

THE FIGURE OF THE ARTIST, THE FIGURE OF THE WOMAN (1983)

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From where they stood in the postwar world, it looked like a new beginning—to start over in everything, including art. The turbulence of the previous half-century was relegated to (mere) history—it was what had led, after all, to the unthinkable debacle. A new global balance, called “The American Century” by *Time* magazine, was underway: But the United States, the most modern, most recent industrial power, would exercise its hegemony through business rather than direct force. The West was united as a patriotic patriarchy: Male quest and male heroism in a militarized society had saved the day, allowing a democratic reconstitution of the West as a space friendly to the private peace of the gender-bipolar nuclear family, as against the earlier possibility of a society split by class war.

The postwar art world placed the artist at the center of its discourse. The figure of the artist as romantic hero reappeared full-blown. Its central organizing features were isolation and genius. “Genius,” meaning a responsive distiller of experience and sensation whose talent lies in his ability to master and transform ideas and substances through an innate imaginative faculty into a new tangible entity that acts powerfully on an aesthetically receptive faculty in the viewer (and critic). Women, by virtue of their earthliness and closeness to Nature, their involvement with natural birth, were foreclosed from Genius, for, of course, flesh and spirit do not mix. In the United States this implicitly male shaping power was inflected by features drawn from the various myths of maleness and productive labor: the cowboy, the patriarch, man of action, working man, hard drinker, and fighter. The isolation of the Hegelian Great Man of history melded with the isolation of the frontiersman and cowboy. As to his product, the work of art, whose existence was taken for granted, its ultimate reference point (or audience) was the artist himself, even at the risk of a wider failure. As June Wayne pointed out a decade later, in combating the American figure of the pansy artist, American artists had to play the self-sufficient supermale role with extra intensity.¹

Assumptions about the work of art centered on its ability to reach toward the “Sublime,” to transcend and contradict the negative and antihuman conditions of everyday life. The work of art represented a utopic bounded rectangle of hope in a hopeless world or (in a different view) the place of symbolic struggle between the artist-subject and intractable materiality. The synthetic space of the work of art, the locus of the struggle of subjectivity to transcend material conditions of unfreedom, provided as well a place for the viewer to experience the atemporal movement of transcendence. The abstract quality of these confrontations was a consequence of their necessary detachment from concrete situations.

¹ June Wayne, “The Male Artist as Stereotypically Female,” *Art Journal* 32 (Summer 1973), pp. 414–16.

² Robert Motherwell and Harold Rosenberg, preface to *Possibilities* 1 (Winter 1947–48), p. 1.

³ Robert Motherwell, “The Modern Painter’s World,” *Dyn* 1, no. 6 (November 1944), pp. 9–14.

Harold Rosenberg, a critic, and Robert Motherwell, an artist, wrote in the first number of *Possibilities* (1947–48), a journal under their editorship:

Naturally the deadly political situation exerts an enormous pressure...

Political commitment in our times means logically—no art, no literature. A great many people, however, find it possible to hang around in the space between art and political action. If one is to continue to paint or write as the political trap seems to close upon him he must perhaps have the extremist faith in sheer *possibility*. In his extremism he shows that he has recognized how drastic the political presence is.²

In this comparison of the politically committed person with the artist, there is no contest: The political is the “drastic,” “deadly,” “catastrophic,” whereas art is the province of “faith” and “sheer possibility.” This is the language of existentialism, whose central construct was *possibility*—existentialism was meant to replace the prewar Marxism in Western intellectual culture.

Motherwell wrote, in “The Modern Painter’s World,” published in *Dyn* (1944):

It is because reality has a historical character that we feel the need for new art... the crisis is the modern artist’s rejection, almost in toto, of the values of the bourgeois world. Modern art is related to the problem of the modern individual’s freedom. For this reason the history of modern art tends at certain moments to become the history of modern freedom. It is here that there is a genuine rapport between the artist and the working class. At the same time, modern artists have not a social, but an individualist experience of freedom. ... The modern artist’s social history is that of a spiritual being in a property-loving world. ... the artist’s problem is *with what to identify himself*. The middle class is decaying, and as a conscious entity the working class does not exist. Hence the tendency of modern painters is to paint for each other...³

The deeply antipolitical and allegorical character of this new art was supported by a [Kant-derived] emphasis on the universalistic nature of the aesthetic and its inability to stray into any other domain, whether politics, religion, morality, literature, or appetite.

