another perhaps more primary character, so as to point out specific traits of the primary character." <http://contemporarylit.about.com/cs/literaryterms/g/foil.htm> (accessed on July 29, 2011).
 18. The film was featured at the 5th Istanbul Biennale in 1997.
 19. For a detailed account of the installation see Zeliha Berksoy, "Semiha Berksoy: The Whole World is in my Room," in Haydaroğlu, ed., *Semiha Berksoy, I Lived on Art, I Lived on Love*, 34–35.
 20. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/wales/485270.stm
 21. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1982), 1.
 22. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 5.
 23. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 159.
 24. This is an ongoing theme of *A Thousand Plateaus*, where the authors present the seemingly dualistic nature of such models as rhizome vs. tree, nomadology vs. war machine, smooth vs. striated.
 25. <http://www.artcrimes.net/my-bed>
 26. <http://www.show.me.uk/site/news/STO882.html>



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CAROL HAMOY

RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR PASSIONS

By Matthew Baigell



Fig. 1. Carol Hamoy, *Welcome to America* (1994), mixed media, size variable. Photo: Courtesy the artist.

Several Jewish American feminist artists who have made important contributions to mainstream feminist art have gained high visibility in the last few decades;¹ Eleanor Antin, Judy Chicago, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Elaine Reichek, and Martha Rosler are in this group. On the relatively few occasions when they have turned to Jewish themes, they have tended to explore secular subjects concerned with issues of gender, cultural assimilation, the eastern European past, and the Holocaust.

During the same period, a number of Jewish women artists across the United States have found inspiration in sacred Jewish texts—the Bible, Talmud, prayer books, and Kabbalah, including Ruth Weisberg (California), Beth Ames Swartz (Arizona), Ellen Holtzblatt (Illinois), Lynne Avadenka (Michigan), Siona Benjamin (New Jersey), Janet Shafner (Connecticut), and Carol Hamoy (New York), the subject of this article. These artists would likely agree with cultural historian Stephen Whitfield's statement that "Only religion can form the inspirational core of a viable and meaningful Jewish culture.... There is simply no longer a serious way to being Jewish—and of living within Jewish culture—without Judaism."² This is not to deny the importance of secular aspects

of Jewish culture, but Whitfield seems to be saying that without religion at the center, all the rest is social history, that bagels-and-lox Sunday brunches are an interesting cultural phenomenon but contribute nothing to the religion.

As much as Hamoy and this latter group of women artists are serious and knowledgeable students of the ancient texts and fearless in presenting images they consider important and relevant to their own lives and the lives of other women, they have not ignored secular subjects. In correspondence over the past twenty-odd years, Hamoy has indicated to me the reciprocal relationships found between her feminism and Jewish heritage.³ The concern for a strong, gendered self-identity manifested through feminism provoked her interest in a more vital Jewish identity, and the social and political values inherited from her cultural and religious background play a key role in her interest in equality for women. For Hamoy, like this group of artists, feminism and Judaism go hand in hand.⁴

Their overall contribution to the development of Jewish art in America is both generous in the scope of their secular subject matter and progressive in their undertaking of wide-ranging challenges to traditional patriarchal and misogynist readings of the ancient texts.⁵ They are the first generation of



Fig. 2. Carol Hamoy, *Portraits of the Artists as Young Girls* (2001), mixed media, size variable. Photo: Courtesy the artist

My work is about life viewed through an acquired feminist lens. Rarely is a wife, mother, daughter, or sister mentioned in Torah [the first five books of the Bible]. Jewish women's historical importance is not emphasized in our tradition. My work is an effort to change that tradition and make visible the invisible part of the children of Israel.⁶

Hamoy's immigrant parents' expectations for her—their middle child and only daughter—differed greatly from those they had for her brothers. For example, she recalls being able to use a sewing machine at a very young age.⁷ At the same time, she says that her experiences as the only girl in her immigrant family “sowed the seeds of my ardent feminism and my need as an artist to reveal to Jewish girls and women a heritage of which they should be proud.”

women artists to do so, perhaps in the entire history of world Jewish art. They are post-secular in that they have rejected what they consider the now old-fashioned, insistent secularism of the twentieth century through their explorations of religious subject matter. At the same time, we might also call them post-postmodern, for having rejected irony in favor of their desire to communicate their deeply felt religious, spiritual, and social concerns through their work.

Of this group, Hamoy is one of the most religiously knowledgeable, socially concerned, artistically imaginative, and outspoken. In a career spanning over three decades, she has created a varied body of work based on both secular and religious subject matter and presented in the mediums of collage, assemblage, constructions, and installations. Her materials include found objects, paper, textiles, metals, and beads. She has had over forty solo exhibitions, has taken part in about one hundred group shows, and has created countless series of works. At times, her sources lie exclusively in the Hebrew Bible, at other times in modern women's history. Often, she acknowledges both sources simultaneously.

Some biographical background helps to place her work in perspective. Raised in a somewhat observant family in the Bronx, New York, Carol Hamoy is the daughter and granddaughter of workers in the needle trades—garment workers. As a child she played with, and as an artist she uses, fabrics, ribbons, remnants, beads, and threads as primary materials in her assemblages and constructions, thus honoring her antecedents, especially her female forebears. Around 1980, she began religious study with Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb, an important figure in the Jewish Renewal Movement. Thus, in her work she combines aspects of religious tradition as well as documenting her family history, her own history, and women's history. About her coupling of religious and secular interests, Hamoy has written:

Certainly, her feminist and religious concerns often coalesce, but she can separate them when she so chooses. A series of three separate installations indicates how Hamoy moves easily from secular to religious themes even when using similar formats.

In 1994, she created the entirely secular *Welcome to America* (Fig. 1. and Pl. 12) based on the experiences of immigrant women's arrival in the U.S. between 1892 and 1992. Inspired by many personal stories that illuminate social issues, particularly those that concern women, Hamoy interviewed two hundred immigrants or their descendants in preparation for this celebration of those courageous enough to forge a new life in a strange land. The installation includes more than 150 dresses created from wedding gowns, dresses, skirts, bed linens, scarves, and undergarments. Each dress, front and back, carries the first name of a woman, her place of origin, and her arrival date, as well as a brief statement about her life. All the garments are white, tinted and stained to acquire an antique patina. They move ever so slightly when viewers walk among them, as if containing the spirits of these long-departed women who toiled in sweatshops and hoped for their piece of the American dream. Hamoy has said, “The dresses come from a secret place in my soul.”⁸ The past in which her grandmother lived and worked in the needle trades comes alive, both emotionally and, equally important, viscerally. We sense the physical presence and strength of these women as well as their emotional duress adjusting to new customs, a new language, and difficult living and working conditions. This is not fiddler-on-the-roof nostalgia. *Welcome to America* was created, says Hamoy, “to honor, acknowledge, respect, and thank the brave souls who took their hearts in their hands and made the difficult voyage to America.” In art historical terms, *Welcome to America* represents the aspirations of ordinary but heroic people—history from the ground up, so to speak—rather than recording a specific, noteworthy event or famous people.⁹



Fig. 3. Carol Hamoy, *The Invisible Part of the Children of Israel* (2001), mixed media, size variable. Collection The Museum of Art, Ein Harod, Israel.

In *Portraits of the Artists as Young Girls* (2000; Fig. 2), Hamoy's focus, a purely secular one, is on women artists, not their art. Her intention was to highlight "what it means to be a woman who is an artist, the impact of that life, the inequity and disappointments, and how one *has* to continue creating her work." Hamoy contacted many artists, asking for a childhood photograph. She transferred these as sepia-toned photos to life-size children's dresses made from paper. Suspended from the ceiling, the over one hundred dresses gently moved as air currents were stirred up by viewers moving among them. As light shone through the translucent garments, illuminating the faces of the young girls, viewers could sense an artistic spirit alive in these young girls that would mature as they became artists. Handwritten lists on the walls display a collection of names of women artists from early to contemporary times. One critic captured Hamoy's central point when he wrote: "One assumes this radiance represents the visionary characteristic of all the artists cited, while at the same time alluding to a sisterhood built on a shared strength."¹⁰

For the third installation, *The Invisible Part of the Children of Israel* (2001; Fig. 3), Hamoy's subject was women in the Bible/Torah. Here she made the invisible visible by providing the names of women only identified as possessions, such as Lot's wife (Idit), Noah's wife (Amara or Noamara), and Jephthah's daughter (Sheilah), names which can be found in various legends that have accrued to the biblical stories over the centuries.¹¹ For this installation, one hundred transparent "dresses" made of clear vinyl were suspended from the ceiling, and more than fifty "text pages" on display listed the names and/or accomplishments of almost four hundred women. (The fact that there are one hundred dresses is significant, as ten and



Fig. 4. Carol Hamoy, *Queen Jezebel* (1992), mixed media, 10" x 7 1/2" x 4 1/2". Private collection.

its multiples have mysterious qualities in Judaism—the Ten Commandments, the ten qualities of God as recorded in Kabbalah, ten persons required as a quorum for prayer.)

Of this work and others in this vein, Hamoy wrote:

It is my goal to have the viewing public see my art and, while looking, hear the following phrase. "Here we are, women in Torah, and these are our names and know us and remember us as you do our husbands, brothers, uncles, and fathers." What a joy that would be!

By including their names, in effect a virtual rewriting of the Bible, Hamoy enables viewers to realize how important is her sense of obligation as a Jew and as a woman to consecrate the participation of women in events recorded in the Bible:

We cannot rewrite Torah (nor do I expect we should), but we have an obligation to inform our daughters (and our sons) of the important parts our foremothers played in Jewish history. *The Invisible Part of the Children of Israel* ... fills a sacred obligation by sanctioning their presence and, when possible, acknowledging their attendance.

A decade earlier, Hamoy had voiced a similar concern when she wrote, "It was time that the voice of the woman—[in Hebrew] *Kol Ishah*—was heard."¹² Her own artistic voice, always loud and clear, became especially so during the 1990s, when she spent considerable time reflecting on the lives of individual women in the Bible and creating works in their honor. Whatever the format, there is an insistent physicality—an appreciation of the living moment and the lived-in moment—that inhabits much of her output. One of her most startling images in this regard is *Queen Jezebel* (1992; Fig. 4). Jezebel, a Phoenician, dominated her husband, King Ahab (reigned 874– 853 BCE). She thought of herself as an absolute ruler, ran roughshod over the law, and encouraged the worship of idols (First Kings 21). Jezebel was so disliked that the Israelites refused to bury her when she died, instead tossing her body over the city walls, where her body was devoured by dogs, except for the soles of her feet. The great Talmudic scholar, Adin Steinsaltz, has called her "perhaps the most perfect representation of the force of evil in the whole of Scripture."¹³

Discounting Steinsaltz's patriarchal observations and those offered by biblical scholars, Hamoy concentrated on Jezebel's human qualities. One legend describes her as quite sympathetic to the joys and sorrows of others. At funerals, she



Fig. 5. Carol Hamoy, *First Wife/Lilith* (1991), mixed media, 32" x 17" x 11 1/2". Courtesy the artist.



Fig. 6. Carol Hamoy, *Sabbath Bride* (1983), mixed media, 38 1/2" x 18" x 32". Hebrew Union College-Institute of Religion Museum, New York.



Fig. 7. Carol Hamoy, *A Womb of Her Own* (1990), mixed media, 28" x 16" x 20". Collection The Klutznick Museum, Washington, D.C.

would join the ranks of mourners, and she would take part in wedding festivities by dancing before the bride and groom, still considered a good deed to this day.¹⁴ Hamoy honored this aspect of Jezebel's activities by representing her as a pair of gaudy dancing slippers.

Hamoy also lessened the demonization of Adam's legendary first wife Lilith in *First Wife/Lilith* (1991; Fig. 5) by dressing her in a fantastical ball gown. Although never mentioned in the Bible except in passing (her name in lower case meaning a she-demon) in Isaiah 24:14, in legends Lilith was the first person to talk back to God, the first to be expelled from the Garden of Eden, a known seducer of men (able to sexually arouse them in their sleep), and even a murderer of children.¹⁵ This connection would not appear to be too subversive had Hamoy not used a similar get-up in 1983 for *Sabbath Bride* (Fig. 6), a seminal work in her career that combined her then newly developing spiritual concerns with both her feminist interests and secular background.

At the same time that *Sabbath Bride* reflects Hamoy's secular and feminist underpinnings, it reveals her knowledge of religious and liturgical materials. A mixed-media construction, *Sabbath Bride* is a motherly/wifely figure composed of fabric, beads, candles, feathers, and a bird's nest. The feathers represent those plucked from the chicken that was prepared for the Sabbath meal. Hamoy probably intended the work to suggest the figure described in the song *Lechah Dodi* (written by the sixteenth-century Kabbalist, Shlomo Ha Levi Alkabetz), which ushers in the Sabbath at Friday evening services. It begins: "Beloved, come to meet the bride; beloved, come to greet the Sabbath."

Sabbath Bride is a complex image, however, and might also symbolize Jerusalem. One of the lines in *Lechah Dodi* is "Shake

off the dust—arise! Don your splendid cloths," which might refer to the passage in Isaiah 52:2, where the prophet urges Jerusalem to rise up, metaphorically, and dress in her finery. Other interpretations (some perhaps conflicting) suggest that Israel is the bride of God, that Israel is the spouse of the Sabbath, and that the Torah is the bride of Israel.¹⁶ Hamoy's *Sabbath Bride*, then, is, among other possibilities, the wife, mother, bride, queen, or Jerusalem welcoming viewers to the Sabbath celebrations. For sixteenth-century kabbalists, as the scholar Raphael Patai observed,

Like a true goddess, she [the Shekhinah, the female aspect of the Deity] played the role of spouse as well as mother to her people. She also assumed the form of a divine queen and bride who joined them every Friday at dusk to bring them joy and happiness on the sacred Sabbath. To this day, in every Jewish temple or synagogue, she is welcomed in the Friday evening prayers with the words "Come, O bride."¹⁷

Hamoy's personification of the Sabbath bride represents one of the most complex, multi-layered concepts in all of modern Jewish art.

To bring the Sabbath bride down to earth, so-to-speak, and to honor individual women, Hamoy created *Women of Valor* in 2011 (Pl. 13). Named for the song in praise of wives (from Proverbs 31:10-31) recited on Friday evenings, the woman of valor symbolizes the Shekhinah, the Sabbath queen, the Torah, and wisdom. On the human level it honors Jewish women as bearers of spiritual and moral righteousness. Emphasizing its feminist aspects, Hamoy's circular arrangement suggests a prayer circle, with twenty-two forms hanging from the ceiling, referring to the twenty-two women of valor mentioned in the



Fig. 8. *Prophet 6: Huldah* (1994). mixed media, 22" x 16" x 16". Collection Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, FL.

Torah. Nearby is a blank book with the words "A woman of valor...she is to be valued above rubies" as the heading on each page. Viewers are invited to inscribe the names of women they believe to be "of valor," a participatory gesture that gives the work a sense of immediacy and particularity.

Hamoy's representation of Tamar (1990; Fig 7) in *A Womb of Her Own*, is in a different register, as she was—unlike most women in the Bible—an event-maker. Her story, briefly, is that after her two husbands died without impregnating her (they were brothers), she became an outcast in her community. No longer living under a man's protection, she contrived to dress as a prostitute to seduce Judah, her former father-in-law, in order to conform to the will of God to perpetuate his line (Genesis 38). Like the biblical Ruth, in the story of Ruth and Boaz, Tamar initiated the sexual encounter, driven not by lust but by the goal of survival through conception. As one commentator observed, she "turns from the passive victim to the active arbiter of her own fate..., [her] triumph depends on her total control of her being."¹⁸ Although praised by feminists, once Tamar's role as a mother was fulfilled (she gave birth to twin boys, one of whom was the ancestor of King David, and for which she was criticized in legends for her trickery), she disappeared from the Bible.

A Womb of Her Own does not illustrate a particular narrative episode in Tamar's marriages, her seduction of Judah, or his response. Rather, its very title indicates Hamoy's support for Tamar's control of her own story and her own body, and the various objects included in the work indicate her place in biblical history—as a woman. The black veils suggest her double widowhood, the two candles in the central rectangle



Fig. 9. Carol Hamoy, *Hail to the Chief* (1997), mixed media, 18" x 13" x 5". Courtesy the artist.

(her womb) represent her twin sons, and the red cloth around the rectangle recalls the passages in Genesis 38:28-30 that describe how the midwife tied a crimson thread around the hand of the first twin to be born to denote the order of birth.

The prophet Huldah, from *Prophet 6* (1994; Fig. 8), is one in a series of mixed-media constructions honoring the seven women prophets mentioned in the Bible. Criticized in the patriarchic literature (like Tamar), Huldah prophesized the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 586 BCE (Second Kings 22:14-20) in the time of Jeremiah. Why was Huldah asked to prophesize? Legends suggest that because she was a well-connected relative of Jeremiah, who by sheerest chance was out-of-town at that time, the task fell to her. She was also thought to be a hateful woman as well as the daughter of a harlot—the kind of subject to which Hamoy was attracted in order to right a biblical wrong.¹⁹

Each work in the women prophets series contains a page from a nineteenth-century book of women's names which includes a poem about the named prophet; Huldah's also includes a poem about her namesake. The columns symbolize the temple in Jerusalem, and the branch to the right refers to the Tree of Knowledge. The circle at the top is the symbol for woman as well as for eternity. By adding these iconographic motifs, not all of which relate to Huldah's role in the Bible, Hamoy, in effect, is insisting that the women prophets be treated with the same sense of dignity and seriousness of purpose as their male counterparts. She surrounds them with

paraphernalia that adds meaning to their position and bearing, and which centers them in biblical history.

