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Mira Schor
Press

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PARIS

Mira Schor. Moon Room

Bourse de Commerce / 20 septembre 2023 - 22 janvier 2024

En contrepoint des expositions de la saison « Mythologies américaines » à la Bourse de Commerce, l'exposition *Moon Room* de Mira Schor (États-Unis, 1950) nous invite à pénétrer dans sa chambre à soi. Et ce, non sans une radicale et intense sobriété. La référence au texte pamphlet féministe de Virginia Woolf écrit en 1929 s'assume ici comme une véritable inspiration. Profondément engagée politiquement dans une recherche picturale et textuelle, à rebours des courants dominants de l'art, l'œuvre de Mira Schor se pense au plus proche d'une émancipation par le langage comme forme, outil d'expression majeur d'une femme artiste et écrivaine, critique d'art et enseignante. Si la production protéiforme de Mira Schor se déploie sur plus de six décennies, l'exposition *Moon Room* se concentre – à l'exception d'une œuvre au titre éponyme réalisée en 2022 – sur la période 1977-78 au cours de laquelle Mira Schor développera plus d'une centaine de masques en papier de riz et une série de robes.

Vingt-et-un masques sont exposés, au gré de cadres de verre accrochés à hauteur d'yeux sur les trois murs de la salle, visibles et lisibles, recto comme verso. Ni figures ni peintures ni textes malgré les signes d'écritures qui les recouvrent, ce sont ce que l'artiste appelle des « choses », à la matérialité si fragile qu'ils ne peuvent plus être feuilletés malgré leur conception d'origine. Entre superposition, transparence et opacité, l'écriture s'y substitue à l'image et inversement. L'accrochage permet de s'immiscer entre les masques comme entre les lignes manuscrites; « de se voir mutuellement à travers mes couches de conscience », selon les souhaits de l'artiste. Réciprocité rappelant à cette double nature image-texte qui structura très tôt son rapport au monde lorsqu'enfant, confrontée à l'incompréhension du langage hébreu de ses parents immigrés aux États-Unis, elle déchiffrait les signes hébraïques telles des images. Leurs titres sont des indices de la nature diariste et onirique de leur contenu: *Mask "May our shadows never meet again"*; *Mask "Last day in the studio"*...

Parmi ces masques, trois robes se dressent, enchâssées elles aussi dans des plaques de verre. *Dress Crazy Lady* retient l'attention: silhouette en papiers épingleés d'une

femme sans abri croisée quotidiennement au pied de l'immeuble de l'artiste, lors de son retour à New York à l'automne 1978. L'assemblage des papiers évoque une certaine vulnérabilité, en écho à la précarité d'alors de l'artiste mais aussi de sa condition féminine. Condition féministe également. Mira Schor a été formée à CalArts dans l'effervescence pionnière du Feminist Art Program mené par Judy Chicago et Miriam Schapiro. En 1972, elle participera à la Womanhouse avec une peinture à l'huile *Red Moon Room*. Cinquante ans plus tard, elle peint *Time/Spirit (New Red Moon Room)*, grande toile non tendue où une femme allongée tient un livre sur le temps/l'esprit, le *Zeitgeist*, brandi sous une même lune rouge flamboyant, qu'elle nous dévoile au cœur de cette *Moon Room*, dans un énigmatique face à face avec le temps qui œuvre.

Rozenn Canevet

As a counterpoint to the "American Mythologies" exhibitions at the Bourse de Commerce, *Moon Room* by Mira Schor (USA, b. 1950) invites us to enter a room of her own. And not without a radical and intense sobriety. The reference to Virginia Woolf's feminist pamphlet, written in 1929, is a true inspiration.

Deeply politically committed to pictorial and textual research, which runs counter to dominant artistic trends, Mira Schor's work is akin to an emancipation through language as a form, a major tool of expression for the woman artist, writer, art critic and teacher. Although Mira Schor's protean output spans more than six decades, the *Moon Room* exhibition—with the exception of a work of the same name produced in 2022—focuses on the period between 1977 and 1978, during which she developed more than a hundred rice paper masks and a series of dresses.

Twenty-one masks are displayed in glass frames hung at eye level on the three walls of the room, visible and legible from both sides. Neither figures nor paintings nor texts, despite the signs of writing that cover them, these are what the artist calls "things." Their materiality is so fragile that they can no longer be leafed through, despite their original design. Between superimposition, transparency and opacity, the writing replaces the image and vice versa. The way the works are displayed allows us to move between the masks and the handwritten lines, "to see each other through my layers of consciousness," as the artist puts it. This reciprocity is reminiscent of the dual nature of images and texts that structured her relationship with the world from a very early age. Confronted as a child with the incomprehension of the Hebrew language of her parents, who had

immigrated to the United States, she deciphered the Hebrew signs like images. The masks' titles are clues to the diaristic, dreamlike nature of their content: *Mask "May our shadows never meet again"*; *Mask "Last day in the studio"*...

Amongst these masks, three dresses stand out, also embedded in glass frames. *Dress Crazy Lady* catches the eye: a silhouette in pinned paper of a homeless woman whom the artist met every day at the foot of her apartment block when she returned to New York in the autumn of 1978. The assemblage of papers evokes a certain vulnerability, echoing the artist's precarious situation at the time, as well as her feminine condition. A feminist condition, too. Mira Schor trained at CalArts in the pioneering effervescence of the Feminist Art Program led by Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro. In 1972, she took part in Womanhouse with an oil painting, *Red Moon Room*. Fifty years later, she painted *Time/Spirit (New Red Moon Room)*, a large unstretched canvas on which a reclining woman holds a book about time/spirit, the *Zeitgeist*, brandished under the same blazing red moon, which she reveals to us at the heart of this *Moon Room*, in an enigmatic face-to-face encounter with time at work.

Mira Schor. Moon Room. Vue de l'exposition exhibition view. Bourse de Commerce-Pinault Collection, Paris, 2023-24. (Ph. © Aurélien Mole / Pinault Collection)





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REVIEWS PARIS

Mira Schor

Bourse de Commerce

By [Ida Panicelli](#) ✉



View of "Mira Schor: Moon Room," 2023–24. Photo: Aurélien Mole.

How many faces make up our personality? How many facets compose our identity? Behind how many masks do we hide our essence? Mira Schor shared all these questions with us in her soulful exhibition "Moon Room," with "Masks" and "Dresses" from 1977 to 1978 and one painting, *Time/Spirit (New Red Moon Room)*, 2022—all acquired by the Pinault Collection last year and, with one exception, never before exhibited. They are poetic works in profoundly touching dialogue with each other, not only thanks to their formal purity, but because they evoke individual and at the same time collective dilemmas about identity, our relationship with family, and our role and responsibility in the world.

Twenty-one masks made of rice paper, installed under glass so they hang perpendicular to the gallery's walls, feature sketches of elongated oval faces. Consisting of two or more superimposed sheets, they are painted on both sides, with words written in hand on the outer or inner surface, traces of Schor's dreams, and personal reflections about the Holocaust. Almost all



Ellen Gallagher, *Fast-Fish and Loose-Fish* (detail), 2023, oil, pigment, palladium, and paper on canvas, 116 1/2 × 79 1/2".

FEBRUARY 2024

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have openings for the eyes, and some for the mouth. They are fragile membranes, like the loose pages of a book of memories, containers of thoughts and history, metaphors for that dissimulation that each of us carries out in society in an attempt to avoid pain, violence, disillusion. But they also represent provisional identities we can wear to reinvent ourselves.



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Schor's "Dresses" are delicate sheets of rice paper at a human scale. In *Dress Book: Angel*, 1977, made of semitransparent yellow paper, illegible fragmented words synthesize with the body, appearing carved into skin—memories of a past or hints of a desire, promises for a future to come, alluding to what migrants carry with them on their journey toward a new life. It made me think of our impermanence and vulnerability, of how just a few words summing up our existence can be a last line of defense against oblivion.

Both series evoke the experience of Schor's Polish-born parents, Ilya and Resia Schor, who fled Europe with the rise of Nazism while the rest of their families perished in the Holocaust and who found refuge in the United States in 1941, bringing with them what was essential: their Jewish tradition. These works bear witness to Schor's profound ties to the creative and intellectual roots of her parents, both of them artists, whose cultural legacy lives on in the richness of her multidisciplinary work as an artist, writer, feminist, and political activist.

With the large painting *Time/Spirit (New Red Moon Room)*, Schor revisits her 1972 work *Red Moon Room*. In the earlier piece, a young woman stands on a checkered floor greeting a bloodred moon with her right hand while her left hand rests on her belly. Now, fifty years later, allusions to the menstrual cycle and procreation are absent. The artist's representation of herself is stylized to the greatest degree, little more than a stick figure who lies in bed beneath the same vivid red moon. She holds between her hands an open book whose pages bear the words TIME and SPIRIT, playing with the German word *Zeitgeist*. In this oneiric atmosphere, Schor refers to the span of her creative and spiritual life and seems to make a gift to the moon of what she has received and achieved over the course of her existence. In this painting, the artist evokes her past, and she ferries us into the present in a spiral course through time, always remembering the fragility of the body and memory but bearing witness to her own inner strength.



ENTRETIEN AVEC MIRA SCHOR « LE LANGAGE EST UN ASPECT ESSENTIEL DE MON EXISTENCE »

Artiste, auteure, critique d'art et enseignante, Mira Schor (née en 1950) occupe une place à part sur la scène new-yorkaise, où elle défend un art personnel, nourri de préoccupations philosophiques, existentielles et politiques. Elle s'inscrit très tôt dans l'histoire de l'art féministe, participant dès les années 1970 au Feminist Art Program, à CalArts, et à la Womanhouse. Dans un entretien avec la commissaire de l'exposition, Mira Schor revient sur les œuvres présentées à la Bourse de Commerce, les thèmes récurrents qui irradiant son travail, ou encore le rôle du langage dans son œuvre.

Propos recueillis par Alexandra Bordes, commissaire de l'exposition

Vous avez dit que vos premiers *Masques* étaient des accessoires destinés à un court métrage tourné en super-huit. Comment avez-vous décidé de poursuivre le travail sur les *Masques* mais d'une façon différente ?

Je ne me souviens pas de l'exact enchaînement d'événements qui m'a conduite à créer la série des *Masques* mais, dès que je commence à m'intéresser à une forme ou à un thème, je travaille dessus jusqu'à en avoir épuisé toutes les possibilités, formelles comme conceptuelles.

Dans la présentation de votre œuvre à la Bourse de Commerce, figurent principalement des *Masques* et des *Robes*, ainsi qu'une grande peinture récente. Pourriez-vous nous parler de ces différentes formes d'expression, nous indiquer comment vous êtes passée de l'un à l'autre et comment le dialogue s'instaure entre elles ?

Je crois qu'il existe une sorte de connexion poétique entre ces œuvres, malgré des écarts importants en termes de médium, de type de narrativité et de relation à l'histoire de la peinture traditionnelle. Les *Masques* et les *Robes* du milieu des années 1970 étaient



– ce qui en représente la meilleure description selon moi – des choses, non des peintures, ni des sculptures au sens où on l'entend généralement. Les relations qu'elles établissent avec le support mural et le sol sont inconfortables ; ces choses sont extrêmement fragiles, et ce qui leur donne leur sens le plus véritable est d'être expérimentées par une personne à la fois, d'être lues dans un corps-à-corps. Les grandes peintures récentes ont,

Mira Schor, novembre 2019.

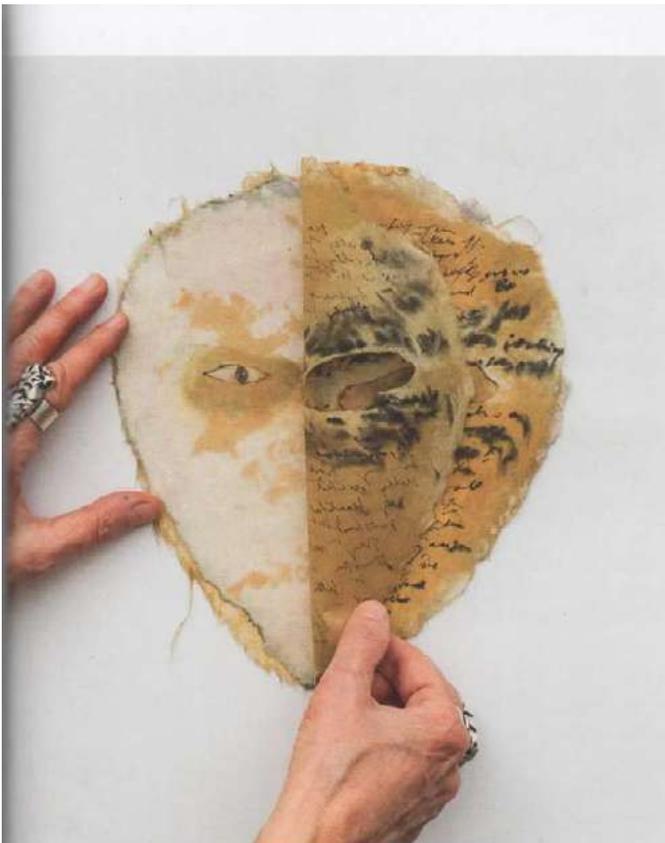
PAGE DE DROITE, DE HAUT EN BAS

Mask

1977, pigment sec, encre, pastel, gel acrylique et vernis sur papier de riz, 24,1 x 21 cm.

Mask « Little Blue »

1977, pigment sec, gel acrylique et vernis sur papier de riz, 21 x 16,8 cm.



d'un point de vue pictural, un lien avec les petites gouaches que j'ai réalisées au début des années 1970 : une femme dans une pièce bleue, une femme la nuit en compagnie de la lune – il s'agissait là de thèmes du début de ma carrière. La différence majeure, c'est qu'il s'agit d'une huile et acrylique sur toile, un médium majeur avec lequel je n'ai commencé à travailler qu'au milieu des années 1980. Cette grande peinture a aussi pour originalité d'être non tendue; elle partage donc avec mes œuvres sur papier de riz un caractère d'imprévisibilité.

Mais je vois un dialogue entre ces différentes œuvres exposées à la Bourse de Commerce : le personnage de la peinture tend un livre agrémenté de texte, et de nombreux *Masques* sont des livres qui portent des textes inscrits dessus et à l'intérieur. La conversation qui apparaît la plus significative du point de vue personnel est celle qui s'établit entre le personnage de la peinture – une vieille artiste pendant le livre qui contient les œuvres de sa vie – et la *Crazy Lady*, l'une des pièces les plus inattendues et fragiles de la série des *Robes*. Tandis que des décennies d'une vie d'artiste les séparent, toutes deux dialoguent, bien qu'il revienne au visiteur de deviner la teneur de leurs propos.

Selon vous, le masque fonctionne-t-il comme une sorte de membrane qui accueillerait ce qui définit la société et, par conséquent, tout ce qui est spécifique au genre? Dans le même temps, le masque ouvre un espace intermédiaire dans lequel la lutte discursive et artistique peut se déployer à l'abri de la réalité, n'est-ce pas?

Voilà une bonne description de la multiplicité des *Masques*!

Les *Masques* percés d'yeux de Janus sont installés de sorte à faire face à chaque visiteur dans un contexte très intime. Quel rôle joue le masque entre dissimulation et ouverture (l'œil), mais aussi en tant que médiateur du « temps », un élément qui transcende votre œuvre? Si les masques servent à cacher, ils sont souvent également des réceptacles de la pensée.

Les ouvertures pour les yeux, quand elles existent, permettent à celui qui porte le masque et à l'observateur de voir à l'extérieur mais aussi parfois à l'intérieur. Dans le cas de

l'installation à la Bourse de Commerce, elles donnent à deux ami(e)s la possibilité de se voir mutuellement à travers mes couches de conscience.

À quel moment les *Masques* ont-ils disparu de votre travail, pour quelle raison et par quoi ont-ils été remplacés ?

J'ai créé tous les *Masques* durant l'année 1977, avant mon retour à New York à l'automne 1978. Je ne sais pas vraiment lequel d'entre eux est le dernier ! Les raisons qui m'ont amenée à arrêter d'en réaliser ? Alors que j'avais présenté quelques *Masques* dans des expositions collectives à New York à cette époque, deux expériences distinctes m'ont conduite à cesser : dans le cadre de « The Pictures Generation » [au Metropolitan Museum of Art], mes réalisations paraissaient à contretemps des œuvres postmodernistes produites par les artistes de ma génération ; on me faisait souvent remarquer qu'elles avaient un air suranné et que je ne m'appropriais pas d'images photographiques ni de textes. Puis, lors d'une exposition pour laquelle l'intérêt du commissaire se focalisait sur les masques folkloriques, venant de divers pays, j'ai senti que je ne voulais pas que mon travail semble s'appuyer sur cette référence ou vouloir y être rattaché. Tout artiste occidental travaillant avec des masques part d'un ensemble historique de sources, principalement non occidentales ou folkloriques ; mais mes *Masques* ne relèvent pas de ce contexte fondamental.

J'ai donc poursuivi mon travail sur les figures avec la série des *Robes* et, plus tardivement, dans des œuvres qui font abstraction du corps. Mon travail actuel suit le même fil rouge. Des échos des *Masques* sont visibles dans la façon dont je dessine aujourd'hui les visages, parfois en leur donnant un aspect qui évoque le masque. En 2013, j'ai décrit mes réalisations du milieu des années 1970, les *Robes*, *Masques* et autres œuvres liées, comme faisant partie d'un monde onirique, un monde que la volonté politique en matière intellectuelle et esthétique a intentionnellement sapé dans les années 1980. Et, bien que le type de prise de conscience spécifique découlant de ma rencontre avec de tels textes (« Critical Theory ») m'ait beaucoup apporté durant la période

conflictuelle et stimulante des années 1980, j'ai également éprouvé la perte de ce monde onirique.

Les écritures présentes dans vos peintures reflètent-elles votre multidisciplinarité en tant qu'artiste et auteure ? Comment décririez-vous le processus de création quand il s'agit de passer de la peinture à l'écriture ? Le voyez-vous comme une dualité de médias pratiqués en alternance ?

L'écriture prenant la forme d'une image est apparue dans mon œuvre bien avant que je ne commence à écrire des essais sur l'art et la culture – lorsque je dis « mon œuvre », je fais toujours référence à mes peintures et à mes dessins, à ma pratique visuelle, tandis que « mon écriture » est mon écriture. Ces deux aspects de ma relation au langage trouvent leur origine dans l'histoire de ma famille, un sujet que j'évoque en postface de mon livre *Wet* [Duke University Press, 1997]. J'y relève à la fois la posture traditionnellement endossée par la première génération d'enfants nés aux États-Unis de parents réfugiés ou immigrés et qui consiste à parler pour leurs parents, même si c'est uniquement d'une façon métaphorique, et le rôle joué par la représentation du langage dans les œuvres d'art qu'ont créées mes parents, Ilya Schor et Resia Schor. Ils incluaient l'un et l'autre des caractères hébreux dans certaines de leurs réalisations, une réalité que je ne pouvais expérimenter qu'à travers l'image car je ne lis pas l'hébreu. Je m'estime chanceuse d'avoir la capacité d'être une peintre et une écrivaine ; ce que je produis dans chacune de ces pratiques me tient vraiment à cœur, et il existe d'importantes correspondances entre mes écrits et mes œuvres, à toutes les périodes de ma carrière.

