

Jersey Women Artists Now:
**Contemporary
Visions**

Exhibition Dates:

March 6 - April 19, 2014

Allison Leigh, Curator

K.S.
Ernst

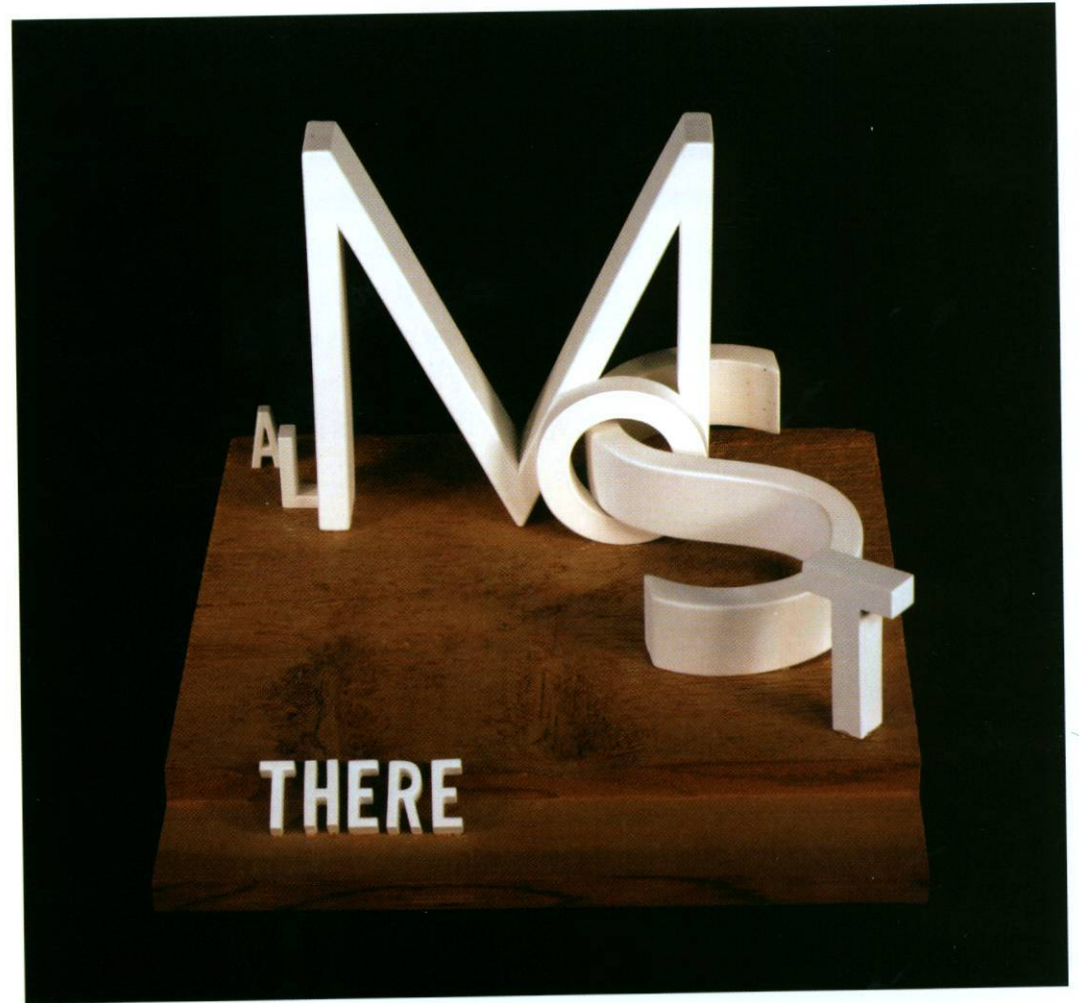
Almost there

1986

wood and ceramic letters

8" w x 6" h x 9" d

courtesy of K.S. Ernst



Almost
There

Jersey Women Artists Now

Allison Leigh, Guest Curator

"We are talking about a society in which there will be no roles other than those chosen or those earned.

We are really talking about humanism."

—Gloria Steinem¹

"Let us hope for the best and it may come, is my motto."

—Lilly Martin Spencer²

Questioning

How far have we come in the art world over the last 30 years? Did the developments brought about by feminism fundamentally change the situation for women artists in America? Or is there still work to be done in bringing about equality in the arts? In 1971 Linda Nochlin posited an incendiary question as the title to a now famous essay—"Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?"—and in so doing, she ushered in a new era in art history.³ Questions like these can be found in many of the leading catalogs, anthologies, and essays on art from the past several decades. The discipline of art history is now characterized by lines of feminist and gender-based inquiry and has undergone a wholesale shift in terms of methodological approaches to the examination of art works past and present. In many ways the feminist art revolution has been a process characterized by the continual asking of difficult questions and the opening of new areas of discourse and dialogue. Twentieth-century feminism acted as the great harbinger of query into the darkest recesses of society's unconscious tendencies; it forced stereotypes, injustices, and entrenched ideological boundaries and binaries out for examination and often destruction.

I open this essay with a series of questions in order to continue this lineage of feminist inquiry, because trying to answer these is vital to understanding the difficulties that face artists, academics, curators, dealers, and critics in the new millennium. In the wake of the previous century's feminist revolution, we have been left with both a series of fresh responsibilities and unprecedented opportunities. The art world currently stands at a moral and intellectual precipice. The question now facing our generation is—where do we go from here? A spate of news articles emerged in the first days of 2014 seeking to address the hinge position at which art now stands.⁴ Critics and market analysts alike turned introspective as they pondered the illicit tendencies coming to rule the art world and its champions. All this serves as recognition that we stand at an important nexus at this moment. This essay and the exhibition of women artists it accompanies serve to highlight the questions facing art today and ensure that the ideological shifts fought for by women in the generations that preceded ours are not taken for granted. We have come a long way, but our success is by no means guaranteed or stable.

I would be remiss, however, if I did not in this introductory section also clearly articulate that the questions I ask, and on a larger level this essay as a whole and the show it accompanies, bear the many signs of my own personal concerns both in terms of art and feminism. I make no claims to objectivity, but instead hope that viewers and readers will broadly search for my social and political agenda in the works I've chosen and the way I write about them—and use this as a springboard for examination of their own critical perspectives. I believe that my background and experiences as a woman, and in particular as a young woman in both academia and the art world, give me a dually privileged and problematic viewpoint for the issues this show examines. I have long espoused self-conscious moral rigor as a method of conducting art historical analysis—one that both engages with the poststructuralist trend within the humanities from the last 50 years to examine the underlying assumptions and power mechanisms within all levels of social discourse and that parallels feminism's own goal of uncovering hierarchies, stereotypes, and

assumptions and bringing them honestly into the light for transcendence. That being said, the questions I ask are by no means the only ones that could be posited, but they are a place to begin.

Women Artists | Female Artists—Terms of Reference

The exhibition *Jersey Women Artists Now: Contemporary Visions* is driven by several desires and motivations. At its core, it is a show dedicated to exploring what women's art practice looks like and is concerned with in this historical moment and in one specific locus of artistic production in the United States. As the title indicates, it centers around the works of artists who are either from the state of New Jersey or are currently working there. In the next section I will discuss the history of feminism and women's art in the Jersey region in order to make clear the reasons for examining this area in terms of women's art. But the other individual elements of the show's title—"Women Artists," "Now," and "Contemporary Visions"—are each indicative of key thematics that engage with the ideological history of feminism in art history. Each is in many ways fraught with meaning and importance and deserves a brief unpacking in this further introductory section. In line with the self-consciousness I indicated above, I will address each term of reference in turn here in turn in order to make my own intellectual standpoint clearer and guide viewers in terms of how to engage with the material the exhibition presents for the purposes of their own independent debate and discussion.

The "Women Artists" portion of the show's title may seem innocuous enough, but belies the wide bevy of choices that could have been used to indicate the same core element around which the show is organized.⁵ I use the phrase at the most basic level to indicate that this is a show about women artists and comprised solely of artworks by women. But why not choose "Female Artists"? Or "Women's Art"?⁶ At first sight, both would seem to serve the same purpose and convey a generally equivalent meaning. Part of the answer lies in the same lineage of art historical inquiry with which I already engaged in citing Nochlin's foundational essay on the multifarious reasons women have been kept from attaining the necessary opportunity and training required to become "great" artists throughout history. The title of that celebrated early feminist essay proved a benchmark in how to discuss the art made by women. In many ways, Nochlin's use of the phrase "women artists" in that title was influential in ways she could not have anticipated. My use of "Women Artists" in the title for the show thus seeks to continue the lineage of Nochlin and the many feminist scholars who have followed her.

And I am not alone. One only has to look at the major textbooks that have emerged in the forty years since Nochlin wrote her essay to see the effect her phraseology had on the development of the field. For my own course on "Women and Art" I have long used Wendy Slatkin's *Women Artists in History: From Antiquity to the Present*, first published in New Jersey in 1985 and now in its fourth edition. But there are many other textbooks on this subject, almost all of which use some iteration of "women artists" in their title: Cornelia Butler, Alexandra Schwartz, and Griselda Pollock's *Modern Women: Women Artists at The Museum of Modern Art* (2010), Debra N. Mancoff's *Danger! Women Artists at Work* (2012), Glenn Adamson, Anna C. Chave, and Robert Cozzolino's *The Female Gaze: Women Artists Making Their World* (January 2013), and the most recently published *The Reckoning: Women Artists of the New Millennium* by Eleanor Heartney, Helaine Posner, Nancy Princenthal and Sue Scott (September 2013).

Likewise, many of the major exhibitions of the last several decades have followed the trend. One important example is the *Mary H. Dana Women Artists Series*, a long-standing yearly exhibition devoted to women artists at Rutgers University's Institute for Women and Art—a project that has been ongoing since the first exhibition in 1971. Also relevant to this discussion is the recent exhibition *Elles: Women Artists from the Centre Pompidou, Paris*, which ran from October 11, 2012 through January 13, 2013 and featured works by 75 women artists created over the course of the twentieth century.⁷ In this sense, *Jersey Women Artists Now* comes in a long line of shows dedicated solely to the works of women artists. And these shows are still vital in that they fulfill a need in the art community for representation of women at a time when shows the world over are still dominated by male artists. In fact, the show will be presented at the same time as another exhibition that engages strongly with both a similar thematic and the lineage of feminism in art. Mary Birmingham and Katherine Murdock's co-curated *Women Choose Women Again*, which runs from January through April of 2014 at the Visual Arts Center of New Jersey, is directly inspired by a historically important exhibition of women artists that took place in 1973.