Event-making women in the secular world are also on Hamoy's radar. One of her memorable portraits, entitled *Hail to the Chief* (1997; Fig. 9), represents the Ohio-born Victoria Woodhull (1838-1927), who ran for president of the United States in 1872, the first woman to do so. A leader in the suffrage movement and the first woman to operate a Wall Street brokerage house, she also insisted (like Tamar) on control of her own body and sexuality. Hamoy, tongue planted firmly (but also with a bit of anger) in cheek, comments on the reception of Woodhull's presidential bid: Woodhull's photograph appears within a faux-Victorian, frilly, ornamented frame surrounded by red striped cloth that suggests an American flag, and a rope of glitter—part patriotic, part sarcasm. A replica of Woodhull's signature as "Presidentess" is prominently included.

In *Mourning Coat* (2011; Fig. 10) and *Psalm song* (2004; Pl. 14), two entirely different works from those previously described, Hamoy reflects on human mortality and the fragility of human feelings, on the need to acknowledge and mourn the dead as well as to meditate. At first glance, *Mourning Coat* seems little more than crumpled paper cut in the shape of a coat with some writing on it. But it is, of course, much more than that. First, it is inscribed in Hebrew with the mourner's prayer and in western script with the names of many women who have died. The names are only a part of the feminist perspective that characterizes this work. Among Orthodox Jews, women are not allowed to say prayers for the dead in public, even in the synagogue, and even if the deceased is a spouse or close relative; that task is reserved for men only. By creating a mourning coat with the names of women, Hamoy thus invites all women to don the coat as a symbol of public mourning. Even if Orthodox women cannot say the prayers for the dead publicly, having the prayer written on the coat allows it to be read by others, a wry comment on an outdated tradition rejected by virtually all non-Orthodox Jews.

One of the recent developments in Jewish American art is the creation of meditation spaces for those in need of spiritual and emotional healing, the kinds of spaces where those in mourning might repair for personal sustenance. Artists Beth Ames Swartz, Laura Wohl, and Tobi Kahn have created such spaces, as has Hamoy. Her *Psalm song*, a nondenominational space, is one of the most elaborate materially and, without question, the most elaborately thought out religiously as well as with regard to various healing processes. The central chamber, a pentagonal space approximately 25 by 18 feet, is meant to provide an atmosphere conducive to meditation and reflection. Against an off-white background, fifteen panels hang from the ceiling, ten of which are inscribed with psalms (rewritten by Hamoy using non-gendered language) based on the teachings of the Hasidic rabbi, Reb Nachman of Bratslav (1772-1810) and intended to promote healing. Ten chairs arranged in a circle are placed in the chamber's center. (Ten is



Fig. 10. Carol Hamoy, *Mourning Coat* (2011), mixed media, 39" x 40" x 29".
Courtesy the artist.

the number of people necessary for communal Jewish prayer.) The name of a healing professional is embroidered on the back of each chair, for example, physician, shaman, midwife, and herbalist. Just outside the chamber, Hamoy has listed twenty-two herbs, from aloe to wheatgrass, used for various kinds of physical and psychological healing (one for each of the twenty-two letters in the Hebrew alphabet). This is the first of Hamoy's installations to include music as an integral component. The Psalms are chanted softly and can be heard only inside the meditation chamber.

This small sampling of Hamoy's oeuvre provides some sense of her interests and sources, both secular and religious. A concern for the condition of women in biblical times and in recent history is central to her practice and motivates her ongoing researches into the ancient texts as well as more current events. Carol Hamoy's commitment to her art and religion imbue her work with meaning that reaches well beyond the manipulation of materials or themes for their own sakes. And in this regard, her contribution to Jewish American art is a solid one. ●

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Notes

1. See for example Lisa E. Bloom, *Jewish Identities in American Feminist Art: Ghosts of Ethnicity* (New York: Routledge, 2006).
2. Stephen J. Whitfield, *In Search of American Jewish Culture* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis Univ. Press, 1999), 224, 237.
3. Several undated statements written by Carol Hamoy are incorporated into this article. I want to thank her for her cooperation and patience during its preparation and for our almost twenty years of conversations about art.
4. Susan Gubar, "Eating the Bread of Affliction: Judaism and Feminist Criticism," in *People of the Book: Thirty Scholars Reflect on Their Jewish Identity*, Jeffrey Rubin-Dorsky and Shelley Fisher Fishkin, eds. (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1966), 27.
5. For further remarks on these and other artists, see my *American Artists, Jewish Images* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse Univ. Press, 2006), chapters 9 and 10; *Jewish Art in America: An Introduction* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), chapter 10; and "The Scroll in Context," in *Ruth Weisberg Unfurled* (Los Angeles: Skirball Cultural Center, 2007), 14-25.
6. Statement on the cover of *Bridges 4* (Winter-Spring, 1994).
7. Howie Movshovitz, "'Passages,' the Story of Everymother," *Denver Post*, Dec. 17, 1996, 8E.
8. Carol Hamoy, "Patterns," *Piecework 4* (Sept. – Oct. 1996): 83.
9. Hamoy's *The Triangle Shirtwaist Fire* (1996) honors the lives of 146 mostly immigrant Jewish and Italian women garment workers who perished on March 15, 1911.
10. D. Dominick Lombardi, "Portraying the Past and the Present," *New York Times*, June 4, 2000.
11. Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, 7 vols. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1937–38), V: 241, 179; IV: 44.
12. Paul Kresh, "Art Exhibit Combines Judaism, Feminism," *The Jewish Week*, March 6–12, 1992, 42.
13. Adin Steinsaltz, *Biblical Images*, Yehuda Hanegbi and Yehuddit Keshet, trans. (Northvale, VT: Jason Aronson, 1984), 211. See also Raphael Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess* (New York: Ktav Publ., 1968),

42. Jezebel could not escape condemnation even at the end of her life when she knew that she would be killed. When her enemy approached her palace, she "painted her eyes with kohl and dressed her hair" (Second Kings 9:30).

One biblical commentary describes her actions in the following way. "Jezebel is portrayed as a proud, cold, noble woman. After hearing of the death of her sons and son-in-law, she neither mourns nor tries to flee... She pretties herself for a final scene and addresses a perfect barb to Jehu when he enters the palace." See Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Study Bible* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1985), 744.

This cold-blooded assessment has been countered by the following observation of a feminist scholar: As a king might dress himself with all the accoutrements of his office in a final stiff-upper-lip act of defiance, so did Jezebel. A prideful person, she wanted to recapture "her god- like splendor and [used make-up] to suggest her feminine and sexual powers to rally people." See Nehama Aschkenasy *Women at the Window: Biblical Tales of Oppression and Escape* (Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1998), 15. See also Naomi Harris Rosenblatt, *After the Apple: Women in the Bible* (New York: Miramax, 2005), 214.

14. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, IV, 189.
15. See especially Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess*, 233-36.
16. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, III, 77, 92, 99, 455. See also, Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1951), 51-62, 109-13; Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess*, 255-76.
17. Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess*, 27.
18. Aschkenasy, *Women at the Window*, 86, see also 77–92. See also Lillian R. Klein, *From Deborah to Esther: Sexual Politics in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 62, 63, 70; Alice Ogden Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes: Women's Stories in the Hebrew Bible* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 69, 91.
19. Rabbi Karyn D. Kedar, "The Prophetess Huldah," in Rabbi Elyse Goldstein, ed., *The Women's Haftarah Commentary*, (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publ., 2004), 390.

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Yayoi Kusama

edited by Frances Morris, contributions by Jo Applin, Juliet Mitchell, Frances Morris, Mignon Nixon, Rachel Taylor, and Midori Yamamura
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Reviewed by Judith Rodenbeck

The basic outlines of Yayoi Kusama's career are well-known: traumatized as a teenager by grueling wartime experiences in Japan and susceptible thereafter to hallucinations, she became an internationally known abstract painter. Establishing a career in New York, she produced Pop sculptures, environments, happenings, and works in other media, drawing on her obsessional visions of "infinity nets" and "accumulations." In the 1970s she relocated to Tokyo, and she has spent nearly forty years since her return to Japan living in a private mental hospital, from which redoubt she has maintained a productive and immensely successful international career as an artist.

It is hard to think of another artist so thoroughly and contradictorily identified with more than fifty years of vibrant artistic innovation and experiment and with the constraining temporalities of trauma and personal eccentricity. The narrative of mental instability, and the vocabulary of obsession, repetition, compulsion, accumulation—all terms the artist herself has deployed since the 1960s in naming her works and describing her process—belie the formal dynamism and lifelong development of Kusama's oeuvre taken as a whole. Kusama is a shape-shifter whose self-invention and continual reinvention have yielded an oeuvre that moves from very early, Surrealist-inflected paintings of the 1950s, to the austere proto-minimal monochromy of the "infinity nets" (her close friend Donald Judd was one of the first people to buy one, in 1959) that allied her with, among others, the European groups Zero and Nul, to what Frances Morris has aptly characterized as the "vivid, shocking and at the same time comic" (12) phallic accumulations first shown at the Green Gallery in 1962,

to guerilla Pop and psychedelic performances to the mirrored installations and hallucinatory pumpkin patches she is known for today.

This summer the last leg of "Yayoi Kusama," the first major retrospective in the West of this artist in over a decade, was seen at the Whitney Museum in New York.¹ The exhibition and its catalog provide an invaluable service, for the Kusama who emerges here is less the mythically obsessive-compulsive artist constructed by her own vocabulary than a rigorous and savvy cultural worker. Indeed, if the trope of the maverick and mentally fragile creative genius is one of the grand canards of artistic modernism, the adoption of this pose, whatever its grounding in actual psychology, by a slight woman from Japan performs the double critical move of revealing the phallogocentric and fundamentally Western aspects of such heroizing while also indicating the terrible double-bind in which the marketplace puts the serious artist. This complex semiosis is typical; "Kusama's work is defined by economies of excess both material and psychic, and the reciprocities between them," writes Mignon Nixon in a lapidary formulation (180). The fact that major support for "Yayoi Kusama" has been provided by Louis Vuitton is apropos: Kusama's career was largely self-managed via press releases, manifestos, and letters; and in the 1960s she began the lifelong project of what we would now call "branding," eventually landing on the proliferating polka dot as a signature motif that could be applied to any number of surfaces, a move that aligns her with the pluperfect Pop artist Andy Warhol or even with another Vuitton collaborator, Takashi Murakami, and the contemporary cult of "*kawai*" or "cute." If anything, Kusama is an artist for today: transnational, political if elliptical, project- rather than medium-oriented.

Born in 1929 in the city of Matsumoto into a well-to-do family—the Kusamas had a successful nursery business in mountainous Nagano Prefecture on the main island of Honshu—the artist's earliest years of relative comfort were cut short by the advent of war in the

Pacific. Kusama recalls being mobilized to do farm work, and at the age of 15 she was conscripted, as part of Japan's war efforts, to labor in a textile factor that made uniforms and parachutes. The people of Japan were living under starvation conditions, sharing recipes for insects and grass while being bombarded with martial propaganda from their own government and with a rain of fire from Allied air forces. "Imperialism and militarism melded together deprived individuals of their ability to develop free thinking," Kusama would recall in an interview (171).² These early experiences were formative for her personal narrative: she began to have hallucinatory episodes, seeing a world covered in nets and dots, experiences in which she felt herself liquidating. Making art, and in particular painting, became for her an existential imperative.

A complex and refreshingly hard-nosed portrait of the artist emerges in the catalog for "Yayoi Kusama." The book consists of a solid introduction by curator Frances Morris, an excellent and handsomely illustrated narrative timeline compiled by Rachel Taylor, and four rich and thoughtful essays, each taking on a different aspect and moment of Kusama's lengthy career. Midori Yamamura provides a blistering contextualist account of the late Imperial and war years in Japan, one that will be useful for scholars of twentieth-century Japanese art. She opens her narrative with Kusama's deliberate incineration in the spring of 1956 of nearly all her early work, then cycles us back through the artist's technical formation. Trained in the *nihonga* style ("Japanese style") officially promoted during the Japanese Imperial period as part of a modern yet nationalist revival, Kusama adapted this conventional mode to her own purposes. Yamamura's essay provides a vital historical and formal background for Kusama's development, deftly moving the reader through readings of Kusama's extant works from this period.

By 1952 Kusama had abandoned the traditional *nihonga* medium of rabbit-skin glue and ground pigments and switched to watercolor; she had also become interested in psychology. She wanted her art

to show things “deep in the bottom of life,” “the tempests, buds, wounds, and genitalia that provoked my anxiety,” the “hidden shadowy part of life on earth” (174).³ And it seemed clear that, as she would write in her autobiography,

Staying in Japan was out of the question. My parents, the house, the land, the shackles, the conventions, the prejudice... For art like mine—art that does battle at the boundary between life and death, questioning what we are and what it means to live and die—this country was too small, too servile, too feudalistic, and too scornful of women. My art needed a more unlimited freedom, and a wider world (177).⁴

Kusama resisted the type of group-identified artistic practices traditional to her native country; an avid reader of the international art press and an assiduous studio experimenter, around 1955 she established an important correspondence with Georgia O’Keeffe, who gave her advice about setting up a career in the United States. A solo show in Seattle in late 1957 provided her with the opportunity she needed, and from there she headed to New York.

Around 1961 Kusama began to assemble sculptural objects, “compulsions” and “accumulations”—e.g., what Kusama calls her “Sex Obsession” series and the “Food Obsession” works, which Claes Oldenburg would characterize as “a small thing that covers”—that would ally her with the developing language of American Pop as well as with the relatively new form of the environment (the important “Environments, Situations, Spaces” show at Martha Jackson Gallery took place that year). Mignon Nixon observes,

With one efficient hyperbolic gesture, repeated ad infinitum, the Accumulations encapsulate the phallic economy of gender and the superfluities of the culture of commodity fetishism and planned obsolescence celebrated in America and imposed on Japan through rapid post-war industrialization (180).

Performances and sculptures were photographically documented and the documentation itself used as artwork, with photographs deployed repetitively as wallpaper or in collage space. The environmental scale would lead to projects like the 1965 *Infinity Mirror Room—Phalli’s Field* (1965; Fig. 1), a mirrored room filled with red polka-dotted stuffed elements in which Kusama, dressed in a red leotard, had herself photographed. Such documentation drew attention to and deliberately played upon Kusama’s race and gender, doubly alienating in the New York art world, producing an evocative and claustrophobic *mise-en-abîme* of identification and disidentification. In a brief and thoughtful essay considering Kusama’s hallucinosis, psychoanalyst Juliet Mitchell arrives at a similar double dynamic: examining the iconography of a series of drawn, painted, and written self-portraits to probe for the consistency of traumatic resonance, Mitchell finds there the legible residue of trauma but also the illegible marks of vast cultural difference.

By 1967 Kusama’s attentions had turned definitively to the counterculture; a series of happenings involving young people, nudity, lots of fluorescent polka dots, an audiovisual smorgasbord brought her wider media attention. In this she followed and in some respects outdid Warhol, staging guerilla Body Festivals and Anatomic Explosions, collaborating with the filmmaker Jud Yalkut to produce hypnagogic documentation (the film “Kusama’s Self-Obliteration,” 1967), literally leaving her marks across the urban landscape. Interventions at MoMA (“Grand Orgy to Awaken the Dead at MoMA [Otherwise Known as the Museum of Modern Art]—Featuring their Usual Display of Nudes,” 1969), the licensing of her name to a soft-core tabloid (“Kusama’s Orgy”), a staged gay wedding in 1968, and the development of a Kusama Fashion Institute and Kusama Enterprises garnered Kusama publicity and notoriety that, along with her efforts at self-promotion, rapidly undermined more traditional art world support, an effect that still resonates in readings of her work. Nixon notes that,

Even now the political significance of Kusama’s work in New York is largely ignored. Its burlesque of compulsive commodity fetishism through pandemic sexual fetishism; its exhaustion of trends in manic overproduction and frantic erotomania; its epic feats of outdoing and overdoing; its exposure of the art world’s naked commercialism in stereotypical pin-up poses and hysterical orgies of hype—all have been subsumed in an overarching narrative of private obsession (185).

Each of these aspects, in Nixon’s powerful and convincing discussion of Kusama’s New York period, is targeted very precisely at the war machine of Vietnam-era patriarchy and the West.

Demoralized, she made a brief trip to Japan in 1970; it was not a success. Nevertheless, in 1973 she moved to Tokyo and, hoping to capitalize on the Japanese economic boom, set up the Yayoi Kusama Art Import Company, a venture intended to support her own studio practice, which in the meantime had turned to collage, ceramics, and object making. It was during these years that the psychological problems that had perturbed her earlier life returned, and in Spring 1977 she voluntarily admitted herself to the private hospital she still calls home. The next year, she published her first novel (she has written more than a dozen), *Manhattan Suicide Addict*.

In recent years Kusama has remained a highly productive artist. In 2004, when Kusama’s 2002 mirror room, “Fireflies on the Water,” (dubbed “an epic piece” by the *Brooklyn Rail*)⁵ was on view at the Whitney Biennial four decades after Kusama had first exhibited in that museum, the raucous wait in line to view the piece was several hours long. As Jo Applin suggestively argues, and as is surely confirmed by contemporary interest in the artist’s work,

Kusama’s demand for collective participation, for “new forms of being-in-common,” which she articulated powerfully in her 1968

rallying cry “Let’s get to know one another,” is striking, less as an instance of publicity-seeking at a time when she was embracing the free love and happening movements, than as a serious and potentially radical mode of “world-building,” which her environments continue both to imagine and produce (191). •

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Notes

1. “Yayoi Kusama” opened at Reina Sofia, Madrid (May 10- Sept. 12, 2011); Centre Pompidou, Paris (Oct. 10, 2011- Jan. 9, 2012); Tate Modern, London (Feb. 9-June 5, 2012); Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (July 28 - Sept. 30, 2012).