Ideologically, the postwar world was locked into a totalizing duality—in West and East the State all but announced itself as a projection of Self against the diabolical Other, whether the Soviet world of Iron Curtain impenetrability or the aggressive U.S. imperialists. In the domestic sphere the big subject was “materialism”—the encroachment of the new mass culture on every previously untouched corner of daily life and its invasion of the self through the commandeering of the instincts. This was the longed-for prosperity of peace, but its character made intellectuals, like Motherwell, decry mass culture alongside

the bureaucratic State and its global menace. In the West the engineering of personal desire and political consent shadowed all of social life with the twin specters of Eros and Thanatos, sex and the Bomb.

In the West, also, the predicament of the postwar world was theorized on male terms, as a failure of autonomy of a powerful and controlling (masterful, patriarchal) self, a sense of impaired potency. This failure of the personal was related to the evident rout from the private (family) sphere of patriarchal power in favor of the overarching and impersonal power of the corporations and the State. Yet if blame was assigned for the depotentiation of the male, typically it was women who were held guilty. Women were identified with domesticity and domestication—pacification—yet they themselves would not be pacified. The extinguishing of any expectation of proletarian revolution (still alluded to by Motherwell)—the virtual embourgeoisement of the working class and the humiliation of those who failed to negotiate this class migration—contributed to the perceived decline of maleness, especially in the eyes of intellectuals and artists.

By the early 1960s, U.S. hegemony over the economically booming West was firm. The center of the art market shifted from Paris to New York. A tired Abstract Expressionism lost its hold on the art world. With it went the understanding of the *oppositional* nature and role of art and artist as enunciated by Motherwell. Abstract Expressionism, which had depended on an image of stripped-down production, of a chosen poverty in a giant-size arena that insisted on its public rather than *owned* (commodity) status, had conquered the art world, achieved high commodity status and even entered mass culture via the media—all contradictory to its axiomatic foundations. Its oppositions to “society” and State were no longer interesting in the new Technicolor world, nor was it convincing in its new context of acceptance, fame, and financial reward.

Its mainstream successor, Pop art, began once in England in the early fifties, once in New York in the late fifties. Mass culture, the rejection of which was so decisive for Abstract Expressionism, was Pop’s point of departure. In rejecting the rejectionism of Abstract Expressionism, jettisoning its values of separation and difference, metaphor and transcendence, Pop artists had asked the same questions about the relations between art and meaning, artist and society—Motherwell’s *with what to identify*—and concluded that the answers had to be radically new. Pop’s great break followed from its perception of the qualitatively different array of social factors that dictated its new answers to the questions about opposition and resistance, about audience, about media, about individual versus society, maleness and mastery, “spiritual freedom in a property-loving world.” The subject behind the work could no longer be the alienated male subject struggling to hold onto civilization’s highest spiritual values through

a sense of personal power, dignity, and autonomy. Even the hope of transcendence had to be relinquished, since God was dead: no more existential choices—the very coherence and character of the subject in the modern world was in grave doubt. If, in the era of consolidating capitalism, the struggle had been to situate oneself in relation to society and to others—the problem of radical individualism as it confronted a hostile social order, a hostile array of radical Others, and a hostile universal order of time and space—by the 1960s, the ground of struggle had become that self. The problem now was to hold together its internal elements, to locate the sources of personal identity in and against a society unified under the “authorial rule of the commodity.” The vantage point outside the self, which is vital to comprehend the self’s unity, was gone.