La notion de *Zeitgeist* est souvent définie comme « une attitude spirituelle caractéristique d'une certaine époque historique ». Le mot allemand *Geist* signifie « esprit » mais aussi « fantôme ». Les *Masques*, les *Robes* et la peinture exposés à la Bourse de Commerce sont réunis dans une salle très intime, plongée dans une sorte de pénombre, où seule brille la lune rose fluorescente qui illumine la scène dans laquelle une figure féminine



CI-DESSUS, DE HAUT EN BAS

Word Games

1977, encre, pigment sec, gouache, gel acrylique et vernis sur papier de riz, 16,5 x 21 cm.

Mask « Blue Eyed Dog Face »

1977, gouache et pastel sur papier de riz, 24,1 x 20,3 cm.

Mask « I will »

1977, pigment sec et encre sur papier de riz, 22,9 x 15,2 cm.



EN HAUT

Vue de l'exposition
«Mira Schor, Moon Room»,
Bourse de Commerce –
Pinault Collection, 2023.

CI DESSUS

*Musk «May our Shadows Never
Meet Again»*

1977, encre, poudre métallique, gel
acrylique et vernis sur papier de riz,
29,2 x 21 cm.

solitaire étendue est occupée à lire.
**Le *Zeitgeist* de 2022 est-il le fantôme
transcendant de la peinture de 1972 ?**

On pourrait le dire, en effet ! Mais, avant toute chose, je veux dissiper une impression, probablement favorisée par la piètre qualité de la photographie de 1972 : la lune de la version originale de *Red Moon Room* n'était pas rose, mais rouge sang. Dans la peinture de 1972, le lien entre la jeune artiste représentée et la lune rouge indique la connexion entre son corps et les cycles de la lune, entre son corps et la nature. La femme plus âgée fait don à la lune rouge de ce qu'elle a accompli dans sa vie, à la fois la dimension du temps qu'elle a vécu et celle de son esprit vivant. Mais ma représentation des termes « temps » et « esprit » a pour origine une idée quelque peu ironique qui m'est venue un jour, selon laquelle je devrais simplement réaliser une peinture du mot *Zeitgeist*. Or, je ne voulais pas peindre en allemand, j'ai donc traduit ce terme en ne pensant pas au « fantôme » mais à l'« esprit ». Je parle d'ironie parce que l'utilisation du mot *Zeitgeist* était très en vogue dans les écrits sur l'art dans les années 1980 et au début des années 1990 – précisément au moment

où j'entamais la lecture de textes critiques ayant pris une place prééminente dans ce domaine et alors que je commençais à intervenir au sein de ce discours.

Les termes employés dans les écrits sur l'art ont beaucoup changé entre les années 1970, 1980 et 1990, au point que des articles tels que « International Art English » [d'Alix Rule et David Levine], publié sur le site Triple Canopy en 2013, pouvaient les satiriser. Et les critiques qui utilisaient le plus le mot *Zeitgeist* dans leurs écrits étaient également les moins à même de considérer mon œuvre comme faisant partie du *Zeitgeist* tel qu'ils le définissaient – en lien avec la Pictures Generation notamment.

Vos *Robes* en papier de riz ne sont assemblées qu'à l'aide d'épingles (tout comme pour l'essayage d'une robe sur mesure ou, ainsi que c'est le cas dans l'architecture intérieure japonaise, pour séparer le moins possible l'intérieur de l'extérieur et profiter d'une lumière du jour très peu filtrée). Par conséquent, elles apparaissent quelque peu inachevées, en cours d'élaboration, et leur présence

répétée dans la pièce souligne à la fois leur fragilité et leur pouvoir en termes de représentation. Était-il important pour vous d'utiliser ce matériau très fragile, presque translucide qu'est le papier de riz pour bâtir votre œuvre, en opposition aux attitudes majoritairement masculines du monde de l'art ?

Je n'ai eu recours à des épingles que pour certaines des dernières *Robes*, celles que j'ai créées à New York, où j'étais revenue pour vivre et travailler après avoir enseigné durant quatre ans au College of Art and Design en Nouvelle-Écosse. Je n'ai donc commencé à faire usage d'épingles qu'à l'automne 1978. Ayant récemment examiné de près ces œuvres pour la première fois depuis de nombreuses années, je me suis rendu compte que nombre d'entre elles sont assemblées à l'aide d'épingles plutôt qu'avec une colle acrylique, comme c'était le cas des *Robes* et *Masques* précédents. J'avais en réalité oublié cet aspect de la construction de mes œuvres de cette période jusqu'à ce qu'elles soient rephotographiées en 2022. Deux des *Robes* récemment acquises par Pinault Collection sont assemblées à l'aide de colle ; seuls les éléments de *Crazy Lady* (1978) sont maintenus ensemble grâce à des épingles droites.

Les *Robes* et les *Masques* ont tous pour fondement la dualité entre les notions d'agression – l'individualité intime d'une femme affichée sur un mur dans un espace public, une voix intime faisant intrusion dans l'espace public – et de fragilité, qui semblait être la dimension la plus dérangement pour les observateurs masculins – des étudiants et d'autres artistes – qui ont fait part de leurs réactions. « Comment pouvais-je faire cela ? » m'a ainsi demandé un artiste lorsque j'ai présenté quelques *Robes* dans une exposition à la Edward Thorp Gallery, à New York, en 1980. Comment pouvais-je accrocher quelque chose de si fragile sur le mur de la galerie, sans cadre – ce qui est la meilleure façon d'expérimenter pleinement ces œuvres, mais malheureusement pas une solution adaptée aux exigences en matière de conservation.

Je crois que le passage à l'utilisation d'épingles en 1978 était une réponse à la profonde incertitude que j'éprouvais alors en tant que jeune artiste essayant enfin

de réussir dans un monde de l'art très concurrentiel et en rapide mutation et, fait significatif, vivant dans un quartier alors assez dur de la ville. J'ai réalisé ces œuvres dans le petit loft sombre dans lequel je m'étais installée sur Lispenard Street, à Tribeca. Le verrou de la porte d'entrée de l'immeuble fonctionnait à peine, le chauffage était loin d'être fiable, et les rues se vidaient généralement à la nuit tombée. D'un point de vue physique et artistique, je me trouvais dans une situation très peu sécurisante. De tous ces paramètres découle le caractère précaire des *Robes* datant des premiers mois suivant mon retour à New York. Je suis peu à peu revenue à l'utilisation de la colle l'année suivante.

Vous avez enseigné à New York durant des années. Comment la transmission de contenus a-t-elle évolué au fil des décennies ? Quelle est votre approche pédagogique, à quel degré y intégrez-vous la littérature féministe et comment vos étudiants réagissent-ils à ce positionnement ?

Le contenu, la transmission de contenus et l'intérêt des étudiants pour tout contenu que je serais en mesure de transmettre ont changé à plusieurs reprises au cours des cinquante années durant lesquelles j'ai enseigné. Dans certains cas, j'ai mis l'accent sur un contenu féministe parce qu'il était spécifiquement indiqué dans le programme. Mais je ne me suis jamais appesantie sur des écrits auxquels les étudiants ne s'intéressaient pas. C'est un principe qui vient de la philosophie qui était appliquée à CalArts lorsque j'y étais étudiante de troisième cycle au début des années 1970 : aucune information qui ne soit pas nécessaire. Je suis également façonnée par l'histoire du modernisme, en particulier de l'art de 1940 à nos jours. Ce que j'avais appris par le biais de l'expérience en grandissant, en tant qu'enfant dans le New York artistique des années 1950, je m'y suis ensuite formée en lisant des textes à propos de cette période de la New York School, découvrant en particulier les écrits des artistes eux-mêmes – notamment Barnett Newman, Ad Reinhardt et Jack Tworkov, dont j'ai édité en 2009 les écrits, publiés par Yale University Press (*The Extreme of the*



Dress Book : Angel
1977, technique mixte sur papier de riz,
146,1 × 44,5 × 13,2 cm.

« LES "MASQUES" ET LES "ROBES" DU MILIEU DES ANNÉES 1970 ÉTAIENT DES CHOSES, NON DES PEINTURES, NI DES SCULPTURES. »



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Vue de l'exposition
«Mira Schor, Moon Room»,
Bourse de Commerce –
Pinault Collection, 2023.

Middle. Writings of Jack Tworok). Cette histoire était alors contestée, mais de nombreux artistes considérés comme faisant partie de la Pictures Generation et du postmodernisme de façon générale s'y réfèrent.

Ces dernières années, savoir comment enseigner s'est avéré une problématique difficile, car les étudiants sont soit en quête de discours qui ne relèvent pas de mes centres d'intérêt, soit moins enclins à lire parce que le rythme de la vie a énormément changé.

Ma façon la plus significative d'intégrer le féminisme et les questions théoriques afférentes, c'est par ma présence physique et par ce que je dis sur ces sujets en suivant l'impulsion du moment – ainsi que par mon

œuvre et mes écrits. L'enseignement est une concrétisation sur de nombreux plans, et certaines choses qui paraissent élémentaires sont peut-être celles qui ont la plus grande importance.

Comment décririez-vous le rôle du langage dans vos peintures et dans votre vie en tant que professeure, artiste et féministe ?

Ainsi que je l'ai indiqué précédemment en répondant à la question de l'interdisciplinarité au sein de mon œuvre, le langage est un aspect essentiel de mon existence, en tant que personne désireuse de se pencher sur l'histoire. ■



De Mira Schor à Cyril Duret, grand écart

LE 15 SEPTEMBRE 2022

L'éclectisme étant une des règles de base de ce blog, je voudrais vous parler aujourd'hui de deux expositions qui se tiennent à peu près à l'opposé sur le plan esthétique et qui ne témoignent pas du tout des mêmes préoccupations, mais qui ont un médium commun, la peinture. Il s'agit de l'exposition de Mira Schor à la galerie Marcelle Alix et de celle de Cyril Duret à la galerie Loeve&Co Marais. Mira Schor est une artiste américaine que l'on ne connaît quasiment pas en France. Pourtant, ce n'est plus une jeune artiste, puisqu'elle est née en 1950. Elle est issue d'une famille d'artistes juifs polonais qui a fui l'Europe pendant la Guerre pour immigrer aux Etats-Unis. Mira Schor, qui a étudié au Lycée français de New York et qui parle très bien notre langue, est peintre, mais elle est aussi autrice, critique d'art et éditrice. Elle a commencé sa carrière en tant qu'assistante de Red Grooms dans cette même ville. Puis, convertie au féminisme par sa sœur Naomi, elle est allée s'installer en Californie où elle a rejoint le fameux projet Woman House (cf [Women House, paroles de femmes - La République de l'Art \(larepubliquedelart.com\)](#)) et où elle a eu Miriam Shapiro et Judy Chicago pour professeurs. Elle le dit elle-même : les quelques mois passés dans le CalArts Feminist Art Program, qui incluait le projet Woman House et partait du principe que, alors que l'espace public était dominé majoritairement par les hommes, le domestique restait celui des femmes, furent déterminants pour le reste de sa carrière, mais elle ne voulait pas s'y enfermer : tout en affirmant son militantisme, elle voulait l'exprimer de sa propre manière, qui n'est pas forcément celle qu'on attend en pareil cas.

En tant qu'éditrice, elle a co-fondé, avec la peintre Susan Bee, le journal *M/E/A/N/I/N/G*, dont la fonction était essentiellement de publier des écrits d'artistes (Mira Schor avait été étonnée de constater à quel point certains artistes parlaient bien eux-mêmes de leur travail). Elle s'y est d'ailleurs beaucoup exprimée et elle est l'autrice, en 1997, de *Wet: On Painting, Feminism, and Art Culture* ainsi que de nombreux essais sur l'art et le féminisme. Mira Schor est également professeur et pendant près de dix ans, elle a enseigné à la Parsons School of Design de New York. Peindre, écrire, enseigner ne sont pas des disciplines parallèles pour elle, mais des activités qui se complètent et se nourrissent les unes les autres.

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LA GALERIE DU MOIS

L'ARTISTE À DÉCOUVRIR

Johannes Sivertsen, l'ambiguïté faite peinture



Elle n'aime pas qu'on la considère comme « atypique », « parce que, dit-elle, tout le monde l'est un peu », mais il faut bien reconnaître que Suzanne Tarasiève occupe une place un peu [...]

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Il y a au moins trois paradoxes dans l'œuvre et la personne de Johannes Sivertsen qui expose en ce moment chez Gilles Drouault, pour la première fois en France. D'abord [...]

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L'exposition qu'elle propose chez Marcelle Alix, *Orbs and eclipses*, composée d'œuvres récentes, témoigne bien de cette hybridation. Elle s'ouvre par deux grandes peintures dans lesquelles est présent un personnage féminin, double de l'artiste, et qui font écho à une petite aquarelle de ses débuts qui semble encore sous l'influence du surréalisme. Dans les deux cas, une surface circulaire (la lune, l'orbe) apparaît et semble traverser les murs de la chambre dans laquelle le personnage se tient enfermé. Plus loin, des toiles sont accrochées qui représentent des mots, car toute une partie du travail pictural de l'artiste est basé sur le langage et n'hésite pas à poser des questions ou à affirmer des propos en lien direct avec une forme d'existentialisme (*I need a reason to live, My Trauma, Your Trauma, our Trauma*). Les mots apparaissent aussi à l'intérieur d'autres toiles, coupés au milieu sur la double page d'un livre. Et dans d'autres toiles enfin, les larmes coulent, abondamment mais seules, comme une entité propre, sans qu'on sache d'où elles viennent. Le tout dans une grande cohérence formelle et des motifs que l'on retrouve d'une peinture à l'autre.

Au fond, au travers des images, des mots, des assertions, Mira Schor se raconte, elle dit ses peurs, son histoire, ses combats. Sa grande référence est Charlotte Salomon, cette artiste allemande qui mourut en déportation à l'âge de 26 ans et dont le travail a été redécouvert ces dernières années (cf [Charlotte Salomon, retour aux sources - La République de l'Art \(larepubliquedelart.com\)](#)). Celle-ci a laissé une œuvre dans laquelle texte et images se combinent et qui a la forme d'un journal intime. Bien sûr, leurs esthétiques n'ont rien à voir, celle de Charlotte Salomon s'apparentant plutôt à un expressionisme un peu brut et Mira Schor étant beaucoup moins explicite dans son propos. Mais elles viennent de la même culture, celle de l'Europe centrale, où la pensée, aussi l'humour, jouent un rôle si important. En cela, Mira Schor est une artiste européenne : elle porte des revendications très actuelles, dans un langage qui ne l'est pas moins, mais ses références sont plus du côté de l'art moderne, d'une époque où le savoir livresque avait au moins autant d'importance que l'image.



A l'opposé, se situe le travail de Cyril Duret, ce jeune peintre qui a été l'élève de Nina Childress, et qui a sa première exposition personnelle à la galerie Loeve&Co Marais. Car son propos est la peinture mondaine, un genre auquel sont identifiés des artistes comme Boldini ou Jacques-Emile Blanche, qui peint le fameux portrait de Proust, et plus près de nous Dali, Warhol ou encore Pierre et Gilles. Mondaine, parce qu'elle représente des gens le plus souvent célèbres ou puissants (le commissaire-priseur François de Ricqlès, l'expert Alain Weil, la chanteuse Barbara Carlotti, par exemple), dans leur environnement, c'est-à-dire avec leurs collections, les objets qui les caractérisent, l'ambiance dans laquelle ils évoluent. Ce sont parfois des portraits frontaux, où le modèle regarde dans la direction du spectateur, à la manière des portraits de familles aristocratiques italiennes que Patrick Faigenbaum réalisa il y a quelques années, parfois des scènes de genre, où les personnages, généralement en groupe, se livrent à leurs activités préférées, un peu comme les « Conversation pieces » du XVIIIe siècle. Mais la particularité de Cyril Duret est de ne jamais chercher l'ironie, le décalage, le commentaire critique : les portraits résultent soit de commandes, soit de choix délibérés, mais ils témoignent toujours d'un véritable respect du modèle, d'une empathie, d'une manière de vouloir le valoriser et le mettre en avant.



La force de ce travail -et, d'une certaine manière, sa modernité- est alors de jouer sur le genre, d'en assumer les règles et les contraintes. Car pour le reste, sa peinture, au demeurant très maîtrisée, pourrait sembler un peu désuète, avec sa palette sourde qui rappelle l'intimité d'un Vuillard, ses clairs obscurs nostalgiques, ses compositions qui renvoient souvent aux maîtres du passé. Mais le dandy en joue et en rajoute même un peu dans la tradition. Une des clés de son travail (outre Nina Childress, qui est d'ailleurs représentée ici et avec qui il partage le goût des images de stars) se trouve sans doute dans la personne de Patrick Mauriès, auteur du *Second manifeste camp*, à qui deux toiles sont consacrées, chez lui, à Nice. Celui-ci a publié récemment un ouvrage sur les « Néo-romantiques », un groupe de peintres de l'entre-deux-guerres, qui privilégiaient la figure humaine, voulaient échapper aux diktats du modernisme et dont Christian Bérard faisait partie (cf [Christian Bérard, la peinture masquée - La République de l'Art \(larepubliquedelart.com\)](#)). C'est à une école de ce type (où officiaient aussi Pavel Tchelitchev et Eugene Berman) que souhaiterait appartenir Cyril Duret, une école de l'à-côté, qui ne va pas forcément dans le sens des aiguilles de la montre, qui joue de sa singularité et de son anachronisme. Mais là où le jeune homme est culotté, c'est quand il demande à des gens comme Colette Barbier, Vincent Honoré ou Nicolas Bourriaud, c'est-à-dire aux thuriféraires de l'art d'aujourd'hui de poser pour lui. Car on sait que, parmi eux, il n'y a pas que de grands défenseurs de la peinture, surtout de ce type !

-Mira Schor, *Orbs and eclipses*, jusqu'au 27 octobre à la galerie Marcelle Alix, 4 rue Jouye-Rouve 75020 Paris (www.marcellealix.com)

-Cyril Duret et *le portrait mondain*, jusqu'au 15 octobre à la galerie Loeve&Co Marais, 16 rue de Montmorency 75003 Paris (www.loeveandco.com)

Images : vues de l'exposition de Mira Schor à la galerie Macelle Alix avec ; 1, *Time/spirit (New Red Moon Room)*, 2022 acrylic, acrylique, peinture à l'huile, pastel et encre sur toile 182,9 x 269,2 cm unique, 2 ; *A life*, 2020, Acrylique et encre sur toile 63,5 x 91,4 cm unique, photos Aurélien Mole ; vues de l'exposition de Cyril Duret à la galerie Loeve&Co Marais



Wilson Tarbox

Six expositions en galerie à ne pas manquer pendant Paris+ par Art Basel

Une rétrospective Mira Schor, les peintures pop hyperréalistes de Chéri Samba et les dernières sculptures en acier de Carol Bove sont parmi les coups de cœur

De nombreuses galeries participant à Paris+ par Art Basel proposent, en parallèle, des expositions au sein de leur espace parisien. Voici une sélection de six d'entre elles, parmi les meilleures, à découvrir entre deux visites au Grand Palais Éphémère.