2. Midori Yamamura quoting from an interview by Bhupendra Karia and Alexandra Munroe, Tokyo, Dec. 16-18, 1988.
3. Yamamura quoting Kusama, “Iwan no baka” (“Ivan the Fool”), *Geijutso Shincho* (New Current in Art) (May 1955): 164-65.
4. Nixon quoting from Yayoi Kusama, *Infinity Net: The Autobiography of Yayoi Kusama*, trans. Ralph McCarthy (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2011), 93; part of this quote appears in Yamamura’s essay (23).
5. Nick Stillman and Megan Heuer, “2004 Whitney Biennial,” *Brooklyn Rail* (April 2004); <http://www.brooklynrail.org/2004/04/art/biennial>.

Fig. 1. Yayoi Kusama, *Infinity Mirror Room—Phalli’s Field* (1965), installation view at “Floor Show,” Castellane Gallery, New York.



Infinity Net: The Autobiography of Yayoi Kusama

by Yayoi Kusama

translated by Ralph McCarthy

University of Chicago Press, 2011

Reviewed by Midori Yamamura

Yayoi Kusama’s (b. 1929) history of mental illness is by now legendary. A little-known aspect of this artist is that, similar to the way she orchestrates her public persona with impeccably coordinated dresses and matching wigs, Kusama obsessively fabricates significant aspects of her autobiography that help to enhance the myth of her artistic genius. Such an obsession can be seen as symptomatic of her *fuanshinkeishō* (or anxiety neurosis). The diagnosis is casually mentioned in the original, Japanese version of her autobiography—published as *Mugen no Ami: Kusama Yayoi Jiden* in 2002.¹ In *Infinity Net*, the translation is “panic attack” (186), leaving Western readers room for interpretation. Kusama is relentlessly savvy. Since *Infinity Net* is a translation of her ten-year old

autobiography, it does not reflect the latest scholarly research on Kusama, including this author’s own, based on the artist’s archival records that became accessible in 2006.² That to a significant extent *Infinity Net* is a “memoir as fiction” becomes quite evident when contrasted with these materials.

Infinity Net opens with the artist’s flight to Seattle in 1957 and a familiar episode: Kusama found a book of Georgia O’Keeffe’s paintings “in a secondhand bookshop” in her hometown, Matsumoto, which provided a “thread” to her travel to the United States. Wanting to write to O’Keeffe, she took a “six-hour train ride” to Tokyo, visited the U.S. Embassy, and “leafed with trembling hands through their copy of *Who’s Who*, looking for O’Keeffe’s address” (12). In her original letter to O’Keeffe, found in the archive, dated November 15, 1955, however, Kusama wrote: “Some days ago when I dropped in the exhibition of American Arts Books which was held at U.S.I.S. [U.S. Information Service], I saw a photograph of your work ‘Corn’ there and then thought of finding out your address by asking the corporation of U.S.I.S.”³ This is but a small example of how Kusama

dramatizes events by altering historical details. *Infinity Net* should be considered as an extension of Kusama’s semi-autobiographical literary works that she began in 1978, treated in Part Five of this five-part autobiography.

Unmentioned in the opening section of *Infinity Net* is Kusama’s relationship with some Pacific Northwest artists. In December 1955, she wrote to Neil Mietzler, a student of the Seattle artist Kenneth Callahan (she wrote to Callahan around the same time she wrote to O’Keeffe). She sent a set of artworks and asked him to explore the possibility of mounting an exhibition of her work in the U. S.⁴ The following January, he brought her works to his Seattle dealer, Zoe Dusanne, who immediately offered Kusama an exhibition.⁵ Although, Kusama presents herself as a singular artist, her correspondence with Mietzler indicates that she was also very much a product of her time.⁶

Two of her early U.S. exhibitions have been re-titled in this memoir: Kusama’s first solo exhibition in New York in 1959 was not “Obsessional Monochrome” (23) but “Kusama,”⁷ and the title of her 1960 Gres Gallery exhibition in Washington, D.C. was not “Infinity Net” (30) but

"Yayoi Kusama—The Painting."⁸ The new names help Kusama to emphasize how her early development in New York resulted from "the thousands of pictures I had made ... over the course of a decade" (27), leading to her phenomenal Net paintings, large overall paintings that resemble monochromatic nets. By January 1962, Kusama had embarked on her soft sculptures, based on found objects, but after Martha Jackson Gallery's influential "New Forms—New Media" exhibition (1960), many up and coming artists also were incorporating found objects in their works.

Kusama "remembers" premiering her soft sculpture in "October of 1962," in a group show at Green Gallery, a prominent vanguard venue in New York. She also recalls, "The work contributed to this exhibition by Claes Oldenburg was a man's suit made of stiff papier-mâché" (39), a recollection borne out by the installation photograph. Oldenburg later said, "I remember the sofa. That probably was the first time I saw her [Kusama's] work."⁹ In fact, this group show took place in June 1962, as confirmed by Brian O'Doherty's review in *The New York Times*, which appeared on the same page as a paid exhibition advertisement mentioning Kusama and Oldenburg.¹⁰ After the group show, Oldenburg embarked on his own distinctive soft sculptures and debuted them at Green Gallery that September, which immediately brought him to international attention.

Kusama suggests her influence on Oldenburg by writing that his former wife, Patty Mucha, asked her to "forgive us!" (39), though Mucha says she does not remember apologizing to Kusama.¹¹ Kusama fails to mention the most important fact: her nervous breakdown at seeing Oldenburg's sewn sculptures. Donald Judd (Kusama's upstairs neighbor between 1961 and 1963) recalled that she had suddenly become "very paranoid about the New York art situation."¹² Another neighbor, the painter Ed Clark, remembers that she suddenly became obsessed with the thought that her ideas might be appropriated, which compelled her to close all the curtains on the windows of her loft facing Park Avenue and 19th

Street.¹³ Kusama almost surely suffered from anxiety neurosis, and to calm herself down, on September 29, eleven days after Oldenburg's opening, she mentions in her diary (for the first time) that she took Doriden (a prescription "minor tranquilizer").¹⁴ Being mindful of her health, Kusama apparently recorded the days she took this medicine. Sidney Tillim's lengthy three-page review of Oldenburg's exhibition appeared in the November 1962 *Arts Magazine*,¹⁵ and beginning on November 9, Kusama took Doriden for ten consecutive days. On November 24, she was hospitalized at St. Luke's Hospital's psychiatric ward, most likely following a panic attack.¹⁶

Because of her self-proclaimed mental illness, Kusama's art-historical reassessment has been delayed: she repeatedly has said that she suffers from hallucinatory visions where she sees "nets" and "dots" that profoundly affect her artistic development and manifest themselves in her visual vocabulary. In Part Two of *Infinity Net*, focused on the artist's growing up in Japan, Kusama dates the first experience of "visual and aural hallucinations" to 1941 (62); however, in June 2010 (while preparing for her 2012 Tate Modern retrospective), she re-edited the autobiographical narrative that she had been previously supplying for official purposes and deleted a line describing her "hallucinatory visions."¹⁷ Thus, as I have argued elsewhere, for her autobiography, Kusama had backdated to 1941 the "hallucinatory visions" that were most likely side effects of the tranquilizers she began taking in 1962.¹⁸

The fact of Kusama arriving in the United States during the golden age of post-World War II pharmaceutical science is key to understanding Part Three, focused on psychedelic art. Many psychiatrists during this time believed that neurological conditions were caused by chemical imbalances in the body, and that it was possible to restore balance using psychotropic drugs.¹⁹ In recent interviews, Kusama mentioned a "successful psychiatric treatment" around 1965.²⁰ By the mid-twentieth century, some psychiatrists were treating obsessional neurosis with LSD-25,²¹ and Kusama's gradual personality change from an introvert to an extrovert during this period coincided

with the new studies made by the behavioral psychologist Timothy Leary. Based on Aldous Huxley's hypothesis, Leary believed that active hallucinogens could turn on never-activated parts of the cerebellum, thereby expanding human consciousness and altering human behavior.²²

In late summer 1965, Leary premiered his neurological art in the form of a "sound-and-light show." He believed that exposing a person to a peculiar amalgam of sound, flashing lights, and projected images could generate visions similar to those experienced through LSD and activate dormant parts of the brain. Based on Leary's theory, by 1967 Kusama developed her own "audio-visual-light performance," entitled *Self-Obliteration*. By scientifically altering people's perception, she aimed to bring about "sexual liberation" (115).

Infinity Net is most valuable when it comes to Kusama's own views about her gender (the "second sex," as Simone de Beauvoir indelibly named it), informing us that this was a key factor in shaping both her life and art. In 1957, when Kusama decided to leave Japan, the "country was ... too scornful of women" (93). In New York, based on her experience, she decided to become an agent for "sexual revolution" (139). She returned to Japan permanently in 1973, in part as a result of the hostile reception she met with from (male) critics (143-45). After just a few years in Japan, in 1977 Kusama voluntarily took refuge in a mental health clinic in Tokyo, and there she continues to wait for her proper historical assessment.

Any history is a written record that reflects a personal perspective, one inevitably influenced by the governing structure of society—an unequal structure, as Michel Foucault has made clear, produced by the conjunctions of sexuality and power.²³ Compared to her white male peers, such as Judd, Oldenburg, and Andy Warhol, Kusama has often been marginalized. To counter this, in 2002, she decided to write her own autobiography/hagiography, altering certain aspects of her life and minimizing her discussion of her psychiatric state. Even with its mix of real and created memories, *Infinity Net* is valuable as it suggests many blind spots

in the way official history is constructed, blind spots that can spur art historians to uncover specific historical fragments and destabilize the art-historical status quo. Only within such a context can an artist such as Kusama be fully appraised—and appreciated. •

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Notes

1. Yayoi Kusama, *Mugen no Ami: Kusama Yayoi Jiden (Infinity Net: The Autobiography of Yayoi Kusama)* (Tokyo: Sakuhinsha, 2002), 194.
2. Midori Yamamura, "Re-Viewing Kusama, 1950-1975: Biography of Things," in *Yayoi Kusama, Mirrored Years*, eds. Franck Gautherot et al., exh. cat. (Dijon: Les Presses du Reel, 2009), 62-109.
3. Yayoi Kusama, letter to Georgia O'Keeffe, November 15, 1955, folder "Georgia O'Keeffe," Kusama Papers, Tokyo, Kusama Yayoi Archive. Hereafter Kusama Papers.
4. Yayoi Kusama, letter to Neil Meitzler, December 17, 1955, Neil Meitzler Papers, accession no. 2761, Special Collection Division, University of Washington Library, Seattle. Hereafter Meitzler Papers.
5. Zoe Dusanne, letter to Kusama, January 14, 1956, Zoe Dusanne Papers, accession no. 2430-4, Special Collections Division, University of Washington Libraries, Seattle.
6. Mietzler Papers.
7. Yayoi Kusama, invitation to "Kusama" exhibition, vertical file, "Kusama, Yayoi," Washington, D.C., Smithsonian American Art Museum.
8. Beatrice Perry, "Yayoi Kusama—The Painting" (ca. April 1960), artist file, "Yayoi Kusama," Museum of Modern Art Library, New York.
9. Audio recording of Claes Oldenburg, interview by Alexandra Munroe and Reiko Tomii, New York, February 21, 1989. Fine Arts Library, University of Texas at Austin.
10. Brian O'Doherty, "Seasons End: Abstractions and Distractions," *New York Times*, June 17, 1962, p. 103.
11. Patty Mucha, e-mail message to author, September 20, 2006.
12. Audiotape of Donald Judd, interview by Alexandra Munroe and Reiko Tomii, New York, December 8, 1988, Fine Arts Library, University of Texas at Austin.
13. Digital recording of Ed Clark (Kusama's neighbor between 1961-1963), interview by author, New York, October 9, 2006.
14. The date of Oldenburg's Green Gallery exhibition is recorded as Sept. 24–Oct. 20, in David Platzker, *Selected Exhibition History, Oldenburg: An Anthology* (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publ., 1995), 536. Barbara Rose's 1970 "Chronology" lists the dates as Sept. 18–Oct. 3, in *Claes Oldenburg*, ed. Barbara Rose (New York: MoMA, 1970), 201. Since Kusama noted the opening as Sept. 18 in her calendar diary, Sept. 1962, Kusama Papers, I follow Rose's chronology. Minor tranquilizers are distinguished from drugs such as Thorazine or reserpine, first called major tranquilizers and now more commonly classified as antipsychotics or neuroleptics. See Andrea Tone, *The Age of Anxiety: A History of America's Turbulent Affair with Tranquilizers* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), ix.
15. Sidney Tillim, "Month in Review," *Arts Magazine* (November 1962): 36-38.
16. Kusama wrote: "I lost my confidence and out of despair, cut my wrist with a blade." Kusama, untitled Japanese statement, ca. 1966, Kusama Papers.
17. Yayoi Kusama, "Press Release," June 2010.
18. Yamamura, "Re-Viewing Kusama," 63–64.
19. Tone, *The Age of Anxiety*, ix.
20. Yayoi Kusama, interview by author, Tokyo, July 28, 2006. See also Midori Yoshimoto, *Into Performance: Japanese Women Artists in New York* (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Press, 2005), 76, n. 102.
21. Robert S. de Ropp, *Drugs and the Mind* (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1957), 241.
22. Timothy Leary, "The Molecular Revolution" (1966), in *Timewave Zero/A Psychedelic Reader*, eds. Lionel Bovier and Mai-Thu Perret (Graz, Austria: Grazer Kunstverein, 2001), 24-26. Kusama remembered "Timothy Leary's big lecture at Fillmore East Theater. And also [Leary's friend] Allen Ginsberg, they were taking drugs," as were "John Lennon and Yoko." Yayoi Kusama, interview by Alexandra Munroe, Tokyo, December 18, 1988.
23. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1978), 48.

Ghada Amer

by Maura Reilly
Gregory R. Miller & Co., 2010

Reviewed by Mary Trent

The silky, fabric-bound cover of Ghada Amer's (b. 1963) lovely monograph introduces the reader to the book's visual and subtly tactile delights. Filling the front are partially colored-in outlines of the young, beautiful Disney heroines Jasmine and Belle from the artist's 2005 work *Princesses* (Fig. 1; derived from *Aladdin* and *Beauty and the Beast*, respectively). These familiar figures read as coloring book outlines that a young girl has scribbled up with colored pencil. Also on the cover, attract-

ing the viewer's gaze and desire for touch, are images of women posing erotically, which Amer borrowed from the pornographic magazine *Hustler* to embroider into her original work. Normally presented to different audiences in different contexts, the Disney characters and porn stars are brought together here by Amer to explore a wide range of ideals of femininity.

Two hundred color images of Amer's works fill the volume. The artist's two-dimensional pieces are most strongly highlighted—though sculptural, performance, video, garden installations, and collaborative pieces made with longtime friend Reza Farkhondeh are also included. Like *Princesses*, the multimedia drawings, paintings, and prints address ideals of femininity, the majori-

ty of which are sewn images of women posing pornographically for a presumed male gaze. Amer often repeats these women serially in a grid-like format, recalling Andy Warhol's screen prints of mass media icons. They are also frequently set against a layer of abstractly applied paint that links them to abstract expressionist oil paintings like Jackson Pollock's. Amer brings to these male-dominated legacies a feminist concern for representations of women and for the domestic medium of embroidery. She states that she works with thread as if it were paint, and her luscious embroidery flows, drips, and streaks across her works. The skill of her needlework is on full display in the wide range of references her lines of thread evoke: paint, ink, off-prints from a printing press, and

organic sources like hair, bodily fluids, and geological striations.

Sadly missing are details that show the finer elements of Amer's embroidery and the complex layering of thread and paint. Nevertheless, the monograph presents so many examples of Amer's two-dimensional works that it makes up in breadth where it falls short in detail. The abundance of Amer's sculptural, installation, site-specific, and performance and video pieces in the later pages of the book is a welcome feast. These examples stretch out into a broader range of issues than those treated in the two-dimensional works, including more explicitly political projects having to do with the post-9/11 "war on terror," Western stereotypes about Muslim women, and pieces in which the Egyptian-born Amer addresses ideals of femininity in non-Western cultures and texts.

The catalog opens with a sizable essay by curator Maura Reilly that clearly and astutely contextualizes Amer's work in contemporary feminist theory, while also contending with the artist's biography. Reilly begins with a quote from the French feminist Hélène Cixous, "Woman must write herself" (8), to argue that Amer answers Cixous's call for an *écriture féminine*. By appropriating pornographic images from male-dominated culture and reworking them through embroidery, Amer's art destabilizes master texts written about women by men to write herself and her desires free of the alienating impositions of dominant male culture. Reilly returns to Cixous throughout her essay as a touchstone for interpreting Amer's art through critical theory, though she notes that Amer does not, herself, relate her work to the French feminist.¹

Though I found it productive to think of Amer's work as a form of *écriture féminine*, I was not convinced by Reilly's argument that she appropriates dominant male imagery into a female-only space to illustrate female jouissance, women's sexuality and pleasure free from male dominance (22). Amer's images of uniformly curvy, long-haired women in stilettos mostly pose for the camera and masturbate, performing female sexual pleasure for a male gaze. Though Amer may transfer these

sources from the male space of *Hustler* to the female space of her art, these works retain elements of the male gaze under which they were originally constructed. Viewers in galleries, museums, or private collections might gaze upon these pieces of sexy eye candy in similar ways to their original audiences, except now in a context elevated from low culture to high art. Amer asserts that she copies "masculine language," including porn magazines, because "women (especially me) do not have a language of their own" (34).