Pop evidences no alarm or opposition to everyday life. It shows the domestic(ated) world not as the private domicile—heretofore but no longer ruled by an actual Father (or Mother), but as the world of the everyday, which appears as the whole world, an airless terrain with neither “inside” nor “outside.” The reconstitution of the work of art as a discourse of images banished affect and consigned the unconscious to muteness; the unconscious became the unrepresentable in a society that attempted to replace it with behaviorist reflexes conditioned toward ownership. Similarly, the problematic realm of Nature now made its rare appearance as Chaos—the unruly domain of Others and the inarticulate residues of the inner life. Against Abstract Expressionism’s existential “possibility” the Pop work paraded the impossibility of “authentic” subjectivity, the impossibility of seeing art as the locus of resistance to the dehumanization of the human subject identified by Marx and Lukács as the concomitant of the humanization of the commodity.

Against the figure of the Abstract Expressionist artist as “resistance fighter,” the Pop artist represented the quiet capitulation of the ordinary inarticulate modern subject—Beckett’s, not Kafka’s—the robotic Mass Man. Where the Abstract Expressionist played his part straight, the Pop artist played his as camp. Against the Abstract Expressionist bohemian, the Pop artist was a dandy, who, surveying his immediate historical circumstances, understood the end of the artist as genius invested with the responsibility for taking serious, calculated risks.

Far from staying in the elevated museum-gallery world, Pop referred always to the mass media. It teasingly skewed and inverted the paradigms of art production, its subjects, sites, allegiances, and models. The new paradigm was above all systemic: a communication model, with appropriately impersonal “sender,” “channel,” “message,” and “receiver.” For the first time, at least since the war, the viewer was acknowledged—but not flattered. The industrialization of the art system, strenuously excluded from most previous

accounts of art-in-society, brought a weak picture of the viewer that mirrored that of the artist. Pop positioned itself in ambiguous relation to sources of power. Against the advancing social orderliness, it resorted to the marginal disorderliness of irony. Wielding the simulacra of phallocratic corporate power, Pop artists (like the diminutive, neuterlike Wizard of Oz) symbolically pursued their only hope of securing some of that male power themselves. As to the magical image-objects, many are those of the female. The lost object, the phallus, may be signified by the image of woman, often in situations reminiscent of the drama of castration, or threatening, as images of the phallic mother may seem to be. The ambiguity of gender as power in Pop reflects the ambiguity of possession: in gaining commodities, who has mastered what?

Pop's appropriation of the commodity image thus takes on a ritualistic character that amounts to a strategic retreat. One may see its literal quotation, relocation, and reordering as the only option of the weak or—not so differently—as an ambiguous maneuver that highlights the *question* of will and control played out in the image arena. Is *selecting* (Pop's basic, "Duchampian," move) an act of aesthetic power or a sign of mere acceptance—like shopping? If reproducing images changes them—in Warhol's work, through coarsening and slippage, in Lichtenstein's, through rigid formalization and industrialization by application of principles of commercial design—what is conveyed? The ambiguity is whether the artist has positioned himself as the *speaker* or the *spoken* of these "languages" of domination. If the spoken, is the refusal ("inability") to reproduce precisely the imagery of commodified pleasure and machined threat the last residue of *humanness*?

In sum, Pop presupposed the socially integrated character of subjectivity and its contents, and the public, corporately authored character of private life. The conclusion was the obsolescence of a culture divided into "high" and "low" and the disappearance of history as a human horizon—for the spasms of desire know nothing beyond the next moment. In this, even intellectuals are complicit, though divided—on no "mission," representing no class, and internally compelled both toward and away from mass culture.

Pop points to a series of oppositions arrayed around the perception of crucial absences or *lacks*: Most important is the absence of a historically transcendent subject and therefore of a human nature, a "species being," and the absence of an answering culture of resistance. If it is not an essence that (as in expressionism) cries out against domination, if a truth beyond culture cannot be discerned, then it depends on conscious discrimination to decide meaning—it depends on idiosyncratic taste and a now devalued rationalism. Thus, Pop was rationalist/antiexpressionist, cool and nonpartisan; it was literalist/anti-transcendent/antimetaphoric; impersonal and chosen rather than authored;

bounded rather than open-ended; sociological rather than metaphysical; synchronic rather than diachronic. In its relation to signification (coincidentally agreeing with Walter Benjamin's earlier description of the death of the aura), pop was radically anti-original both in the sense of rejecting originality or creativity—constrained selves cannot create—and in the sense of rejecting the idea of singular truth and authenticity.