< 1/3 >

Mira Schor, « Orbs and eclipses »
Galerie Marcelle Alix
Jusqu'au 27 octobre

Nichée dans une petite rue du haut Belleville, la galerie Marcelle Alix est le lieu emblématique où bat le cœur de la jeune scène artistique underground parisienne. Cette image ne se dément pas en cet automne, avec l'exposition « Orbs and eclipses », présentant des peintures réalisées ces deux dernières années, ainsi qu'une gouache historique réalisée en 1971. Bien que Mira Schor ne soit peut-être pas une « jeune » peintre – elle explore depuis 50 ans le même médium avec les mêmes aspirations –, son travail témoigne de l'esprit rebelle propre au quartier qui accueille actuellement son exposition. Ses petits formats, ses toiles non tendues, son économie de matériaux et son iconographie résolument féministe produisent une alchimie unique, à la fois puissante et modeste.

< 1/4 >



Mira Schor, l'as des astres

Avec «Orbs and Eclipses», l'artiste s'affranchit des codes et joue avec une temporalité mouvante.



GALERIE MARCELLE ALIX

Née en 1950, Mira Schor a emmagasiné assez d'expérience en matière de peinture pour s'en faire fort. Elle ne s'en prive pas, mais le clame avec une telle ostentation, en se contentant de dépeindre en toutes lettres le mot «*expérience*» sur quelques-unes des toiles qu'elle expose à la gale-

rie Marcelle Alix, que l'ironie du geste ne manque pas de faire sourire. Avoir de l'expérience, un certain âge (72 ans), n'empêche pas de savoir en plaisanter. Ses œuvres se teintent toutes de cette défiance sur les idées reçues en peinture. L'art est-il censé saisir l'esprit du temps? L'artiste américaine couche un per-

sonnage au lit, sous la couette, les yeux clos, déjà las du livre qu'il tient ouvert à la page «*Timespirit*». Manuel de savoir-peindre au goût du jour? Très peu pour Mira Schor. Qui semble s'en remettre plus volontiers aux astres. Et notamment à celui qui rougeoie dans le coin de la toile, faisant clignoter une autre temporalité, celle de l'éternité, et une autre connexion. Celle qui s'établit entre le cosmos et le corps (de l'artiste et des autres) bien plutôt que celle qui brancherait chacun avec la mode. Les astres planent sur d'autres toiles de l'expo, avec leur grosse boule colorée de rouge ou de noir sans jamais que les coups de pinceaux ne débordent des limites du cercle. Curieux. Parce qu'aucune des toiles n'est enchâssée et qu'elles flotent au mur, punaisées.

Puis parce que les contours des autres motifs restent vagues. Les astres, non. Ils sont en place et se tiennent là. A chacun (personnage peint comme spectateur) il appartient de savoir quoi faire de ce rayonnement, de cette influence lointaine sa vie et son œuvre. Mira Schor, bien qu'elle soit une militante féministe, se garde bien de reconnaître à l'art ou la peinture la capacité de donner à rien le moindre sens définitif. Non sans humour, le tableau qui clôt l'expo est lui-même pris d'un besoin qui laisse pantois – et qu'on finit par faire sien – en réclamant pour lui-même une raison d'exister: «*I Need a Reason to Live*», est-il écrit.

JUDICAËL LAVRADOR

ORBS AND ECLIPSES
MIRA SCHOR à la galerie
Marcelle Alix, à Paris,
jusqu'au 27 octobre.



MIRA SCHOR : LE LANGAGE DE LA PEINTURE

30.09.2022 | MATYLDA TASZYCKA



Mira Schor avec *Strange Fruit* et *Dicks, or The Impregnation of the Universe* (œuvres de 1988, huile sur multiples toiles, 284,5 x 134,6 cm chaque), Lyles & King, New York, 2017 © Mira Schor.

À la fois peintre et critique d'art, Mira Schor occupe par son double engagement une place singulière sur la scène artistique new-yorkaise. Élève de Miriam Schapiro et Judy Chicago à CalArts, au sein de l'expérimental Feminist Art Program, elle choisit finalement une voie artistique singulière, opérant à la croisée du langage et de la peinture qu'elle transforme, avec l'appui de ses nombreux textes critiques, en médium féministe à part entière. En 1986, elle fonde avec Susan Bee la revue *M/E/A/N/I/N/G*. Cet entretien est l'occasion de revenir sur sa formation, sa carrière et son engagement féministe.

Matylda Taszycka : Ces derniers temps, la situation politique a eu une grande influence sur vous et vos travaux. Vous avez écrit que la peinture est un « piège à miel pour le discours contemporain¹ ». Dans quelle mesure le langage de la peinture est-il selon vous capable de représenter la réalité historique contemporaine ?

Mira Schor : Laissez-moi revenir sur le « piège à miel ». J'ai utilisé cette expression dans les années 1990, lorsque je travaillais avec l'imagerie de parties du corps genrées sexualisées mais aussi politisées. Je décrivais alors une visite de mon atelier avec une commissaire d'exposition et galeriste intéressée par l'art politique, y compris par les questions sexuelles et raciales. Elle essayait de comprendre mes tableaux : « Ils sont politiques, mais ce sont des tableaux ; ce sont des tableaux, mais politiques. » C'était exactement ce que j'essayais d'atteindre : une œuvre que vous regarderiez, mais parce que l'on vous aurait dit de la regarder ni parce qu'elle illustrerait une situation politique spécifique, mais parce que votre œil serait saisi par quelque chose d'expressif en elle ; la peinture elle-même était métaphorique.

J'ai passé la période allant de l'été précédant l'élection de Donald Trump jusqu'à 2018 à faire ce que je conçois comme un travail extrêmement politique, dont 150 dessins. Je lisais le *New York Times* et faisais ensuite un dessin spécifique à un moment particulier d'indignation, parfois en le citant, donc certains de ces dessins sont emplis de ses paroles démentes. Ce travail était figuratif par le fait qu'il y avait une sorte de femme mythologique indignée, hurlant ou je ne sais quoi. J'ai continué une pratique parallèle d'annotation et de correction occasionnelle d'exemplaires du journal.

M. T. : Lorsque vous étiez étudiante, vous avez participé au Feminist Art Program, au California Institute of Arts (CalArts), en 1971-1972, sous la direction de Miriam Schapiro (1923-2015) et de Judy Chicago (née en 1939). En 1972, vous avez pris part à *Womanhouse*. Vous avez écrit que votre éducation a été formatrice d'une double manière, vous marquant d'un point de vue à la fois générationnel et politique. À quoi ressemblait cette éducation féministe ?

M. S. : J'appellais ça un « camp d'entraînement pour féministes ». Le but était d'utiliser l'éveil des consciences, les lectures féministes, le développement d'une histoire des femmes artistes et d'une histoire de l'art féministe afin de faire prendre conscience aux jeunes femmes de la manière dont elles étaient éduquées dans une forme de complicité avec leur propre oppression au sein du patriarcat. Il s'agissait de retirer ces lunettes qui vous font voir la vie en rose et d'expérimenter avec de nouveaux matériaux, sujets et méthodes pour créer un art qui refléterait cette nouvelle conscience. Ce n'était pas un « cours », c'était un engagement à plein temps et un programme séparatiste. Interdit aux hommes. Il y avait un grand atelier commun dédié au programme, avec une porte fermée. Ce que nous faisons derrière celle-ci et la curiosité à ce sujet ont éveillé la conscience féministe de toute l'institution.

J'étais déjà consciente de l'exclusion des femmes artistes de l'histoire de l'art parce que je baignais depuis l'enfance dans les croyances et les mœurs de la scène artistique new-yorkaise. Étudiante en histoire de l'art à New York University, je suivais les cours de H. W. Janson, auteur de ce qui était alors le plus grand manuel d'histoire de l'art, qui excluait toutes les femmes. Je ne voulais pas devenir historienne de l'art ; je m'identifiais à ce qu'il y avait de l'autre côté du projecteur de diapositives. J'avais la chance de connaître des femmes artistes ; ma mère Resia Schor (1910-2006) était une artiste ; vers 18-19 ans, je suis devenue amie avec Pat Steir (née en 1940) ; j'étais une bonne amie de l'artiste pop Red Grooms (né en 1937) et de son épouse la peintre Mimi Gross (née en 1940) ; par leur biais, j'ai rencontré la peintre Yvonne Jacquette (née en 1934). Elles étaient toutes si intéressantes, si sérieuses au sujet de l'art et si encourageantes. Quand je suis entrée à CalArts, j'ai été acceptée et prise au sérieux en tant qu'artiste. À cette époque, mon travail était autobiographique. J'étais bien au fait des questions formalistes grâce à la fois à mon enfance et à mon éducation dans le secondaire. Je pensais ce que je faisais en termes de mouvements historiques, je comprenais pourquoi j'étais rejetée par le schéma de pouvoir masculin de l'école formaliste greenbergienne. J'ai commencé à comprendre le rôle du *surréalisme* comme une sorte d'espace féministe clandestin



(même si les hommes à la tête du mouvement étaient odieux). Mes œuvres étaient représentatives de mon état psychique et autobiographique. Aucune autre école n'aurait permis cette approche.

Vers la fin de ma première année, je suis partie du Feminist Art Program pour ne jamais y revenir. Dans *Goodbye CalArts!* (1972), je suis représentée à demi-nue avec des fleurs derrière moi, entrant dans un cercle social. Dans ce monde, Fluxus était très important et avait autant d'influence sur l'idéologie de l'école que sur moi en ce qui concerne l'attitude, l'importance du langage et même la performativité. Les derniers mois que j'y ai passés, j'avais mis en place un cours intitulé « Picture Making », qui s'est révélé avoir de l'influence, et c'est ce qui m'a lancée sur ma propre carrière d'enseignante.

CalArts encourageait l'ouverture à différentes formes de pratiques artistiques, même sans enseignement direct. C'était une expérience académique non académique - la dernière expression de l'esprit de 1968 dans l'éducation artistique aux États-Unis. Vous n'aviez pas besoin de vouloir devenir un artiste de performance pour apprendre quelque chose en regardant Simone Forti (née en 1935) les yeux bandés dans un couloir, faisant l'expérience d'être aveugle, assistée par un professeur de judo. Je n'avais pas besoin de prendre un cours avec elle ; je pouvais voir ses idées en action. Cela m'a permis d'enseigner à un spectre assez large d'étudiant-e-s et d'acquérir une connaissance de base des principes ou possibilités offerts par les différentes formes artistiques.

M. T. : Vous écrivez que l'enseignement a toujours à voir avec le pouvoir et vous parlez de la contradiction entre la séduction et le fait d'avoir de l'influence sur ses étudiant-e-s. Après CalArts, quelle a été votre attitude par rapport à cette position dominante ? Quelle expérience avez-vous fait de l'influence en tant qu'étudiante et en tant qu'enseignante ?

M. S. : Gross et Chicago n'avaient pas de modèle pour ce que pouvait être un schéma de pouvoir féministe, parce que le schéma de l'autorité dans l'enseignement était masculin et patriarcal. Ce modèle était brutal ; si vous y résistiez, alors vous étiez considérée comme ayant réussi. En tant que professeurs, elles essayaient de créer une atmosphère et une philosophie d'enseignement entièrement nouvelles, mais aussi de secouer les jeunes femmes pour qu'elles prennent conscience de leurs habitudes patriarcales et les abandonnent. C'était intense.

C'est un privilège d'avoir pu participer à cela. Aucune école ne pourrait enseigner de cette manière de nos jours ; ces dernières années, nous avons eu à faire à des réactions fortes d'étudiant-e-s déclenchées par l'emploi de certains mots. Mais travailler avec J. Chicago, qui s'intéressait à la performance, dans une sorte de psychodrame, c'était comme un énorme événement déclencheur ! L'une des idées les plus importantes du Feminist Art Program était d'essayer de développer, à travers le processus d'éveil des consciences, des sujets pour l'art à une époque qui succédait à ce moment greenbergien lors duquel il était impossible d'explorer d'autres sujets que la forme elle-même. Nous avions des séances à propos de nombreux aspects de l'expérience féminine : la sexualité, le corps, le viol. C'étaient des sujets standards d'éveil des consciences à l'époque et cela faisait souvent naître des émotions puissantes, que le corps enseignant ne parvenait pas toujours à gérer de manière adéquate.

Quand j'ai commencé à enseigner, mon approche était inspirée d'un modèle plus ou moins basé sur l'interaction psychanalytique, quelque chose qui était alors encouragé par le professeur avec qui j'ai travaillé après le Feminist Art Program, Stephan von Huene (1932-2000). Je parle de l'œuvre avec l'étudiant-e jusqu'à ce qu'il y ait un déclin. J'en parle en des termes formels, parce que de nos jours, les jeunes artistes travaillent souvent à partir de politiques identitaires, en excluant tout formalisme. Certains sont déterminés d'une manière si rigide à représenter des questions politiques qu'ils ne regardent même pas l'art, ils essaient simplement de travailler à partir de cette identité. J'essaie de leur faire voir leur travail comme un travail artistique. Mais j'essaie de répondre à leurs problématiques personnelles.

M. T. : Dans quelle mesure ce type d'expérience a-t-il eu un impact sur vous, non seulement en tant qu'artiste mais en tant que critique ?

M. S. : On nous a appris non seulement qu'il était important d'avoir produit une œuvre, mais également qu'il était préférable qu'il y ait des textes à votre sujet. Si le discours ambiant vous rejetait, il fallait que vous créiez votre propre discours.

M. T. : Le lien entre l'écriture et la peinture est caractéristique de votre pratique. Certains de vos tableaux contiennent des citations directes de vos textes critiques. Qu'est-ce qui vous a amenée vers ce travail pictural avec le langage ? Est-ce directement lié à votre travail de critique et autrice ?

M. S. : Le langage comme image est d'abord apparu dans mon travail à la fin des années 1960 puis, plus sérieusement, au milieu des années 1970, bien avant que je commence à écrire sur l'art. Dans les années 1990, quand j'ai recommencé à utiliser le langage comme image, j'ai écrit : « Je peins en anglais. » La signification de ce que je peins est importante. Ce que je veux, c'est que la-le spectateur-riche regarde mon œuvre, même si elle ou il ne peut en déchiffrer la signification. Je veux qu'il pense : « c'est du langage », parce que tout le monde l'utilise ; il y a la même motivation derrière le tableau *Slit of Paint* (1994), reproduite sur la couverture de *Wet*. Le langage est important, mais il faut aussi reconnaître celui de la peinture comme un langage en tant que tel et considérer les deux ensemble. Ma pratique se situe à l'intersection entre la « facture », la matérialité, le plaisir visuel et un contenu linguistique conceptuel.

Modest Painting (2001) est le titre d'un essai ainsi que d'un tableau représentant la première phrase de cet essai². Quand Virginia Woolf a écrit *Une chambre à soi* (1929), on ne pensait pas que les femmes étaient imprégnées du langage, dans le sens des concepts, de la littérature ou du langage politique. J'avais cette image en tête d'être une jeune femme, assise dans une salle de cinéma, et de réaliser que chaque femme dans la pièce pourrait disparaître de la vie publique et personne ne se soucierait jamais ou ne serait jamais conscient du fait qu'elle ait existé. Woolf écrit sur cette accumulation de vies non documentées. Ce livre est un des manifestes de ma vie.

Dans les années 1970, le texte représenté dans mes œuvres était personnel - des lettres que toutes les femmes écrivent, mais c'étaient les miennes, elles m'étaient propres. Ensuite, je n'ai plus utilisé l'écriture en tant qu'image pendant un moment, puis j'y suis retournée au début des années 1990, avec du langage approprié, car à cette époque, je baignais dans le discours sur l'appropriation et le langage théorique. En 2007, après la mort de ma mère, je n'avais plus de mots pour exprimer ce que je ressentais, alors j'ai évacué le langage de mes tableaux. Et ces dernières années, je mets sur la toile tout ce qui me semble nécessaire à un moment donné.

M. T. : Vous avez été formée par les féministes de la deuxième vague à CalArts et en même temps, vous n'avez jamais abandonné la peinture, vous l'avez défendue dans vos écrits et dans votre pratique. Dans l'introduction de *Wet*, vous écrivez que vous essayez d'unir féminisme et formalisme. La théorie féministe et la matérialité ne sont donc pas mutuellement exclusives selon vous ?

M. S. : Non, au contraire. C'est drôle : j'ai aussi été accusée d'essentialisme, à la fois parce que je parle des femmes et parce que la peinture elle-même est perçue comme essentialiste - quoi que je fasse, je suis perdante ! J'ai toujours été consciente des mouvements historiques et de leurs politiques. Mais j'ai aussi grandi en voyant l'art en train d'être fait. J'ai reçu plus qu'une seule influence. De ces années de formation, j'ai appris les valeurs formelles et matérielles, ainsi que l'importance du récit. Ensuite, lors de mes études d'histoire de l'art, j'ai commencé à apprendre les contextes et les raisons pour lesquelles les styles ont changé. Tout ce que l'on pense d'abord détester en tant qu'artiste peut être utile, car cela ouvre des portes, tandis que les choses que l'on aime nous donnent surtout les fondements de l'amour de l'art. L'une des choses qui me préoccupent en ce moment est de travailler à de très grands formats : il est plus difficile pour moi d'être physiquement engagée avec le matériau et de laisser des accidents se produire.

M. T. : En 1986, vous avez fondé avec la peintre Susan Bee la revue d'art *M/E/A/N/I/N/G*, qui est depuis devenue une référence. Pouvez-vous nous raconter sa genèse ? A-t-elle à voir avec la possibilité d'écrire en tant qu'artiste ?

M. S. : À l'origine, il y a « Appropriated Sexuality », mon premier essai publié, sur la représentation des femmes dans la peinture de David Salle (né en 1952), notamment *Autopsy* (1982)³. Au fil du temps, de nombreuses personnes ont lu l'essai, y compris plusieurs des *Guerrilla Girls*, avant même qu'il ait été publié. S. Bee et moi faisons partie d'un petit groupe de critiques-artistes qui se retrouvait une fois par mois pour regarder des vues d'expositions et en discuter. Un jour de 1986, nous avons simplement décidé de publier une revue, car *October*, à laquelle nous affûtons alors notre réflexion, se concentrait majoritairement sur la photographie, et nous voulions mettre l'accent sur d'autres formes artistiques que la photographie. Nous sommes toutes deux féministes, mais nous voulions aussi publier des hommes. Nous avons décidé de ne pas imprimer d'images sur un papier de mauvaise qualité, donc les auteurs devaient décrire les œuvres, et il n'y avait pas de publicité. Le premier numéro était autofinancé, autoédité et autodistribué. Je n'avais aucune expérience des petites revues, je ne connaissais pas l'histoire des revues au sein de l'expressionnisme abstrait et je ne



savais pas que certains artistes que je connaissais, comme Jack Tworkov (1900-1982), étaient de fantastiques auteurs. Le numéro a été très bien reçu et mon papier a reçu des réponses enflammées. L'historienne de l'art féministe Carol Duncan m'a appelée après cela. Il nous fallait faire un autre numéro. Au bout d'un an, nous avons publié le deuxième numéro et ensuite, nous sortions deux livraisons par an. Nous avons donné la parole à d'autres artistes et aidé des gens à publier leur premier texte sur l'art. Au bout de dix ans, nous avons arrêté et travaillé pendant plusieurs années à faire aboutir la publication d'une anthologie de *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* (2000). À ce moment, mon livre *Wet* était sorti.

M. T. : Les critiques d'*October* n'étaient pas enthousiastes au sujet de la peinture contemporaine et prédisaient sa mort, au profit de la photographie et de l'art vidéo. Leur approche était celle dominante aux États-Unis lorsque vous avez lancé *M/E/A/N/I/N/G*. Quelle était votre position au sein de ce débat critique dans les années 1980 ? Pensez-vous qu'ils étaient conscients de la dimension genrée et antiféministe de cette critique de la représentation ?