To me, Amer's art seems less about posing a radical challenge to masculine language than about exploring how women incorporate that language into their own psyches and lived experience. For example, Reilly reads Amer's provocative connection of pornographic representations with girlhood fairy tales in works like *Princess* as an empowerment of female characters from children's stories awakened to their own erotic jouissance (32). Might these works also speak to ways young women today, in a digital world where such pictures are just one-click away, grow up increasingly aware not only of ideals of femininity manufactured by Disney but also by the porn industry, which no doubt affects their expectations of sex? The repetition of these images in Amer's work seems to suggest the inauthentic, manufactured quality of the original images, as well as their inescapable presence and influence. By employing the traditionally feminine media of domestic space and, occasionally, a childlike colored pencil scribbling to appropriate these ideals, Amer evokes the process of a young woman incorporating such unavoidable ideals into her own awareness and identity, privately at home. In Amer's work these images also become stained by drips of paint that seem to tug at the manufactured fantasies of porn with the presence of real bodily and sexual experience. Less a heroic, critical struggle, this exploration of women's



Fig. 1. Ghada Amer, *Princesses* (2005), ink, crayon, and embroidery on paper, 22 1/2" x 28".

daily practice of processing such widespread, culturally-sanctioned norms about love, sexuality, and femininity into the subjective landscape of her own private, lived understandings is a valid, important, and interesting project.

Also included in the book is an interview with Amer by Martine Antle and a shorter essay on the collaborative works of Amer and Farkhondeh by Laurie Ann Farrell. Antle's interview moves in non-linear directions, to which Amer offers thought-provoking responses, such as her statement that her copying of the pornographic images produces a destabilizing "erotic game in the appearance and disappearance of the figures" (185). Farrell's essay is a clear, well-written account and, along with the corresponding images, will prove interesting to readers looking for examples of fruitful collaboration in fine art practice sustained over several years. Though it leaves room for further analysis, this beautiful book's extensive selection of works and Reilly's theoretically-grounded interpretation will prove a solid resource to anyone interested in the artist's work. •

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Notes

- 1 Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," *Signs* 1 no. 4 (Summer 1976): 875.



Fig. 1. Betsy Greer, *Anti-War Graffiti Cross Stitch* (2007–08), cotton floss on Aida cloth.

Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art

edited by Maria Elena Buszek
Duke University Press, 2011

Reviewed by Mary Caroline Simpson

Studio craft's recurring identity crises over its marginalization in relation to fine art, writes Maria Elena Buszek, has been perpetuated by craft historians like Howard Risatti that adhere to Clement Greenberg's formalist art criticism and other modernist constructs as they encourage artists working with traditional craft media "to draw strength from the various functions that those media have historically provided" (3).¹ Believing that this advice has both obstructed and obscured craft's maturation into greater conceptual complexity since World War II, Buszek aims to make up for a lack of sympathetic critical and theoretical writing on this topic with *Extra/Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art*. At the same time, she introduces readers to twenty-first-century crafting collectives, until recently on the art world's fringes. Supported by the University of North Carolina Center for Craft, Creativity and Design, the anthology features fifteen essays (theoretical essays, scholarly case studies, personal reflections, and interview transcripts) organized into four thematic sections. Small in format and illustrated primarily in color, the anthology provides an index and brief

biographies of the essayists (art historians, curators, sociologists, artists, and craft activists, from North America, the United Kingdom, and Denmark).

Together, Buszek's comprehensive introduction and the first section, "Redefining Craft: New Theory," comprising critical readings and summarizations of craft historiography, modernist precepts, and postmodernist theory, establish a firm foundation for the remaining essays. Section one opens with M. Anna Fariello's contextualization of the traditional studio craft community's long held views of the "craft/art continuum." She promotes use of the term "Studio Craft" to identify that point on the continuum "where imagination and vision meet skill and craftsmanship" (40). Dispensing with this viewpoint, the next essayist, Dennis Stevens, offers a problematic explanation of the creative differences distinguishing the baby boomers (b. 1946–64), who "established their understanding of art based on the traditions of modernism" and thus "view their world in light of a distinct artistic hierarchical order," from Generation X artists (b. 1965–81), who "cut their teeth on the tenets of postmodernism" and whose "worldview is a more loosely structured, interdisciplinary construct than the baby boomer ideal" (49). Stevens's theme is complicated by his valorization of one generation over another. Furthermore, the boomers *were* the postmodernists responsible for dismantling modernist ideals in the late 1970s and 1980s. Postmodernism was mainstreamed and folded into curriculums, as Gen X entered college and art school between 1983 and 1998.

Postmodernist art theory and design discourses inform Louise Mazanti's contextualization of nonfunctional ceramic forms; she coins the term super-object to describe "an object that exists parallel to the object category of the design commodity, at the same time as it contains (super) layers of meaning that relate to visual art" (62). Paula Owen demonstrates how conceptual craft practitioners (e.g., ceramicist Bean Finneran and fiber artist Elaine Reichek),

who emphasize the physical and conceptual processes of making over the object itself, are indebted to Marcel Duchamp, Jackson Pollock, Robert Morris, and Ann Hamilton among others. Furthering this discussion in the second section, "Craft Show: In the Realm of 'Fine Art,'" are essays by Karin E. Petersen (postmodernism and the quilt), Elissa Auther (plays on wallpaper in installation art), Betty Bright (letterpress printing), and Jo Dahn (conceptual ceramics).

The anthology's third and most cohesive section, "Craftivist History," shines considerable light on the craft world renegades aligned with Third Wave feminism and the DIY (do-it-yourself) subculture that Buszek and others champion. It opens with Betsy Greer's lively, candid explanation of the origins of "craft + activism" and its ties to protest against the Iraq War with pieces like her anti-war stitchery (2007–08; Fig. 1), and in support of global economic reform. Similarly, Kirsty Robertson covers knitting in public as a form of protest, by Cast Off Knitters and the Calgary Revolutionary Knitting Circle among other collectives. She also lucidly explains how Debbie Stoller's *Stitch 'n Bitch* books challenged anti-craft camps among Second Wave feminists and proved them to be fundamentally anti-feminist. Brief references to traditional female handicraft as part of the 1970s women's art movement are sprinkled throughout the anthology (but never brought to the foreground except in Buszek's introduction). Several contributors maintain that many craftivists and DIY crafters have taken up a particular craft "without knowing of their craft world antecedents" (93), and are disinterested in "American craft hierarchies, power structures, or institutional methods for confirming status" (53). Despite this indifference, galleries and museums are exhibiting this work with greater frequency, prompting the call of Anthea Black and Nicole Burisch for more politically engaged curatorial approaches capable of leading to thoughtful critique and greater understanding of alter-globalization craftwork as it inevitably enters the art world (215, 218). Closing

the third section, Janis Jefferies explores how group activities like cake decorating are a form of performance art revealing longings for intimacy and community.

The anthology's final section, "New Functions, New Frontiers," brings together Lacey Jane Roberts's thoughts on the use of queer theory to reshape craft's identity, and Andrew Jackson's exploration of the motivations of men involved with crafting. The final contribution is a transcript of Buszek's interview with Margaret Wertheim that frames the science writer's organization of crocheting circles to create models of hyperbolic space within the context of gender bias in artistic and scientific communities.

The anthology's contributors reiterate that the "nonhierarchical and decentralized" properties of the Internet and social media initially united craftivist groups globally and enabled conceptual craft artists to build community and promote their work free from the control and influence of boomer-aged curators, dealers, and journal editors dedicated to the preservation of traditional studio craft (14). While younger people typically take to new technologies first and push their use in new and often unanticipated directions, individuals of disparate ages, inter-

ests, and political persuasions today use websites, blogs, videos, podcasts, and tweets to form communities, exchange ideas, and sell goods. Black and Burisch in particular address corporate uses of technology to appropriate "alternative and DIY lifestyles" and then depoliticize them through the sale of "hobby commodities for affluent consumers" (204). Craftivism was a subculture that has been legitimized, historicized, and commodified by galleries, museums, and publishers relying on the very same technology for educational, promotional, and sales purposes. Stevens's Gen-X'ers are, after all, at ages 31 to 47, old enough to be established professionals capable of representing their own interests. Through this anthology, Buszek strives to generate "a much-needed dialogue" between the generations, because "many of the emerging, conceptually focused artists" have made "surprising, subversive, and poignant" work that "actually depends on and pays homage to the trails blazed by their predecessors" (13). Portraying the elder studio craft community as primarily either oblivious or hostile to change, Buszek, Stevens, and others warn that it ought "to pay close attention to this new generation of crafters or risk obsolescence, as those who would be

their successors are joining the fray of today's interdisciplinary and technologically minded art discourse—with or without them" (14). This anthology offers a one-sided conversation because, aside from Fariello's historiography, the views of the studio craft community, itself diverse in ages and preoccupations, are not provided. Also beneficial would be an expanded explanation of how the experimental craft practices of boomer-aged artist educators, fiber artist Ann Wilson of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago for instance, have established a place for conceptual craft practices and craftivism in the contemporary art world. That being said, the anthology is a significant and useful contribution to burgeoning scholarship on contemporary craft. •

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Notes

1. See Howard Risatti, "Metaphorical Implications of Function, Material, and Technique in Craft," *Skilled Work: American Craft in the Renwick Gallery* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998).

Louise Bourgeois: Conscious and Unconscious

by Philip Larratt-Smith
Bloomsbury Qatar Foundation
Publishing, 2012

Reviewed by Jan Garden Castro

At the Qatar Museums Authority (QMA) gallery the exhibition "Louise Bourgeois: Conscious and Unconscious," on show for most of the first half of 2012, featured thirty works created between 1947 and 2009. One work that will remain in Qatar is the giant spider *Maman* (Mother), first shown at the Tate Modern's giant Turbine Hall in 2000 with three monumental towers, *I DO*, *I UNDO*, *I REDO*.¹ The towers were not shown in Qatar, but the exhibition's curator, Philip Larratt-Smith, gives these

works new poignancy by discussing them explicitly in this catalog in the context of Bourgeois's other works and of the artist's Freudian self-questionings of her life as a child and as a mother. Larratt-Smith links *I DO* to the good mother, *I UNDO* to the bad mother letting her milk drip as the baby goes hungry, and *I REDO* to the mother's self-examination and redress of her state. These towers each have different kinds of spiraling, precipitous stairs, and various kinds of mirrors that reflect the viewer's persona through different, distorted lenses; they are ingenious, well-crafted art works that demonstrate how subtly Bourgeois's team has been able to realize her most ambitious constructions. I



Fig. 1. Louise Bourgeois, book cover with Untitled (No. 7) (1993), pink marble, 13" x 36" x 15", on two timbers, each 15" x 39" x 15".

recall them as being three to four stories tall; they are listed as 6,000, 4,500, and 9,000 cm. tall (ca. 200, 150, and 300 feet), respectively. Larratt-Smith calls *Maman* the fourth tower, stating that the artist was summoning her own mother,

unconsciously linking her fear of abandonment with her fear of death, and creating, as in the towers, a mother who is both good and bad (the spider eats her young). Finally, for Larratt-Smith, Bourgeois herself becomes the master spider, creator, and tale-spinner. His concise yet powerful essay contains fresh psychoanalytical insights into the artist's work:

Entrenched psychic conflicts condemned the artist to a life of repetition.... Thus art was at once an indication of her underlying psychic disorder and a means of making herself whole. It was both symptom and cure. In the place of Freud's talking cure, which she rejected as inadequate, Bourgeois found another "royal road to the unconscious" in the making of art, which she called her "form of psychoanalysis" (12–13).

The catalog introduction by QMA Chairperson Her Excellency Sheikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani states that *Maman's* new home (since 2011) at the National Convention Center Qatar Foundation "has already inspired writers, artists and members of

the public here" (9). Her Excellency sees Bourgeois's spiders as linked to her memories of her mother; she adds that the spider in the Holy Qur'an wove a web that protected the Prophet from his enemies. This information further universalizes the spider and gives Westerners and non-Muslims added insights into another culture.

The exhibition title, "Conscious and Unconscious," is related to a slender sculpture with two sorts of towers. A stack of sponge-like white fabric shapes recall the spinal column and stand for order and the conscious mind. Nearby, on a pole, a blue rubber pear shape is pierced with five needles, each holding a small spool of thread. "The thread represents the unspooling of time, the sewing of the mother-weaver, the spider's web, the fragility of human relationships, and the tenuous linkage to memory," according to Larratt-Smith (15).

The dual language QMA catalog, in English and Arabic, is richly illustrated, and the cover image (Fig. 1), two life-sized pairs of pink marble hands clasped together, suggests closeness, warmth, and friendship between people and cultures. In the full untitled work, the four limbs stop below the elbow,

forming an X. The hands are a symbol or sign of human interconnections.

Other works in the exhibition range from red gouache "flowers," created in 2009, to a womblike, bronze hanging piece *Fée Couturière* (1963), to fabric webs and a fabric head, and metal and marble sculpture pieces, including *Cell XV (for JMW Turner)* (2000), a work in which water spirals together from two sources.

This exhibition catalog seems important both for the intimacy of its theme and for its range of work focusing on layered psychoanalytical readings about relationships between children and their mothers. This universal subject deserves more attention worldwide; it's refreshing to think that the exhibition has opened some minds to women's (and human rights) issues as well as to art that requires some thought. •

Jan Garden Castro is Contributing Editor for *Sculpture* and for *Ceramics: Art & Perception*.

Notes

1. See my article on the towers, "Louise Bourgeois: Turning Myths Inside Out," *Sculpture*, 20:1 (Jan/Feb 2001): 16–23.

Agnes Martin

edited by Lynne Cooke, Karen Kelly, and Barbara Schröder
Dia Art Foundation and
Yale University Press, 2011

Reviewed by Vittorio Colaizzi

The impression emerges, through reading this anthology and remembering the work, that Agnes Martin's paintings are somehow not there. Their qualities and effects are of a second order, not directly tied to their material facts, because as perceptions, they evade and exceed these facts. Although it is entirely clear of what they consist and how they were made, viewers report constant dissolution and condensation of screens, veils, or mists from the tiny elements on the surface. Emblems of the less than absolute sufficiency of empirical knowledge, they

reinforce Martin's claim that "The cause of the response is not traceable in the work" (232). The question with which these essays grapple in light of these effects is: what could such phenomena mean? How are the artist's ambitions and conditions, as well as the conditions of the viewer, inscribed upon them?

Issuing from a colloquium sponsored by the Dia Art Foundation, in conjunction with a series of focused exhibitions, this anthology is, of course, a claim for Martin's importance, but at the same time, particularly in the essays by Rhea Anastas and Jonathan D. Katz, a critique of the very notion of "importance" as it is understood in the survey mode of traditional museums. That is to say, Martin's work cannot be placed, firmly and without reservation, in a causal chain of generation-to-generation influence. Although she is prized by many and her stature is likely to increase, it is

to her credit that she will never be "canonical" in this sense, because her work is singular in its treatment of gesture, scale, seriality, and image, as well as the complexities of meaning that are never fully independent from her persona and career. This singularity makes her an especially appropriate artist to be housed in Dia:Beacon; her work needs the luxurious attention that is less available when placed in a room full of obligatory heavy-hitters of either Abstract Expressionist or Minimalist generations. Because the opportunity to spend time with a sizable body of one artist's work is all too rare, this book can stand as a literary accompaniment to Dia's holdings.

"Literary," because in addition to its scholarly rigor, it reads almost like a novel due to the recurrence of certain themes. One leitmotif is the constant tension or conflict as to pictorial effects,

motivations, and principles. As several of the authors note, a consideration of Martin's work often leads to multiple dualities, such as rigorous measurement versus handmade imperfections, frank materiality versus numinous haze, or apparent depth versus actual flatness, to say nothing of Martin's own personal mythos of artistic commitment coupled with her abrupt abandonment of New York, as well as her avowed classicism against viewers' intimations of the (romantic) sublime. Martin's classicism also contrasts with what she calls "turmoil" or "torment," an emotional intensity and worldly chaos to which she insisted she had "turned" her "back" (174, 68).

Douglas Crimp's refreshingly candid reminiscences of his contact with Martin introduces three interrelated themes; her anomalous 1976 film *Gabriel* (which patiently chronicles a boy's walk alongside water, woods, and flowers), the problematic place of nature in her oeuvre, and the above-mentioned turmoil. *Gabriel* receives a more sustained consideration in Zoe Leonard's generously illustrated essay. Leonard and Crimp's contributions are the most personal and inquisitive, and are perhaps the most true to Martin's somewhat optimistic tone, which is not to say that they are frivolous; their searching character sets the stage for the more analytical approaches to come. In the course of Leonard's essay, she never finds out "whether [Martin] was queer," despite her admitted temptation to speculate (98). This is a strength, not a deficiency, because as an artist herself, Leonard provides a different order of experience to the reader, one not entirely based on knowledge, but equally responsive and responsible to Martin's paintings. For his part, Crimp is the first of many authors to introduce Rosalind Krauss's 1993 essay, "Agnes Martin: The /Cloud/," which crops up repeatedly in this book with the force of a character. Krauss rejects as a viable interpretive rubric the "abstract sublime" and its concomitant evocation of nature. Also engaging Martin's film, she finds, with playful sarcasm, "one after another 'Agnes Martin' painting" throughout the horizontal divisions of landscape. Such a

celebration of natural beauty is, for Krauss, a diversion from what she sees as Martin's primary project, that of objectivizing subjectivity, of using the grid and its dissolution as a signifier that highlights and destabilizes the sovereignty of individual perception. For this she draws on a description by Kasha Linville that organizes perception of a painting by Martin into three states: the close-up view of individual pencil lines, a middle view of unstable mist, and finally a far view of solid opacity.¹

In the present volume, however, nature will not just go away. While Martin insisted that her paintings are "Not about the world, or nature or things like that" (75), she continued to make reference to mountains, trees, waterfalls, etc., in her poetic statements as well as in her titles, only some of which, in the 1960s, were devised by her then-partner, Lenore Tawney (181). While certain shots of *Gabriel* might look like "Agnes Martins," no one who has seriously studied her paintings can think that they are, at bottom, clandestine landscapes. It is, of course, important to temper the interpretation of abstraction as tacit picture-making, which renders moot the very pictorial strategies to which Martin committed. This issue demonstrates what Crimp sees as the fundamental (and compelling) irresolution of Martin's work; it denies referentiality, and wears that denial on its sleeve. Building on Martin's assertion that classicists "stand with [their] back to the turmoil" (68), Crimp posits, "But surely it is the turmoil *away from which Martin turned* (by leaving New York, perhaps) that constitutes the tensions so many of us see in her paintings" (68). For Leonard, Martin's work leads the viewer to nature by inducing a state of concentration. She evocatively describes her "mind mov[ing] past the painting" as she is "held ... not stuck" by one of them, to contemplate her own recent experience of morning light in the city (85).