So on one hand, I use the specific wording "women artists" in a self-conscious manner to engage with the ancestry of feminist scholarship and curatorial work that has been so vital in the past half century. Tellingly, even the Internet has registered the trend and followed suit. If one performs a Google search for "female artists," the first result in the list that results is a link to the Wikipedia page on the subject—not incidentally the title of which as an encyclopedic entry is "Women Artists."

However, I do not intend simply to follow trends without probing their deeper meaning. So why not use “Female Artists”? Or “Women’s Art”? These other options are problematic for a number of reasons. The more logical modifier for “artist” might at first glance seem to be “female.” The term female denotes at the most basic level the sex of the human organism under discussion. But it also serves to anesthetize the subject, make it more clinically scientific and seemingly objective than is necessary in what is at deepest level a political stance as much as it is a semiotic one. Discussions of “female artists” lead quite quickly to talk of such misplaced conceptions as feminine art and female styles within art practice. Both notions have been hotly argued against by feminist art historians and artists alike and are at this point anathema in serious scholarship.

But if one calls to mind the case for the opposite sex this is not true. One often hears about the abundance of exhibitions (group and solo alike) devoted to “male artists.” But it would be strange to hear a discussion being carried out on the subject of the profusion of shows dedicated to “men artists.” So does this then demonstrate a double standard? Not exactly. If we were to use female as the modifier we would be robbing women artists of much of the very ground they so vigorously fought for over the past century. What “women artists” and “women’s art” both contain in usage is the idea that women’s art is something fundamentally different from that of their male counterparts.⁸ But not on the level of masculine versus feminine, but at the very level of existential and experiential embodiedness. If art is, at least in part, the externalizing of certain core, internal perceptive elements centered around vision and thought, and we accept as true that whether for biological or cultural reasons men and women’s experience in and of the world is fundamentally different, then we must also accept that there is such a thing as women’s as opposed to men’s art.⁹

The problem comes in this—experience, and therefore art (as the encapsulation and transmission of emotional/devotional/perceptive/cultural experience), has long been coded hierarchically masculine, but it wasn’t until the outset of the feminist and poststructuralist revolutions that the gendered bias of experience itself was uncovered and discussed. Thus it isn’t so much the difference between men’s art and women’s art or male artists and women artists, but rather Art versus women’s art and Artists versus women artists. The reason both “male artists” and “men artists” sound relatively odd as constructions whereas both “women artists” and “female artists” are not only logical but somewhat interchangeable is that for centuries the word “artists” didn’t need a modifier. If one was speaking of art or

artists one was always by default speaking about the art of men. Thus my use of “Jersey Women Artists” is not flippant, offhand, or simply slave to fashion and semiotic style, but rather loaded, weighted and fraught with centuries of problematic interchange and assumption. The words we use have the incendiary potential to display hidden biases and outworn tendencies for thinking. There is a politic being expressed even at the foundational level of the exhibition’s title. And indeed a politic is expressed in nearly every title of every book, essay, and show, whether their authors choose to admit it or not.

We use constructions like “female artists” or “women’s art” at our own peril. More than anything I am arguing here simply for self-examination about the words we use and the ideologies they carry—consciously or unconsciously. The phrase “women artists” allows us to carve out a space for understanding how experience itself can be understood as at least in part a gendered and culturally developed phenomenon, one not exclusively or even best understood as owing to any biological factor that could allow us to use the phrase “female art” with productive logic. Put most simply—we are born female, but we are made women. And we are not born making art. Art comes from life, from the act of living itself, it is a process and it is, like so much in life, something that is at least to some extent the result of learning. Therefore, if we are talking about the art of a specific gender, we can reasonably call it the work of women or men artists.

In the end it is all wrong. We simply can’t have it both ways. I long for a time when the phrase “women artists” and “women’s art” will fade away. When art can be Art and be understood as being composed by equal measures of works from both sexes. But we are not there yet. In the meantime, it would perhaps be best to start using a modifier for the art produced by men. Perhaps only in utilizing overly clunky descriptive terms will we realize the ridiculousness of needing to talk about them as categorically different or have exhibitions devoted solely to one sex while excluding the other. The latest statistics still show that women continue to be vastly underrepresented in galleries, museums, biennials, and art fairs.¹⁰ According to the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington D.C., while 51 percent of visual artists are women, only five percent of the art currently on display in U.S. museums is made by women. Similarly, while women earn more than half of the MFA degrees awarded in the U.S., only a third of gallery representation is women.

And many in the art community recognize these discrepancies. The art critic Jerry Saltz has long written pieces for *New York Magazine* decrying the exclusion of

women from the display of the Museum of Modern Art's permanent collection of painting and sculpture. According to Saltz's count, there were 400 works of art from the permanent collection on view in 2007 and only 14 were by women (a total of less than four percent).¹¹ Likewise, less than three percent of the artists in the Modern Art section of New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art are by women, but 83 percent of the nudes on view are female.¹² And the situation is not much different in terms of the history of art espoused by academia. The current edition of one of the leading art history survey textbooks used in university classrooms nationwide, H.W. Janson's *History of Art* has only 27 women artists represented in its pages. And that number is up from the zero women artists (out of 3,000) included in the text in the 1980s.¹³ Janson himself famously justified his actions in 1979: "I have not been able to find a woman artist who clearly belongs in a one-volume history of art."¹⁴ This kind of blatant sexism among male academics led feminists of the 1970s and 1980s to describe the field of art history as instead, art "his-story."

Statistics and writings like these prove without a doubt that there is still a real need for shows devoted exclusively to works of art created by women. Shows like this one seek to redress the imbalance, but are nonetheless still part of the problem. By treating the art of women as separate from works created by men, we do not allow them to be appraised on equal footing. And this is not a new idea or problem within gender studies discourse. In the now seminal proto-feminist piece of 1792 entitled *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley devoted an entire chapter to this problem: "Of the Pernicious Effects Which Arise from the Unnatural Distinctions Established in Society." A recent interview with Dave Hickey also revealed similar strong anti-group show aspirations. While Hickey was not speaking specifically about gender, he nonetheless makes a relevant argument in saying, "I have a big problem with group shows. If I could abolish group shows from museums and group crits from graduate schools, I would be happy. They are both modalities of social control. You work your butt off to get out of a pigeonhole so some curator or professor can fit you into a new one."¹⁵ Likewise, Jerry Saltz has called the lack of works by women on view at MoMA "not only a failure of the imagination and a moral emergency; it amounts to apartheid."¹⁶ I agree, but not exactly with how he meant it. I see a further deeply troubling segregation in what lies at the other end of the spectrum—from not enough works by women on view to the exclusionary vision that is all-women group shows. Exhibitions dedicated to women artists alone are an apartheid of their own, one that perpetuates keeping women separate while trying to make them equal.

So how do I make peace with the fact that I am proudly curating a show devoted to women artists while at the same time believing that these kinds of shows perpetuate gender-based division and grow inequality while seeking to end it? First, I recognize that we live in an unfair and often contradictory world. But that I would rather see the works of women artists on view than invisible, or worse—completely absent. I believe it is better to be present than missing or lost, even if one is showing up or being presented not at their absolute best. And I believe one must choose one's battles. I would rather show the tremendous works by these 18 women artists in an imperfect ideological setting than leave them unseen in the artists' studios. Growing the world where the phrase "women artists" sounds as odd as "men artists" demands putting the works of women on view for all to see. And eventually the strength of the works alone, without any thought to the names of the artists or their reproductive organs, will be what gains them exhibition space. Or so I desperately want to believe.

Contemporary and Now

So why the focus specifically on New Jersey? This region, and the state in particular, have an important feminist lineage of their own going back more than 200 years. For over a century, New Jersey has been among the states at the forefront of women's education. The first school for women in the state, the Gummere Academy in Burlington, New Jersey was founded in 1822.¹⁷ It was followed shortly thereafter by the establishment of another academy for women, St. Mary's Hall, which was also the first school founded on church principles in the United States.¹⁸ Evelyn College, the first women's college in New Jersey, was founded in Princeton in 1887 by the Reverend Joshua Hall McIlvaine, a Presbyterian minister, with the help of his wife and two daughters.¹⁹ Along these same lines, The New Jersey College for Women was founded in 1918 and was affiliated with Rutgers College, which it in turn became a part of in 1955 when the name was changed to Douglass College and it was recognized as the largest public women's college in the United States. All of these institutions granted opportunities for women to receive higher education at a time when it was controversial, putting New Jersey at the forefront of questions about women's equality throughout the history of the nation. Perhaps most interesting, New Jersey was also the first state in the nation to allow women to vote. Allowing limited women's suffrage for a brief period in the eighteenth century, Jersey women possessed this right to vote more than a century before the full Amendment was granted across the United States in 1920! Following the

Revolutionary War, New Jersey's only stipulation on general suffrage was that the voting citizen must own at least £50 in cash or property.²⁰ So for more than 30 years, single women with property took an active part in New Jersey elections. Unfortunately, in 1807 the law was revised to exclude women when their disenfranchisement was justified as protecting women from the crude world of politics.²¹

In terms of art, New Jersey also played a prominent role in the history of women's professionalization as artists.²² Some of the nation's first women artists came from the region—including the wax sculptor Rachel Lovell Wells (1735–1796) and two French female expatriates, one the watercolorist Baroness Hyde de Neuville (1761?–1849), who arrived in New Jersey from France with her husband in 1807 and produced some of the earliest scenes of Native American life, and the other a painter and draftsman named Charlotte Bonaparte (1802–1839). A relative of Napoleon, she lived in New Jersey for only three years before returning to Europe. Several other Jersey women artists deserve mention. Perhaps the most famous American woman artist of the middle of the nineteenth century, Lilly Martin Spencer (1822–1902) was not born in the state, but left her native Ohio to settle in Newark, where she spent most of her adult life. Spencer was one of the most prominent American artists of the nineteenth century and is exceptional for having supported her family through her career while her husband managed the household.²³ Also of note, her mother belonged to the Utopian group known as the Fourierists, which supported communal living as a way to provide child care so that women could have free time. One such experiment in communal living was set up in Monmouth County, New Jersey. Known as the North American Phalanx, it lasted from 1843 to 1856, and women in this community did possess a large degree of economic autonomy and independence for the time.²⁴ Also prominent in the realm of experiments in communal living and women's art, the late nineteenth century Quaker artist Carrie Cook Sanborn (life dates unknown) founded the Cedars Art Colony in Point Pleasant Beach, New Jersey. Sanborn presided over the art colony, which in its history hosted many prominent artists and writers.