M. S. : Ces hommes étaient vraiment contre la peinture, et contre un groupe particulier de peintres - dont certains que je critiquais également -, mais ils étaient critiques à leur égard pour *le fait* qu'ils peignaient et non pour *ce* qu'ils peignaient. Donc, dans le cas de D. Salle, leur problème, c'était la trahison des principes baldessariens et non la manière dont les femmes étaient représentées. Le langage utilisé pour écrire sur l'art a radicalement changé au début des années 1980 pour incorporer l'influence de Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, ainsi que du marxisme et du langage anthropologique, entre autres. C'était quelque chose de différent du langage formaliste qui était alors remplacé. Progressivement, ce nouveau langage est en partie devenu le mien également, mais étrangement, c'est exactement à ce moment que j'ai commencé à utiliser la peinture à l'huile et que je me suis recentrée sur un point de vue plus féministe. J'étais donc influencée en tant qu'artiste par le discours avec lequel j'étais engagée en tant que critique d'art. J'étais en grande partie d'accord avec la critique que Benjamin D. Buchloh faisait du néo-expressionnisme, mais pas avec sa critique de « Figure/Ground », de la peinture en tant que telle. J'aime toujours la peinture ; j'aime en faire, j'aime la regarder. Il y avait une sorte de front unifié composé de, disons, le Centre Pompidou, *October*, le New Museum, le Whitney Independent Study Program et, enfin, le Museum of Modern Art qui avait beaucoup de pouvoir institutionnel. Ce n'est pas que les femmes artistes étaient complètement exclues ; le formalisme l'était, comme l'essentialisme pictural, l'abstraction et la représentation qui ne découlaient pas de l'appropriation. L'appropriation jouait un grand rôle pour moi lorsque j'ai commencé à peindre : j'ai appris d'elle ; je me suis approprié le langage politique mais pas l'imagerie. Il était acceptable que D. Salle représente les femmes d'une manière pornographique tant que c'était un acte d'« appropriation », ce qui était censé lui donner un « regard critique¹ ». Il y avait des peintres femmes, bien sûr, dont certaines avaient du succès à l'époque, comme [Susan Rothenberg](#) (1945-2020) ou [Elizabeth Murray](#) (1940-2007). Mais le discours auquel je me confrontais ne s'intéressait pas à de telles « peintres pour peintres ».

M. T. : Était-il possible de s'identifier, en tant que féministe et en tant que peintre, à des femmes de la génération précédente, comme [Barbara Kruger](#) (née en 1945) ou [Mary Kelly](#) (née en 1941) ? Ou bien y avait-il d'autres modèles pour vous ?

M. S. : Parmi mes premiers modèles importants, il y avait [Florine Stettheimer](#) (1871-1944), [Charlotte Salomon](#) (1917-1943) et, à la fin des années 1970, [E. Murray](#), [Nancy Spero](#) (1926-2009), [Ana Mendieta](#) (1948-1985) et [Louise Bourgeois](#) (1911-2010). J'admire [Ida Applebroog](#) (b. 1929) - au sujet de laquelle j'ai écrit pour *Artforum* en 1989 - et [Alice Neel](#) (1900-1984). Elles étaient et continuent d'être des modèles. J'admire B. Kruger et je reconnais l'importance du travail de M. Kelly. Mais le drame du milieu de ma carrière, dans les années 1990, quand j'avais établi ma pratique de l'écriture, c'est que lorsque je représentais le langage, c'était souvent un langage approprié - politique. Et pourtant, je n'étais pas reconnue par le milieu théorique, parce que j'étais peintre, et les féministes qui admiraient la méthodologie et les fondements théoriques de M. Kelly m'accusaient d'être essentialiste, un trait préjudiciable à la carrière, à cette époque. Il a fallu presque quinze ans pour que certaines de mes œuvres commencent à être décrites dans des termes que je pouvais reconnaître, par des autrices telles qu'[Amelia Jones](#).

M. T. : Dans « *The Erotics of Visuality* », vous écrivez être intéressée par « le retour du plaisir visuel comme une intervention féministe en peinture⁵ ». Est-il difficile de dialoguer avec l'histoire de la peinture, majoritairement masculine, tout en restant féministe ?

M. S. : Une partie du contexte de cette citation serait la critique du plaisir visuel incarnée par l'essai extrêmement influent de Laura Mulvey, « *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* » (1975), une bible de la critique féministe à l'époque. Mes modèles viennent de l'ensemble de l'histoire de l'art, qui est majoritairement masculine, donc il n'est pas difficile de dialoguer avec. J'ai fini par comprendre que le travail de certains artistes hommes était considéré comme « féminin » dans la hiérarchie de l'histoire de l'art (voyez la façon dont Michel-Ange décrit l'art flamand de son époque comme un art pour les moines et les femmes). Adolescente, j'adorais les surréalistes - malgré leurs opinions personnelles au sujet des femmes, ils étaient au moins intéressés par *l'animé*. Beaucoup de choses m'intéressent lorsque je regarde un tableau : dans un Francisco de Goya (1746-1828), chaque coup de pinceau fait partie d'une conversation - il dit quelque chose et je réponds. L'expérience que je fais de l'art se joue à plusieurs niveaux. Cela commence avec ce que Walter Benjamin décrit comme la « facture », avec l'histoire de la peinture et les conditions idéologiques de la représentation. Quand je regarde un tableau, je suis bilingue : je lis la surface et l'échelle, ainsi que l'histoire, s'il y en a une représentée.

M. T. : Je me suis souvent retrouvée tiraillée entre, d'un côté, la fascination pour les brillants écrits sur la matérialité de B. Buchloh, par exemple, et, de l'autre, l'attrance envers la puissance visuelle des œuvres et de l'histoire de l'art. Il y a quarante ans, vous avez en fait déjà posé cette question...

M. S. : B. Buchloh est brillant et il s'intéresse aux choses d'une manière profonde, bien que dogmatique. Lorsque j'ai écrit « *Figure/Ground* » (1989)⁶, de jeunes artistes m'ont dit : « Vous m'avez fait comprendre qu'il est possible d'être peintre. » Beaucoup d'entre eux et elles avaient entendu des figures d'autorité qu'ils respectaient leur dire qu'ils ne devraient ou ne pouvaient pas peindre. Dans mon texte, j'avais réussi à utiliser certaines références et certains schémas d'appui théorique communs à ceux de B. Buchloh, tout en introduisant deux autres discours à cette thèse, ceux de Klaus Theveleit et de Luce Irigaray. Tous deux ont eu une grande influence sur moi.

M. T. : Vous avez écrit sur la pression que ressentent les artistes de faire des œuvres qui attirent l'attention mais aussi sur la peinture modeste.

Considérez-vous vos gouaches sur papier des années 1970 comme une contribution explicitement modeste à cette grande tradition de la peinture ?

M. S. : J'avais conscience du vaste problème que constituait la dimension dans l'histoire de l'art occidental et de ses implications critiques et théoriques - c'était même un but politique. Mais j'étais aussi influencée par les petits tableaux de mon père, par la peinture flamande et par les prédelles des retables de la Première Renaissance. D'une certaine manière, c'était simplement le travail que j'étais en mesure de produire à l'époque. À Womanhouse, j'ai réalisé une grande peinture, une fresque sur les trois murs d'un dressing (1,2 x 2,4 m) - une peinture dans laquelle on pouvait entrer. La même année, j'ai essayé de travailler à des peintures à l'huile de dimensions conventionnelles et ce n'était pas ce qui me correspondait à ce moment-là : je n'appréhendais pas la peinture à l'huile d'une manière qui m'était propre. J'ai fait beaucoup d'œuvres, comme *War Frieze* (1991-1994), qui sont de grandes dimensions, mais composées de petites parties ; ainsi, je pouvais facilement exécuter l'œuvre et la ranger.

Lorsque j'avais une vingtaine d'années, j'ai compris qu'il y avait pour moi trois échelles pour une œuvre : ce que je peux tenir dans ma main ; ma taille ; la dimension architecturale. J'ai travaillé à l'échelle de ce qui tient dans ma main et appris qu'il était possible de faire des images puissantes de cette dimension. Ensuite, dans les années 1970, les robes de papier étaient à l'échelle du-de la spectateur-riche. Dans les petites peintures, je veux que le-la spectateur-riche soit incité à s'approcher. Dans le cas des délicates figures de papier, j'ai trouvé la relation avec les spectateurs masculins intéressante : confrontés à une forme féminine, délicate, dans leur espace, ils la percevaient comme agressive. Récemment, j'ai pu travailler à l'échelle architecturale pour certaines œuvres, y compris une peinture sur papier calque de 5,5 mètres de large. Elle est ridiculement fragile, comme une aile de papillon géant. C'est ma version de *L'Atelier du peintre* (1884-1885) de Gustave Courbet.

M. T. : Vos parents, Ilya Schor (1904-1961) et Resia Schor (1910-2006), étaient deux artistes qui ont émigré de Pologne en France puis fui la France pour New York afin d'échapper à l'Holocauste. Vous êtes née aux États-Unis. Comment cette culture mixte, qui apparaît dans *The Jewish Daughter* (1985) - où une figure féminine abstraite est couronnée par la représentation de l'une des couronnes de Torah en argent de votre père -, se présente-t-elle dans le reste de votre travail ? L'œuvre de vos parents a-t-elle été importante pour vous ?

M. S. : Les œuvres de mon père contenaient souvent des représentations de texte en hébreu. Je ne lis pas l'hébreu, donc je ne pouvais faire



l'expérience du texte que comme une forme ou comme l'idée de l'écriture et de l'apprentissage. J'ai peint *The Jewish Daughter* alors que je finissais mon essai sur D. Salle. Je m'étais immergée dans l'idéologie qui promouvait l'appropriation comme la seule possibilité de produire de manière légitime une imagerie politique sans tomber dans tous les pièges de l'histoire et de l'essentialisme. Alors je me suis dit que j'allais m'approprier quelque chose, l'une des couronnes de Torah de mon père⁷, qui n'est pas une chose que je perçois de manière ironique, mais une chose que j'aime et considère comme un chef-d'œuvre - elle a été détruite dans l'incendie d'une synagogue.

Je me souviens de mon père travaillant dans son atelier à la maison ; je regardais les mouvements de son pinceau ou de son poinçon de gravure. Cela m'a profondément marquée. Sa carrière passait en premier, à la fois dans la chronologie et en termes d'importance au sein de notre famille, mais aussi dans le monde extérieur, car il comptait comme une voix authentique de l'esprit de la judéité d'Europe de l'Est détruite par l'Holocauste. J'ai été influencée par lui, son travail et sa présence. Quand il est mort, ma mère, qui était une peintre abstraite, n'avait que 50 ans. Elle avait deux enfants et il fallait qu'elle gagne sa vie, donc elle a décidé de finir certaines des œuvres que mon père avait laissées inachevées sur sa table de travail. Elle n'avait jamais pratiqué ce médium auparavant. Et soudain, elle a commencé à faire de magnifiques bijoux dans un style à elle, complètement sculptural, abstrait. J'admirais son travail et elle accordait de l'importance à mon opinion, même lorsque j'étais adolescente. Mon père était un artiste délicat, à la main légère, très habile, tandis que ma mère avait une approche plus musclée et audacieuse. Elle travaillait souvent au-dessus du four, dans la cuisine, où elle avait une installation à gaz pour souder ses larges pièces d'argent. Elle portait des lunettes de protection et son visage était entièrement recouvert de suie. Elle a gagné sa vie, elle a exposé et on a écrit sur son œuvre. Son travail a surtout été considéré comme de l'artisanat, mais selon moi, c'était un art puissant et unique.

Les étudiant-e-s posent souvent des questions sur la valeur de l'art, l'intérêt politique ou l'intérêt qu'il y a à être un-e artiste si l'on n'est pas connu-e. Je ne pense pas exactement que l'art puisse changer le monde, mais il constitue certainement mon monde. Il m'a aidée à vivre. Et en même temps, c'est juste une entreprise familiale ; l'art est une activité normale.

Traduit de l'anglais par Delphine Wanes.

1

Mira Schor, *Wet: On Painting, Feminism, and Art Culture*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1997, p. VII.

2

« *I would like to put forward the notion of "modest painting." It won't put itself forward, because it is inherently resistant to the self-commodification actively encouraged by contemporary culture.* » (« J'aimerais mettre en avant la notion de "peinture modeste". Elle n'est pas facile à mettre en avant car elle est intrinsèquement résistante à l'automarchandisation activement encouragée par la culture contemporaine. ») *Id.*, « Modest Painting », *Art Issues*, janvier-février 2001, p. 18.

3

Id., « Appropriated Sexuality » (1986), dans Susan Bee et Mira Schor (éd.), *M/E/A/N/I/N/G: An Anthology of Artists' Writings, Theory, and Criticism*, Durham / Londres, Duke University Press, 2000, p. 24-36.

4

Ibid.

5

Id., « The Erotics of Visuality » (1992), dans *Wet, op. cit.*, p. 165.

6

Id., « Figure/Ground » (1989), *ibid.*, p. 144-155.

7

Id., « Ilya Schor and Resia Schor: Refuge as Transformation », Renee & Chaim Gross Foundation, 8 juin 2022.

Matylda Tazzycka est responsable des programmes scientifiques d'AWARE : Archives of Women Artists, Research and Exhibitions, où elle pilote les actions et les publications portant sur les artistes femmes des XIX^e et XX^e siècles. Elle est notamment chargée de l'organisation de colloques en partenariat avec des musées et universités, ainsi que de la coordination des prix AWARE pour les artistes femmes. Diplômée de l'École du Louvre, elle a aussi travaillé à la Monnaie de Paris, avant de rejoindre l'Institut polonais de Paris en tant que responsable des arts visuels. Elle est également commissaire d'exposition et critique d'art indépendante.

L'entretien a été retranscrit par Éléonore Besse.

Pour citer cet article :

Matylda Tazzycka, « Mira Schor : le langage de la peinture » in *Archives of Women Artists, Research and Exhibition Magazine*, [En ligne], mis en ligne le 30 septembre 2022, consulté le 1 octobre 2022. URL : <https://awarowomenartists.com/magazine/mira-schor-le-langage-de-la-peinture/>.

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De Mira Schor à Cyril Duret, grand écart

LE 15 SEPTEMBRE 2022

L'éclectisme étant une des règles de base de ce blog, je voudrais vous parler aujourd'hui de deux expositions qui se tiennent à peu près à l'opposé sur le plan esthétique et qui ne témoignent pas du tout des mêmes préoccupations, mais qui ont un médium commun, la peinture. Il s'agit de l'exposition de Mira Schor à la galerie Marcelle Alix et de celle de Cyril Duret à la galerie Loeve&Co Marais. Mira Schor est une artiste américaine que l'on ne connaît quasiment pas en France. Pourtant, ce n'est plus une jeune artiste, puisqu'elle est née en 1950. Elle est issue d'une famille d'artistes juifs polonais qui a fui l'Europe pendant la Guerre pour immigrer aux Etats-Unis. Mira Schor, qui a étudié au Lycée français de New York et qui parle très bien notre langue, est peintre, mais elle est aussi autrice, critique d'art et éditrice. Elle a commencé sa carrière en tant qu'assistante de Red Grooms dans cette même ville. Puis, convertie au féminisme par sa sœur Naomi, elle est allée s'installer en Californie où elle a rejoint le fameux projet Woman House (cf [Women House, paroles de femmes - La République de l'Art \(larepubliquedelart.com\)](#)) et où elle a eu Miriam Shapiro et Judy Chicago pour professeurs. Elle le dit elle-même : les quelques mois passés dans le CalArts Feminist Art Program, qui incluait le projet Woman House et partait du principe que, alors que l'espace public était dominé majoritairement par les hommes, le domestique restait celui des femmes, furent déterminants pour le reste de sa carrière, mais elle ne voulait pas s'y enfermer : tout en affirmant son militantisme, elle voulait l'exprimer de sa propre manière, qui n'est pas forcément celle qu'on attend en pareil cas.

En tant qu'éditrice, elle a co-fondé, avec la peintre Susan Bee, le journal *M/E/A/N/I/N/G*, dont la fonction était essentiellement de publier des écrits d'artistes (Mira Schor avait été étonnée de constater à quel point certains artistes parlaient bien eux-mêmes de leur travail). Elle s'y est d'ailleurs beaucoup exprimée et elle est l'autrice, en 1997, de *Wet: On Painting, Feminism, and Art Culture* ainsi que de nombreux essais sur l'art et le féminisme. Mira Schor est également professeur et pendant près de dix ans, elle a enseigné à la Parsons School of Design de New York. Peindre, écrire, enseigner ne sont pas des disciplines parallèles pour elle, mais des activités qui se complètent et se nourrissent les unes les autres.

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[Répondre](#) [Retweeter](#) [Favori](#)

A Paris cet été? Ne manquez pas l'exposition conçue par #emmalavigne à la Bourse du Commerce, sous le titre "Une Se... [t.co/Vv9R9G6fu4](#)

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LA GALERIE DU MOIS

L'ARTISTE À DÉCOUVRIR

Johannes Sivertsen, l'ambiguïté faite peinture



Elle n'aime pas qu'on la considère comme « atypique », « parce que, dit-elle, tout le monde l'est un peu », mais il faut bien reconnaître que Suzanne Tarasiève occupe une place un peu [...]

[LIRE LA SUITE .../...](#)

Il y a au moins trois paradoxes dans l'œuvre et la personne de Johannes Sivertsen qui expose en ce moment chez Gilles Drouault, pour la première fois en France. D'abord [...]

[LIRE LA SUITE .../...](#)

L'exposition qu'elle propose chez Marcelle Alix, *Orbs and eclipses*, composée d'œuvres récentes, témoigne bien de cette hybridation. Elle s'ouvre par deux grandes peintures dans lesquelles est présent un personnage féminin, double de l'artiste, et qui font écho à une petite aquarelle de ses débuts qui semble encore sous l'influence du surréalisme. Dans les deux cas, une surface circulaire (la lune, l'orbe) apparaît et semble traverser les murs de la chambre dans laquelle le personnage se tient enfermé. Plus loin, des toiles sont accrochées qui représentent des mots, car toute une partie du travail pictural de l'artiste est basé sur le langage et n'hésite pas à poser des questions ou à affirmer des propos en lien direct avec une forme d'existentialisme (*I need a reason to live, My Trauma, Your Trauma, our Trauma*). Les mots apparaissent aussi à l'intérieur d'autres toiles, coupés au milieu sur la double page d'un livre. Et dans d'autres toiles enfin, les larmes coulent, abondamment mais seules, comme une entité propre, sans qu'on sache d'où elles viennent. Le tout dans une grande cohérence formelle et des motifs que l'on retrouve d'une peinture à l'autre.

Au fond, au travers des images, des mots, des assertions, Mira Schor se raconte, elle dit ses peurs, son histoire, ses combats. Sa grande référence est Charlotte Salomon, cette artiste allemande qui mourut en déportation à l'âge de 26 ans et dont le travail a été redécouvert ces dernières années (cf [Charlotte Salomon, retour aux sources - La République de l'Art \(larepubliquedelart.com\)](#)). Celle-ci a laissé une œuvre dans laquelle texte et images se combinent et qui a la forme d'un journal intime. Bien sûr, leurs esthétiques n'ont rien à voir, celle de Charlotte Salomon s'apparentant plutôt à un expressionisme un peu brut et Mira Schor étant beaucoup moins explicite dans son propos. Mais elles viennent de la même culture, celle de l'Europe centrale, où la pensée, aussi l'humour, jouent un rôle si important. En cela, Mira Schor est une artiste européenne : elle porte des revendications très actuelles, dans un langage qui ne l'est pas moins, mais ses références sont plus du côté de l'art moderne, d'une époque où le savoir livresque avait au moins autant d'importance que l'image.