Suzanne Hudson addresses the nature problem most directly through a contextualization of Martin's rhetoric in relation to contemporaneous social and political history. Pointing to Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) and the growing environmentalist movement,

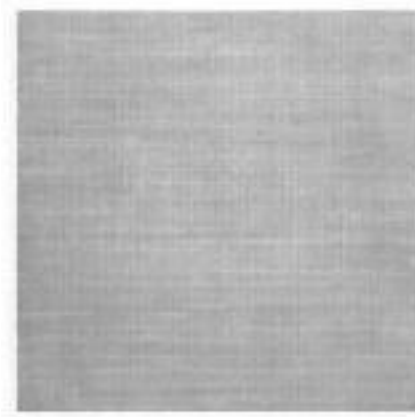


Fig. 1. Agnes Martin, *Play* (1966), acrylic on canvas, 72" x 72". Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

she follows the overused word "nature" through a history of its own, from transcendentalism to ecological ruin. After establishing Martin's shrewd management of her own "gnomic" (120) image, Hudson notes it would be "implausible" (124) for her to identify her ambitions too closely with such a fraught term at the precise moment of its politicization. Martin's famous account in which "the innocence of trees" incited a grid in her imagination represents to Hudson the "cleav[ing]" of the referent from the sign, so that the grid appears "unmoored" (127). Martin, Hudson concludes, decided to "forgo nature to preserve spirituality" (128).

The nature issue leads to an even larger question: that of the generation of meaning in abstraction. In several of the essays, meaning itself is productively interrogated as not encoded within the work's form, but rather something (a state of mind, perhaps, as in Leonard's account) that emerges through the experience of its properties.

Jonathan D. Katz argues that Martin's entire practice—both painting and public construction through behavior, writings, and statements—is a form of "queer self-realization" (173), thereby participating in a broader reinvigoration of abstraction on the part of scholars, critics, and artists that forwards specific perspectives (race, gender, and orientation) against the ostensible universality of modernism. Through a combination of social history, literary parallels with

the poetry of Gertrude Stein (which Martin had invoked in an early statement), and some iconographical sleuthing that links a Zen Buddhist illustration with the painting *Cow* (1960), Katz shows that Martin's queer abstraction is constituted by her pattern of renunciations read against her historical milieu (for example the widespread firings and persecution of homosexuals known as the Lavender Scare of the 1950s, as well as Martin's studio environs in Coenties Slip in Manhattan that included Ellsworth Kelly and Robert Indiana). The unresolved tension of simultaneous and intermingling opposites (grid/plane; measured/hand-wrought; figure-upon-ground/figure-within-ground) that constitutes her formal idiom, according to Katz, challenges "heteronormativity[s] ... policed ... attachment to definitions of difference" (187). By privileging ever more uncertain perceptual experience over the constant search for conceptual resolution and, by implication, power, Katz finds Martin's work to achieve an almost utopian freedom.

With a final rhetorical flourish—"It is a pure presentness, and it is grace" (194)—Katz makes a veiled but obvious reference to the last line in Michael Fried's "Art and Objecthood" of 1967,² the same year Martin left New York. This reference at first seems gratuitous, until one remembers that Fried's claim that the highest achievement of modernist art is to be entirely self-evident and independent appeals to a universality that would be denied to Martin as a lesbian on an everyday level. Moreover, the phenomenological ebullience of her paintings would probably have rendered them "theatrical" in Fried's view. Katz therefore appropriates the same promise that Fried advocated, but in Martin's case it is achieved only through its conditioning by tragic cultural realities. At this point, the reader might also recall Anastas's citation of Lawrence Alloway's careful distinction of Martin's work from the privileged quality of "opticality" in color-based abstract painting (137-38), as well as Jaleh Mansoor's aside that with Martin, "Shape ... is not form" (156), a clear

reference to Fried's writing on Frank Stella. Interwoven in many of the essays is the theme of Martin's exteriority to supposedly mainstream narratives.

In "Self-Effacement, Self-Inscription: Agnes Martin's Singular Quietude," Mansoor similarly makes a claim for an activist Martin by addressing the question of the "self"; specifically, do post-structuralist critiques of the author allow for the agency of a gendered and socially specific subject? Mansoor argues that Martin maintains artistic agency while still distancing herself from the self-expressive paradigm through a "negotiation between adherence to the physical parameters of the discursive structure and a break from them." While the tools of "string and ruler act as surrogates for the binding frame," Martin "resisted the grid's dictates" (156) through the unavoidable imperfection of the hand as well as the nuanced decisions she continued to make as to color, configuration, and interior scale. Among Mansoor's most compelling claims is that through "sheer composition," i.e., what she painted and drew, Martin reinvigorated intentionality, not as self-absorption, but as an "ethical" self-effacement that acknowledged an "Other" (165).

Michael Newman's penultimate essay is dense with both textual reference and attention to the experience of Martin's works. He addresses their unending and multifaceted irresolution, particularly as to the simultaneous phenomenological and structural readings as outlined by Krauss, i.e., they can never be wholly and definitively known through perception, and at the same time the elements and states through which they pass take place in a system of signs. He distinguishes the materiality of paint, canvas, and graphite from the materiality of language, and finds both in Martin's linear constructs. For Newman, there is no raw materiality in her lines, because they always refer to, among other things, writing and drawing, albeit in a "dismembered" state, a term he borrows from Paul de Man (212-13).

Anne M. Wagner's "The Cause of the Response" provides a kind of coda that critiques Linville's account for its "physical ... impossibil[ity]" (233) of

beginning with a close view (one must always approach a painting at first encounter), but ultimately valorizes her intensely contemporary reading. In linking Linville's "red mist of uninflected anguish" to a "body ... vaporized by the blast of a bomb," an allusion rife with the anxieties of the Vietnam era (237), Wagner credits the paintings for renewability in the face of what the viewer brings. They are not blank slates as much as webs that catch one's thoughts, and, as Leonard noted, allow one to divert one's mind and follow it where it will. All of this reinforces Martin's claim from which the title of the essay is taken: "The cause of the response is not traceable in the work."

The other essays flesh out a picture of Martin as fully as any single volume can; Lynne Cooke provides a cogent survey of her work and career, while Christina Bryan Rosenberger addresses her exacting care with materials, while stipulating that Martin saw technique as having "nothing to do with it" (104). Again, Martin demanded that her work lay elsewhere than in its facts. Anastas, drawing on Laura Riding as well as Linda Nochlin, celebrates Martin's work and life choices (particularly her exile from New York) as an act of subversion against the presumed inevitability of the art world's masculine, competitive paradigm. In the course of this argument, Anastas cites Martin's claim that "Painting is not making paintings; it is a development of awareness" (146), reinforcing her work's fundamentally elusive character.

Although densely penciled grids receive the most attention, not all of Martin's paintings adhere to this schema. Nevertheless, the careful and lively detail with which representative works are described makes the authors' focus and purpose clear. Additional treatment, beyond Cooke's thoughtful but necessarily brief mention, of the very late paintings that feature large, black geometric figures on gray grounds would be most welcome, but some time is needed to digest these in the context of her life's work.

A relatively large selection of plates for a critical anthology conveys well the shape of Martin's career. Although they

are a bit small on the page, they are more faithful as to color and texture than other reproductions in circulation, and can trigger memories of actual encounters, while inducing a desire to see the work again. As several of the authors note, the experience of Martin's paintings depends upon a variety of distances and vantage points, a "mating dance" as Wagner calls it (233). This dance is impossible in reproduction, a state that is acknowledged by the close details on the front and back covers and frontispiece to the plates, featuring graphite and colored-pencil grids respectively. Cloth binding echoes the texture of canvas that is so important to Martin's work, and a ribbon bookmark attached to the spine gives the book-as-object a pleasantly antiquated feel.

The essays in this volume are very much in dialogue with previous liter-

ature, and the reader may want to gather some of it for reference. Most frequently cited are the collected writings edited by Dieter Schwarz (1992), Krauss's "The /Cloud/" (1992), Briony Fer's "Drawing Drawing: Agnes Martin's Infinity" (2005), Kasha Linville's "Agnes Martin: An Appreciation" (1971), Thomas McEvelley's "Grey Geese Descending" (1987), as well as the writings of Alloway (1973). The many critical treatments might make one dream about another anthology of previously published materials, although the extensive bibliography will assist the reader in procuring these sources.

This book will be of particular value to practicing artists in addition to art historians and students, because of its protracted look at Martin's methods and goals. Her tenacity is likely to inspire, and the variety of contributors' approaches

models the complicated permutations of intention, perception, and meaning that inform an artist's reception. •

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Notes

1. Rosalind Krauss, "Agnes Martin: The /Cloud/," in *Bachelors*, (Cambridge: MIT, 1999): 75-89. See also Kasha Linville, "Agnes Martin: An Appreciation," *Artforum* 9, no. 10 (June 1971): 72-73.
2. Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," in Gregory Battcock, ed., *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1968), 147.

In Wonderland: The Surrealist Adventures of Women Artists in Mexico and the United States

edited by Ilene Susan Fort and Tere Arcq
with Terri Geis

Delmonico Books and Prestel, 2012

Reviewed by Natalie Phillips

Oftentimes, exhibition catalogs are useful only to experts in the field, rarely appealing to both the general public and serious scholars. However, this catalog manages to do both. *In Wonderland: The Surrealist Adventures of Women Artists in Mexico and the United States* is a welcome resource. The catalog was published in conjunction with an exhibition that was jointly organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) and the Museo de Arte Moderno in Mexico City. Its short but thorough history of women surrealists in Mexico and the United States is coupled with articles that explore a variety of scholarly topics.

Editors Ilene Susan Fort and Tere Arcq have included essays by well-known scholars in the field that feature a wide-range of artists and topics, as well as

varying perspectives. The essays also deal with a range of historical periods, from the 1930s—when surrealism moved beyond the borders of Europe—to an examination of surrealism's influence on later generations of women in the contemporary period.

More than two hundred high-quality images meticulously reproduce a variety of works, some of them well known but not often exhibited, others little known. Brief biographies written by Terri Geis on all forty-eight of the women featured in the exhibition, as well as selected individual bibliographies, help to locate each artist in historical context. The surrealist movement was dominated by men, many of whom viewed women as muses, and as less capable of becoming artists in their own right. As Whitney Chadwick notes in her prologue, this exhibition is the first to truly explore the role of women internationally in the surrealist movement. That said, many of the women discussed in the catalog did not explicitly identify with surrealism but rather drew influences from the movement that were relevant to their own experiences as women. Chadwick sets the tone for the catalog, saying that Mexico and the United States are "central to this narrative, both for the lasting

impact of surrealism in those countries and for the relatively large number of women artists who were associated with it" (12). Some of the women featured in the book, including the photographer Lee Miller (1907-77) and painters Leonora Carrington (1917-2011) and Jacqueline Lamba (1910-93), were among those associated with surrealism in Paris before the war and later became "part of the movement's legacy in North America" (12). Mexico City also drew a number of important surrealist émigrés, including painter Remedios Varo (1908-63), photographer Kati Horna (1912-2000), and eventually, Carrington. Chadwick also notes that as early as the 1940s, women gallerists—Betty Parsons and Peggy Guggenheim in New York and Carolina and Inés Amor in Mexico City—were exhibiting works by the surrealists, both male and female.

Fort's introductory essay, "In the Land of Reinvention," gives a historical overview of surrealism in the United States, including women surrealists working in the U.S. and exhibitions of surrealist art. She notes several key themes that appear in the women's work, such as the refusal to sexualize the female body like their male counterparts had done. Instead, women used the



Fig. 1. Remedios Varo, *Creación de las aves* (Creation of the Birds) (1958), oil on Masonite, 20 5/8" x 24 5/8". Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City. Collection Isabel Gruen Varsoviano, In Memoriam, gift of Walter and Anna Alexandra Gruen.

female form to explore their own gender identity and to critique traditional domestic roles. For example, when Los Angeles artist Helen Lundeberg (1908-99) co-authored "the first and only surrealist manifesto to originate in the United States" (34) in the mid-1930s, it was accompanied by her painting *Plant and Animal Analogies* (1934-35), drawing connections between female and plant morphologies.

Arcq's essay, "In the Land of Convulsive Beauty," offers readers an overview of the cultural environment for women artists in Mexico. They were afforded more liberties and opportunities for public commissions when compared to their European counterparts. While she ultimately passed on the offer, Varo was hired to do a mural for the Centro Médico Nacional, and Carrington completed several public commissions, including a mural at the Museo Nacional de Antropología. Women artists in Mexico made work that reflected their experience as women and attempted to subvert the male-dominated ideals of European surrealism. In Mexico, writes Arcq, "away from Breton's surrealist group, these women artists found the freedom to express themselves through deeply personal artistic languages" (75). Their "questioning of the traditional role of women is evident in the work of several artists associated with surrealism.

Some early works [e.g., by Carrington and Lola Alvarez Bravo] show women as trapped, immobilized" (75). Later these same women focused on bold imagery of "strong women, creative goddesses with the power to control the universe" (75).

Geis and Rita Eder, in "The Ancestral and the Living," reveal how women surrealists were influenced by the indigenous cultures of the Americas, which offered a tantalizing alternative to European traditions. Artists like María Izquierdo (1902-55) and Frida Kahlo (1907-54) used "pre-Hispanic, traditional, and 'primitive' aspects of

Mexican culture" to discover their own Mexican identity and ancestral past, and also as a tool of political resistance against the "patriarchal genre of Mexican murals" (158).

Gloria Feman Orenstein, in her essay, "Down the Rabbit Hole," discusses women surrealists who covertly explored occult rituals in their work, including witchcraft, alchemy, and various matriarchal religions that emphasized women's power. The egg appears multiple times in the work of Carrington, Varo (Fig. 1), and the American-born surrealist Kay Sage (1898-1963), for example, as a reflection of their occultist interests. According to Orenstein, this universal symbol of rebirth also represents the unification of opposites and protection. Similarly, these and other artists' images of masquerade and camouflage also pertain to the hidden powers of women and were ways for these artists to symbolically explore gender identity.

In "One Hundred Percent Photographic," Dawn Ades discusses how women used photography as a unique tool for their surrealist work. Examples such as *Tu imagen te persigue* (Bird's Eye View), c. 1940s by Bravo (1907-93), the series *Oda a la necrofilia* (Ode to Necrophilia) from 1962 by Horna, or *Untitled (Self-Portrait)*, c. 1932 by Claude Cahun (1894-1954), employ unusual

angles and odd juxtapositions to make the ordinary seem strange and unfamiliar. Surrealists Rosa Rolanda (1895-1970) and Miller (both of whom worked in the Paris studio of Man Ray in the late 1920s) used x-rays and photograms to capture in their work that which cannot be seen by the human eye. Much like the unconscious mind itself, processes like photomontage put disparate objects together to create new meaning and to reveal the unexpected in the everyday world in unique ways.

Salomon Grimberg's essay, "Guided by the Invisible," explores the notion that the women surrealists more often looked to intuition and emotional experience for artistic inspiration, whereas their male counterparts tended to look "to the imagined, which arose from intellect" (201). Grimberg explores how aspects of several artists' personal lives influenced their art. For example, he details the pain, alienation and victimization felt by Izquierdo after being abandoned by her lover Rufino Tamayo, and how this experience was a creative force behind works such as *Prisioneras* (Prisoners) (1936). The autobiographical aspect of Dorothea Tanning's (1910-2012) work is also readily apparent in *Eine kleine Nachtmusik* (A Little Night Music) from 1943. Tanning, he notes, was a "sexually precocious child" (205), and the painting reflects the artist's interest in childhood sexuality through the suggestion of a primal scene and the "sexual games" played by the young girls standing in the corridor (207).

Surrealism's continuing legacy for women in the contemporary period is the subject of "Eros and Thanatos," by Maria Elena Buszek. She observes that "surrealism's misogyny was for many women outweighed by the powerful freedoms and self-knowledge they gained from the movement" (210). A number of contemporary artists, such as Courtney Andrews (b. 1983), Cindy Sherman (b. 1954) and Carrie Moyer (b. 1960), subvert the misogynistic tensions of the movement by showing the female form not as a sexualized body, but as a powerful one in which women are in control of how their bodies are represented, thereby critiquing the surrealist notion of woman as

mere muse. In her analysis of works such as Louise Bourgeois's (1911–2010) *Fillette (Sweeter Version)* (1968–99), and Francesca Woodman's (1958–81) *Untitled, Rome, Italy* (1977–78), Buszek effectively demonstrates the ambivalence contemporary women feel toward surrealism and how they come to terms with and subvert the misogyny of the movement.

Overall, *In Wonderland* serves as both a general primer on women in surrealism as well as an in-depth study on the subject. By bringing together in an interesting way many threads of surrealism, the exhibition and catalog have brought into focus the significant role that women played in the surrealist movement from its earliest days. •

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Women Artists between the Wars: "A Fair Field and No Favour"

by Katy Deepwell
Manchester University Press, 2010

Women Artists in Interwar France: Framing Femininities

by Paula J. Birnbaum
Ashgate, 2011

Reviewed by Joanne Heath

Two recently published works significantly expand our understanding of the scale and extent of women's presence as artists in Britain and France in the period between the two world wars. Existing scholarship on women's artistic production in Britain in the early years of the twentieth century has tended to take the form of (often biographically based) monographic studies of still comparatively well-known individuals, such as Gluck, Dora Carrington, or Vanessa Bell. This detailing of individual women artists' personal lives has, however, come at the expense of any analysis of the broader professional opportunities available to women artists in the interwar period, their exhibiting strategies, or of contemporary critical responses to their work. In *Women Artists between the Wars: "A Fair Field and No Favour,"* author Katy Deepwell sets out to correct this oversight. She challenges the focus on a small number of exceptional figures, asking instead, "why individuals' successful careers and reputations were forgotten and how that invisibility was secured" (1).