In the twentieth century, several important events took place in New Jersey that would help usher in the feminist revolution in art. In 1971, Joan Snyder established the aforementioned Mary H. Dana Women Artists Series at Douglass College (then a part of Rutgers University as described above). The Series was one of the first exhibitions of its kind in the U.S. and broke new ground in its exclusive dedication

to women artists. Predating the founding of *Womanhouse* in California in 1972 as well as the founding of A.I.R. Gallery and SoHo 20, the Series provided a venue for women artists to interact with one another and to exhibit. This proved a direct challenge to the status quo, since women's artworks were largely not shown in mainstream galleries at the time.²⁵ To this day it remains the longest-running continuous series of exhibitions in the United States dedicated to women artists and is an important model for *Jersey Women Artists Now*.

Also run out of New Jersey, the Institute for Women and Art (IWA), which hosts the Series and is a unit of Rutgers University, continues to be a leader in establishing equality for all women artists through educational programming, exhibitions, and a commitment to documentation and audience development. An offshoot of the IWA, The Feminist Art Project, is also based at Rutgers and functions as an international collaborative dedicated to promoting the aesthetic, intellectual, and political impact of women on the visual arts. The Feminist Art Project promotes diverse feminist art events, education, and publications through its website calendar and facilitates regional networking and program development both in the U.S. and internationally. New Jersey is also home to a number of arts organizations dedicated to serving men and women in the visual arts who are underrepresented in the contemporary art world and art market. In organizing this exhibition, I was greatly helped by the existence of several of these organizations, including the Arts Council of Princeton, The Creative Women's Collective, Discover Jersey Arts, the Princeton Artists Alliance, and the Exhibitor's Co-Op. I hope this brief description of the history of women artists in New Jersey helps to make clear what an important locus for creative activity the state has been in the course of the nation's history. Jersey women artists have been and continue to be at the forefront of feminist art practice, and this show engages with the history of women artists and feminist thinkers who have played such a prominent role in the region's history.

The other final elements of the show's title also deserve a brief explanation to bring this section to a close. Like my choice of the phrase "Women Artists," the final two elements in the title—"Now" and "Contemporary Visions"—were carefully chosen to engage with the history of art and feminism. At first glance the use of both together may seem repetitive, as though they express nearly the same information. But by doubling the emphasis on the present moment I hoped to underscore several key themes of the show. First, by situating the exhibition in its absolute moment, I reiterate the fact that the circumstances that give rise to

the need for a show like this one are, as I explored in the previous section, current but hopefully on the wane. *Jersey Women Artists Now* contains within it the deep emphasis that this show is about what women artists in New Jersey are creating in this moment, but also creates a space for future shows that could critically engage with it as a model for exposition and as a product of a once-dire, but now past need.

Second, by doubling the emphasis on contemporaneity, I seek to move definitively beyond the two central problems currently facing feminism in terms of (1) terminology and (2) chronology. We have entered an era in the feminist movement where there is a great deal of vacillation as to what to call the period in order to designate it chronologically. The term "first-wave feminism" has usually been ascribed to the pioneering women who fought for women's suffrage in the 1910s. Then "second-wave feminism" marks the rise of the feminist revolution that took place in the 1960s and 70s, followed by a "third wave" in the 1980s and 90s.²⁶ But even within this structure, the terms are sometimes used differently by scholars and critics in various fields. Though not as common, some theorists designate first-wave feminism as that which took place alongside the civil rights movement in the 1960s. Then second-wave feminism designates the changes the movement underwent in the 1980s and 90s. Both systems of demarcation are problematic in that neither allows for a way to easily accommodate future versions of feminism. Are we now in the fourth or fifth wave? In another century will we be talking about twelfth-wave feminists? At what point does such a chronology become arbitrary and uselessly demarcating? Along these same lines, there is a great deal of debate about how useful "feminism" itself is as a term anymore. Most texts of the last decade have begun using the construction "post-feminism" to describe the current situation, though scholars widely disparage the significance of such an additional stipulation. The tagging on of the prefix "post-" has become a widely proliferated (and hotly criticized) point of contention in the humanities. Just a few examples of its widely varying usage include: postmodernism, post-structuralism, post-colonialism, post-blackness, Post-Impressionism, Post-Soviet, and so forth. As a result, its meaning-value is often called into question.

And what would it even mean for us to have entered a "post-feminist era? If the addition of the prefix "post" is generally understood as indicating "after," what would it mean for us to be living in the "after feminism" era? In asking groups of my students in courses on Women and Art about their stance on using this word, well over half of every group responds that they would not call themselves "feminists."²⁷

And this seems to be largely true in the wider population as well. The numbers for women who identify themselves as "feminists" seem to be quickly declining. According to one study, the most recent numbers show the percentage has dropped to 23 percent. So if the word "feminism" has fallen out of fashion, or worse, become associated with politics that are considered outdated and/or tainted by negative associations, then it makes sense that we have indeed entered an era of "post-feminism."²⁸ But I also agree with Caitlin Moran, whose recent manifesto on being a woman today, entitled *How to Be a Woman*, issues a call to return to the use of this word as a mode of self-identification: "We need to reclaim the word 'feminism.' We need the word 'feminism' back real bad. When statistics come in saying that only 29 percent of American women would describe themselves as feminist—and only 42 percent of British women—I used to think, What do you think feminism IS, ladies? What part of 'liberation for women' is not for you? Is it freedom to vote? The right not to be owned by the man you marry? The campaign for equal pay?"²⁹

Thus my double use of the words "now" and "contemporary" in the show's title seek to work against these problems and find ground above the largely arbitrary discourse on terminology and chronology. I refuse to give in to this kind of nostalgia. We are NOW. And art is NOW even more so than most endeavors. It speaks to its moment. It is the here and the instant via material presence—against waves, beyond terms, above movements and styles. It will be the task of historians to decide what to call the eras we are currently living through. This exhibition seeks to transcend the current problems that beleaguer feminism, while still taking a feminist stance. This exhibition contains works by women artists who were instrumental from the "first" feminist generation on, with the key designation that they all also continue to work today. It is comprised of works by women like Joan Snyder and Joyce Kozloff, who are well established in their careers and who rose to prominence in the 1970s and 1980s, but also by those like Lizz Andronaco, who are just beginning. The women's art movement—all of its generations and waves of participants—must in this moment begin finding a way out of the politics of its own discourse and return to solving the problems that still linger. Addressing dilemmas of terminology and chronology are not real actionable problems. But the fact that women represent only 25 percent of recent solo shows in prominent New York galleries—that is a problem for feminism today and a crisis which this show seeks to address by bringing several generations of women artists together in one space. The task for "fourth-wave feminists" or "fifth-wave post-feminists" or whatever we should be called is to address and correct these dismal numbers. There are still many issues, both in the art world and beyond, to be faced by those who still man the battle lines of

Feminism with a capital F. And who use this F-word to describe themselves even when we are told it is no longer hip or fashionable, even when the movement itself would call us too late in coming to the table.

This is why I have added the words “Almost There” to the title of this essay. These words appear in the 1986 work by K.S. Ernst, which figures prominently in the show (see plate facing the title page for this essay). And they make an important point. We are indeed ALMOST there. But we, as women, have been almost there for too long now. Ernst’s work is dated 1986. How far have women artists come in the almost three decades since this work’s creation? This is the question. And it leads me to one last point that needs to be made regarding the exhibition’s title. The clause that comes after the colon in the title—“Contemporary Visions”—has a dual meaning. On one hand it refers to the multifarious artistic visions that comprise the exhibition. Each of these women possesses and demonstrates a strong personal vision, and this is part of what makes their work so fascinating to look at in the context of a group presentation. But the plurality of that word and of their voices contains within it what I believe is the most useful way to think of feminism and gendered experience in the twenty-first century—as plural. I believe the problem in terms of feminism lies not in the word itself, but in the lack of inclusion contained in its singularity. There may be no such thing as “feminism” today, but the “post-” prefix does nothing to help the situation. Instead, we might benefit from thinking in terms of greater plurals. I may not meet many self-professed feminists, but I do see “feminisms” abounding. As much as we can talk about the plurality of artistic vision, we can and should talk about the plurality of feminist positions, stances, and viewpoints. “Contemporary Visions” is meant to draw in and create a space that parallels the diverse experiences of the “Women Artists” whose work comprises not just this show, but the larger art world as it exists now.

Categorization

So now that the goals of the show have been outlined and the history with which the exhibition engages both in terms of feminism and art history explored, let us turn to the works themselves. I begin with another series of questions that will serve to bracket the discussion—Is there such a thing as the existence of a style among women artists? Or subjects and themes specific to women’s art practice? Are there domains of creative experience which demarcate the sexes? The answer at least in terms of past practice would seem to be yes. For several decades, prominent exhibitions and textbooks on women artists have found categorization to be a useful mode for engagement with women’s art.

One of the most important exhibitions of the last 10 years, *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, operated under a rubric of organization by major themes based on media, geography, formal concerns, collective aesthetic, and political impulses. Curated in 2007 by Connie Butler for the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, *WACK!* organized the work of 120 artists from around the world into six major thematic categories: Abstraction, Body as Medium, Family Stories, Gender Performance, Knowledge as Power, and Making Art History. Similarly, the exhibition *A Complex Weave: Women and Identity in Contemporary Art*, which took place in 2009 at the Rutgers-Camden Center for the Arts in New Jersey, also utilized the categorization model, despite the fact that it was a show that focused on a much smaller selection of women. The works by 16 women artists were divided according to five themes and sub-themes: Image and Text (Superimpositions), Complex Geographies (Hybrids), the Female Body (Pushing the Boundaries), Childhood and Family (Relationships), and Accessories (Clothing and Related Objects).