As to subjectivity, the true subject in the image empire is neither the maker nor the consumer of images, the "private person," but the spectral person, the person-as-image, that is, the celebrity. As Warhol developed this point, the artist recognizes the centrality of celebrity as the new reference point for identity—which is thus increasingly replaced by role. The phallic order and the Father's Law are supplanted by an array of male and female heroes whose biography is dwarfed by their images, which they do not control. Yet pop artists, with the exception of Warhol, and unlike other sixties artists, were not the media figures one might have expected. It was, appropriately, the image and the style that got top billing. American pop artists tended to be biographyless, one might say characterless. The homosexuality of a number of the leading figures, which might have suggested so much about the work, registered zero for the mass media.

Where is the woman in this account of postwar art? Was pop androgynous? Degendered? If lack was a central construct, why didn't women articulate their absence or domination? In fact, there was no space for women in pop. Its main tasks required a silencing of women that was related to its ambiguous theater of mastery through the transcoding and rearrangement of magical images, many of them images of women. The replacement of artistic *touch* by deauthored affectless production signaled more than deadening, superficiality, and detachment; the replacement of subjectivity-as-emotion and suffering (Abstract Expressionism, existential angst) with rationalism, or identity-in-cognition, meant an end to the problem of having a feminine intuitive softness at the core of art. There was no room for the voicing of a different, "truly" female, subjectivity, although Pop rejected the mastering maleness of Abstract Expressionism and toyed with the femaleness of surrender. In other sixties art it is clearer that the new rationalism was viewed as a male mastery, as in "Earth Art," Minimalism, and Conceptualism.

In Pop, the female appears as sign, deconstructed and reconstructed as a series of fascinating fields of view, each with its own fetishized allure. The figure of the woman was assimilated both to the desire attached to the publicized commodity form and to the figure of the home—even there, where she *should have* yielded to the male subject's desire, she functioned instead as sign of the prepotency of social demands. In both locales she is the masquerade

of faceless capital whose origin is in the boardroom but which is projected into the home, in a maneuver that every modern man knows about but forgets in the moment of surrender—which itself is an assumption of the female role. Yet, *as sign*, the female is indeed conquered in Pop, as in Expressionism.

If Pop contains a critique, it depends on the viewer to perceive it, and many could not. Instead, many—especially the new postwar petite bourgeoisie—saw affirmation and confirmation in its bright accessibility and fun. If Pop contains a critique, it is not of any particular historical event, such as a particular war, but of a civilization. It was a critique that depended on embrace. Critique, like women's voice, is absent, appears as absence. The resurgence of feminism in the late sixties arose partly from the same materially superabundant, spiritually vacant bourgeois life that gave rise to Pop, and partly from the opposition, the progressive movements which reclaimed the public as the arena of dissent and activism. Feminism, like Pop, articulated the social character of the self and of private life. Unlike Pop, feminism, and feminist art, insisted on the importance of gender as an absolute social ordering principle and also on the *politics* of domination in all of social life, whether personal or public.

Women artists renounced the "feminine" passivity of Pop and understood the importance of the renarrativization of art. The figure of the artist was problematized to allow a space for women. The "woman artist" had won limited acceptance in a grudgingly given space in modernism; thus, because of the allegorical subject in Abstract Expressionism, women could be accepted as quasi-men. To name this as tokenism and to show it as based on exclusion required, of course, the force of a mass movement. Already established women artists (like token participants everywhere) tended to reject feminism. They had developed within a different discourse and would have had to disclaim its rules of excellence. In *Art and Sexual Politics*, edited by Thomas Hess and Betsy Baker, artists Elaine de Kooning and Rosalyn Drexler replied to Linda Nochlin's famous essay "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" with venomous rejection. Nochlin's own answer was sociological: women were historically kept from the training needed to become great, and their contributions were undervalued because of their gender. Elaine de Kooning replied: "To be put in any category not defined by one's work is to be falsified." Drexler: "No one thinks collectively unless they are involved with propaganda." De Kooning:

"I think the status quo in the arts is fine as it is—in this country, at least, women have exactly the same chance as men do. ...There are no obstacles in the way of a woman becoming a painter or a sculptor, other than the usual obstacles that any artist has to face."⁴

⁴ Elaine de Kooning and Rosalyn Drexler, "Dialogue," in *Art and Sexual Politics: Women's Liberation, Women Artists, and Art History*, Thomas B. Hess and Elizabeth C. Baker, eds. (New York: Macmillan, 1971), pp. 57–59.