Through analysis of the statistical

data provided by the four censuses taken between 1911 and 1951, and by examining the participation of women as members and exhibitors in artists' groups, Deepwell uncovers a groundswell in the numbers of women who worked professionally as artists in Britain in the interwar years. She sets these changes in the careers and reputations of women artists within a larger pattern of social and cultural changes affecting women in Britain in the first half of the twentieth century. Although this period witnessed a significant expansion in the economic and social opportunities available to upper- and middle-class women in particular (a select number of women over the age of thirty who met minimum property qualifications were enfranchised in 1918, followed by all women in 1928, while the passing of the Sex Disqualification [Removal] Act in 1919 enabled women to enter into the professions for the first time), Deepwell shows how the social and cultural values attributed to femininity at this time determined the reputations of artists who were women.

Where aspiring women artists in the late-nineteenth century had needed to fight for right of entry to all-male institutions of training and display, by the 1920s access to a formal artistic training was no longer an obstacle to be overcome. As Deepwell demonstrates, however,

institutionalised forms of sex discrimination persisted in the separate and often poorer facilities and opportunities for study provided for girls and women, particularly in the life class, and in the often disparaging attitudes of the male teaching staff who

assumed that most women were there to acquire accomplishments and not to train for a career (50).

In spite of the fact that it was commonly assumed that women's enthusiasm for art would peter out on marriage, many women did establish long-term careers as artists, even after they married and/or became mothers. In contrast to male artists, for whom teaching in art schools brought status and security of income, most women artists who earned a living through teaching did so in secondary schools for girls. Many women also developed a design, craft, or trade specialty, such as book illustration, textile design, or pottery, as a means of securing additional income.

In seeking to establish a reputation for, and income from, their art practice, women artists, like their male contemporaries, were also concerned to have their work included in the large group shows organized by the major artists' exhibiting societies that then dominated professional practice in Britain. In tracking the historical presence of women as both exhibitors and members of groups, including the New England Art Club, the London Group, the Seven and Five Society, and the Artists' International Association, Deepwell reveals that, while women artists accounted for 25–33 percent of the elected membership of these groups, the number of women who participated in their annual exhibitions was significantly higher. Yet reviews of these group exhibitions tended to focus on the men's work. Works by women were discussed by contemporary reviewers not in terms of the rhetoric of "significant form" developed by modernist critics Clive Bell and Roger Fry, but were instead praised

for their “feminine” qualities. This stereotyping of women’s artistic production as “charming,” “simple,” “delightful,” or “pretty” persisted into reviews of exhibitions staged by women-only exhibiting groups during this period, including the Society of Women Artists (established 1857) and the Women’s International Art Club (established 1900).

As Deepwell contends, the summary value judgments made about women’s artistic production by contemporary reviewers have been taken at face value by later art historians, thus contributing to the continuing marginalization of artists who were women within histories of early-twentieth-century British art. *Women Artists between the Wars* complicates this established view by revealing how, in spite of the institutional discrimination they faced during both their early artistic training and their later exhibiting careers, significant numbers of women did manage to negotiate for themselves successful careers as professional artists in the interwar period. As the author herself makes clear, the aim of her well-illustrated book was not to advance new readings of individual art practices, but rather to offer a larger and more collective picture of the substantial and stylistically diverse contributions made by women to art and visual culture in Britain in the interwar period. Katy Deepwell’s extensive archival research and comprehensive statistical analysis of women artists’ contributions to group exhibitions in this period will, however, serve as an invaluable point of departure for future researchers, informing and enabling more detailed consideration of how individual women artists forged their own specific relationship both to the institutional structures of the art world and the representational tropes of their day.

In *Women Artists in Interwar France: Framing Femininities*, Paula Birnbaum is also concerned to demonstrate that women artists made a substantial contribution to the art world in the period between the wars. Building on existing feminist scholarship, which has



Fig. 1. Tamara de Lempicka, *Maternity* (1928), oil on canvas, 13 3/4" x 10 5/8". Barry Humphries Collection.

already begun to explore how women artists accessed art education, and how they negotiated a relationship to avant-garde art movements in Paris in the early years of the twentieth century, Birnbaum focuses her analysis upon the all-women exhibiting group known as the Société des femmes artistes modernes (or FAM).¹ Founded and led by Marie-Anne Camax-Zoegger (1887-1952), between 1931 and 1938, FAM staged annual exhibitions featuring the work of both contemporary and recently deceased women artists. Birnbaum reveals how, through these exhibitions, Camax-Zoegger aimed to construct and transmit her own, woman-oriented, art-historical narrative as a means of challenging popular stereotypes around the role of women in the arts in the interwar period.

Most of the artists who showed with FAM were painters and sculptors working within a figurative tradition, and their works represented a range of stylistic trends, from postimpressionism to late cubism. Like Deepwell, Birnbaum questions the usefulness of a monographic approach to the study of artists who were women. Rather than simply integrating

those artists into existing narratives of the stylistic development of European Modernism—assessing, for example, the hitherto overlooked contributions made by individual women artists to early-twentieth-century avant-garde art movements—Birnbaum proposes that FAM provides a specific institutional framework through which to consider how a diverse group of women artists “approached the problem of framing femininities in a society that was re-examining the notion of gender as a stable category in the wake of World War I and during the rise of fascism leading to World War II” (11). Through close consideration of specific case studies, she explores how artists who were women tackled a range of subjects including motherhood, the self-portrait and the female nude—key tropes of Western art history as well as important signifiers of femininity—during this period.

In her examination of the representation of motherhood in the work of FAM artists including Camax-Zoegger, Tamara de Lempicka (1898-1980) and Maria Blanchard (1881-1932), Birnbaum shows how such imagery acquired new meaning in the light of widespread fears over the depopulation of the French nation in the period after the First World War. While Camax-Zoegger’s paintings of her own daughter could readily be appropriated by those conservative critics who endorsed both a pronatalist social agenda and the aesthetic return to order in the wake of the Great War, other paintings of mothers and children exhibited with FAM proved more challenging. Birnbaum analyses how de Lempicka’s paintings of recognizably modern women nursing (Fig. 1), or of her own daughter poised on the brink of puberty, or Blanchard’s depiction of working-class mothers and children, inscribe some of the less popularly mythologized aspects of motherhood as it may have been differently experienced by women of diverse classes, ethnicities, and nationalities in the 1920s and 1930s.

She goes on to consider the divergent self-fashioning of Marie Laurencin (1883-

1956) and Alice Halicka (1895-1975). While both artists had been associated with the cubist avant-garde during their early careers, the work they exhibited with FAM during the 1930s was less visibly engaged with experimental theories and practices. Birnbaum interprets the highly stylized images of female types painted in predominantly pastel colors by Laurencin in the post-World War I period as a conscious strategy on the part of the artist, arguing that Laurencin “chose throughout the 1920s and 1930s to use the concept of masquerade to play up visual codes of femininity as a consistent aesthetic style that would earn her a prominent reputation” (99). The Polish-Jewish Halicka also faced the problem of how to construct an artistic identity on the fringes of a predominantly male avant-garde. Birnbaum examines how Halicka, who was married to the cubist painter Louis Marcoussis, endeavored to reconcile her ambitions as an artist with her personal expectations of marriage and motherhood. Marcoussis was said to have actively discouraged his wife’s experimentation with cubist techniques and, in the period immediately after World War I, Halicka abandoned an ambitious cycle of cubist works to adopt instead a more overtly figurative style of representation. Birnbaum reads Halicka’s images of the Jewish ghetto in Cracow produced during this period in relation to works by other Jewish women artists who exhibited with FAM, including Chana Orloff (1888-1968) and Mela Muter (1876-1967), pointing out that, in

their self-representations, these artists had not only to negotiate “their own conflicted attitudes about gender, professional identity, social class, nationality and ethnicity” (151) but also the increasing presence of anti-Semitism in the French art world of the 1930s.

In the final two chapters of the book, Birnbaum turns her attention to representations of the female nude by FAM artists including Emilie Charmy (1878-1974), Suzanne Valadon (1865-1938) and de Lempicka. Although she refers to broader shifts in the representation of the female nude in avant-garde painting in France in the 1920s, such as the post-cubist ‘return to order’ evidenced in the work of artists including Derain and Picasso, in discussing these images Birnbaum draws predominantly upon feminist critiques of the gender politics of spectatorship and the gaze initially expounded within feminist film theory during the 1970s and 1980s² to explore how artists such as Charmy, Valadon, and de Lempicka “negotiated the tension between the commodification of working-class female sexuality [as seen in the many paintings of the female nude produced by their male contemporaries] and the wish, as women, to resist it” (190).

Women Artists in Interwar France not only restores to cultural visibility a number of women painters and sculptors who have been largely overlooked by historians of early-twentieth-century avant-gardist art, but also provides a critical framework through which to read a substantial body of art practice that

does not readily conform to the stylistic and theoretical concerns of modernism as it has been canonically constituted. Informed by both primary archival research and key concepts in feminist scholarship, in this lavishly illustrated volume Paula Birnbaum illuminates the diverse representational strategies deployed by those women artists who exhibited with the Société des femmes artistes modernes in their negotiation of both social and art critical constraints in the interwar period. The sustained interrogation of questions of femininity, modernity and (self-)representation in the work of these artists is made to seem all the more startling when set against a backdrop of rising nationalism and the resultant desire for state control over the female body in France during the 1920s and 1930s. •

Joanne Heath recently passed her PhD at the University of Leeds. Her thesis examines literary and visual representations of the artist/model relationship in fin-de-siècle France.

Notes

1. See Gill Perry, *Women Artists and the Parisian Avant-Garde: Modernism and “Feminine” Art, 1900 to the late 1920s* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1995).
2. The seminal analysis in this respect is Laura Mulvey, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,’ originally published in *Screen* 16.3 (Autumn 1975).

Eileen Gray and the Design of Sapphic Modernity: Staying In

by Jasmine Rault
Ashgate, 2011

Reviewed by Ricki Sablove

This fascinating book on Eileen Gray examines the links between the oeuvre of this Irish-born designer and architect and her ties to the lesbian culture of Paris during the early

decades of the twentieth century. Searching within a wide range of examples, both artistic and literary, author Jasmine Rault has found indications that Gray belongs within a sphere of non-heterosexual women artists—Romaine Brooks, Radclyffe Hall, and Djuna Barnes, to name but three—as well as male “decadent” artists of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. Expanding upon existing scholarship, Rault adds a provocative dimension to the discourse on Gray and her role as a sexual dissident in the

history of modernism. Unlike Caroline Constant,¹ in whose excellent writings Gray’s unique, sensuous aesthetic signals nothing more than a highly personal style within the modernist rubric, Rault asserts that comparisons with contemporary works by lesbian artists and writers, and an examination of Gray’s friendships with those women, show that Gray’s own sensuous decorative arts and architecture are uniquely related. Rault also sees Gray’s similar pursuit of luxury within a realm of privacy related to her desire, as a

lesbian, to be safe from intrusion. With her lucid prose and diligent research, she makes a compelling case about Gray and other women in her circle. Moreover, Rault's rigorous scholarship and the rather esoteric nature of her subject matter do not lessen the accessibility of her text, even for those with little exposure to gender theory.

Rault's fascination with Gray's position as a sexual outlier seems to have started when she discovered Beatriz Colomina's study of Le Corbusier's bizarre defacement of Gray's most famous work, her house, E1027.² Built between 1926 and 1929, E1027 bears a name that reflects the close connection between Gray and Jean Badovici, her sometime lover and collaborator on the house (E stands for Eileen; 10 is for the tenth letter of the alphabet, J for Jean; 2 symbolizes the B for Badovici; and 7 is shorthand for the G in Gray). Colomina's theory that Le Corbusier's "attack" on the house—in 1938, without Gray's permission, Le Corbusier painted a mural in the living room—was a personal assault, not only on Gray but on her legacy, led Rault to examine the ways in which Gray's work reflected her sexual identity. Was Le Corbusier's vandalism an act of envy? Le Corbusier, after all, admired the house and built his own nearby. Or was it simple hostility? Or perhaps both? This bizarre episode prompted Rault to examine theories of modern architecture and Gray's divergence from mainstream modernists such as Adolf Loos, Walter Gropius, and Le Corbusier himself. She also refers to Piet Mondrian as an architect; admittedly, Mondrian's assertion that abstract interior design calls for "new people" reveals an attitude from which Rault launches her case that one of the main purposes of modern architecture was to purge society of unhealthful living (27). She writes:

Early twentieth-century modern architecture would put this production of "healthy" living spaces at the centre of its modernist project. Rather than proclaim the regenerative effects of ornament,



Fig. 1. Eileen Gray, Tempe à Pailla, door to the main entrance.

privacy and domesticity, however, early twentieth-century architectural discourse managed to conflate these values with the decadent tendencies and the degenerative diseases they had been introduced to combat, and thereby was able to proclaim itself modernity's only healthy option (39).

Among the unhealthful practices Le Corbusier and his ilk fought against, Rault argues, was homosexuality. Le Corbusier's rant against houses of the nineteenth century reflects not only concerns about hygiene, but decency as well. In *Toward a New Architecture*, he called the house "a coach full of tuberculosis," as well as "a moral crisis."³ This was at odds with Gray's own, less austere designs for interiors, which included fur blankets and other highly-tactile accessories.

Those accessories, which included Gray's beautiful lacquer screens, were, according to Rault, influenced by lesbian artists like Romaine Brooks, as well as homosexual artists and writers, including Aubrey Beardsley, Oscar Wilde (in whose *Salome*, even heterosexual obsession has elements of same-sex desire) (79–82), and, despite Rault's characterization of him as misogynist and homophobic, Gustav Klimt. Also influential was the Ballets Russes, including the sets and costumes of Leon Bakst; Gray owned copies of Bakst's designs for the 1910 production of *Scheherazade*, which display what Caroline Constant has called "the blurring of gender distinctions."⁴ Of equal significance for Rault's argument is the fact that the bal-

let company's impresario, Sergei Diaghilev, "chose to cast in the lead roles two of the early twentieth century's most renowned queer icons: Vaslev Nijinsky as the feminized and sexually submissive Golden Slave to Ida Rubinstein's powerful *femme fatale*..." (84). Rault is critical of Constant for failing to make that point in her book.

Even more germane to Gray's own sexuality is the influence of Romaine Brooks, given the friendship between the two women. It is, according to Rault, no coincidence that two of Brooks's paintings, *White Azaleas* and *The Screen*, depict either folding screens or wall-mounted panels. The screen is fraught with sexuality in art, and some of Gray's earliest works were screens. As Rault points out, "Considering the history of folding screens, it seems surprising that the existing literature on Gray neglects to explore the fact that Gray had chosen the folding screen as her first medium" (78). Rault also cites the attenuated figures in Gray's panels, *La voie lactée*, which recall those in Brooks's paintings. Indeed, even the sickly appearance of the figures reflects a decadent attitude that is at odds with the modernist vision of health. That is so, but decadence was not restricted to homosexuals. Decadence, conflated with ill health, might have been at odds with the attitudes of many modernist architects, but it was not, by definition, exclusively gay.

Rault's analysis of the issue of discretion is especially intriguing. Following the obscenity trials surrounding Radclyffe Hall's book *The Well of Loneliness* in 1928, female sexual dissidence became pathologized, and women such as Gray, not wishing to be exposed or categorized, became more concerned with privacy. Her house, Tempe à Pailla, with its obstructive exterior and byzantine approach, was designed to shield Gray from prying eyes. Even when one finds the entrance (Fig. 1), the house continues to guard its inhabitants. Rault compares Gray's reticence to that of Djuna Barnes, whose novel *Nightwood* defied clarity and conventional interpretation. Both the

book and the house, says Rault, promise and deny access, either syntactically or materially (147).

While Rault's arguments are quite strong, they are not all entirely indisputable. Individual style is certainly an important part of a designer's identity, and Gray, as a versatile artist who excelled in many media, was not tied to any one aesthetic. Indeed, the formal qualities of her architectural works are not so different from those of Le Corbusier. Moreover, Rault paints modernism with a rather broad brush. For example, she invokes the name of Peter Behrens as part of the austere group of modernist architects, but neglects to mention the sensual aspects of much of his work; surely *The Kiss*, his famous woodcut depicting two women with sinuous, interlocking hair, celebrates same-sex desire. Even what is arguably his best-known work, the turbine building for the Allgemeine Elektrizitäts-Gesellschaft, is anything but

sterile. Modernism is not monolithic; Eileen Gray is not easy to pigeonhole, but neither are many other modernist artists and architects.

In terms of sexuality, it is hard to deny that Gray had affairs with women, and may have even preferred them as friends and lovers. But sexuality is often more complex than definitions of gay or straight. Indeed, Gray's relationship with Jean Badovici complicates her identity considerably; and the desire for privacy would have been, and still is, important to many women, particularly those living alone.

One also feels that Rault is too critical of earlier scholarship on Gray. While other authors may not have adequately addressed Gray's sexuality, surely they provided valuable resources for Rault's own work. This is not to say, however, that *Eileen Gray and the Design of Sapphic Modernity* is not an extraordinary book. It is cogent, well researched, and interesting. And by addressing the issue

of Gray's lesbianism and the notion of a distinctly lesbian aesthetic, Rault has opened up new avenues of inquiry that will undoubtedly enrich future discussions of this remarkable, multi-faceted artist. •

Ricki Sablove, a PhD candidate at Rutgers University, is currently writing a dissertation on American architects and their travel sketches.