Textbooks too have utilized this model. The just-published text, *The Reckoning: Women Artists of the New Millennium*, Eleanor Heartney, Helaine Posner, Nancy Princenthal, and Sue Scott’s follow-up volume to the widely cited text *After the Revolution: Women Who Transformed Contemporary Art*, takes a different tactic than their first book on women artists. According to the authors, “Rather than attempting an encyclopedic survey, we have organized *The Reckoning* around four themes that, we feel, capture significant impulses in artwork by younger women.”³⁰ The themes that the authors center their discussions around are: Bad Girls, Spellbound, Domestic Disturbances, and History Lessons. In a less formal way, feminist theorists have for decades described central categories for women’s art practice. In 1975, Lucy Lippard described the “recurring motifs” that she saw gaining prominence in women’s work: abstracted sexuality (circles, eggs, boxes), a preoccupation with the body and body-like materials, and a fragmentary, nonlinear approach that was different from their male counterparts.³¹ While this is by no means a comprehensive list of the instances when categorization has been utilized to conceptualize and understand women’s art practice from the last 50 years, it is a representative sampling.

In line with this method, *Jersey Women Artists Now* is an exhibition that also can be approached from the standpoint of categorization. I proceed, however, with much the same tentative and qualified outlook as the authors of *The Reckoning*, who said: “We readily acknowledge that many important artists do not fit comfortably within these categories. However, we feel they allowed us to map out a set of revealing relationships among women, culture, and world.”³² There is no system

of categorization that will ever perfectly contain all the realms of women's art in the twenty-first century (or in any time period for that matter). And an over-emphasis on delineating groupings for art and artists can often produce negative side effects, making history and criticism little more than systems for creating exclusivity to the detriment of avant-garde artists and their outlying practices. But while categorization may be less than perfect, I maintain that the mode does still possess usefulness for discussion and analysis. So while the exhibition itself is not organized around categories, I will utilize them in this essay to reveal relationships that may otherwise not be apparent. The exhibition quite intentionally mixes the works so as to resist categories imposed by my method of arrangement. Even works by the same artist have often purposefully not been kept together so as to defy systemization. I believe arranging the works by formal qualities rather than subject or theme in the exhibition space will allow viewers to formulate their own parameters for classification and make connections among the works that innovate beyond my viewpoint.

The works that comprise this show cluster around five central categories in terms of their thematic content and subject matter. Most simply stated these are: The Body, Nature, Time and Place, and Experience. I will nuance these groupings to a larger extent in the discussion which follows, but it is interesting to point out the extent to which they run parallel to the categories engaged with in the other shows and texts described above. The most recurring category and the site of artistic production most noted by art historians among women in the last 30 years has been "the body." In almost every text or exhibition, the body as a subject is a central fixture. It featured in three of the four examples cited above under various guises: *The Female Body (A Complex Weave)*, a "preoccupation with the body and body-like materials" (Lippard), and *Body as Medium (WACK!)*. Some notion of place has also figured prominently in many recent exhibitions on women artists. Running parallel to the idea expressed above regarding the importance of understanding the plurality (and reality) of feminisms, there is a new tendency within the arts to think of feminisms as plural in terms of globalism as well. As a reflection of this, in 2007 the Brooklyn Museum presented the exhibition *Global Feminisms*, a show dedicated to feminist art from 1990 to the present and predicated on understanding feminism with an emphasis on the role of place.³³

Other dynamics for these categories will be discussed in the sections devoted to each below. I would encourage readers and viewers to actively draw out places where there is cross-fertilization among the categories and places where they

overlap or draw on the same material themes. In many ways the category of "The Body" could be subsumed within a larger category devoted to "Nature," but I draw a distinction between them that I believe is important to understanding new ways women artists are engaging with potentially problematic material. Likewise, the categories I've constructed often allow for a great deal of slippage to occur between them. A work I may address in terms of its reliance on natural elements may just as well contain ideas that would have allowed it to be productively included in the "Time" category or vice versa. I invite these new interpretations and hope that the categories only serve to illuminate underlying or unconscious ideas and deep structures within the works, as opposed to categorically pinning down or hemming in the meanings they produce on different viewers.

THE BODY

In her survey text on women artists from antiquity to the present, Wendy Slatkin states, "Since the 1970s, a significant group of works both in performance and in representations, that is, paintings and photographs, has been focused around issues crucial to the female body."³⁴ Indeed, no other single source of subject matter would seem to have more empowered or motivated women artists than their own bodies.³⁵ Across media and throughout the last several decades and continuing without sign of abatement even today, women's art has been focused on representing and (re)interpreting the bodies of women.³⁶ In part, this reflects a similar trend in theoretical debates across the humanities to reexamine the body and its status within culture. Discourse on the use of body imagery within women's art has often centered on the nude as a particular locus of creative activity. In this exhibition, several works feature the female body in prominent ways, whether as primary subject matter or metaphorical referent. And indeed the nude as a sub-category for the body also plays a role in *Jersey Women Artists Now*.

There are two definitive female nudes in the exhibition—Lizz Andronaco's *Venus* (PL1) and Grace Graupe-Pillard's *Self Portrait as a Blonde* (PL 2)—and both are less than traditional in terms of their portrayal of the female body. Andronaco's take on the Venus prototype, for so many centuries a mainstay of the male artist's repertoire, presents the subject as unhinged and sliding off the very board which attempts to ground it. Her reclining Venus is not strictly representational or figurative; she utilizes color and line for expressive rather than strictly delineative formal purposes. But even more so, Andronaco has abstracted the body through its sheer tumescence. Breasts and thighs, shoulders and hips—all spill out beyond the normal bounds of

the frame as they slip too beyond the edge of rational epidermal limits. Evoking at once the monstrous bodies of Willem de Kooning's "Woman" series but also the hyperbolic realm of Jenny Saville's paintings of female obesity and the abstraction and eroticism of Cecily Brown, Andronaco seeks to, in her own words, "make the grotesque beautiful" and in so doing explore issues pertinent to female identity and sexuality.³⁷

Graupe-Pillard's large canvas self-portrait also addresses identity and issues of female sexuality, but with different emphasis. Where Andronaco's work engages via painterly abstraction with the ubiquity of the male artist's view of the eroticized female body in the history of art over the last five hundred years, Graupe-Pillard brings to the fore the nude body, but here thoroughly realistic in its portrayal. In representing on a monumental scale the un-idealized nude body of a woman in her fifties, Graupe-Pillard unravels our expectations for youth and beauty when encountering depictions of female nudity. As Lisa Tickner argued in 1978, the body has been a crucial site for feminist artistic intervention because "it represented all that was perceived to be degrading in the erotic tradition of western art and yet, at the same time, it offered a means of articulating a specifically female experience."³⁸ And Graupe-Pillard follows in these footsteps as she reclaims herself from the degradation normally associated with both the nude and our society's ageism. The work on view is only one section of a triptych, which altogether becomes almost sculptural in the provision of a three-dimensional view of the body from multiple primary angles. Grace's body as she presents it is erotically charged and beautiful, despite its imperfections. The glaring and unmodulated red background combines with the harsh yellow of the blonde wig and green frame of the cheap sunglasses to produce an uncanny effect, but one that is oddly not alienating. The result is instead surreal while maintaining a kind of poignancy not usually associated with the dreamlike quality of this style. The nude here is dignified, but at the same time comical. Grace undoes and remakes our notions of the artist by evacuating the sense of seriousness that has for so long been a sign of the nude in both feminist's and male artist's practice. At root, both women reclaim the body and give agency back to the women represented, providing a refreshing take on how the body can be refigured by women artists and to what purposes. These artists seem to have moved beyond the battle with the body that has characterized so much work by women artists since the 1990s.

The body is used for other purposes and across a range of media by other artists in the show as well. Several sculptors engage with the body—from Pat Feeney Murrell's life-size body casts constructed out of hand-made paper (PLATE 3) to Nancy Cohen's vaguely anthropomorphic mixed media pieces (PLATE 4). In these, the body is shown as remaining a source of inspiration for artists working in three-dimensional realms. Murrell's *remains VIII* presents a haunting image of the body evacuated but still charged with emotion. This work evokes the bodies frozen in death and uncovered at sites like Pompeii and Herculaneum, but also moves beyond these associations to draw on positions and poses redolent of family and the maternal embrace. Arms press to chest in a motion of empty cradling and allow the viewer to create a narrative for this figure melting into or emerging out of the ground. The ashy gray of the flax paper and the emphasis on emptiness brought



Figure 1

K.S. Ernst
Rough Cut Woman
2013

Wooden Letters, Acrylic Paint, Stone Base

19"h x 12.5"w x 10"d

Courtesy of K.S. Ernst

about by the gaping hole where the head should be make her works viscerally effective. And again, like Graupe-Pillard's work, a sensation of the uncanny is induced as these artists play on the familiar while disturbing the comfort inherent in accepting what we see as known. Nancy Cohen's *Fleshed Out* gives a more abstracted view of the same section of the body—ribs, heart, veins, thighs, and viscera are all suggested in this sculpture. This headless torso plays on the viewer's imaginative fantasies regarding the internal parts of our structural bodies; all present the body in a state of some bizarre but beautiful metamorphosis.