As I said, to make these attitudes unacceptable required a mass movement. From its basis in that movement, feminism brought into the art world new but firm discourses, rituals, procedures, and goals, many adapted directly from the black, student, and antiwar movements, but others developed within its own distinctive discourse, notably the consciousness-raising group.

Like the liberation movements, feminism made a political and moral critique of domination, as well as of the accompanying ideology that blamed the dominated for lacking the right characteristics and having the wrong ones. Part of the project of feminism was the redefinition of subjectivity as socially produced rather than as "natural," a task they shared with Pop. But feminism made it its business to show "weakness," "lack," and exclusion not only as imposed but also as remediable. Women suggested that the "feminine," far from being unimportant, irrelevant, or disqualifying, not only existed as a positive and powerful force but also that it still remained to be discovered. The feminine, it was implied, might have been deformed by the historical domination of women, but its subterranean expression in "women's culture," when sympathetically excavated and evaluated, would provide both an inspiration and a guide. Contrary to the posture of surrender assumed by Pop, art world feminists demanded not just a space for women's voices but social change.

The figure of the artist most bitterly attacked by art-world women was the mass myth of the artist-seer-HeMan, which had last been applied unquestioningly to Abstract Expressionism. Although it hardly operated in New York Pop, it continued to do so in California, where Pop artists like Billy Al Bengston traded heavily on their images as hard-drinking, skirt-chasing motorcyclists.

California was also the locale of the first organized and institutionally housed feminist art educational program, begun with Judy Chicago's classes at Fresno State college. A couple of years later, Chicago and Miriam Schapiro set up the Feminist Art and Design Program at California Institute of the Arts (Cal Arts), near Los Angeles. The fact of the program's existence was very important to American women artists everywhere. A few years later, differences over the possibility of having a truly feminist program in an "establishment" institution led to the program's dissolution and to the formation, by Chicago and others (but not Schapiro) of the Woman's Building, in a poor Los Angeles neighborhood. The Woman's Building was an "alternative" institution, like many, such as the so-called free universities, formed on the periphery of educational and cultural institutions in that era, with the understood foundations of self-expression, self-management, and self-help. The Building attempted, in many respects successfully, to provide women with supportive social and learning situations, with places to gather, with access to materials and printing facilities, with entertainment, and so on. Its teaching and organizing functions

went well beyond the classes it provided in the Feminist Studio Workshop and other programs.

The West Coast feminist artist practice is interesting particularly because it attended to audience creation and artist reproduction. The creation of a space discontinuous with capitalism and patriarchy, with an agenda of transformation and self-transformation, helped give it its strength. It is significant that Chicago and Schapiro had come to maturity during the Abstract Expressionist (Schapiro) and Pop (Chicago) eras and had not adapted particularly well to the art system's demands—or at least had not been granted much "success."

The Feminist Art Program and the Woman's Building were cultural-feminist in orientation. That involved an investigation of what women's (art) work might be as it developed in a context (sometimes called "free space") in which not only did women populate the entire system of production and reception but also the works produced constituted an utterance that originated from one or more women but that was meant to be taken as a contribution to an open-ended collective project, that of building women's culture, and perhaps more. This shared discourse was seen as conscious and direct, as opposed to what was thought of as the covert, distorted, and denied one of disguised male art and architecture. The nonhierarchical model of art production and of the art work itself challenged the mastery of both the work and the artist in high modernism, as I have suggested Pop was also doing, but in a very different way—for feminists, especially cultural feminists, believed they were developing an alternative that would transform society, whereas Pop artists had neither the program nor the wish to promote change. (There were other male artists, of course, who did have a vision of social change.)