Notes

1. See for example, Caroline Constant, *Eileen Gray* (London: Phaidon, 2000).
2. See Beatriz Colomina, "War on Architecture," *Assemblage* 20 (1993), 28-29.
3. Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, F. Etchells, trans. (New York: Dover Publications, 1986), 4.
4. Caroline Constant, "E.1027: The Nonheroic Modernism of Eileen Gray," *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 53, 3 (September 1994), 279. Quoted in Rault, 84.

The New Woman International: Representations in Photography and Film from the 1870s through the 1960s

edited by Elizabeth Otto and Vanessa Rocco, Foreword by Linda Nochlin
University of Michigan Press, 2012

Reviewed by Joanna Roche

...a man turned toward me and asked,
"Are you free this evening?"

I said "Yes—but please allow me to
remain so."

Chantal Thomas
*Coping with Freedom*¹

This deliciously succinct rejoinder could have come from the lips of one of the many remarkable "New Women" encountered in the pages of this important new volume. Securing freedom (and remaining free) was at the heart of this powerful global phenomenon. In their compelling introduction, "Imagining and Embodying

New Womanhood," editors Elizabeth Otto and Vanessa Rocco write,

The New Woman is constantly associated with the word *freedom*. In addition to political enfranchisement, this term translated into women's more general independence in public and professional life, new possibilities of visibility and movement in public space, and the ability to travel even long distances on one's own (9).

Indeed, as we dig into this volume's sixteen essays, which range over time (1870–1960) and place (China, Czechoslovakia, England, France, Germany, India, Japan, Spain, United States), we discover that the New Woman was actually New Women. As Linda Nochlin states in her foreword, "Representing the New Woman—Complexity and Contradiction,"

Too often the discussion of this powerful "Woman" has been limited to *either* the flapper of Weimar *or* the hearty suffragist in the turn-of-the century United States and

Great Britain, with little or no crossover in those discussions and rare applications of them to regions beyond (viii).

She concludes, "This timely book reminds us that the desire for New Woman role models in this pursuit of liberation was a transnational one, not the realm of a particular nation or culture" (x).

What unites these essays and the international cadre of historical women they represent—from the famous (e.g., Louise Brooks, Amelia Earhart, Hannah Hoch) to the less studied (e.g., Japanese Bluestockings, the New Negro Woman, the New Woman in Spain)—is their engagement with visual representation, notably photography and film. The book's cover image, Germaine Krull's 1925 *Self-Portrait* (Fig. 1), serves as an excellent icon for this volume and for the movement itself, as it depicts a figure active in her self-representation. At once subject and author of the photograph, Krull wields the technology that helped define the New Woman. The editors state: "By concentrating on photography

and film, *The New Woman International* identifies essential links among gender, technology, and spectacle, and it explores the camera-made images that allowed for an increased circulation of representations of modern femininity" (4).

These camera-made images were more extensive than we might think, as these essays and the book's numerous illustrations reveal. In addition to products of the global film industry, art photography, portraiture, photomontage, stereoscopic photography, offset printing, mug shots, advertisements, newspapers and magazines, are among the media that shaped New Womanhood. "By contrast to histories of modernism that have tended to place the male viewer and creator at the center of culture," write Otto and Rocco, "a focus on New Womanhood allows for another story to emerge, one that situates the development of a feminine modernism as parallel to the emergence of new visual technologies, democracy, and urban culture" (4).

The richness of this anthology is extended through engaging notes, acknowledging each author's debt to previous scholarship in the field, which has been considerable in the last several decades. The volume is segmented into four thematic and chronologically driven sections: "The First New Women: Photography, Politics, and the Public Place of Women from the 1870s through the First World War;" "Art and Identity: Gender Constructions in Photography and Photomontage of the 1920s;" "Mass Media Icons: The New Woman as Embodiment of Transnational Modernity;" and "Girls and Crisis: The New Woman in the 1930s and Beyond."

In addition to its significance to scholars, the interdisciplinary nature of this collection recommends it as an excellent reader for courses covering nineteenth- and twentieth-century photography, mass media, and, above all, feminist history. The editors' organization of the sixteen contributions by Jan Bardsley, Matthew Biro, Gianna Carotenuto, Melody Davis, Kristine Harris, Karla Huebner, Kristen Lubben,



Fig.1. Germaine Krull, Self-Portrait (1925), gelatin silver print, 8" x 6". Collection of Ann and Jürgen Wilde, Zulpich. © Museum Folkwang, Essen, Germany.

Maria Makela, Martha H. Patterson, Clare I. Rogan, Despina Stratigakos, Brett M. Van Hoesen, Kathleen M. Vernon, Lisa Jaye Young, and themselves, encourages readers to make connections between the three to five essays within a given section, and at the same time "reveal[s] the ways in which a feminine ideal circled the globe to be translated into numerous visual languages (3)."

The creation—and acceptance—of a "feminine ideal" was, of course, a painstaking process, much like the rise of internationalism during the late-nineteenth through the twentieth century. One of the remarkable offerings of this collection is that it allows us to chart the development of the global culture we know today through the lens of the New Woman. As we pore over the specificities engaged in these essays, we witness the dynamic play between the individual and the type—one of the primary means by which a feminine ideal struggled to form from the (often harsh) criticism of specific New Women. Jan Bardsley points out in "The New Woman Exposed: Redefining Women in Modern Japanese Photography," that "long stable categories distinguishing types of women—foreign from domestic, ladies

from geisha—and women from men were being threatened by these upstart Bluestockings" (45). Bardsley traces the circuitous path of Kamichika Ichiko from "notorious Bluestocking" to respected politician. We see how the media's classification of individuals as members of a group (the Bluestockings) served to contain the societal threat of these women, both as individuals and as a collective. Bardsley concludes that, "The New Woman underestimated the power of reproduction and new media to blur boundaries between women of different classes and nationalities, never imagining how this would intensify efforts to reinvigorate those borders" (54). To name is often to contain, hence the power of stereotypes. However, the increased familiarity of a type due to media exposure leads (if slowly and painfully) to the acceptance of that type.

In "Female Firsts: Media Representations of Pioneering and Adventurous Women in the Early Twentieth Century," Despina Stratigakos also notes the complex dynamic between the individual and the type: "[t]he identifying features of faces and names, such as the smiling Mrs. Mitchell [a deep sea diver in 1908 England], and the singularity of the achievement, such as the first woman to earn an architecture degree, make memorable these individuals as individuals, making the production of a type more difficult to achieve" (67). The goal of revealing the "singular within the type" (68), which this essay—and this collection—exemplifies, has been a key pursuit since first-wave feminism to the present.

Indeed, through these varied essays we come to know the New Woman as singular individuals: Kamichika Ichiko, Jovanka Bontschits, Miss Marie Bhor, Hannah Hoch, Marianne Brandt, Louise Brooks, Milča Mayerová, Li Dandan, to name just a few. We also come to know the New Woman through her many historic descriptions (i.e., types): flapper, *garçonne*, *neue Frau*, *Girl*, *trampka*, *Bluestocking*.

We track the gradual, historic progress in the representation of New Women, from "comic construction" in

Melody Davis's "The New Woman in American Stereoviews, 1871-1905," where the New Woman is lampooned as wearing the literal and metaphoric trousers (as husbands are left behind to do the wash) to the "vigorous and self-sufficient" image of Amelia Earhart explored in Kristen Lubben's "A New American Ideal: Photography and Amelia Earhart." We also observe the recurrent ways in which, as Lubben says of Earhart, "this potent image was threatening and required management or mediation" (293). The ever-expanding mass media's representation of individual women as types performed a double, if contradictory, function:

checking societal anxiety over changing gender roles through containment via the production and reiteration of types, while at the same moment, familiarizing the public with a new, feminine ideal.

The fascination with global, visual phenomena—and the complex dance between individual and type—is, clearly, not unique to our technologically driven era. As readers of *The New Woman International*, we rediscover the enormous potential (and problematics) of the mass media. Our contemporary notions of selfhood continue to be constructed by many forms of visual media. What this anthology importantly reminds is that the New Woman (in all her complexities) precedes

us—as producer, consumer, and object of consumption. How we negotiate our relationship to today's cosmos of visual cultures is one well learned from these historic role models. •

Joanna Roche is professor of art history at California State University, Fullerton. Her writing investigates contemporary artists with a focus on memory and process. She recently published *Tyrannical Angels and Other Love Poems* (2011).

Notes

1. Chantal Thomas, *Coping with Freedom: Reflections on Ephemeral Happiness*, trans. Andrea L. Secara (New York: Algora Publishing, 2001): 59.



Fig. 1. Berthe Morisot, *Woman Powdering her Face* (1877), oil on canvas, 15 3/8" x 18 1/8". Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

In her introduction, Ribeiro lays out some of the recurring themes of the book, beginning with the question of ideal beauty and its relation to cosmetics (defined as potions for achieving healthy hair and skin) and makeup (defined as mineral substances applied to the skin to alter appearance). Is there an innate beauty or is it constructed through the use of these products? Further, is beauty universal or specific? Is there a link between physical and spiritual beauty? Starting with the ancient Greeks' opinions on these and other questions, Ribeiro quotes liberally from a wide gamut of philosophers, artists, physicians, novelists, and moralists, including Aristotle, Ovid, Francis Bacon, Théophile Thoré, Henry James, Immanuel Kant, Albrecht Dürer, Oscar Wilde, and Umberto Eco. Indeed, her extensive use of often-lengthy quotes throughout the book wears on the reader rather quickly.

Ribeiro touches on the problematic use of visual culture by scholars who want to understand historical beauty ideals, given the impossibility of determining whether any given artist has

recorded a woman's actual appearance or idealized it through a particular medium. This is an especially thorny question, as Ribeiro points out, in a book that also deals with makeup, because in portraiture it is impossible to differentiate between the depiction of a woman wearing makeup and an artist's use of his or her medium to enhance a sitter's appearance. In fact, although Ribeiro relies on paintings to illustrate her argument, she alludes more than once to the portrait subject's "makeup," not acknowledging that the coloration under discussion could have been the creation of the artist.

In "Renaissance," the first of three chapters, Ribeiro argues that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, women's self-presentation through cosmetics and fashion was increasingly emphasized, and a sustained discourse on beauty was begun. Along with ample condemnation of makeup's falsity and sinfulness, particularly among Christians still influenced by medieval opinions on the topic, there was concomitantly an increased celebration of women's beauty. Ribeiro uses the emergence of the female nude as a subject in Venetian art to consider the debates over which was more beautiful, the nude or clothed female form, and, more broadly, over definitions of ideal female beauty.

Here, as in each chapter, Ribeiro presents an interesting discussion of beauty rituals and includes recipes for beauty products. On the "ideal beauty" of

Facing Beauty: Painted Women and Cosmetic Art

by Aileen Ribeiro
Yale University Press, 2011

Reviewed by Temma Balducci

Changing Western ideals of female beauty have had a close and sometimes fraught association with cosmetics and makeup from the sixteenth century to the beginning of World War II. Aileen Ribeiro's book charting these shifts, with its lush color illustrations on almost every page, is itself a thing of beauty.

Elizabeth I of England, Ribeiro includes statements by contemporaries, albeit taking them at face value rather than reading them critically—considering the amount of power and influence held by Elizabeth and the court in general, it likely would have been unacceptable, if not dangerous, to refer to the queen's physical appearance as anything less than ideal. Topics such as the vanity and deceitfulness of makeup are discussed in the context of the times: in the case of Puritan England, for example, this was a particularly contentious issue, as the evils of makeup were denounced along with ornate hairstyles. Also, during this time the dangers of makeup, often made with lead, were beginning to be realized.

Ribeiro elaborates on the development of the toilette at Versailles, its complicated rituals and etiquette as well as its various accoutrements. Her sometimes-problematic use of visual culture is in evidence throughout, as paintings and prints are for the most part used to provide illustration for the many texts from which she quotes rather than as evidence in their own right.

In the "Enlightenment" chapter, Ribeiro argues that women were increasingly empowered by a societal focus on appearance and fashion, something augmented by the emergence of the fashion magazine in the 1770s. Despite philosophical musings on the

nature of beauty by the likes of the Earl of Shaftesbury and others, Ribeiro notes an obsession with surface rather than substance, and speculates that this trend is tied to the ever-increasing popularity and ritual of the toilette about which there was an onslaught of publications by both men and women.

In the final chapter, "Modernity," covering the 1830s to the start of World War II, Ribeiro shifts her attention to the influence of stage and film celebrities on women's appearance, beginning with Sarah Bernhardt and continuing with American movie stars of the 1930s, particularly Greta Garbo. There is a significant decrease in moralizing in this period, though negative opinions are not wholly absent, as makeup increasingly became part of the daily beauty ritual for women, noted by Ribeiro in her discussion of Berthe Morisot's *Woman Powdering her Face* (1877; Fig. 1). By the early 1940s, makeup had come to signify freedom, democracy, and modernity, with cosmetics accessible for a mass market, and Hollywood starlets providing glamorous role models.

In addition to being stunningly illustrated, the book is well researched and provides a wealth of information. The chronological organization of the material, however, detracts from its usefulness and readability. Not only does reading the many, many quotes get tedious, but

the same topics—opinions pro and con about makeup and its falsity, theories of beauty, makeup recipes—are rehashed in each chapter with little indication that they have been broached before. A thematic organization would have perhaps been more useful. Also significant, as mentioned, the illustrations do not serve as a basis for the author's argumentation or theorization, but rather to underscore the opinions of the various writers or philosophers being quoted.

Finally, I was surprised that the feminist implications of makeup were so rarely touched upon. Ribeiro's claim that the societal focus on beauty and appearance, in the Renaissance, for example, led to an examination of women's social roles and, later, more freedom, is not supported by any evidence. Her observation that contemporary women do not see themselves as victims of patriarchal judgments because they choose their makeup and clothes with themselves, rather than men, in mind is in line with contemporary third-wave feminist thought, but Ribeiro does not acknowledge that there are disagreements on this issue among feminists. •

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Royalists to Romantics: Women Artists from The Louvre, Versailles, and Other French National Collections

by Jordana Pomeroy, Laura Auricchio,
Melissa Lee Hyde, Mary D. Sheriff
National Museum of Women in the Arts
and Scala, 2012

**Reviewed by Kimberly Chrisman-
Campbell**

Quick: Name ten French female artists born in the eighteenth century. Attentive museumgoers should recognize Adélaïde Labille-Guiard, Anne Vallayer-Coster,

and Elisabeth Vigée-LeBrun—the most famous names in their time as well as ours. True lovers of eighteenth-century art might add Marguerite Gérard or Catherine Lusurier. And an art historian with some professional expertise in the period would fill out the list with Rose Adélaïde Ducreux and Marie Victoire Lemoine before giving up in despair.

But no fewer than thirty-five talented women were represented in the exhibition "Royalists to Romantics: Women Artists from The Louvre, Versailles, and Other French National Collections," on view at the National Museum of Women in the Arts in early 2012. During the period 1750 to 1848, NMWA director Susan Fisher Sterling suggests in her foreword to the exhibition catalog,

[W]omen were so integrated into the fabric of the aristocratic world, the Revolution, Napoléon's rise, and the return of the monarchy that women artists' absence heretofore from scholarly discussion of the era throws into question assumptions that reach far beyond the particulars of individual careers (9).

Three essays by a triumvirate of eminent scholars of eighteenth-century art—Laura Auricchio, Melissa Hyde, and Mary Sheriff—address and redress those assumptions.

In 1783, the Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture had four female members—the maximum number

permitted. If few women were accepted into the Académie's inner circle, many others had thriving artistic careers nonetheless. As exhibition curator Jordana Pomeroy assures readers in her introduction to the catalog, "even if they were a minority among artists, women formed a vibrant community within the art world, one far more prolific and more varied than popularly portrayed" (15). The example of women artists in late-eighteenth-century France teaches us that "there existed many paths to a solid reputation and financial success that did not require an academic pedigree or a pass to an officially sanctioned venue" (21).

Indeed, recent scholarship has revealed a much broader and more diverse picture. In her essay "Looking Elsewhere: Women and the Parisian Art World in the Eighteenth Century," Hyde contends that art histories focused on the French royal institutions like the Académie "offer a partial and skewed view.... These institutions were but one part of a larger aesthetic culture in which women *were* a real presence" (36). Though most women artists worked outside the Académie, they "were nonetheless recognized by their contemporaries and able to participate as professional artists in the rich visual culture of their own time" (40). Women also played an important unofficial role behind the scenes of these venerable institutions. "As mothers, wives, sisters, daughters, and godmothers of academicians, women were critical links in the kinship networks that often affected the day-to-day affairs of the Académie—matters such as who studied with whom, or who sponsored whom for admission" (36). Though the contributions of influential female patrons are outside the scope of this book, they have been discussed at length elsewhere; for example, in Hyde and Jennifer Milam's *Women, Art and the Politics of Identity in Eighteenth-Century Europe (Women and Gender in the Early Modern World)* (2003). Both as patrons and practitioners, "women in the eighteenth-century Parisian art world were not in every way excluded 'others' but, rather, active agents," Hyde declares (36).

The French Revolution—with its insistence on *égalité*—should have been



Fig. 1. Adrienne Marie Louise Grandpierre-Deverzy, *The Studio of Abel de Pujol* (1822), oil on canvas, 37 7/8" x 50 7/8". Photo: Musée Marmottan Monet, Paris.

transformative for women artists and women in general. In 1791, the Salon was opened to all, regardless of Académie membership, allowing unprecedented access to women. But when the Revolutionary government disbanded the Académie, women artists lost a powerful professional network, and other privileges and opportunities vanished along with it.