Even a work like K.S. Ernst's *Rough Cut Woman* (Figure 1—thumbnail) which is so heavily language and text based as to seem not relevant to a discussion of the body, evokes its form none the less. The doubling out of the letters "A" and "N" are reminiscent of two legs, as is the "M" for hips, the "O" for the belly, and the top of the "W" for shoulders. *Woman* can even be read as abstractly erotic in its suggestion of various

female erogenous zones—the dip in the center part of the letter “M” evokes the female *mons pubis*, the “O” the belly button, and the bottom two clefs of the “W” downturned breasts. Similar evocative shapes can be found across the exhibition, regardless of size of work or media. Hearts can be seen present in Joan Snyder’s deeply affecting (and also textual) *My Work* (PLATE 5) as well as in Joyce Kozloff’s tondo *Descartes’ Heart* (PLATE 6). The former work, like Ernst’s, also evokes on multiple erotic levels—the heart at the center of the work and the drops of blood scattered around it double as the vulva. Snyder’s work in this sense engages with a range of depictions in the history of art, from Courbet’s infamous *Origin of the World* from 1866 to works now associated with the feminist canon—Georgia O’Keeffe’s large-scale flower paintings from the 1920s and Judy Chicago’s *The Dinner Party* of 1979. But as opposed to the project of intense female empowerment that characterized the evocation of the vulva in particular for feminist artists in the 1970s and 1980s and their desire “to transform the female sex from a locus of objectification to a powerful sign of subjectivity,”³⁹ Snyder and Ernst are in these works less political and more personal. They evoke this charged synecdoche of the female body, but less to will female empowerment via the locus of pleasure, and more as a means of exploration. In *Woman* and *My Work*, it is as though the body (or body parts) shown are a part of the soul’s journey; they must be pictured because they are the site of experience—places of pain, or fear, or more simply presence.

The body appears transmuted as well in other ways across works in the exhibition. Hannah Fink’s various iterations of women’s shoes, *Glassy* (PLATE 7), finely modeled from plastic, wire, wood, encaustic, and more, all engage with a similar synecdochic metaphor—the shoe stands for the foot which in turn stands for the entire body. But these are not just any shoes, they are women’s heels. And they are not pairs, but rather lone oddities—singular presences that evoke their missing other half as much as they call to mind the absence of a body to fill them. Fink’s works in this sense return us to the dynamic of Murrell’s empty body casts—made from and for the body that once inhabited them, but never to be occupied again. These women artists’ relationship to the body seems more to be one of observation. As O’Keeffe famously said, “I feel that there is something unexplored about woman that only a woman can explore—Men have done all they can do about it.”⁴⁰ So have women arrived at a place where we are fascinated by our own material presence? Where we are now examining the accoutrements of what makes us substantively experiential in the world? No longer in the space of reclaiming our own bodies from patriarchal modes of representation, no longer walking the tightrope of subjectivity versus objectivity, but now fully inhabited and embodied—phenomenologists of our

own internal and external terrain. If so, and this is what I believe these Jersey women artists’ engagement with the body as subject matter and theme reveals, then this bodes well not only for feminism, but for the art of the remainder of this century as well.

NATURE

Running parallel with many of these artists’ emphasis on the body is an interest in the natural world. While it can of course be argued (and rightly so) that the human body is a part of nature, I draw them as separate categories because they are used to different effect in the art on view in the exhibition. Women artists’ engagement with nature has long been fraught with problems in the history of art as a result of centuries worth of patriarchal discourse associating women and their bodies with natural phenomena. Women have long been believed to be more closely related to the rhythms of nature and thus women artists have often avoided the subject out of fear of association with stereotypes that were long used to keep women from standing on equal footing with men.⁴¹ Because art belongs so firmly to the realm of culture as opposed to nature, professional women artists have had to carve out a space against these long-ingrained stereotypical notions to be taken seriously in a domain considered “foreign” to their natures.⁴² Thus the number of works in this exhibition showing women engaging with natural subjects, themes and materials demonstrates an important turning point happening in this second decade of the twenty-first century.

Works like Leah Tomaino’s *Dear Artist* (PLATE 8) and Nancy Ori’s *Faces in Nature 1* (Figure 2—thumbnail) demonstrate a direct engagement with the natural world, specifically trees, which is both refreshing aesthetically and deeply meaningful. Tomaino devised a mode of recycling past emotional material to constitute the ground and medium of the work itself and in so doing makes a deeply personal



Figure 2

Nancy Ori
Faces in Nature 1
 2013
 Archival Inkjet
 14" x 11"
 Courtesy of Nancy Ori



Figure 3

Nomi Waksberg
First Blossom (Anthurium Erotica)
 2004/2013
 Pigment Print/Archival Paper, Edition of 5
 19.75" x 19.75"
 Collection of the Artist

statement about her experience as a young female artist in the New Jersey art world. The branches of the blossoming tree are painted on top of rejection letters Tomaino received from approximately 40 galleries. The letters and the branches stretch across the viewer's space—on one level drawing a parallel between the material origin of the sheets of paper from trees themselves, but then also symbolizing the growth of the artist herself—her blossoming from the very rejection that drives the struggle to find recognition. Tomaino describes the process: "I am interested in the concept that the bags [and letters] started out as trees and then were made into paper which was torn and collaged into an image of the natural world, which in itself provided the required inspiration and energy. My works are personal metaphors of my spirituality-conscious [sic] and direct affirmations of life after death, death after life, and life within death." Thus her works in their evocation

of the cycles of the natural world also call to mind the process of life itself—as a microcosm of the creative act.

Nancy Ori's work too carries a double meaning. On one hand an astounding close-up photograph of tree roots in high-resolution focus, *Faces in Nature 1* is also, as the title suggests, a visual evocation of the human face. Like Ernst's anthropomorphosized letters, Ori's careful capturing of "found" natural circumstances doubles the meaning of the work—allowing the viewer to see themselves in everything around them and, on a larger level, positing a breakdown for the walls between nature and culture or art and life. Similarly, Nomi Waksberg's *First Blossom (Anthurium Erotica)* (Figure 3 - thumbnail) plays on the mind's vacillation between appreciating the waxy, high-pitched color and luminosity of the flowering plant and the evocation of the erect phallus that it so closely mimics. Like Snyder's *My Work*, Waksberg's photograph engages with the long lineage of erotic visual double entendres, but in this instance, largely without the intervention of the artist's hand. Of course,

Waksberg as the photographer chose the angle at which to capture this plant and may even have arranged it to a certain extent, but the form and the double evocation it presents are not due to the manipulation of the artist's hand. This pink flower is as it is found in nature and would look as it does regardless of the artist's presence. Perhaps this is why in her artist statement Waksberg chose three quotes to sum up her point of view:

"Art is not what you see, but what you make others see."—Edgar Degas
 "Art is not what you see, but what you make others see."—Georgia O'Keeffe
 "Art is not what you see, but what you make others see."—Nomi Waksberg

Also interested in the natural world as a source of creative inspiration, Dannielle Mick creates pastel landscapes (PLATE 9) that transfigure swaths of the New Jersey countryside into astoundingly beautiful and quiet abstract realms of color. With all the majesty of Mark Rothko's color-field paintings, but at one-tenth the size, Mick's works' power comes in part from the intensity of the facture as she captures the atmospheric effects near Lake Parsippany. The colors are blended and worked in these small pieces by the hand of the artist, underscoring the presence of Mick herself as a potent force in the creation of images. Without intervening implement, she creates outside the bounds of painting's phallic reliance on the brush. Mick is able to create images in which art and nature are drawn almost inextricably close together, but without the fear that kept women artists from too closely associating themselves with nature for so many centuries.



Figure 4

Jennifer Cadoff's *Rain # 3* (Figure 4 - thumbnail) and Giovanna Cecchetti's *Fire Melts Metal* (PLATE 10) also perform a similar feat but take the abstraction of natural forms to new heights. Both

Jennifer Cadoff
Rain #3
 2012
 Ink on Watercolor Paper
 28" x 36"
 Courtesy of Jennifer Cadoff

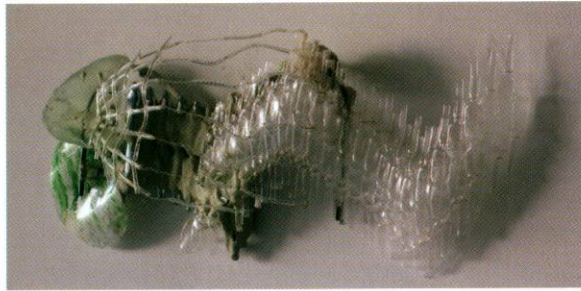


Figure 5

Nancy Cohen
Amphicron
2010

Metal, Resin, Glass and Monofilament

12" x 24" x 6"

Nancy Cohen, Courtesy of Accola Griefen Gallery

evocation. From the crustacean-like transformation of Nancy Cohen's sculpture *Amphicron* (Figure 5—thumbnail) to the hyper-ample nudes of Andronaco, these women artists manage to evoke the body and nature without slipping into stereotypical associations with fecundity, fertility, and procreation. There is sex here; the erotic is present, but as personal, as experiential, as outside the constraints of society's expectations. Nature rules; but nature here is neither female nor feminine, but rather simply beautiful. Nature is here, but like the body it is made quiet; it is aestheticized. The natural world is in these works meaningful and made for contemplation, but not political.

TIME and PLACE

The core themes of time and place as situational markers are also of central importance in many of the works on view in this exhibition. Both are offshoots of the categories just discussed. They grow out of the experience of the body as the artist's perceptive home and nature as the locus of the body's habitat for experience. Time figures especially prominently in the paintings of Lauren Ennist, whose *Triangle: Lower Right Corner* (PLATE 11) is a focused study of at once intense focus and complete distraction. Like Edouard Manet, who was hailed for his representations of aloof absence in the nineteenth century and thus called "the painter of modern life," Ennist uses the medium of painting to heighten the

artists challenge the bounds of depiction by trying to depict natural forces and circumstances that are nearly impossible to illustrate. From the interaction of metal and fire in Cecchetti's piece to the intricate delineation of raindrops in Cadoff's, these women artists unabashedly tackle the essence of their subjects from a phenomenological standpoint. Calling on line and color to evoke events of nature's splendor, but not in a gendered way, none of these women artists engaging with nature as their subject and inspiration fall into the trap of maternal

viewers' sense of their own alienation from the world around them and from themselves. Time unfolds for the figures she depicts in a continuum of sameness. Ennist describes her works as being charged with the strain of time and action as it impinges on the body perceptively: "I am tensely aware of people, and experience them through their overt actions as well as subtle nuances... I live in the modern, industrialized framework of New Jersey... Due to this influence, I choose to push figures close to the canvas surface..." Like Murrell, Ennist recognizes something of the pain of daily existence and represents the body as the vehicle for the effort involved in simply being.