A l'opposé, se situe le travail de Cyril Duret, ce jeune peintre qui a été l'élève de Nina Childress, et qui a sa première exposition personnelle à la galerie Loeve&Co Marais. Car son propos est la peinture mondaine, un genre auquel sont identifiés des artistes comme Boldini ou Jacques-Emile Blanche, qui peint le fameux portrait de Proust, et plus près de nous Dali, Warhol ou encore Pierre et Gilles. Mondaine, parce qu'elle représente des gens le plus souvent célèbres ou puissants (le commissaire-priseur François de Ricqlès, l'expert Alain Weil, la chanteuse Barbara Carlotti, par exemple), dans leur environnement, c'est-à-dire avec leurs collections, les objets qui les caractérisent, l'ambiance dans laquelle ils évoluent. Ce sont parfois des portraits frontaux, où le modèle regarde dans la direction du spectateur, à la manière des portraits de familles aristocratiques italiennes que Patrick Faigenbaum réalisa il y a quelques années, parfois des scènes de genre, où les personnages, généralement en groupe, se livrent à leurs activités préférées, un peu comme les « Conversation pieces » du XVIIIe siècle. Mais la particularité de Cyril Duret est de ne jamais chercher l'ironie, le décalage, le commentaire critique : les portraits résultent soit de commandes, soit de choix délibérés, mais ils témoignent toujours d'un véritable respect du modèle, d'une empathie, d'une manière de vouloir le valoriser et le mettre en avant.



La force de ce travail -et, d'une certaine manière, sa modernité- est alors de jouer sur le genre, d'en assumer les règles et les contraintes. Car pour le reste, sa peinture, au demeurant très maîtrisée, pourrait sembler un peu désuète, avec sa palette sourde qui rappelle l'intimité d'un Vuillard, ses clairs obscurs nostalgiques, ses compositions qui renvoient souvent aux maîtres du passé. Mais le dandy en joue et en rajoute même un peu dans la tradition. Une des clés de son travail (outre Nina Childress, qui est d'ailleurs représentée ici et avec qui il partage le goût des images de stars) se trouve sans doute dans la personne de Patrick Mauriès, auteur du *Second manifeste camp*, à qui deux toiles sont consacrées, chez lui, à Nice. Celui-ci a publié récemment un ouvrage sur les « Néo-romantiques », un groupe de peintres de l'entre-deux-guerres, qui privilégiaient la figure humaine, voulaient échapper aux diktats du modernisme et dont Christian Bérard faisait partie (cf [Christian Bérard, la peinture masquée - La République de l'Art \(larepubliquedelart.com\)](#)). C'est à une école de ce type (où officiaient aussi Pavel Tchelitchev et Eugene Berman) que souhaiterait appartenir Cyril Duret, une école de l'à-côté, qui ne va pas forcément dans le sens des aiguilles de la montre, qui joue de sa singularité et de son anachronisme. Mais là où le jeune homme est culotté, c'est quand il demande à des gens comme Colette Barbier, Vincent Honoré ou Nicolas Bourriaud, c'est-à-dire aux thuriféraires de l'art d'aujourd'hui de poser pour lui. Car on sait que, parmi eux, il n'y a pas que de grands défenseurs de la peinture, surtout de ce type !

-Mira Schor, *Orbs and eclipses*, jusqu'au 27 octobre à la galerie Marcelle Alix, 4 rue Jouye-Rouve 75020 Paris (www.marcellealix.com)

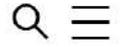
-Cyril Duret et *le portrait mondain*, jusqu'au 15 octobre à la galerie Loeve&Co Marais, 16 rue de Montmorency 75003 Paris (www.loeveandco.com)

Images : vues de l'exposition de Mira Schor à la galerie Macelle Alix avec ; 1, *Time/spirit (New Red Moon Room)*, 2022 acrylic, acrylique, peinture à l'huile, pastel et encre sur toile 182,9 x 269,2 cm unique, 2 ; *A life*, 2020, Acrylique et encre sur toile 63,5 x 91,4 cm unique, photos Aurélien Mole ; vues de l'exposition de Cyril Duret à la galerie Loeve&Co Marais



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artnet

People

'If I'm Going to Do This, I've Got to Do It Now': Artist Mira Schor on Deciding to Tackle Monumental Artworks After Decades of Working Small

Now 70, Mira Schor is ready to take on new challenges.

Sarah Cascone, February 4, 2021



Mira Schor with her piece *The Painter's Studio* (2020). Photo courtesy of Lyles and King, New York.

Like many Americans, artist [Mira Schor](#) spent the last four years watching in horror as former President Donald Trump turned democratic norms on their head, dividing the country with his increasingly toxic rhetoric.

The politically dominated news cycle became a driving force in her studio practice, and selections of the resulting works make up her new solo show, "Tipping Point," at [Lyles and King](#) in New York.



One piece quotes Trump on sanctions against North Korea: “A very rough thing, very unfortunate for the world.” A piece from a series of *New York Times* interventions, created using pages from the newspaper, answers the headline, “Where Do Republicans Go From Here?” with the handwritten message, “straight to hell.”



Mira Schor, *This Is Not Political* (2020). Photo courtesy of Lyles & King, New York.

When the gallery first proposed the exhibition late last summer, the artist was anxious about whether the work would still be relevant by the time the show opened.

“I thought, what if [Joe] Biden gets elected and everything’s okay? No one’s going to want to look back at this very dark period in our history,” [Schor](#) said. “Of course, there’s no problem with that, because we’re still in such deep trouble.”

The focal point of the show are two monumental new works, each measuring 18 feet wide—a major development for an artist who has always worked in a scale of inches, not feet. They were painted as part of a residency at Brooklyn’s [Sharpe Walentas Studio Program](#), begun in August 2019 and extended through summer 2021.

Artnet News spoke to Schor, a lifelong New Yorker, about her current show, making work in response to current events, and what she thinks about the city—and its art scene—in 2021.

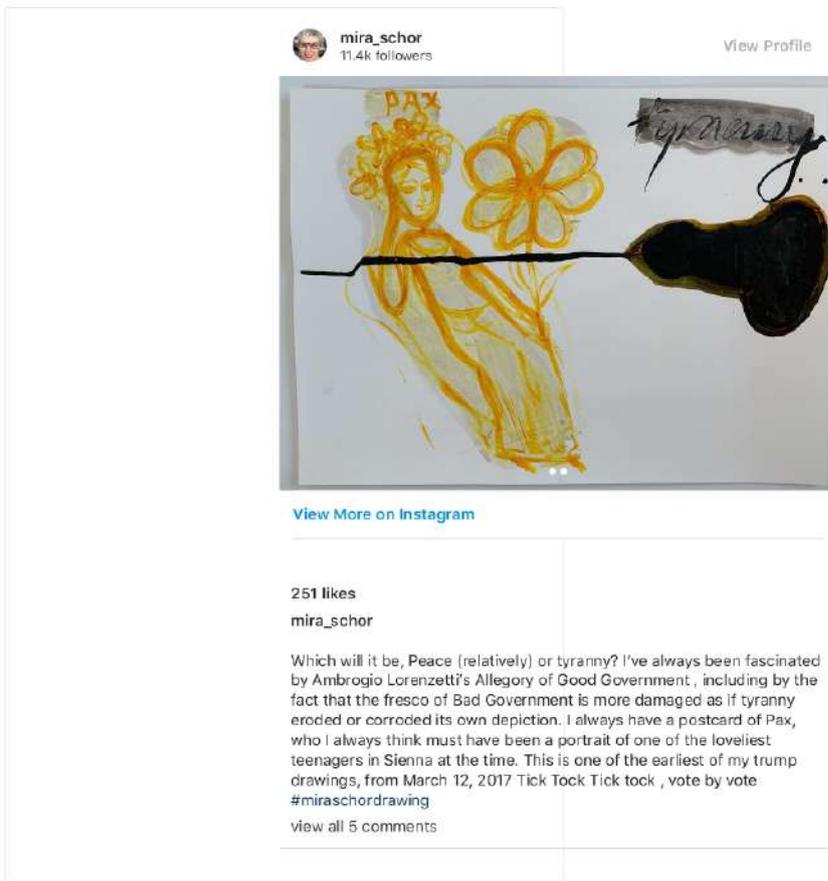


Mira Schor, *A Very Large Fragile Drama* (2019). Photo courtesy of Lyles & King, New York.

What were you thinking about making the works in the current show?

All of the paintings were done after Trump was inaugurated—I never call it the Trump administration, I call it the Trump regime.

I also made a series of about 200 works on craft paper that are not in the show, because they require expensive framing. I call them the Trump drawings, and I think they are a very powerful group of works. I have been very haunted by the amount of work I've done over the last four that has not been seen. It is a little upsetting, to feel that you've done something that really addressed the moment, and not have it become, at that moment, an image that people reference. I feel like these drawings won't be seen for quite a long time, and perhaps I will not be around.



Why had you stuck to smaller works until this point in your career?

Lyles and King showed some of my early work from when I was a graduate student at Cal Arts. They were representational and narrative and personal and had a feminist impulse to them. But the fact that they were small gouache-on-paper [works] was a big issue. I did them against the art world's concerted view that that was not painting. Painting was large, preferably abstract, on canvas—that was it.

And I kind of stuck to my guns. I devised a module for small paintings: 12 by 16 or 16 by 12, depending on how I oriented it. And I did make large works, including a work called *War Frieze*, which I did right after the first Gulf War. In its totality, it is 200 feet wide, but only one foot high, made of 12 by 16 modules put together.

I really had a lot of commitment to that form, wanting to show that that size could have density of meaning and could hold a wall, even from far away. But there was another part of me that always wanted to address the grand tradition of Western painting.



Mira Schor, *After the Party's Over* (2020). Photo courtesy of Lyles & King, New York.

Why did you decide now was the time?

When I was 27, I went to Paris. There was this room at the Louvre that had kind of the apotheosis of the history of Western art, with *The Painter's Studio* [by Gustave Courbet], *The Raft of the Medusa* [by Théodore Géricault], and *The Death of Sardanapalus* [by Eugène Delacroix]. That moment, I was almost completely alone in that room, and just so impressed with those paintings.

I wanted to address them in their own language, scale, and ambition, on my own terms. So I went from admiring those works, but not feeling they were something I could do, to a point where I suddenly could see and believe in myself doing very large works.

I was also thinking of my experience and my friendships with artists older than me, like Leon Golub and Ida Applebroog. Ida is still alive, still doing amazing work, but in her 70s, she began to develop physical problems that made it difficult for her to do her paintings—the physical activities that require strength and mobility, being able to get up and down. I'm 70, and I thought, okay, if I'm going to do this, I've got to do it now.

What have you learned working large?

It requires a lot of physical energy—and now of course, it requires even more. I can't get any assistance in there. So if I do a painting, it sort of lies on the floor, because I can't lift it onto the wall without any help.



Mira Schor, *New York Times Intervention (Straight to Hell, August 9, 2020)* 2020. Photo courtesy of Lyles & King, New York.

How did lockdown affect your ability to work?

I went out to the studio on March 18. It was clear that we were going to be locked out of the building. I realized I had get some art supplies that can't be ordered online because they aren't made anymore. A lot of my brushes are just old—I love them. I grabbed whatever I could carry.

I had to adapt to my domestic studio. It's a decent-sized room, but not for what I'm trying to achieve right now.

We weren't allowed back until September. At first, they were very concerned about the ventilation and the public spaces. We all have separate studios with doors and windows, but they limited how many of us could be there at a time. It was very stressful.



And I have to take three subways to get there each way! It's like an hour trip from the Upper West Side. It takes a lot out of me to do it. I have to deal with fear, but also it's very exhausting to be double masked for two hours a day and deal with all the people who don't wear masks.



[View More on Instagram](#)

689 likes
mira_schor

I just want to get home without having been infected by all the men not wearing masks at all or not on their noses and then I can stay off the subway for about three weeks (ps I have a KN95 mask under that blue surgical mask)

[view all 45 comments](#)

What is your routine like now, in terms of going out?

I have to go to the studio, but otherwise I am trying not to do very much else.

I've gone to a couple of museums, which feels incredibly safe because they're completely empty, which is one of the great treats. I've been to MoMA twice, and both times, you could have just gone roller skating in it. I mean, I was completely alone. To me, that's like a dream, you know?

Actually, one of the biggest risks that I've taken is this show. I had to be in a room with people for a few hours for a few days in a row, having these two guys come from the gallery and help pack the work, and then unpacking the work, and then supervising the hanging.

I had a "opening," which really just meant that one or two friends might show up every 15 minutes—but still it was exposure to a lot more people in an enclosed space. Everybody was wearing masks. I've been wearing a KN95 with a surgical mask over it. So it's pretty safe, one hopes.



Looking back after a year of such dramatic change, how have you seen the city evolve over the decades?

I was born in New York city. I actually live in the apartment that I grew up in, that I was brought to as a baby when I was born. I inherited my mother's apartment and moved here 10 years ago. My parents were artists, so I preserved their studios, and added one of my own.

I lived in Tribeca for over 30 years. When I moved into my loft, it was just a room. I had to pay to have water pipes brought from the center of the building. It was illegal, but everybody was doing it. It was very rudimentary; you did the minimum to just make a place livable.

I had just one room. There was this tremendous simplicity—a unity of life. I could paint, watch TV, cook —things happened in the same place. But I got evicted, owner occupancy eviction.

How hospitable is New York to young artists today?

I treasure living in New York because I can see so much great art. And I'm glad that there are these mega-galleries that are like sort of mini museums. But I think that for young artists, they're kind of alienating.

I teach graduate students at Parsons, and I think that the very corporate, imposing, kind of Death Star-feeling of those large galleries makes it a little less clear how you could ever get to that point. When I started to go to galleries in my late teens, and then my 20s and my 30s, 40s, it had a human scale still. You could somehow imagine how maybe you could get from A to B to C, you know?



Mira Schor, *Justice* (2018). Photo courtesy of Lyles & King, New York.



You've been with Lyles and King since the gallery opened in 2015, as part of their inaugural group show. How has that relationship been compared with your past experiences with dealers?

I've had very, very poor exhibition career—huge gaps of time in between galleries.

I went to graduate school in California, I taught at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, and then I came back to New York. So I had to find my way. I was represented by Ed Thorpe Gallery for two years. Then I went like 11 years without a gallery, until I met Stuart Horodner, who was the director and co-owner of a gallery called Horodner Romley.

It was just a great place. There was a wonderful sense of community. I loved both the shows that I did there, but Stuart's partner decided to retire and the gallery closed in 1995. I didn't show again until 2009!

Working with Isaac [Lyles] has been the most real and consistent and focused gallery representation I've ever had. It's not that easy to "get" an artist with a complex body of work, which mine is. It's not like I've done one thing for 50 years and finally people go, "Oh, right. That one thing." So I admire Isaac for taking it on, understanding it, and working to put it out into the world on a bigger stage.

"Mira Schor: Tipping Point (<http://www.lylesandking.com/mira-schor-exhibitions-1>)" is on view at Lyles & King, 21 Catherine Street, New York, January 8–February 7, 2021.



HYPERALLERGIC

Mira Schor's Critical Annotations of the New York Times
By Valentina Di Liscia
28 September 2020



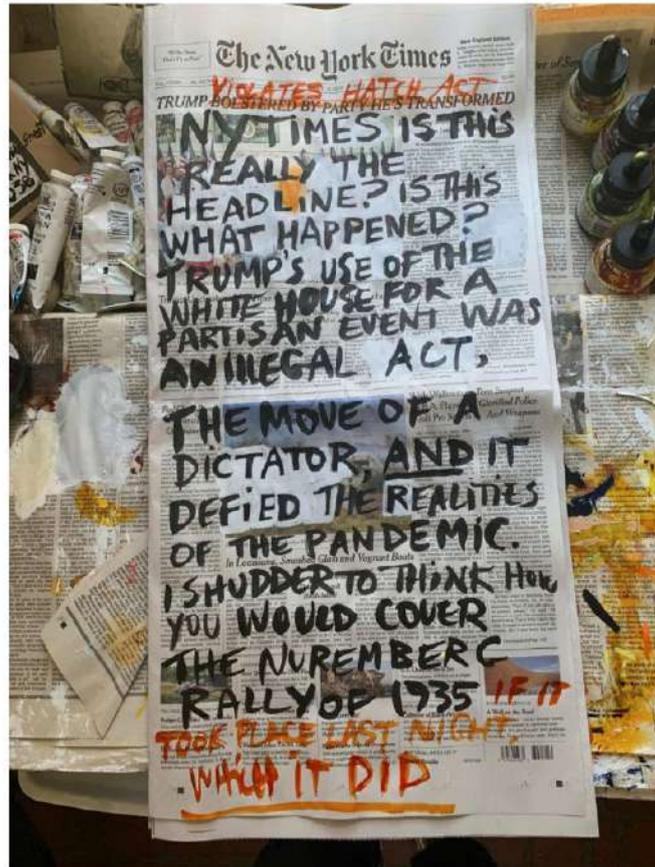
Mira Schor's first intervention into a *New York Times* cover, created the day after Donald Trump's inauguration in 2017. (all images courtesy of Mira Schor)

“Trump Sworn In, Issues a Call.”

This is the phrase brandished on the front page of the *New York Times* on January 21, 2017. That Saturday, the day after the president gave a bizarre inaugural address filled with nationalist rhetoric, millions across the nation flooded the streets of their cities to protest his election and the threat to women's and human rights. Yet the words above the fold of one of the world's most widely-read periodicals struck an unfittingly reverent note. Artist Mira Schor took a black Sharpie to newsprint and proffered a sobering alternative.



“I think what’s significant is that in the issue, the reporting was much tougher,” Schor told Hyperallergic. “Their language was more honest, more accurate. But they don’t put that on the cover — they bury the lede.”