The implicit challenge to authorship embedded in the critiques put forward by the Feminist Art Program and the Woman's Building led to the production of communal work by some of the students but not by the teachers; individualism was the hardest to relinquish of the demands of the art world. Judy Chicago has pointed out that her *Dinner Party*, which required vast contributions from many people, was not a collaborative work.

Schapiro and Chicago were unfriendly to socialist analyses and socialist feminism, though a number of younger faculty and students at the Woman's Building became interested in and included class alongside gender in their analyses of oppression. The Building also made a number of rapprochements with the poor Mexican residents of their neighborhood, though with modest success. Versions of goddess worship and mysticism, although perhaps as uninteresting to Chicago and Schapiro as economic analysis, were tolerated far more easily and were more easily assimilated into the theories of women's culture, since they suggested a less threatening, more unfamiliar hermeneutic

source of powerful imagery. Following the model of the Woman's Building, but often more politically involved with poor women, women in other cities set up Women's Buildings, although none with the timeliness or the impact of the first.

The suggestions of essentialism and mysticism on the part of the California women upset many East Coast feminist artists, who were far less willing to accept the idea of a female essence that could be traced in style and form. (There was a fuss over the "central vaginal imagery" thesis, which in any case may have originated with the decidedly East Coast Lucy Lippard, at that time the best-known feminist art critic in America.) But the majority of the women who identified with, participated in, or supported the women artists' movement accepted the goals of participation, of some kind of communalism—although usually outside the act of art making itself—of political progressivism, of acceptance of difference, of critique of domination (thus, of egalitarianism), of optimism and productivity. Nonteaching alternative institutions were established, such as the Women's Interart Center in New York City. Following a time-honored artists' option, women also established cooperative galleries, such as New York's A.I.R. Other "alternative spaces" were also formed. These may or may not have been intended as stepping-stones into the high-art world. In any case, they provided a context for theoretical work that, in other disciplines, including art history, was occurring in and around the academy. Art journals and newsletters were begun, and some feminist art criticism appeared in established journals. Women exposed, picketed, and protested the exclusion and under-representation of women in major museum collections and shows, with significant effect.

Some of the differences between the east and west coasts may be instructive. The West Coast women tended more toward the formation of communities, creating their new discourse and working inward toward it. In New York, with its larger network of people and institutions, activities seemed to be directed outward. Consensus seemed to be based on political actions and statements rather than on collective adjustments of theory, study, and art making, although study groups were an important element. But intellectual considerations were broader, and there were more competing theories, and East Coast women were unlikely to seize on a few simple tenets such as the "vaginal imagery" thesis. On both coasts, however, many lesbian artists were interested in separatism and therefore in the formation and theorization of a strong women's culture, in which goddess imagery was often central. On the West Coast, collective works were more likely to be tried. On the East Coast, individualism in the studio, as required by the New York "scene," was virtually a given, and the search for the springs of creativity in presocial, mythic forms was pursued by few—but notably by Lippard. Formal boundary-breaking, the use of mass media, theatricality, simultaneity of metaphoric and direct speech,

and multiplicity of elements characterized West Coast performance art, which was the main new form pioneered there and which was the perfect form for the emergence of women's voices.

Feminist reinterpretation of the most stringently formal mainstream art, combined with an assault on ideology and practice, was a further step in the process under way in Pop of carrying high art into the wider cultural arena. The appearance of the female voice in the discourses of high art as something other than *lack* shattered, temporarily, the univocality of style. So did the struggle against commodity form and against dealer control of art-world entry—but this process helped put the high-art world into even closer accord with the entertainment model of art.

The women's movement, because it had a political analysis and agenda, stressed the *continuity* of mass culture and high culture with respect to the representation of women. Blasting the images of Pop for their male chauvinism went hand in hand with attacking such images at their original sources in the mass media. Further (see John Berger), such images in advertising could be seen as a continuation of the representation of the female in the history of Western painting.