Time is also a driving force in Joan Snyder's *Spring Eternal* (Figure 6 - thumbnail) and Nomi Waksberg's *Twenty Years* (PLATE 12). Both works visually hinge on the proliferation of life's material accumulation. The sheer weight of materials seems to be visually both fixed and sliding off the linen ground in Snyder's work. Time is indicated in the title – on one hand the rebirth and renewal of spring and on the other prolongation and infinity. Their fixity mirrors the drips of paint all around them—drips which belie movement and are thus the ultimate signs of movement now stilled by time. Waksberg's photograph too is characterized by the accumulation wrought by time. In her photograph a stack of papers interspersed with digital media cannot be contained even by the bounds of the camera's frame in their profusion. The stack seems to go both above and below our range of vision; it spills out from all sides in its sheer abundance. But the viewer is given no sign of the information on these pages and the disks between them. Are they vital or simply the detritus of an office on their way to some nameless landfill?⁴³ Waksberg's emphasis on the value of time and its particular relevance



Figure 6

Joan Snyder
Spring Eternal
2012

Oil, Acrylic, Paper Mache, Graphite on Linen,
54" x 66"

Courtesy of the Artist and Tierney Gardarin Gallery, New York, N.Y.

in the lives of women artists registers in her artist statement, where she describes the difficulty of “professional women who were (and are) struggling to find a balance between life, art, humanity, professionalism, ethics.”

Another photograph, this one by Nancy Ori (PLATE 13), highlights the intersection of these themes, visually marking the connection of time and place. *Dimension* is a close-up rendering of a rusted boat in Cape May, New Jersey, which revels in the aesthetic properties created in an incidental and accidental manner by time itself. In so doing, Ori draws the viewer into the pocket of time that allowed this material to become rusted to this extent, situating us in the decades that have passed as the boat journeyed on the waters and then sat languishing in its abandoned space on the shore. In opposition to the specificity of the Jersey locations on view in many of Ori’s photographs in the exhibition (see also Ori’s *Wildwood Boardwalk 3*), Roslyn Rose creates digital montages that hint at the specificity of place, but remain in the realm of surreal fantasy. Her *Closed I* (PLATE 14) evokes the specificity of towns across America where the depressed economy has been hardest hit, but at the same time possesses a dream-like quality that draws it out of any logical local referent.

Altogether, these women artists’ emphasis on themes of time and place speak to their desire to situate both themselves and their practice in terms of chronology and locality. Growing out of women’s particular focus on the body, attention to these themes of orientation allow women not only to grow a sense of identity for their practice, but for themselves as well—one that importantly lies well outside the bounds of gendered constructions for identity formation. On a deep level, these works ask: what are we beyond our sex? How does what we make of the world depend not on gender, but on *where* and *when* we’re looking? The answers to those questions posed by these works carve out a new space for self-understanding via art; one that



Figure 7

Lizz Andronaco
Bearded Lady
2013

Mixed Media on Board
24" x 48"

Courtesy of Elizabeth Andronaco

in many ways realizes early feminist artists’ dream to transcend gender and find acceptance as “artists” pure and simple.⁴⁴

EXPERIENCE

All of these works, and the categories which can barely contain them, hinge on the particular experiences of the women artists who made them. More than any other parameter or thematic measure, women’s experience rings loud and clear across virtually every piece in the exhibition. Once a domain frowned upon by many feminist artists as problematic for women’s larger acceptance within the art world, a space for the depiction of the experiences and expectations that make women’s lives uniquely singular has now returned to the fore.⁴⁵ Women’s lives—from the process of their gender socialization through dolls (see Roslyn Rose’s surreal *Closed I* discussed above—PLATE 14) and fairy tales (see the previously discussed *Glassy* by Hannah Fink—PLATE 7) to notions of what it means to be feminine (see the graceful flower arrangements in photographs like Nomi Waksberg’s *Orange and Two White Tulips*, [Homage to Baroque Dutch Painters] and assumptions about what women’s hopes and dreams regarding idealized family and domestic life (see the haunting abstracted chandeliers of Mona Brody’s *The Dancing Stopped*—PLATE 15; Jennifer Cadoff’s eerie *Picket Fence # 10 (Ball-Top Picket Fence)*—PLATE 16; and Gina Minichino’s astoundingly realistic *Wonder Bread*—PLATE 17). All these facets of women’s experience of the world are present in work being made today.

A few works in the show deserve to be highlighted even further in this particular regard. Lizz Andronaco’s work is largely focused on aggressively breaking down mainstream conceptions of gender and sexuality. Works like *Bearded Lady* (Figure 7—thumbnail) seek to carve out space for the depiction of women across a range of gender experience and undermine assumptions about desire and beauty. Leah Tomaino’s previously discussed *Dear Artist* also speaks to the actual experience of what statistics show is true for women artists working today. She finds visual and expressive form for the high incidence of rejection she has undergone as a woman artist seeking gallery representation, making the numbers leap off the page and into the viewer’s (and society’s) realm. Finally, Grace Graupe-Pillard’s *Darfur/Sudan* (Figure 8—thumbnail), a work that could also have been discussed in terms of its emphasis on time and place, is also very much a work about the cultural specificity of women’s experience.

But before the implication becomes that there is such a thing as “women’s experience” in the singular, I want to carefully underscore the fictitious nature of any such

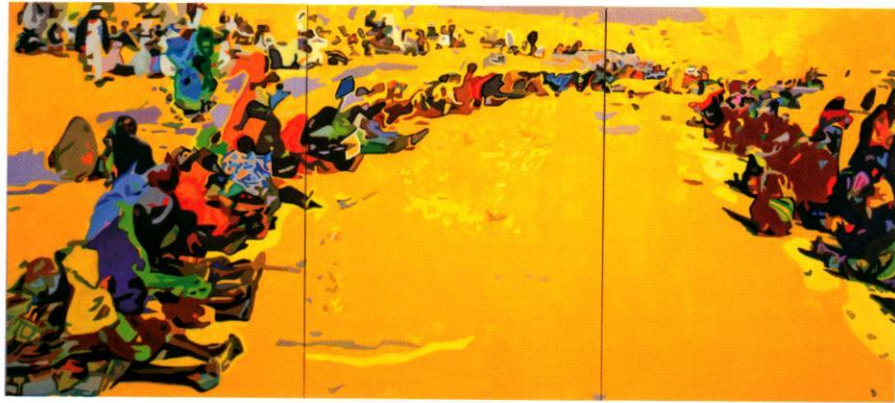


Figure 8

Grace Graupe-Pillard
Darfur/Sudan
 2013
 Oil, Alkyd, Wood
 40" x 90" (3 panels)
 Courtesy of Grace Graupe-Pillard

construct. Women's experience is inherently multivalent and diverse. Even for a show as narrowly focused as this one—about the art of one segment of the population: women, in one geographic location: New Jersey, and in one fixed moment in history: the now that is “2013–2014,” one can see the sweeping perceptive range that constitutes even a sample comprised of 42 pieces. *Darfur/Sudan*, by the very nature of its subject, highlights the uniqueness of our vantage point in the United States. Not a day goes by that news reports about egregious violations of women's (and more fundamentally human) rights do not abound in the media. Indeed, we do well to recognize as we discuss twenty-first century feminism and the inequality that still beleaguers the art world to remember that there are still many places in the world where a woman cannot get an education, where women are not free to dress as they please, where women are still considered the property of men (be it their husband or father), and where violations or deviations from these principles are considered offences punishable by death.

Does that mean we should stop talking about the art of women in New Jersey? Not at all. Art is one of the greatest means and measures by which to assess the relative freedoms of peoples the world over. It provides a tremendous tool for accessing experience at culture's subconscious level. And it teaches empathy and compassion to those who not only practice it, but view it as well. We need art—as feminists, and humanists, as citizens of the world trying to navigate increasing geopolitical complication and ethical complexity in the twenty-first century.

Answers (A Tentative Conclusion)

I began this essay with a series of questions. In concluding, I would like to provide at least some tentative answers to those questions. So how far have we come in the art world over the last 30 years? Quite far—and even farther if we change the question to assess how far women have come in the last 50 or even one 100 years. Women are overall a larger force in the professional art world than they were 30 years ago. The situation is by no means equal in terms of gallery representation or museum wall space. And the situation remains especially dire in terms of the art historical narrative. But compared to the profoundly limited opportunities for women artists in the nineteenth century or even in 1950, we have come a very long way. Did the developments brought about by feminism fundamentally change the situation for women artists in America? Again, I would answer this in the affirmative. Feminism was of the utmost importance for changing the situation of women across professional fields in America. And despite whatever feeling each of us may have about the term “feminism” or whether we identify ourselves as “feminists,” we should not forget our debt to these pioneers of gender equality.

But there is still most definitely work to be done in bringing about equality in the arts. The bottom line is that we cannot talk about there being complete parity in the art world until exhibitions dedicated to women artists alone no longer exist. And the same for classes focused solely on women artists throughout history. Once we reach a place as a society where the phrase “women artists” sounds as strange and awkward as “men artists,” then we can begin using words like equality in the present tense. Until then exhibitions like *Jersey Women Artists Now: Contemporary Visions* serve an important purpose. We are almost there ladies. But there is still much to be done.

¹ Address to the Women of America, July 10, 1971.

² Letter, September 10, 1856. Quoted in David Lubin, *Picturing a Nation: Art and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 182.

³ Linda Nochlin, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” *ARTnews* (January 1971): 22–39, 67–71.

⁴ See especially Christian Viveros-Fauné, “Art’s Dirty, Big Secret,” *Village Voice* (January 1, 2014) and Marion Maneker, “Big Dirty Secret: The Market is a Terrible Judge of Art,” *Art Market Monitor* (January 2, 2014).

⁵ I must address one major criticism that this show and its organizational parameters may elicit regarding race. I did not consciously seek out works by women artists from various racial, ethnic, or religious backgrounds in order to bring diversity to the exhibition. While the lack of this kind of diversity may be a warranted criticism, in my own defense I would like to establish that I chose the works (and the artists to be included) “blindly”—i.e., by letting the quality of the work speak for itself. For the vast majority of these artists, I do not know their race or religion. I know only their names and their work.