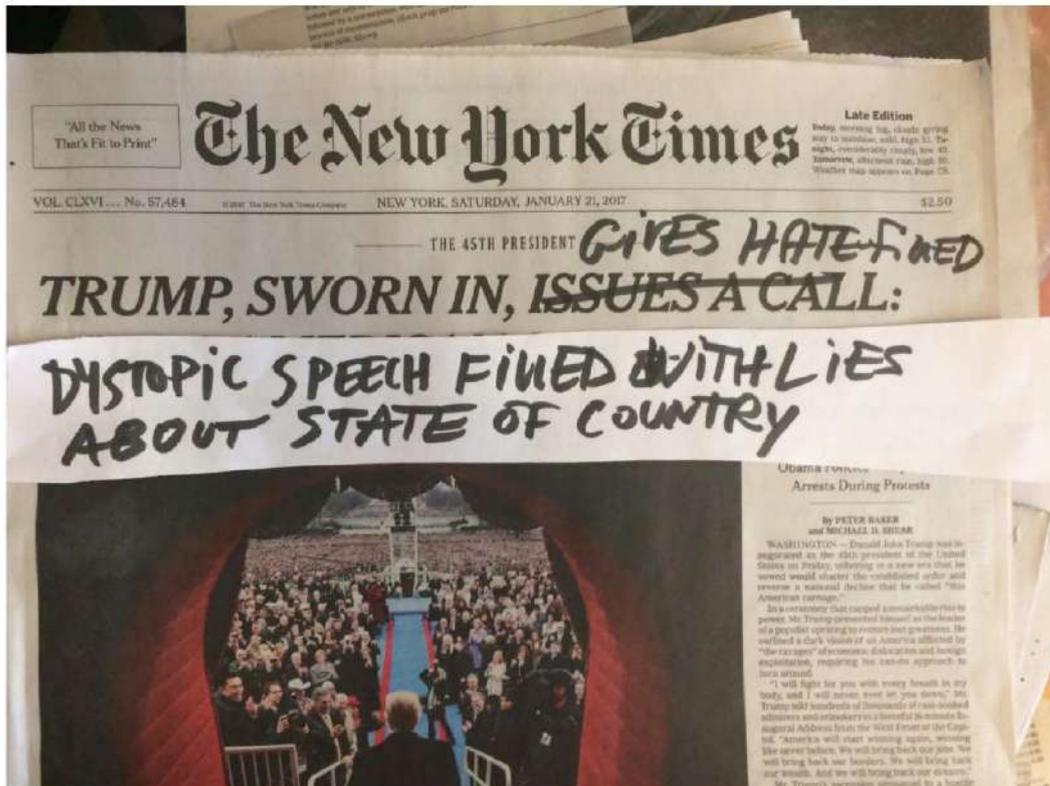
A recent New York Times intervention by Schor.

Nearly four years later, Schor has produced approximately 66 interventions of the Times — she hesitates to call them artworks, though many of them have a visible painterly spirit, balancing spatial and formal elements. One example is a recent cover dedicated to the Republican National Convention, overlaid in her distinctive block text against expanses of white paint. She has reworked the paper’s headline, which credits Trump with transforming the Republican party, to denounce his use of White House grounds for a partisan event — an alleged violation of the 1939 Hatch Act. “Is this really the headline for what took place last night in Washington D.C.?” Schor asks in the caption to the post on her Instagram, where she has been sharing the works. “Be best,” she urges, tagging @nytimes.



Schor's interventions into a November 16, 2019 headline in the wake of Marie Yovanovitch's hearing in the impeachment inquiry.

For decades, Schor has created works of political urgency and feminist ethos. One of her major multi-canvas installations, "War Frieze" (1991-94), was based on language appropriated from news coverage of the First Gulf War. Since the 2016 election, she has produced approximately 200 drawings and a series of related paintings responding to the daily news. In these quasi-surreal landscapes, a cadre of suggestive symbols — a red necktie, a sagging phallus — embody the current executive in chief.



Mira Schor's first intervention into a *New York Times* cover, created the day after Donald Trump's inauguration in 2017. (all images courtesy of Mira Schor)

In recent weeks, Schor has witnessed an unprecedented response to her *New York Times* interventions in particular, which have been suddenly shared by the thousands on social media. But the artist says she did not initially conceive of the works as a series; instead, she told *Hyperallergic*, they started as “an effort to educate people.”

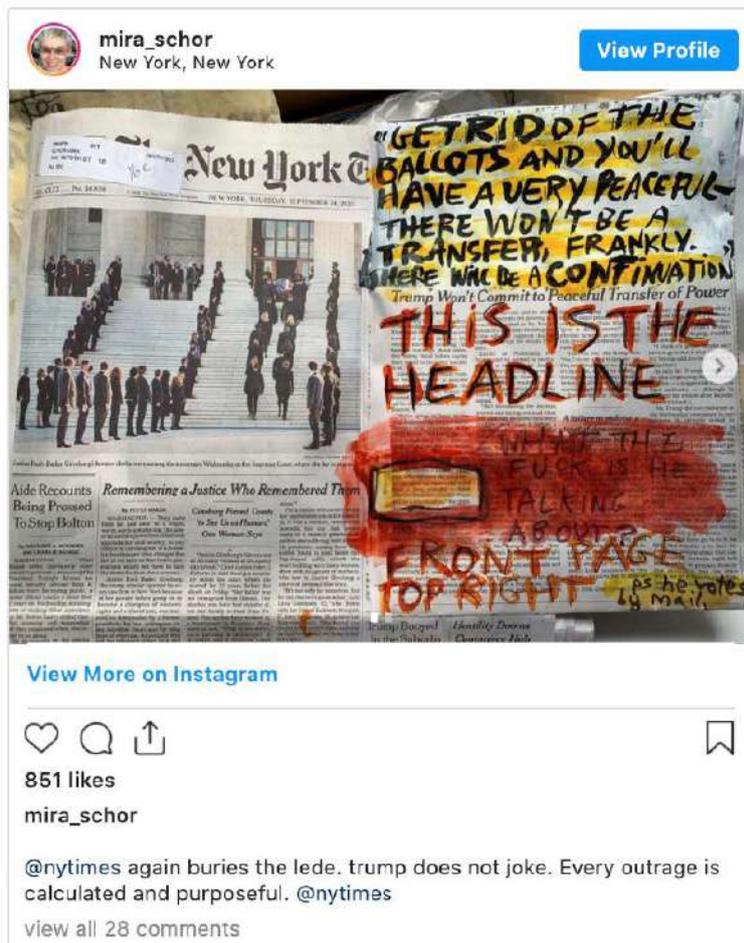
“I felt the need to respond to the namby-pamby, weak reporting that was missing the point or diminishing the reality,” she said. “I’m not ever trying to make it pretty or beautiful. I’m doing what I think is necessary.”

In her edits, she exposes how words can work to warp reality. Though many of these annotations take place on the front page, some of Schor's most interesting alterations are to easily-missed details in the paper's interior: her sharp comments on a letter to the editor from a conservative reader, for instance, or her attention to not-so-subtle equivocations. In one article, she has highlighted in yellow the term “naturalized immigrant,” and added the correction, “You become a naturalized citizen.”



“I have not stopped subscribing. I will subscribe to the Times until they go out of business; it’s part of my life to read it,” Schor continued. “But I think what’s happening now to the paper is very tragic. I think they’re very frightened, which is why they’re doing this pussyfooting — in the tone of the language of the headlines, the interior, and also the op-ed selections. I think they’re very afraid of Trump.”

Indeed, the president is notorious for his ruthless attacks on the press, with the Times among his principal targets. His campaign has sued the paper for libel, claiming an opinion piece published by one of its columnists falsely asserted a “quid pro quo” between Trump and Russian officials.

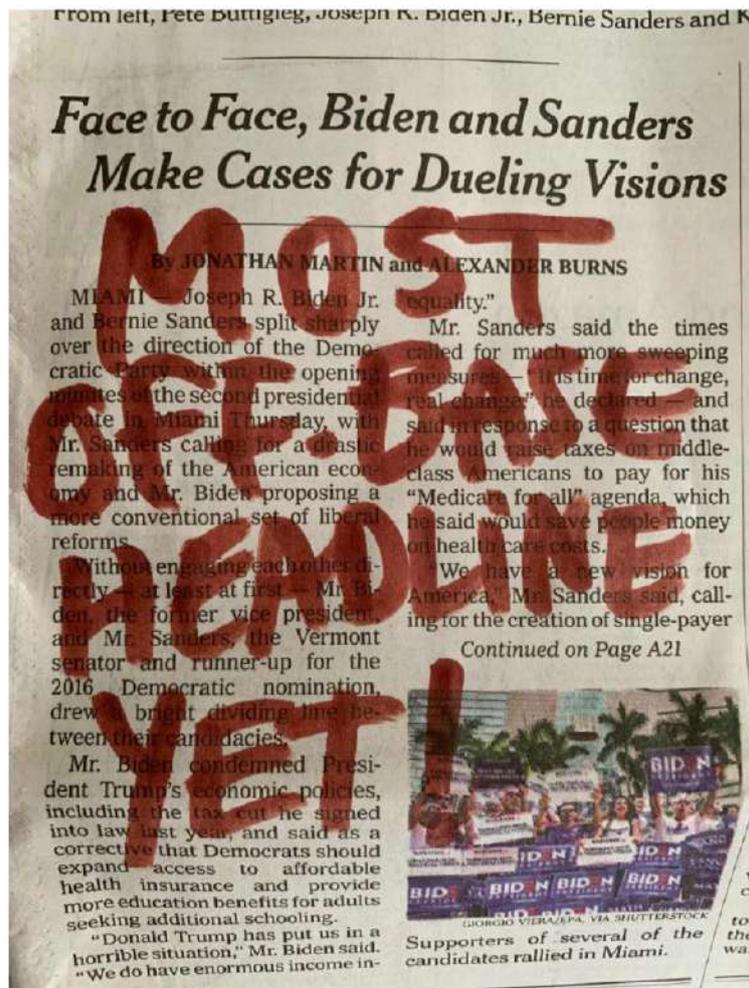




Schor recalls her mother reading the Times cover to cover with a voracious hunger for objective truth and a critical eye. She first became aware of the paper's tendency toward conservative reporting after attending the 1967 march on the Pentagon and reading the attendance numbers, which struck her as conservative.

"I think that everyone comes to political awakening from a specific place. Maybe something happens in your life where you suddenly get a sense of injustice," she told Hyperallergic. "For me, I'm a first-generation American, and my parents were refugees from Hitler. They were in France when the war began and fled."

"There was a historical awareness of fear of fascism, knowledge of the history of Europe and so I think I was very much on alert as this history that we're in right now began," she added.



Some of Schor's New York Times interventions take the form of commentary rather than edits, as in this headline from the paper's coverage of the second presidential debate last year.



It is perhaps not surprising that Schor's Times interventions are going viral in the months leading up to one of the most contentious elections in the history of this nation, as the threat of disinformation and electoral fraud become more imminent. Readers who remember with bitterness the failed predictions of vote forecasters in the wake of the 2016 election — among them the New York Times's Upshot polls — may be especially attentive to vague headlines and overly optimistic leads across all media.

On the day of Trump's inauguration, during an artist speak-out at the Whitney in solidarity with the #J20 Art Strike, Schor expounded the impact of artworks — even those which are not explicitly political — to stir human sentiment. Artists, she said, have a responsibility to reach an audience and mobilize it to action. Her bold edits of a trusted news source invite us to do our own double take.



Doris

15 Jan 2021

Mira Schor: The Disembodied Mind, review by Sharon Butler

Mira Schor's galvanizingly insistent new paintings continue her exploration of self and the disembodied mind. Many painters traffic in purposeful ambiguity, using metaphor and abstraction to leave meaning-making for the viewer. Schor's work, however, is not mysterious or enigmatic: her intention is to tell us what she thinks, to enable viewers to read her mind. One small canvas, stained a bright orange, is overpainted with a black outline in the shape of a protest sign. In an elegant black script, riffing on the 1960s feminist epiphany that the personal is political, the sign reads, "This is not political." Schor, a lifelong New Yorker whose immigrant parents lost most of their family and friends during the Holocaust, is telling us that this work is unapologetically personal.

That's hardly to say that Schor is not engaged with politics. During the past four years, she has been outraged by how Trump and his Republican enablers' anti-democratic, fascist behavior and willful neglect of vital issues like climate change became normalized in the *New York Times*. So each day she began correcting the headlines and posting images of them on Instagram. Of all these pieces, one is included in the show. The front page of a *Times* Sunday Review from last August features an image of Donald Trump seated on a small chair. The headline asks: "Where Do Republicans Go From Here?" Schor smeared garish orange paint over the figure of Trump and, below the headline, in red uppercase painted letters, Schor responded "#1—> STRAIGHT TO HELL." Her rage is palpable.

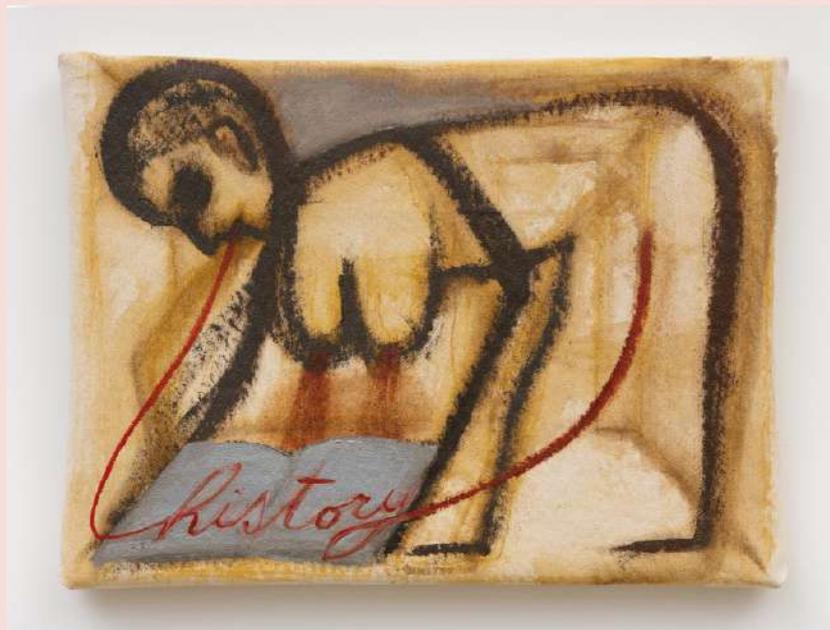
In "A Very Large Fragile Drama," one of the largest paintings in the show, Schor has pieced together sheets of yellow tracing paper and covered them with blue ink that creates a delicate buckled surface. In the center she outlines the simple shape of a house, the kind a child might draw if she knew about linear perspective. Inside the house, an outlined image of a large woman sits on a chair, echoing the image of Trump in the earlier newspaper piece. In her lap she holds a book that seems to be receiving a message in the form of thin red script from the small dark window in front of her. Her outsized head is turned away from the book and the window towards the viewer at what looks like a rapidly, recklessly spinning globe hanging precariously by a thread. An owl with round red eyes, perhaps a symbol of dark times, hovers above the figure. Schor's combination of ephemeral materials, scale manipulation, and shorthand technique for representational drawing underscore the urgency of her message.

In this body of work, how we experience history weighs heavily on Schor's mind. As in much of her previous work, she uses handwritten script as both message and drawing. The handwritten word "history" appears in several paintings. We are a part of history in the moment, we study it, and yet we will never know if our participation continues after we are gone. In *Painting History Painting* Schor addresses this continuum. An image of a naked woman bends over a book, breasts hanging down. The word "history" is written upside down. The viewer can easily



read it, but the figure, who is both making and eyeing it, cannot. Constructed of a single line of red paint and starting at the woman's mouth, the word emerges on the canvas and finishes in the woman's vagina. Red streams of what must be mother's milk pour out of her breasts as if from watering cans that nourish the ongoing enterprise. Schor is connecting with her parents' experience of rising fascism by living through an incipient version of it herself. How did they find the resilience, the hope, to continue? Amid the unrelenting anxiety of the Trump years, Schor seems to have found an existential answer. In *Atlas (Woman and Flower)*, a small hand-stretched painting on canvas at the back of the gallery, the woman is clearly meant to be the artist herself, sporting Schor's cropped white hair and reading glasses. Naked, as all the figures are – clothes are superfluous – she looks at the viewer. Her arms are raised to the ceiling, like Atlas, the titan who held up the sky and the heavens. The effort enables a sunflower, which has arisen on a stem from her vagina, to bloom and grow even bigger than she is. In this cogent and powerful exhibition, Schor declares, defiantly if not quite triumphantly, that in standing up for future generations, there is hope.

"Mira Schor: Tipping Point," Lyles & King, 21 Catherine Street, New York. Through February 7, 2021.









artnet® news

Events and Parties

Editors' Picks: 10 Events for Your Art Calendar This Week, From an Online Art Therapy Class to a Show of Mira Schor's Polemical Works

Plus, take a virtual tour of the Morgan Library and Museum's gems and see works by the Studio Museum in Harlem's latest artists in residence.

Sarah Cascone, January 5, 2021



Mira Schor in her studio at Sharpe Walentas Studio Program. Photo by Brad Ogbonna, courtesy of Lyles & King.

Friday, January 8–Sunday, February 7

5. "Mira Schor: Tipping Point" at Lyles & King, New York

Just days after the Donald Trump presidency draws to a close, Mira Schor will present a series of works created over the course of his term. Some are fueled by the US's increasingly tribal politics (one is titled *What kind of art will we make under facism?*) while more recent works respond to the strange new reality of being stuck at home during lockdown this past year. The show will include the 70-year-old artist's largest works to date, measuring a monumental 18 feet wide.

Location: Lyles & King, 21 Catherine Street

Price: Free

Time: Tuesday–Saturday, 10 a.m.–6 p.m.; Sunday, 12 p.m.–6 p.m.

—Sarah Cascone

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Mira Schor

Johanna Fateman



Mira Schor, *Bear Triptych (Part III)*, 1973. Gouache on Arches paper, 22 × 30 inches.
Image courtesy the artist and Lyles & King.

Lyles & King's exhibition last spring of storied feminist artist Mira Schor's early works from the 1970s might not be as explicitly sexual as the other entries in this week's missive. However, Schor's painting of the tender intimacy between a woman and a bear is an unusual erotic emblem that couldn't be left off this list.



Reviewer Johanna Fateman describes Schor's "eerie, erotic Bear Triptych (1972–73), a heart-quickenning high point in the intriguing exhibition, [which] makes plain the narrative, myth-making quality of her images. Part I depicts the dark-haired Schor seated on a steep sandy slope, her pale form the composition's bright focal point. Framed by imposing cypress trees and a triangle of sky, she gazes into the eyes of a grizzly bear, its sharp claw resting gently on her shoulder as she wraps a long arm around its neck. In Part II, the sun sets on her weird Eden, and she stands turned away, hiding a bloody hand. It's unclear what happened—the barbed tentacle of an agave plant is also stained, and the approaching bear is spattered with crimson. Part III delivers a kind of resolution: the artist and animal locked together, having sex."



MOUSSE

Read My Lips: Mira Schor
Camila McHugh

In the early 1990s, Mira Schor punctuated a series of vaginas with semicolons, nestled between labia or a bristle of pubic hair, the mark's point and curve a deep red. The semicolon denotes a pause; then the sentence carries on. It can signal continuation; let's move forward with attention to what came before. It can also indicate a shift; marking a move in a new direction. Schor's feminism drives her work as she moves deftly between criticism and painting, often positioning language itself as the image or concept of her visual art. In the afterword to her book *Wet: On Painting, Feminism, and Art Culture* (1997), Schor describes her aim to "literally embed the gap between verbal and visual languages with each other's materiality and meaning."¹ This scaring, still-subversive collection of essays bears the semicolon-vagina *Slit of Paint* (1994) on its cover.

In the wake of Hélène Cixous' seminal 1975 text on *écriture féminine*, "The Laugh of the Medusa," Schor answered Cixous' call for outpouring ("I, too, overflow; my desires have invented new desires, my body knows unheard-of songs") with the semicolon's pause.² For Schor, flow is how abuse of power moves cyclically and relentlessly. Her work aims to breach: it is explicit. She takes aim at amnesia. She works in series, often on small canvases, to depict this violent and shape-shifting power that courses through history. Her cycles include allegorical erotic conquests in California landscapes, titled *Story Paintings* (1972-1973); *Language as Image* (1990-2005), comprising word paintings in scrabble-like installations; the *Dickheads* (late 1980s), adorned with ears or red caps that could pass for condoms or missile heads; and *The Avatar Paintings* (2009-2014) of stick-figured women, often with speech-bubble or skull-like heads. In *Red Tie Paintings* (2017-2018), recently exhibited at Lyles & King, New York, this transmission stems from Donald Trump's red tie. The red line transmutes into a noose around a limp dick, from semen to swastika to bloody entrails, before it twists into words.