The analyses of systematic exclusions from the art world of types of work based on black and Left critiques was enlarged by women's critiques and made effective in that women succeeded in legitimating their claims to enter the art world on their own terms—as women, making “women's art,” not degendered art—whereas no racial or ethnic minority had succeeded in doing so. Nevertheless, the feminist agenda—the allowance of difference, of explicit analysis within the work, attention to institutional exclusions and the reworking of the terms of participation in art—allowed for the *possibility* of an open cultural apparatus. The success of the political and cultural strategies of the sixties depended on the generalized demand for social justice and participation. Government agencies, public institutions, and schools adapted accordingly, and the art world seemed more permeable than ever to new ideas and multiple practices. But this phase of “postmodernism,” premised simply on rejecting the aesthetic closure of modernism, was inevitably transitory. Although many women artists, and many art world institutions, developed through the seventies with the adjusted model of the art system, conservative and specifically anti-democratic forces were building their strength during the period of economic contraction. Many younger women began to regard feminism as passé, as having achieved its goals.

The conservative sweep of the eighties immediately began dismantling the political and cultural changes of the sixties and seventies, and sectors of the art world quickly seized the initiative. Enterprising dealers saw the right moment

for the repositioning of blue-chip commodities at the top of the market. In no time at all, painting and sculpture were repositioned at the top of the art world hierarchy of sales and attention. Not just any painting and sculpture—a mythic, irrationalist, and highly misogynistic Neo-Expressionism appeared which confirms the triumphantly resurgent misogyny and elitism of the high rollers. Lest anyone miss the point that progressivism and difference have been ridden out of town on a rail, one of the leading New York dealers, the tiny, ultrafeminine, and expensively ornamental Mary Boone, explained that women are simply not as expressive as men and that although she'd take on a good woman anytime, the buyers and curators would have none of it.

Before feminism, women could make it in the art world only through superprofessionalism: by seeming tough and “masculine.” Now the point is that expressiveness is being reclaimed as the softer side of male-only artists, and that necessary toughness is being redefined as lack. It seems that the big expression, like the pinnacle of haute cuisine, requires the banishing of women from the kitchen, although it was woman, as woman, who returned subjectivity and expression to the figure of the artist.

Nothing is more central to the movement of economic, cultural, and private reaction than the reassertion of principles of inequality and domination, the reconstitution of the Law of the Father (even when mediated by “the figure of a woman,” Margaret Thatcher or even Mary Boone): Yet the Law of the Father, as Pop saw, cannot be restored; true patriarchy is broken, and the current heroic male artist-figures from both continents are only shams, suffering nostalgia twice removed.

Young women artists, who seemed content to regard feminism as having been accomplished by the mid-seventies, are in no position to appreciate the repeat nature of these moves or to figure out what to do. Economic contractions send people rushing to the center, and New York is currently full not only of rich Europeans but of artists from all over the United States, each trying to succeed no matter what it takes. Ferocity rather than communalism is the rule, and it is hard enough for a woman to break into showing without trying to seem as though she has a “message” from the sixties.

Nevertheless, although there are few women's shows now, there are many feminist artists of all ages. And the academicization of feminist criticism and its development as a psychoanalytic approach to culture and subjectivity, particularly in France, provides support—although, as critic Lawrence Alloway recently pointed out, hardly anyone writes feminist criticism anymore. Women of the sixties and seventies generation continue to meet and to work from a feminist viewpoint. Some women artists have been identified with critical, often feminist, though not political art—art that points its finger at discourse

itself and its tendency to swallow up the powerless, especially women, and silence them. Interestingly, such work, in New York, at least, is aimed right inside the commercial gallery, the last place it would have sought a decade ago. We should probably take this to mean that the "alternative space" is moribund, yet the past few years in New York have seen the formation of many small galleries by young male and female artists, often with some aspect of social negativity to their work. Many of these women artists are feminists, though operating outside feminist communities. Most of the new galleries are meant to provide entry to the big galleries, but it is always possible that they will reach critical mass and become a scene in their own right. Still, it seems safe to predict that, as in the past, the distinctive presence of women will be made to evaporate without concerted effort on women's part to redefine their wider goals and resume militant activities.

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