⁶ One other major contender could have been “Feminist Art,” but this would have bracketed the women's work on view into a particular political stance with which they may not all identify. See my discussion of the term “feminism” in the section “Contemporary and Now.” In their introduction,

- Heartney, Posner, Princenthal, and Scott write, "While many women artists have enthusiastically embraced the label of feminist artist, others . . . have been more ambivalent, reluctant to confine themselves to what they perceived as an overly limiting definition of their art practice." See *After the Revolution*, discussed below, 13.
- ⁷ Two further examples of exhibitions and texts with this construction in the title include: Carol Armstrong and Catherine de Zegher, *Women Artists at the Millenium* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006) and *How American Women Artists Invented Postmodernism 1970–1975*, Judith Brodksy and Ferris Olin, curators (Rutgers University, Mason Gross School of Arts Galleries, 2006).
- ⁸ Chicago painter Elizabeth Murray once stated along the same lines that I am arguing, "I don't believe there's such a thing as 'women's art.' It's a distasteful phrase, like any categorization." See Eleanor Heartney, Helaine Posner, Nancy Princenthal, Sue Scott, *After the Revolution: Women Who Transformed Contemporary Art* (New York: Prestel Publishing, 2007), 11. Of course my discussion here does not attempt to analyze the usage from a deep linguistic standpoint. There are other reasons and examples of this type of gendered adjectival usage, but I leave that discussion to another scholar.
- ⁹ I am in this sense then in agreement with Lucy Lippard, who once argued that "the overwhelming fact remains that a woman's experience in this society—social and biological—is simply not like that of a man. If art comes from inside, as it must, then the art of men and women must be different too." See "Prefaces to Catalogs," in *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art* (E. P. Dutton, 1976), 49.
- ¹⁰ The following statistics all come from the National Museum of Women in the Arts website, <http://www.nmwa.org/advocate/get-facts>, accessed January 4, 2014. For more useful and very recent statistics on women in the arts see Eleanor Heartney, Helaine Posner, Nancy Princenthal, Sue Scott, *The Reckoning: Women Artists of the New Millennium* (New York: Prestel Publishing, 2013).
- ¹¹ Jerry Saltz, "Where are all the Women?" *New York Magazine* (November 18, 2007).
- ¹² National Museum of Women in the Arts website, <http://www.nmwa.org/advocate/get-facts>, accessed January 4, 2014.
- ¹³ Eleanor Dickinson, "Report on the History of the Women's Caucus for Art," in Karen Frostig and Kathy A. Halamka, eds. *Blaze: Discourse on Art, Women and Feminism* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), 38.
- ¹⁴ Norma Broude and Mary Garrard, eds. *The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact* (Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1994), 16.
- ¹⁵ "In Conversation: Dave Hickey with Charles Schultz," *The Brooklyn Rail* (November 5, 2013).
- ¹⁶ Saltz, "Where are all the Women?" *New York Magazine* (November 18, 2007).
- ¹⁷ Jack H. Newman, *St. Mary's Hall and Doane Academy* (Arcadia Publishing, 2012), 11.
- ¹⁸ See http://www.doaneacademy.org/about_us_historic_timeline.php, accessed January 2, 2014.
- ¹⁹ Frances Patricia Healy, *A History of Evelyn College for Women, Princeton, New Jersey, 1887 to 1897* (Ohio State University, 1967).
- ²⁰ Dorothy A. Mays, *Women in Early America: Struggle, Survival, and Freedom in a New World* (ABC-CLIO, Inc., 1994), 382.
- ²¹ Ibid.
- ²² The information in this section comes from Joan N. Burstyn, *Past and Promise: Lives of New Jersey Women* (Syracuse University Press, 1996) and the website <http://www.njwomenshistory.org/>, which is a nonprofit organization formed in 1984 by a group of scholars, librarians, teachers, and community activists to retrieve and disseminate New Jersey women's history. Its research and organizational papers are held by Special Collections, Alexander Library, Rutgers University.
- ²³ Two excellent pieces on the life and work of Spencer include David Lubin, *Picturing a Nation: Art and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994) and Helen S. Langa, "Lilly Martin Spencer: Genre, Aesthetics, and Gender in the Work of a Mid-Nineteenth Century Woman Artist," *Athanon* 9:37–41.
- ²⁴ Jayme A. Sokolow, *The North American Phalanx (1843–1855): A Nineteenth-Century Utopian Community* (Edwin Mellen Press Limited, 2009).
- ²⁵ *40 Years of Women Artists at Douglass Library*, Mary H. Dana Women Artists Series 40th Anniversary Virtual Exhibit (1971–2011), <http://iwa.rutgers.edu/programs/mary-h-dana-women-artists-series/40-years-of-women-artists-at-douglass-library/introduction/>, accessed May 21, 2013.
- ²⁶ Martin Rosenberg and J. Susan Isaacs, curators, *A Complex Weave: Women and Identity in Contemporary Art* (Rutgers University, 2009), 9.
- ²⁷ This informal survey includes both my male and female students.
- ²⁸ See Marisa Meltzer, "The Last Feminist Taboo," *ELLE Magazine* 341 (January 2014), 89.
- ²⁹ Caitlin Morgan, *How to Be a Woman* (Harper Collins, 2012).
- ³⁰ Ibid.
- ³¹ Lucy Lippard, "What is Female Imagery?" in *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art* (E. P. Dutton, 1976), 81–82.
- ³² Eleanor Heartney, Helaine Posner, Nancy Princenthal, Sue Scott, *The Reckoning: Women Artists of the New Millennium* (New York: Prestel Publishing, 2013), 8.
- ³³ Interestingly, the *Global Feminisms* show was also organized around four major categorical themes: Life Cycles, Identities, Politics, and Emotions. See Roberta Smith, "They Are Artists Who Are Women; Hear Them Roar," *The New York Times* (March 23, 2007).
- ³⁴ Wendy Slatkin, *Women Artists in History: From Antiquity to the Present*, 4th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2001), 258.
- ³⁵ Rosenberg and Isaacs, *A Complex Weave*, 37.
- ³⁶ This has been particularly true in the areas of installation, performance, and new media. These major arenas of women's artistic practice are not represented in this show due to gallery constraints, but it is very important to note that these have been key areas for the establishment of women artists over the last fifty years, and any truly comprehensive survey or exhibition of women artists would need to include pieces from across these media.
- ³⁷ Interview for Posture Magazine, May 21, 2013, <http://posturemag.com/2013/05/21/lizz-andronaco-2/>, accessed September 4, 2013.
- ³⁸ Rosemary Betterton, *An Intimate Distance: Women, Artists and the Body* (Routledge, 2013), 9.
- ³⁹ Amelia Jones, "The Sexual Politics of *The Dinner Party*," in Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, eds. *Reclaiming Female Agency: Feminist Art History After Postmodernism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 417.
- ⁴⁰ Georgia O'Keeffe in a letter to Dodge Luhan, cited in Roxana Robinson, *Georgia O'Keeffe: A Life* (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 1989), 292.
- ⁴¹ For a brief discussion of this phenomenon and the ways women sought to "expose and dismantle the traditional identification of women with nature" see *After the Revolution*, 18–19.
- ⁴² For a wonderful and more lengthy discussion of this phenomenon in the nineteenth century, see Tamar Garb, "Renoir and the Natural Woman," *Oxford Art Journal* 8, No. 2, Renoir Re-Viewed (1985), 3–15.
- ⁴³ Conversation with the artist revealed that the pages and disks contain images and information for "twenty years" of her artworks. Altogether, the organizational project dealt with over 100,000 images.
- ⁴⁴ For more on this, and the role of women artists in the 1950s and 60s such as Lee Krasner, Helen Frankenthaler, and Grace Hartigan in it, see Broude and Garrard, eds. *The Power of Feminist Art*, 17.
- ⁴⁵ Continuing note 43 above, Broude and Garrard write on this subject: "The question of how—or whether—the fact of being female had in any way affected the style or the content of these women's art was a question that was increasingly foregrounded by feminist criticism in the 1970s.... Those women artists of an older generation, who had long struggled to negotiate their female identities and to find acceptance as "artists" pure and simple...." See *The Power of Feminist Art*, 17.

Lizz
Andronaco
Venus

2013
Mixed Media on Board
24" x 16"
Courtesy of Elizabeth Andronaco

PLATE 1



Grace
Graupe-Pillard

Self Portrait As A Blonde

2013
Oil, Alkyd, Canvas
90" x 48"
Courtsey of Grace Graupe-Pillard

PLATE 2





Pat
Feeney Murrell
remains VIII

1995
Flax Handmade Paper Body Wrapping, Bamboo,
Upright Figure on Flax Sprayed Wood Board
27" h x 27" w x 41" d
Courtesy of Pat Feeney Murrell

PLATE 3

Nancy
Cohen
Fleshed Out

2011
Glass, Wire, Fiber, Cement, Resin, Rubber
12" x 12" x 10"
Nancy Cohen,
Courtesy of Accola Griefen Gallery

PLATE 4



**Joan
Snyder**
My Work

1997

Print (Etching and Woodcut)

22.5" x 28.5"

Courtesy of the artist

and Tierney Gardarin Gallery, New York, N.Y.

PLATE 5



Joyce
Kozloff

Descartes' Heart

2008

Acrylic on Canvas,
48" diameter

Courtesy of Joyce Kozloff
and DC Moore Gallery, N.Y.