After participating in the Feminist Art Program at CalArts in 1970 and the *Womanhouse* exhibition led by Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro in 1972 in Los Angeles, Schor taught at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in Halifax, Canada, from 1974 to 1978. There she began working with language as image, layering diary-like entries on translucent rice paper until her handwriting was indecipherable. In *Book of Pages* (1976) she bound these papers, layers of text largely obscured by bleeding ink, rips and redactions, layers of paint and pigment. She also created masks (*Ten Masks* [1977]) and V-neck dress shapes (*Dress Book* [1977]) measured to her body's dimensions from this delicate paper covered with performatively personal and illegible scrawl.

Schor's use of language is distinct from her contemporary Betty Tompkins, for instance, who in 2018 laid pale pink phrases over photorealistic genitalia, a return to her *Fuck Painting* series (1969-1974; reprised 2003). Tompkins uses language—often crowdsourcing reliably misogynist phrases used to describe women—to play with juxtaposition: misogyny in pale pink, stencil against airbrushed grisaille. By contrast, Schor mines political rhetoric or art world refrains where the connection between words

and their meaning is already loose. For instance the term "undue burden"—part of the wording of a Supreme Court abortion decision—circumscribes a deep magenta painting (also titled *Undue Burden*) from 1989 in looping white cursive. In a work in ink and gesso on tracing paper, a speech bubble in hasty handwriting juts into the frame to inquire, "Are you a feminist artist?" (*"Power" Figure #18: Are You A Feminist Artist? [red book]* [2015]). Schor takes language as line; its shapes occupy the same plane as her visual forms.

Returning to New York in the early 1980s, inculcated in the semiotics of the era, Schor painted language like still life. She drew upon the same deep sense of language as an aesthetic form that informed her parents' work in Judaica, particularly Hebrew engravings on silver mezuzahs. She still lives and works among these objects in her Upper West Side apartment—the one she grew up in. From this consciousness coupled with her continuous political activism, Schor created *War Frieze* (1991-1994). Never exhibited in its entirety, this work is a sequence of thirty-by-forty-centimeter canvases arranged in sections of two to six meters in length, stretching nearly a hundred running meters. Borrowing the phrase Griselda Pollock used to describe Charlotte Salomon's *Life? or Theatre?* (1940-1942), *War Frieze* is an "event in the history of art."³ Though it is more loosely narrative, Salomon's *Life? or Theatre?*—which stretches across a thousand works of gouache on paper—also operates sequentially in language and image as well as musical notation, to hover in the possibility that meaning lies between them. *War Frieze* envisions transmission of power as a linguistic bodily fluid propelled from penises into undulating loops that spell "Area of Denial" (a weapon used during the Gulf War), "Essence of Joy," or "Modernism" before inseminating an ear, a womb, or a swollen breast. Sometimes shaded with an amber glow, her thin and steady line recedes into pinkish murk, emerges in strident yellow. *War Frieze* imagines how patriarchy is metabolized, metastasized. What is a body to do? As Schor's fifty-year career indicates, an expansive and evolving notion of how the personal is political and the political is personal is an ever-urgent place to start.

1 Mira Schor, *Wet: On Painting, Feminism, and Art Culture* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 1997), 213.

2 Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs* 1, no. 4 (Summer 1976): 876.

3 Griselda Pollock as quoted by Toni Bentley, "The Obsessive Art and

Great Confession of Charlotte Salomon." *New Yorker*, July 15, 2017. <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/the-obsessive-art-and-great-confession-of-charlotte-salomon>.

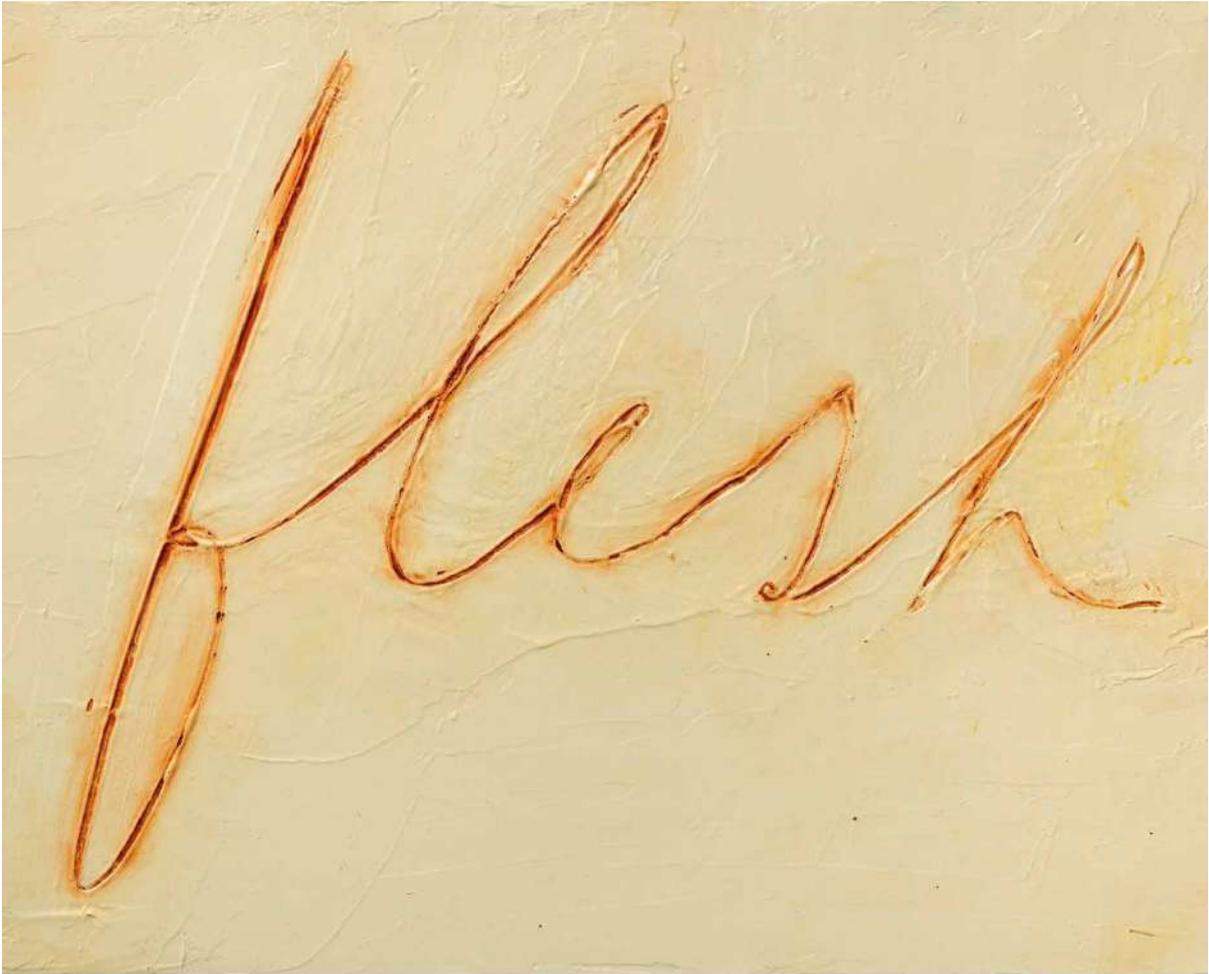
105 Mira Schor, *Flesh*, 2013. Courtesy: the artist and Lyles & King, New York.

Photo: Charles Benton

106 Mira Schor, *Area of Denial*, 1991. Courtesy: the artist and Lyles & King, New York.

Photo: Charles Benton

107 Mira Schor, *Slit of Paint*, 1994. Courtesy: the artist and Lyles & King, New York









NEW YORK

The 10 Best Art Shows of 2019 From an art-world protest to a radically original self-portraitist
December 12, 2019
By Jerry Saltz

9. Mira Schor, Lyles & King Gallery



Photo: Charles Benton, Courtesy of Lyles & King, New York

The early-'70s work of this artist's artist, longtime activist, and respected critic Mira Schor showed how far ahead, strong, personal, and pointed her art has been from the very beginning. An institutional survey is in order.



BORDERCROSSINGS

Mira Schor

Kim Dhillon · Crossovers · Issue 151 · September 2019

Looking back at journals or artworks made as a student can be painful as well as nostalgic, exposing a soft underbelly, ideas raw, not yet finessed. But examining such material reveals the groundwork laid in those early days for what followed. “California Paintings: 1971–1973,” an exhibition of Mira Schor’s early works, many never exhibited before, or not since her MFA show at CalArts in 1973, reveals the foundation of Schor’s practice and maintains their relevance nearly 50 years later. The “California Paintings” here map Schor’s progression as a graduate student, to the completion of her MFA at CalArts in the early 1970s, where she enrolled in the now-legendary Feminist Art Program before she herself became a respected feminist painter and writer.

One year out of her art history degree at NYU, she moved to California, aged 21, having never been to the state before (a friend described it to her as “another country”). Growing up with two artist parents in New York City (her mother, Resia, and her father, Ilya, both multi-talented and working across painting, jewellery, silversmithing), Schor was privy to the daily practice of creating, with both parents working from home. She was also, presumably, aware of the prejudices within the New York art world, specifically those against craft, narrative and gender. The large array of works in “California Paintings,” almost exclusively gouache on paper, demonstrate a young artist finding her form, her themes and her language from this nascent stage in a formative period for the artist, as well as a time of great ferment culturally and politically.

Schor’s visual language in this time is wide-ranging: from Warholesque high heels with pointed toes, positioned in profile, some against a backdrop of an endless highway, to female figures lying in bed hovering above the landscape (surrealist Leonora Carrington was an influence), to the flat melding of figures and landscapes of Rajput paintings. There are recurring spiky succulents, moons and twinned young Miras. The landscape of Schor’s experimentations is distinctly California—palm trees and sunsets on dense painted surfaces that read like stage flats, providing layers of imagery. Gouache on paper was not considered serious painting in the 1970s. (Schor didn’t turn to oil until the 1980s.) Reflecting on the doubts she had to overcome in the course of her time in California, Schor writes on her Instagram feed: “In plain terms, small, narrative, gouache, paper did not denote painting at that time, period.” Against the west coast sunsets, animals often appear both threatening and protecting. Cats are frequently next to the female figures, and a pack of wolves stare down two twinned, naked female figures who stand with their backs to the viewer, hands on hips in *Car Triptyc (Part I)*, October–November 1972. In *Bear Triptych (Part III)*, March 1973, a naked female figure and a bear are locked in a circular embrace that is more erotic than attacking (and this was painted three years before the publication of Canadian writer Marian Engel’s *Bear*). Both triptychs evoke storyboards or filmic sequencing.



Mira Schor, *Car Triptych (Part I)*, 1972, gouache on Arches paper, 30 x 22 inches. All photos: Charles Bontton. All images courtesy the artist and Lyles & King, New York.

Schor, who is arguably as well regarded for her critical writing as she is for her painting, posted excerpts on Instagram from personal letters that she had sent to her close friends. In one to the painter Pat Steir, dated 28 October 1971, Schor writes: "My dorm room is very nice and big, on the top floor, with a view of a golf club (don't knock it though, it's the only green for miles and the water in its 'duck' ponds are the only water for miles), all around are beige hills for miles, and the ever present freeway." The arid landscape and the constructed environment collide, and Schor, reflecting in a letter to Ben Sonnenberg from 7 November 1971, writes that her "brain still holds the sound of the Golden State Freeway which was a constant background hum particularly audible at night." In another letter to Steir (29 November 1971), Schor writes that she has overcome her doubts, arriving at a sense of worth, confidence and euphoria about her work.

In quintessential
Hollywood timing,

it is in her final work, at the culmination of this formative period, that Schor has a creative breakthrough. In May 1973, her painting changed abruptly and dramatically, the self-portrait figure in landscape replaced by image fragments and scrawled language. White space opens up in her composition and her gesture becomes more forceful. *Romance*, May 1973, marked an abrupt pivot with the urgency of someone come to the end of a formative experience. Line is suddenly more jagged, and Schor writes the words "Bruised/ Romance/Kill/Fruit" in an urgent hand, some words smudged or scratched over so as to obscure them. There are areas of dense black contrasting with the white paper, a cloud above a circle from which lines and missiles extend, and lines of red rain down. Nancy Spero's response to the violence of the Vietnam war in works such as *Bomb*, 1966, echoes here. Words will remain in Schor's paintings, and the gap between the verbal and the visual becomes a recurrent theme.

Schor's young signature is remarkably childlike in these works: just "Mira" followed by a doodle of a bird. One story that runs through the "California Paintings" is youngwoman- goes-forth: a new state, a new school, a new art, a changing world. But recontextualizing the "California Paintings," and Schor's then-nascent practice, within the #MeToo movement allows a broader implication than looking back at one artist's career arc. Amongst her many essays, Schor writes in "Patrilineage" on the exclusion of women artists from art history. Schor never needed rediscovery; she has been well recognized with significant achievements and awards throughout her career. But the politics of the US place women under threat, with many civil liberties won in the 1970s being eroded and others not yet won, making these works resonant again, perhaps all the more so.



Car Triptych (Part II), 1972, gouache on Arches paper, 30 x 22 inches.

"California Paintings: 1971-1973" was exhibited at Lyles & King, New York, from April 12 to May 19, 2019.

After 15 years in London, Kim Dhillon now writes about art from Vancouver Island. She teaches critical theory at the University of Victoria.



FLASH ART

REVIEWS

19 September 2019, 5:44 pm CET

Where Art Might Happen: The Early Years of CalArts *Kestnergesellschaft* / *Hannover* by [Andreas Schlaegel](#)



1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

Mira Schor, *The two Miras*, 1973. Gouache on paper, 22 x 29,52 in. Photography by Charles Benton. Courtesy the artist; and Lyles & King, New York.

"A community for all the arts ... a cultural center for the new age." This sounds like another Bauhaus centennial celebration, currently ubiquitous in Germany. But it is the closing promise for the planned CalArts school in Los Angeles, as stated in the Disney-produced short film *The CalArts Story*, produced as part of a fundraising effort in 1964. Apparently successful, it took only another six years until the school was able to move onto its new campus, by then having merged with the Chouinard Art Institute, which had been educating draftsmen for Disney productions since the late twenties, and the traditional Los Angeles Conservatory of Music.

The show's two curators, *Kestner Gesellschaft* director Christine Vegh and LA-based curator Philip Kaiser, started working on the exhibition four years ago, and filmed interviews with thirteen artists active at the school, among them Judy Chicago, Barbara Bloom, Suzanne Lacy, Matt Mullican, Klaus vom Bruch. These commentaries constitute a critical but also anecdotal storyline illuminating the exhibited works, many of which were produced in the early 1970s heyday of CalArts.

The historical exhibition shows that dialogue between two distinct areas of practice were key to the success of the budding institution. Generous funding and artistic freedom early on allowed the first school president, Robert W. Corrigan, to hire visionary artists, including internationally known Fluxus veterans such as Nam June Paik, Alison Knowles, and Allan Kaprow, alongside regional innovators such as John Baldessari and Michael Asher. Each coined their own innovative teaching programs, such as Asher's "temporary structures" or Baldessari's "post-studio" course. In an interview, post-studio alumnus Stephen Prina recalled being congratulated for not needing a studio anymore; rather, he learned that "the world is your studio." Works in



the show reflect the discourses of the period, such as John Baldessari's video *Teaching a Friend the Alphabet* (1972), which shows the artist literally doing that, or Douglas Huebler's *Represented Above is the Shadow of a Point* (1970). Both pieces deliver a somewhat humorous reflection on the difficulties of being a serious teacher in a transformative art-school setting.



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Installation view of "The early years of CalArts" at kestnergesellschaft, Hannover, 2019. Photography by Raimund Zakowski. Courtesy of kestnergesellschaft, Hannover.

The counterpart to this idea-oriented emphasis was the short-lived but equally influential Feminist Art Program (FAP), established by Judy Chicago and Miriam Shapiro. Recruiting only female students, among them Suzanne Lacy and Mira Schor, they sought to develop concepts around women's art history, art practice, and general "consciousness raising." The FAP's activities peaked with the *Womanhouse* exhibition project in 1972, a surprise success that drew thousands of visitors. The outspokenly feminist site-specific installation and performance program was set up and run entirely by female artists in a run-down mansion in Hollywood. Works included installations such as *Crocheted Environment* by Faith Wilding and *Menstruation Bathroom* by Chicago, and performances such as Wilding and Chicago's hilarious *Cock-Cunt Play*.

Artistic positions of later CalArts students show a fusion of these earlier discourses — a synthesis of the formalist and sociological aspects of the post-studio conceptual approach and the systematic critique of inequality and gender roles pursued by the FAP. This sometimes resulted in a politicized focus on psychological, spiritual, and occult imagery and narratives, prevalent in the works of Tony Oursler, Jim Shaw, Mike Kelley, or Ericka Beckman. Or in the beautifully direct and refreshingly empathic photo series "Family Pictures and Stories" (1982) by Carrie Mae Weems, which explored aspects of the artist's everyday family life. The latter being one of the only works in the exhibition by a person of color suggests that the early years of CalArts is also a story of white, middle-class privilege.

Personal disagreements lead to Chicago leaving the school, and, in spite of its success, the FAP was defunct by 1975. Already Disney family support had dwindled in tandem with the growing politicization of the school (and, as former students recall in interviews, naked performances and swimming-pool parties around campus that were famously unappreciated by visiting trustees). Much of the staff associated with Fluxus also stayed for only a year or two; since the mid-1970s Baldessari's post-studio class has taken center stage. Still, over time, the school fulfilled its initial objective and contributed significantly to making LA a counterpoint to the New York art scene. The show will travel to Kunsthau Graz in Spring 2020.



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PRINT SUMMER 2019



Mira Schor, *Bear Triptych (Part II)*, 1972, gouache on paper, 30 × 22". From the suite *Bear Triptych*, 1972–73.

Mira Schor

LYLES & KING

As a painter, writer, teacher, and recipient of this year's Women's Caucus for Art Lifetime Achievement Award—in addition to being a dedicated cultural commentator on her blog, ayearofpositivethinking.com—Mira Schor freely roams between art criticism and artmaking. Her gestural renderings of text are as tactile as her fluid, figurative imagery, treating language and bodies as constitutive elements of consciousness. A keen feminist analysis is as present and salient in her images as it is in her thoughtful, clear-sighted essays. Schor's show "California Paintings: 1971–1973" brought us back to the beginning of her career trajectory; namely, her graduate-school years at CalArts. The works here, most of which hadn't been shown since they were originally made—and some of which had never been seen before—included *Glimmer*, 1973, a gouache-and-pencil drawing on paper of sharp-tipped cacti leaves, one spraying blood. The drawing was appended with a list of words and phrases such as *PRODIGAL RETURNS . . . OR MYTHS TEARS STIGMA*. This would seem to be where she first introduced her now-signature motif of handwritten annotations on painterly or otherwise tactile grounds. Additionally, a vitrine of archival photographs and sketchbooks, among other ephemera, framed the exhibited works as artifacts of a particular time and place.