Whereas the Académie royale de peinture et sculpture had established a quota of four female members, the Revolutionary-era art institutions ultimately barred all women on the grounds that professional art making was incompatible with virtuous republican femininity (23).

Auricchio notes in an essay titled "Revolutionary Paradoxes: 1789-94." Instead of liberating women, the Revolution forced them into a regressive gender and social hierarchy.

In "The Woman-Artist Question," Sheriff examines less tangible barriers to success. The philosophes held that women were "more able to sense than to create," to reflect rather than to imagine

(45). The pseudo-science of *sensibilité* accorded women stronger sensations but weaker minds, justifying the exclusion of women from official artistic institutions. Vigée-LeBrun challenged this notion in her self-portrait of 1790, by depicting the shadow cast by her hand and arm—an allusion to the myth of Dibutades, the maiden who invented painting by tracing her lover's shadow on a wall. "In view of contemporaneous writings about woman's imagination, this Dibutades is significant," Sheriff points out (48). Vigée-LeBrun was no mere tracer; indeed, the self-portrait depicts her at her easel, sketching a portrait of Marie-Antoinette from memory. It "thwarts any suggestion that the woman artist merely copies, for projected on the canvas pictured in Vigée-LeBrun's self-portrait is a distinct shadow, which she does not trace, and her sketch of a queen she cannot see" (48).

The three essays are supplemented by page-length biographies of the thirty-five female artists, astonishing in both their detail and their sometimes heartbreaking narratives. Take, for example, sculptor Julie Charpentier. She came from a family of professional artists, grew up in

the Louvre, studied with academican Augustin Pajou, and enjoyed the patronage of the powerful d'Orléans family, but still ended up eking out a living as a taxidermist in the Muséum d'histoire naturelle before finally dying in poverty in a public hospital. Or Anne Rosalie Filleul, whose seemingly charmed career ended abruptly in 1794, when she was tried and executed as a counter-revolutionary. Indeed, the story of women artists in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries might be a longer and happier one if so many of them had not died prematurely. In 1801, Rose Adélaïde Ducreux, daughter of portraitist Joseph Ducreux, followed her fiancé to war-torn Saint-Domingue, where she contracted a fatal case of typhoid. Catherine Lusurier died at age 28, cutting short a promising career. Constance Mayer slit her own throat with a straight razor belonging to her teacher, Paul Prud'hon.

For many female artists, the path to critical and commercial success was smoothed by famous teachers, who were sometimes also their husbands or lovers. The careers of Mayer and Prud'hon, Marguerite Gérard and Jean-Honoré Fragonard, and Marie Thérèse Vien and Joseph-Marie Vien became so closely intertwined that scholars are still trying to disentangle them. (In Mayer's case, many paintings originally exhibited under her name were later sold as the work of Prud'hon, "thereby fetching higher prices while generating considerable confusion concerning Mayer's oeuvre" [101]). Jeanne Philiberte Ledoux touted her status as Greuze's only student; Angélique Mongez, a rare female history painter, signed her work "student of David" (102). But this strategy could backfire; Vien had to put up with Diderot's snarky insinuations that her husband had been responsible for her best work.

Other women benefited from family connections in the art world. Vallayer-Coster's father was goldsmith to the king. Ducreux and Charpentier learned to draw from their fathers, both professional artists. Marie Éléonore Godefroid's entrée into the art world came through her grandmother, Marie-

Jacobe van Merle, who worked as the restorer of the royal painting collection.

Many women artists, including Pauline Auzou and Constance Marie Charpentier, extended their careers—and influence—by taking on female students. Just as the publicly displayed self-portrait served as a business card, announcing the sitter's profession while advertising her skills, scenes set in artists' studios helped legitimize women artists who did not enjoy official professional status. Marie-Amélie Cogniet's *Studio Interior* (2nd quarter 19th century) finds a child playing with an artist's lay figure. In Adrienne Marie Louise Grandpierre-Deverzy's view of the studio of her husband, history painter Abel de Pujol (1822; Fig. 1), female pupils employ gender-appropriate instructional aids like religious paintings and a clothed female model. A plaster cast of a nude male torso is playfully turned towards the wall. In a companion piece showing the studio during the hours reserved for male students, it is a nude female model who turns her back to us, preserving the artist's decorum rather than her own.

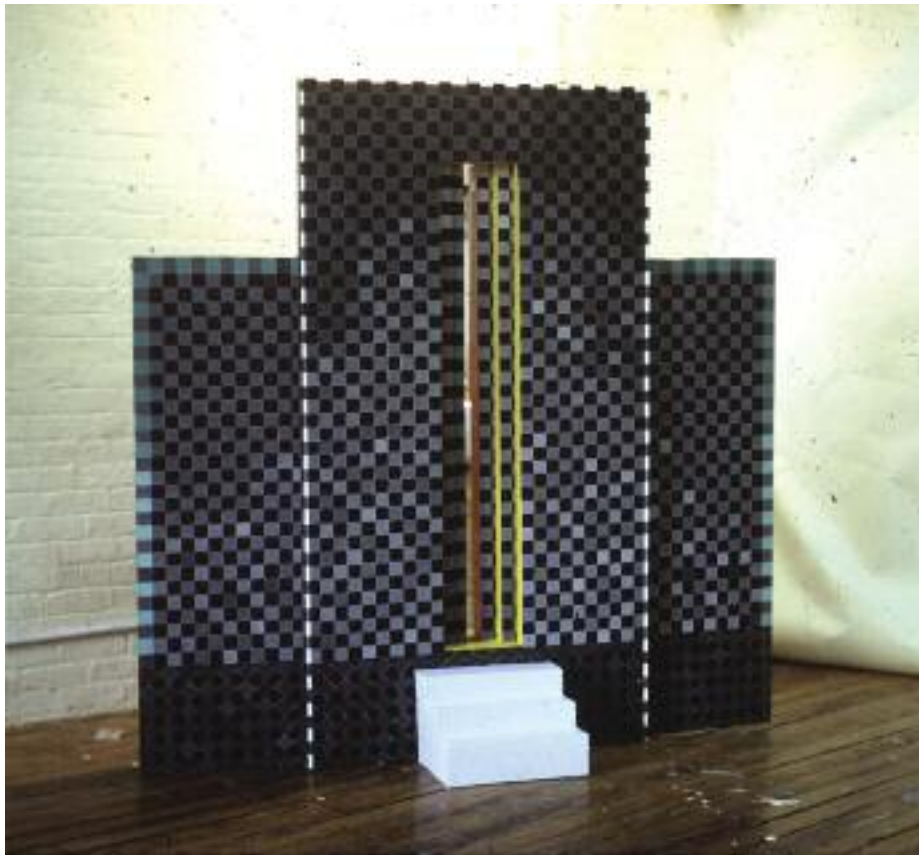
"Continuing to recover artists who have been lost to art history, and looking beyond the usual official sources, is essential to writing the much-needed histories of the art world that have remained hidden," Hyde proposes (41). Of all the artists represented in the catalog, Adèle Romany seems particularly ripe for rediscovery. The natural daughter of the marquis de Romance-Mesmon, she herself had three children by three different fathers, to whom she may or may not have been married. She is best known for her theatrical portraits of actors and fellow artists, but she supplemented her commissions by speculating on assignats during the Revolution. Another "hidden" figure, the sculptor Félicie de Fauveau, was born in Florence to French émigrés. When the family returned to France, the sight of sculptures defaced by Revolutionary iconoclasts inspired her to take up carving. A fervent royalist, she was imprisoned for seven months following the revolution of July 1830; her counter-revolutionary activities eventually forced her to return to Florence,

where she resumed her successful artistic career. Eulalie Morin, whose limpid portrait of 21-year-old Madame Recamier (4th quarter 18th century) graces the cover of the catalog, owned a partial interest in a Caribbean coffee plantation. Little else about her background has been discovered—so far.

There are a few notable omissions: Marie-Suzanne Roslin (née Giroust), Sophie Cheradame, the distaff side of the Saint-Aubin family. The checklist of seventy-seven works includes only two sculptors and one landscape artist, Louise Joséphine Sarazin de Belmont, though the catalog tells us that "a number of women" established themselves as landscape painters in the first half of the nineteenth century (110). Every artist is represented by at least one piece; however, even the most celebrated and prolific painters merit no more than three or four, and those not necessarily their best or most representative work. In some cases, one identifiable example is all that survives; Vien, as a member of the Académie, exhibited regularly, but most of her oeuvre has been lost.

While the resulting eclecticism is an accurate representation of the wide range of media and genres in which women artists worked, it also seems a bit random and uneven. A few additional A-list works and a slightly more focused checklist would have resulted in an exponentially stronger exhibition. Some of the catalog reproductions are of poor quality, and the design of the book does them no favors by employing awkward, unacknowledged cropping, too-tiny images, and full-page images placed side by side, so they appear to be a single canvas. But all three essays are compelling reading, and the artists' biographies will be an essential reference tool for many years to come—at least until every single one of these women is rediscovered and honored with a dedicated exhibition of her own. •

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Pl. 1 (left). Donna Dennis, *Egyptian Hotel* (1972), acrylic on Masonite®, wood, mirror, sandbag, 68 1/2" x 60" x 17".

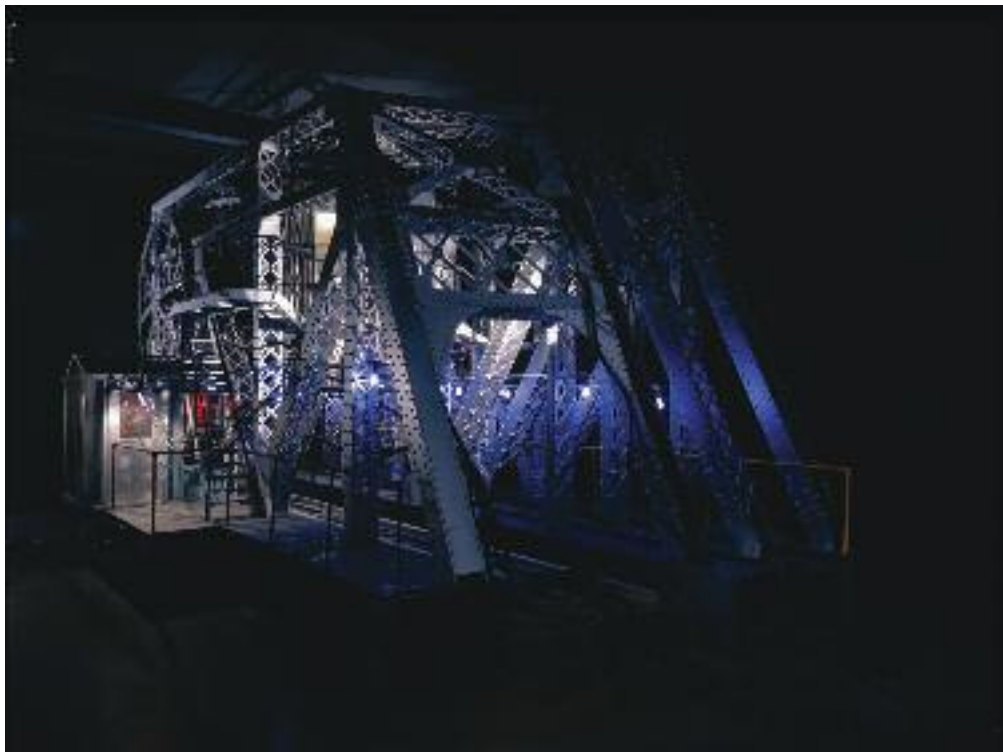
Pl. 2 (bottom left). Donna Dennis, *Two Stories with Porch (for Robert Cobuzio)* (1977–79), graphite and acrylic on Masonite®, wood, cellulose compound, glass, neon, plastic, metal, fabric, printed wallpaper, 126" x 120 1/2" x 85".
Photo: D. James Dee.

Pl. 3 (bottom right). Donna Dennis, *Tunnel Tower* (1979–80), graphite, enamel and acrylic on Masonite® and wood, glass, plastic pipe, cellulose compound, neon, incandescent and fluorescent lights, metal, foamcore, 138" x 56" x 62".
Collection Neuberger Museum, Purchase, NY.
Photo: D. James Dee.





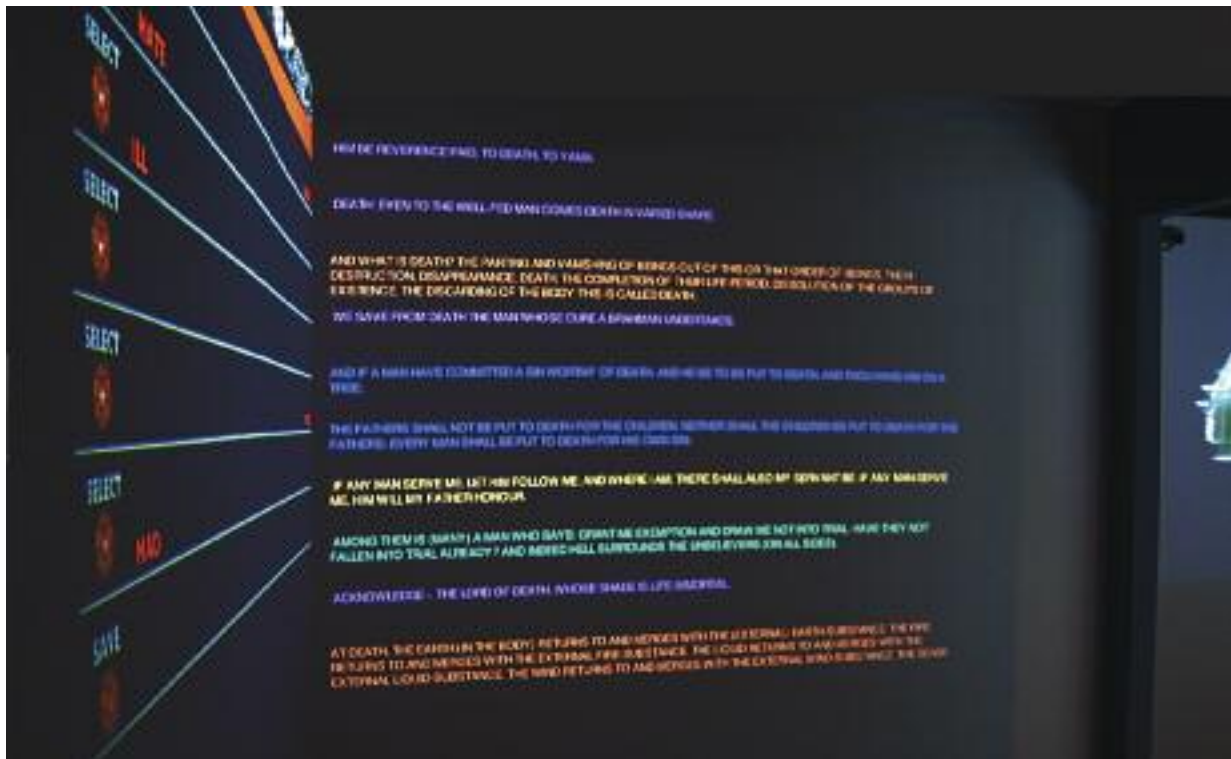
Pl. 4. Donna Dennis, *Deep Station* (1981–85), graphite, enamel, acrylic and charcoal on Masonite® and wood, plastic, cellulose compound, glass, metal, incandescent lights, sound. 144" x 240" x 288". Photo: Peter Mauss/ESTO.



Pl. 5. Donna Dennis, *BLUE BRIDGE/red shift (In memory of Helen Hogue Dennis)* (1991–93), enamel and acrylic on Masonite® and wood, glass, metal, cellulose compound, plastic, rubber, incandescent lights, sound, 144" x 168" x 288". Photo: Peter Mauss/ESTO.



Pl. 6. Donna Dennis, *Coney Night Maze* (1997–2009), acrylic and enamel on wood, glass, plastic, metal, grout, cellulose compound, incandescent lights, sound. Photo: Peter Mauss/ESTO.



Pl. 7. Nina Yankowitz, *Crossings* (2009), interactive installation with computers, infrared tracking wiimote, projectors, metal wand, variable size. Photo: Mauri Kaipainen.



Pl. 8. Nina Yankowitz, *Buried Treasures/Secrets in the Sciences* (2006), aluminum medical table, paper scroll, text and algorithmic projections, 12'4" x 6'4" x 7'2". Photo: Barry Holden.



Pl. 9. Nina Yankowitz, *CloudHouse* (2004), aluminum, glass, water mist, ultrasound generator, 8'4" x 6'4" x 7'2". Photo: Barry Holden.



Pl. 10. Tracey Emin,
My Bed (1998), mattress
linens, pillows, various objects,
31" x 83" x 92".
Photo: The Saatchi Gallery.

Pl. 11. Semiha Berksoy,
Bedroom (1994),
bed, piano, various
objects, size
unspecified.
Photo: Istanbul
Museum of Painting
and Sculpture Archive.



Pl. 12. Carol Hamoy, *Welcome to America* (1994), mixed media, size variable. Photo: Courtesy the artist.



Pl. 13. Carol Hamoy, *Women of Valor* (2011), mixed media, D. ca. 100". Courtesy the artist.



Pl. 14. Carol Hamoy, *Psalmsong* (2004), mixed media, ca. 25' x 18'. Courtesy the artist.



THE FLUIDITY OF GENDER

SCULPTURE
BY
Stein
LINDA STEIN

Currently at:
Alexandria Museum of Art, Alexandria, LA
September 21 - November 24, 2012

Next at:
Wenatchee Valley College, Wenatchee, WA
January 2 - March 14, 2013

The Fluidity of Gender: Sculpture by Linda Stein
is a 5-year touring exhibition/lecture/performance
traveling to more than twenty United States
museums and universities through 2015,
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HAVE ART: WILL TRAVEL INC.
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