PLATE 6



Hannah
Fink

glassy

2008

Plastic, Wire, Button, Fabric

6" x 12.5" x 5.5"

Courtesy of Hannah Fink

PLATE 7



**Leah K.
Tomaino**

Dear Artist

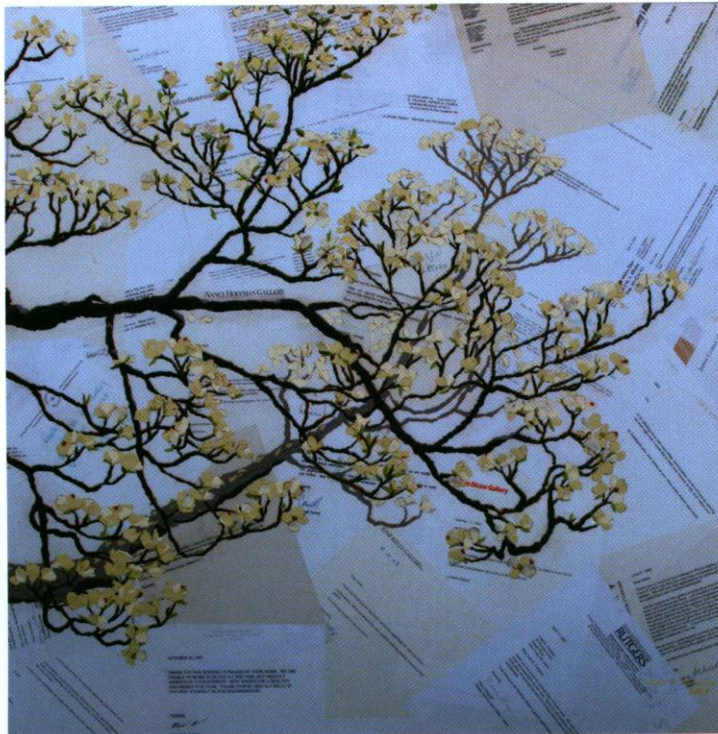
2007

Recycled Gallery Rejection Letters and Brown Bags on Canvas

36" x 36"

Courtesy of Leah K. Tomaino

PLATE 8



**Dannielle
Mick**

2349 Winter Meadow I

2013

Pastel

6" x 8"

Courtesy of the Artist

PLATE 9

**Giovanna
Cecchetti**
Fire Melts Metal

2001
Acrylic on Canvas
58.5" x 47.5"
Collection of the Artist

PLATE 10



**Lauren
Ennist**

*Triangle:
Lower Right Corner*

2008

Oil on Linen

11.5" x 14.5"

Courtesy of Lauren Ennist

PLATE 11



Nomi
Waksberg

Twenty Years

2004/2013

Pigment Print/Archival Paper, Edition of 5

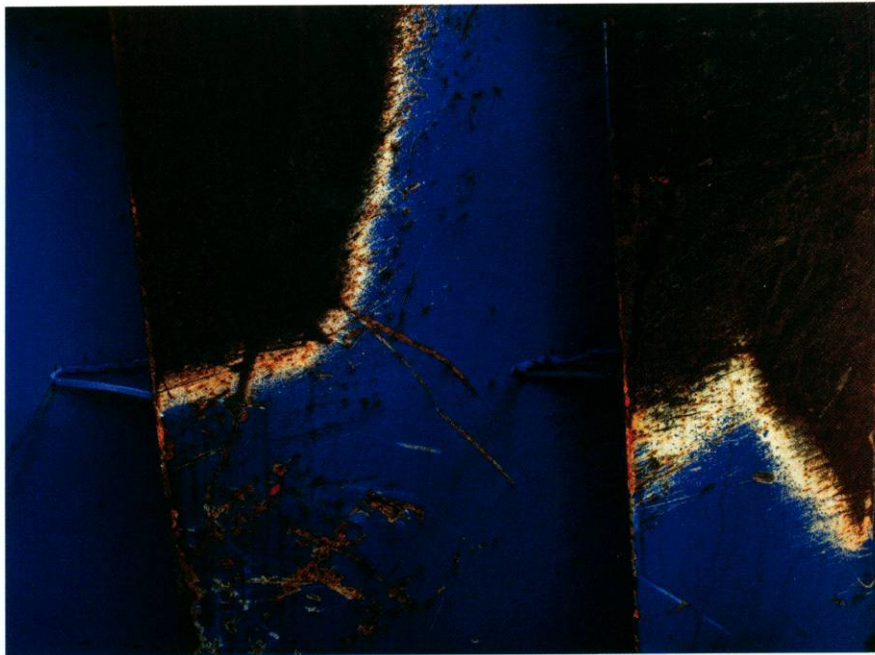
19.75" x 19.75" framed

Collection of the Artist

PLATE 12



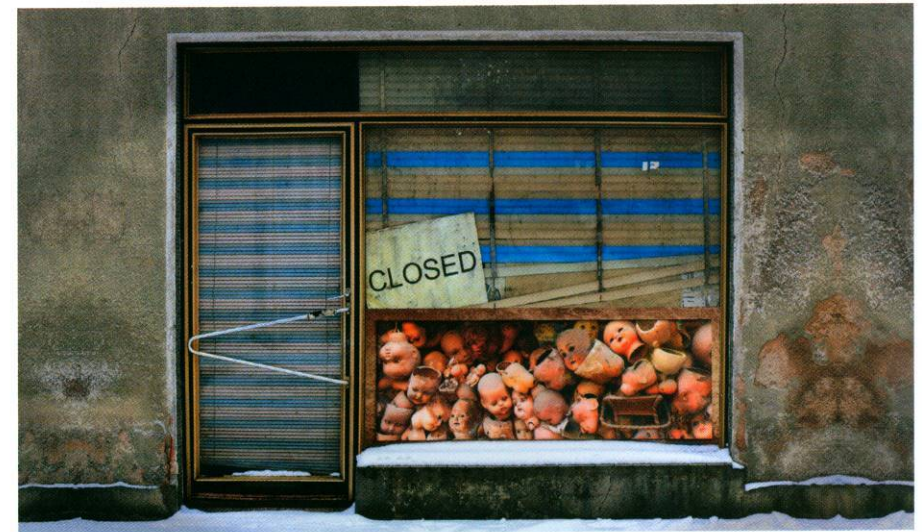
Copyright © 2013 Nomi Waksberg



Roslyn
Rose
Closed 1

2011
Digital Montage
18.5" x 27"
Courtesy of Roslyn Rose

PLATE 14



Nancy
Ori
Dimension

2013
Archival Inkjet on Canvas
20" x 24"
Courtesy of Nancy Ori

PLATE 13

Mona
Brody

The Dancing Stopped

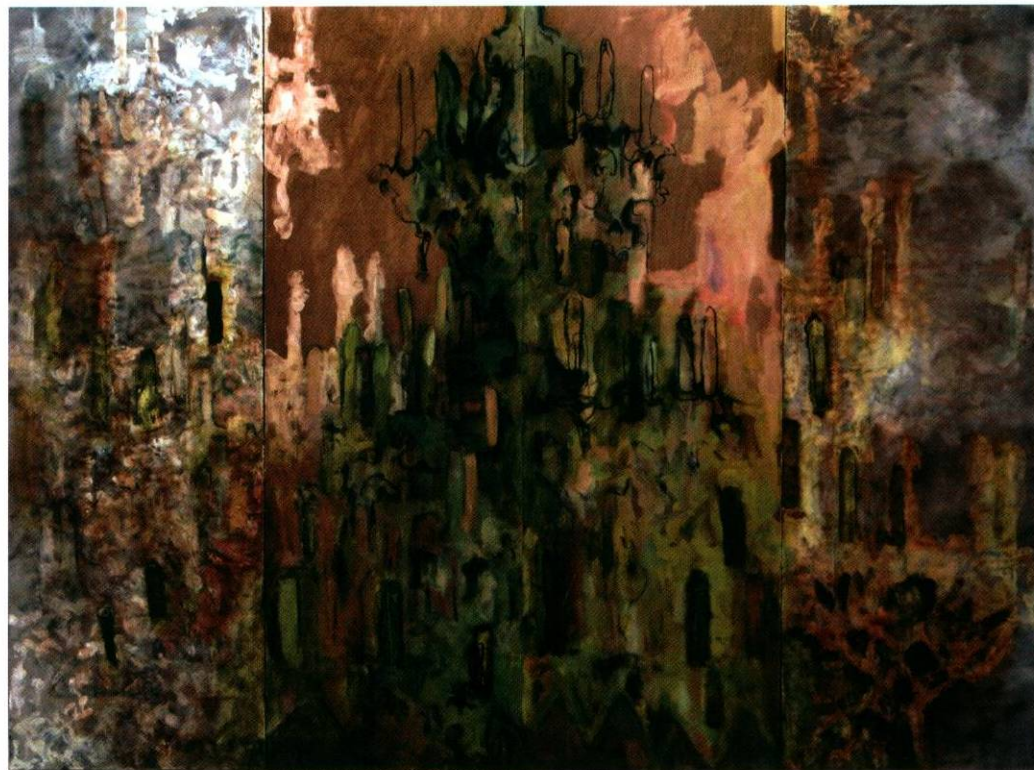
2007

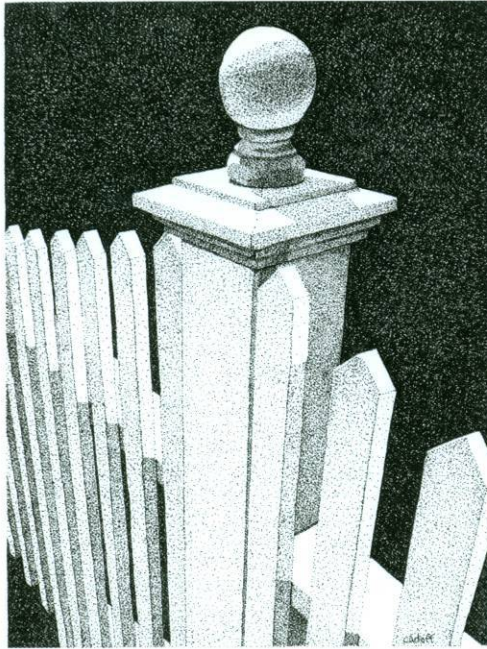
Wax, Oil, Charcoal on Wood Panel

48" x 64"

Courtesy of the artist

PLATE 15





**Jennifer
Cadoff**

Picket fence #10

2007
Pen and Ink Drawing
21" x 26"
Courtesy of Jennifer Cadoff

PLATE 16

**Gina
Minichino**

Wonder Bread

2012
Oil on Panel
10" x 20"
Courtesy of Gina Minichino

PLATE 17





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