Schor was enrolled in CalArts's legendary but short-lived Feminist Art Program, led by Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro. Her immersion in its emotionally and intellectually heady curriculum surely had a profound impact. But Southern California's natural and man-made landscapes also seem to have been a clear influence on her imagery, especially given that Schor was raised by artist parents in a Jewish émigré community in New York before she landed in Los Angeles's expansive suburbs. The *Bear Triptych*, 1972–73, and *Car Triptych*, 1972—both gouache on paper—are unsettling and surreal tableaux of palm trees, cacti, and a luxe vehicle. They also depict women and animals gathered together, entangled with one another, or simply floating above it all, in the manner of the ascending gal in *Car Triptych (Part II)*. SoCal's

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peculiar desolation peeks out in the receding perspective of *Bear Triptych (Part II)*, 1972, where a woman with an injured hand stands at a safe distance from a blood-spattered brown bear. The mammal appears unruffled by the wounding, as if violence was just as normal as a palm tree or well-maintained hedge in paradise (and as someone who grew up in LA, I assure you it is).

This body of work, brought back more than forty-five years later, complemented other reappearances this spring. Serendipitously displayed at Red Bull Arts, across town from Schor's Lyles & King show, was Gretchen Bender's installation *Flash Art*, 1987, which threw shade at the painter David Salle, favorite son of the 1980s, for his depiction of women. The year before Bender made the work, Schor's first published essay appeared in the premier issue of the journal *M/E/A/N/I/N/G*, which she and the artist Susan Bee ran between 1986 and 1996. Titled "Appropriated Sexuality," it was a pull-no-punches critique of Salle in which she concluded: "A vicarious suicide, David Salle savages women rather than savage himself. This is considered appropriate sexuality, and this is a source of his market value." This sentiment was echoed by the radical feminist author Andrea Dworkin in 1981, in a text now excerpted in the recently published anthology *Last Days at Hot Slit*: "In pornography, men express the tenets of their unchanging faith . . . to ward off recognition that a commitment to masculinity is a double-edged commitment to both suicide and genocide."

Men creating any kind of image of a woman were taken more seriously than women committed to taking seriously their own depictions of themselves, their interior lives, or the structural ideology mediating and generating their sense of reality. As Schor relates in the intro to her essay collection *Wet: On Painting, Feminism, and Art Culture* (1997), a curator once sat in her studio puzzling over whether to understand her paintings as mostly political or purely formal. Schor wanted to say, "Stop right there, the whole point is that they are both!" Breaking down binaries is of top concern these days, and she's been doing it all along.

— *Paige K. Bradley*

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PRINT DECEMBER 2016



Mira Schor, "Power" Figure: The Great Man Speaks, 2016, ink, Flashe paint, and gesso on tracing paper, 64 × 24". From the series "'Power' Frieze," 2016.

Mira Schor

CB1 GALLERY

The problems of painting, language, and gendered power relations have long animated the work of New York–based artist and writer Mira Schor, who graduated from CalArts in 1973 and participated in its Feminist Art Program. In a preface to her 1997 book of essays titled *Wet: On Painting, Feminism, and Art Culture*, Schor noted that her goal has been to make political paintings in the “full sense of both terms”—artworks whose political content is enhanced by their seductive medium. “Painting not as ‘eye candy;’” she wrote, “but as a synergetic honey-trap for contemporary discourse.” This statement, written a few years after Schor completed her multi-canvas work *War Frieze*, 1991–94, continues to resonate nearly twenty years later in her series “‘Power’ Frieze,” 2016. Both bodies of work were recently on display at CBI Gallery.

Installed along the four walls of one large gallery was the second half of Schor's *War Frieze*, made between the fall of 1992 and that of '94. Comprising eighty-two twelve-by-sixteen-inch painted linen canvases placed side by side slightly above eye level, this installation was the most comprehensive presentation of the work to date. (The frieze is more than two hundred feet long and has never been viewed in its entirety by the public or by the artist herself.) Begun in the aftermath of the First Gulf War, and informed by gender-related controversies such as the Anita Hill hearings and abortion litigation (which remains a topical issue), the paintings in *War Frieze* feature body parts and suggestive corporeal forms, as well as words in cursive script connected by a thin, sinuous line that stretches across the entire suite. Disembodied breasts and penises (some with ears), vagina-like slits, toilet bowls, and politically charged phrases such as AREA OF DENIAL and UNDUE BURDEN commingle on sometimes thinly scumbled, other times thickly built-up grounds of fleshy-pink, bloodred, jizzy-white, and turd-brown paint. Language fragments taken from the news media (such as terms referring to weapons of war and to the legal standard used by the Supreme Court to determine the lawfulness of state restrictions on a woman's access to abortion) are incorporated into the paintings, provoking a meditation on how legislative phrases can make abstract the very bodies whose owners experience these words' consequences most keenly.

In another room hung thirty-five works from Schor's “‘Power’ Frieze” series. Made from any of various combinations of ink, gouache, oil, pencil, and charcoal on gessoed tracing paper, each work portrays an archetypal figure representing “Woman Artist.” The monumental female figures are sketchy, skeletal, and sticklike. Their eyes and breasts appear respectively vacant and unarticulated, often hauntingly represented by large dark circles. In comparison to Schor's earlier *War Frieze*, the tone of these recent works feels more urgent and more personal. For example, in *‘Power’ Figure: The Great Man Speaks*, 2016 (one of three works included with this title and date), the “Woman Artist” clutches the sides of her head, like the disconsolate figure in Munch's *The Scream*. But whereas Munch's figure sways in existential isolation, Schor's cringes in an attempt to block a dark phallus pointed at her head that announces THE

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'GREAT' MAN SPEAKS. (This phrase and phallic shape ominously recur throughout the series.) A watery line trickles down from between the "Woman Artist's" legs onto a miniature female figure below and circles back up to a bubble that states, HER WHEREVER (a reference

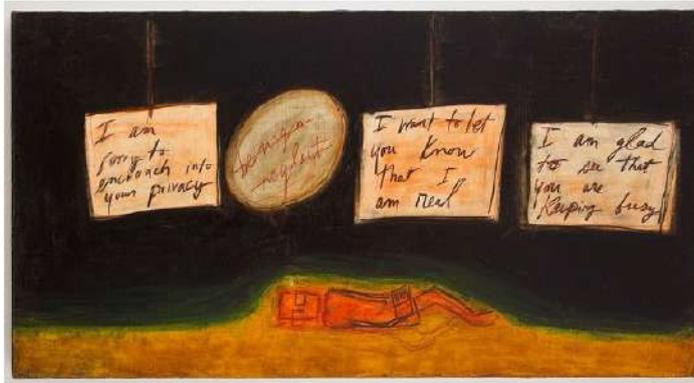
to presidential candidate Donald Trump's crude remark about blood "coming out" of Fox News anchor Megyn Kelly). Schor has mentioned that the series was inspired by a recent exhibition of Kongo Mangaaka sculptures, nearly life-size "power figures" made of wood, metal, and sacred materials that were commissioned by Kongo political leaders during the latter half of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. These intimidating figures were intended to serve as embodiments of social authority and, ultimately, as protective talismans against the brutal Belgian colonizing regime. As with the Mangaaka sculptures, Schor's "Power Frieze" paintings should be interpreted as tools for cultural resistance in dire political times, as symbolic images of collective struggle and opposition against a paternalistic order that seeks to subjugate and disenfranchise.

—Kavior Moon

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artillery



Mira Schor, *Morning in America*, 2013, Image courtesy CB1 Gallery, Los Angeles

NOTES FROM UNDERGROUND

Mira Schor's paintings connect with reading and thinking

by Joanna Roche ·

January 7, 2014 · in

Summer of 1965. The artist's mother, Resia (also an artist), stands between her two daughters wearing a sleeveless shift with a bold daisy pattern. The horizon line of the Atlantic connects the heads of the three women, who pose, smiling and relaxed, in front of a long vista of open sea.

That horizon, those daisies are among the leitmotifs in Mira Schor's show of new paintings and drawings at CB1 Gallery. "Chthonic Garden" comprises a green-filled and surprisingly optimistic body of work "given the incredible precarity we're living in," the artist comments as we sit in the elegant gallery space, part of the original 1915 lobby of the former Citizen's Bank in downtown Los Angeles. Most of us know this feeling of precariousness, perfectly distilled in the painting *The Ground*, where Schor's schematic figure (or "avatar," as she calls it)



hovers, simultaneously relaxed and destabilized. I love this ironic humor, which advises us to maintain balance, even if we are on the edge of our respective and collective unknowns. A lifelong New Yorker, the articulate and engaging artist talked about balance and precarity during our interview.



Mira Schor, *The Ground*, 2013, Image courtesy CB1 Gallery, Los Angeles

I first met Schor's bespectacled stand-in three years ago in her 2010 show at CB1, "Paintings From the Nineties To Now." Her newly created avatar was up and around, thought bubbles of dense black lines mirroring those in the open book she carried. Schor's long-term interest in the interconnections between reading, thinking and painting was evident here, as in the earlier series, where single words, such as "flesh," "trace" and "sign" are carved into thickly-textured oils.

In "Chthonic Garden," the avatar has come into her own, inhabiting a lush, more narrative realm, where handwritten words share her space, which may be above or below the horizon, or even inverted. "There is no upside down, we're living in a topsy-turvy world," Schor remarked in her well-attended gallery talk on opening night.

Are beauty and productivity underground or overground? Schor asks us; then complicates the answer. This interplay between above and below is key. Chthonic means underground and the concept of lying fallow has deep meaning for the artist. Her paintings—largely ink and oil on gesso on linen—suggest that underground can be a time/place of regeneration, contemplation and renewal. Schor's fallow isn't about being dormant, clearly. It's a time of "productive anonymity," which she aligns with "experimentation" and "benign neglect," in opposition to "celebrity culture" and "austerity measures"—all

words found in *Conditions of Contemporary Practice*. In the luscious, nocturnal *Morning in America*, we find the avatar nestled below ground like a seed, protected against so much hovering verbiage, dreaming of benign neglect (as in leave me alone vs. abandonment). But underground is not always fertile or productive. Sometimes the avatar is pitched into the earth or uprooted, like the 100-year-old tree near Schor's apartment during Hurricane Sandy, another experience of collective precarity entering this body of work.



Mira Schor, *Underground Garden*, 2013, Oil on linen, Courtesy CB1 Gallery

Above, below and sometimes upside down, daisies appear, bracketing the avatar like guardians, as in *Underground Garden*. Schor's "goofy" flowers represent the "uncomplicated impulse of childhood drawings, like the houses children draw." She elaborates: "It's a happy visual pleasure, a design pleasure." We reminisce about the Pop fabrics of Finnish design company Marimekko, and the purposely naïve pleasure of the big-daisy forms that Schor plants throughout "Chthonic Garden."

Visual pleasure, and its possibility, is a consistent theme in both Schor's artwork and writing (I recommend her collections of essays: *Wet: On Painting, Feminism, and Art Culture* and also *A Decade of Negative Thinking: Essays on Art, Politics, and Daily Life*). In *Visual Pleasure/Productive Anonymity*, the avatar sports sunglasses and sits beneath the shade of a schematic tree, reading "theory," the floating square of "visual pleasure" joining the green space of reading/thinking with the world beyond. This co-habitation is significant, as too often in the poststructuralist-heavy decades of the 1980s and '90s, "theory trumped visual pleasure" (to quote Ingrid Calame in conversation on opening night). In this series, Schor has, in her own words, "re-embraced the notion of visual pleasure and the sensuality of color." Lying fallow and productive anonymity converge in this work: the latter is literally the ground on which the avatar rests. Celebrity culture is out of sight and the figure can relax and be fallow—this time above ground.



Mira Schor, *Conditions of Contemporary Practice*, 2013, Courtesy CB1 Gallery
Ink and oil on gesso on linen

These multilayered states of being explored in "Chthonic Garden" rely on premises antithetical to the air we breathe in today's fast-paced, fame-driven culture. Schor suggests an alternative universe, one outside the finite state of being known—a deep-rooted and expanding universe of perpetual becoming.



ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS

Los Angeles



Mira Schor, *"Power" Figure: The Great Man Speaks*, 2016, ink, flashe, and gesso on tracing paper, 64 x 24". From the series "Power" Frieze," 2016.
LOS ANGELES

Mira Schor

CB1 GALLERY
1923 S. Santa Fe Avenue
September 10–October 30, 2016

Both writing about and painting language have been hallmarks of Mira Schor's inventive practice for decades. Her latest solo show provides an opportunity to grasp the depth of this output vis-à-vis two large-scale accumulative series, separated by more than twenty years.

Schor has described "War Frieze," 1991–94, as a response to the 1990–91 Gulf War; and bits of language, such as "area of denial," that appear in the eighty-canvas segment shown here are exemplary of the artist's expert ability to massage the multiple meanings of words and phrases. She paints the line of this particular phrase as coming out of a vagina, thereby pointing to the sexualized taboo that produces and reenacts (ad infinitum) the cultural meanings ascribed to the female body. But "area of denial" is also a historically specific phrase, one used to describe a class of weapon that was designed to prevent an opponent from traversing or accessing territory; the expression thus represents one of those convenient collages of language by members of the military-industrial complex to at once dodge description and obfuscate intent. In this regard, "War Frieze" remains sadly relevant—despite not being as well known as it should be.

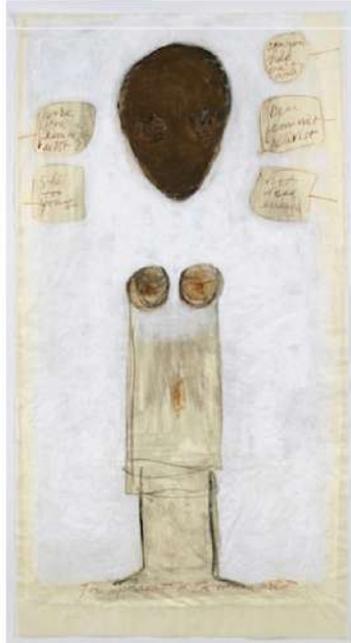
The second, more recent "Power" Frieze," 2016, depicts a central figure representing "Woman Artist." Inspired by the Mangaaka sculptures that Schor encountered in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, these skeletal power figures, some of them wearing boxing gloves, do battle with internal and external invalidations. Painted on tracing paper as thin as onion skin, they too are works of uncompromising strength and clarity.

—*Andy Campbell*



ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS



Mira Schor, "Power" Figure #7: *Still Too Young, Not Dead Enough*, 2015, pastel, ink, gesso, tracing paper, 45 x 24", NEW YORK

Mira Schor

LYLES & KING
106 Forsyth Street
March 18–April 24, 2016

"Are you a feminist artist?" is a dogged refrain, running like an earworm through Mira Schor's new exhibition of oil paintings and delicate works on paper. Rendered in the artist's fluid, unfussy script—the hallmark of her painterly conceptualism and long-standing investigations of language as image—the text fills sm15–16, which fills the gallery's large main room, is composed of two dozen or so iterations of this symbol/woman. In a number of them, rust-colored lines connect their crotches or nipples to open books, as if the figures—or their organs—write telekinetically with menstrual blood or milk. Schor, with this weird archetypal imagery, provocatively confuses tropes of female reproduction with concerns of feminist representation. "Power" Figure #7: *Still Too Young, Not Dead Enough*, 2015, is a stark picture of the woman artist whose dead career will merit discovery or resurrection at her life's end. In it, a dead alien head floats above a scribbly, sexed body and the show's dominant query is countered with another pervasive contemporary demand: "Can you help once a month?" It's a subtle time stamp embedded in this timeless-looking show, which, taken all together, forms a complex and energetic portrait of feminist fatigue.

—*Johanna Fateman*

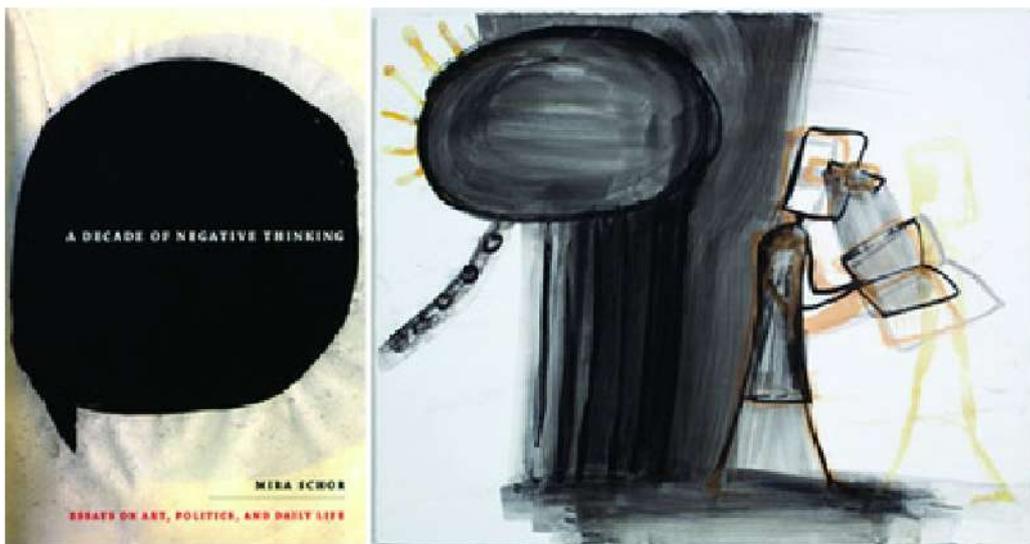


ARTFORUM

INTERVIEWS

MIRA SCHOR

May 09, 2010 • Mira Schor talks about her latest book and new blog



Left: Cover of Mira Schor's *A Decade of Negative Thinking: Essays on Art, Politics, and Daily Life* (2010). Right: Mira Schor, *Reader*, 2009, ink and gesso on linen, 16 x 20".

*Recognized for her contributions to painting theory and to feminist art history, the painter and writer Mira Schor has a new book available from [Duke University Press](#). Here she discusses *A Decade of Negative Thinking* and her new blog, *A Year of Positive Thinking*.*

AM I A NEGATIVE THINKER, AS THE TITLE OF MY BOOK SUGGESTS? I don't think so, although it may seem that way because I speak out when I suspect that other people are just drinking the Kool-Aid. It's necessary to dig beneath press-release culture, and not just take the promotional sound bite as gospel and let it go viral into art discourse. So I decided to give myself the test or the experiment of *A Year of Positive Thinking*. There are so many things that I love in art, film, art history, and political history, which help me to be an artist; I really want to share that part of my experience.

I've been doing a lot on Facebook, posting links to things I think are beautiful, funny, moving, inspiring, while venting on various political issues that make me angry. The blog will be a battle between the two sides of my personality, maybe like Cassandra and Pollyanna. Cassandra tells truths no one wants to hear. But it's good to keep in mind that Pollyanna actually does the same thing: She's not at all the sweet, cloying kind of character we think of when we use the name in a disparaging way; instead she's more like a realistic, grounded character in a Kurosawa movie, albeit via Disney—she confronts with a generous curiosity the



repressed private griefs of the inhabitants of the little town she has come to live in, as an orphan.

My father, the artist Ilya Schor, died when I was eleven. The Archives of American Art asked my mother for his papers sometime in the 1960s, when I was a teenager. My father didn't do that much writing, but they said they were interested in *everything*—the ephemera of his life, art supply bills, that kind of thing. I helped put some of the material in order. At that time they did microfiches. Later, I was an art history major in college and I studied with H. W. Janson for one semester, which was in some ways very tedious and in others very interesting and an honor. It also pretty much persuaded me not to pursue art history! One of the things it taught me is that classic art history is actually doing things like researching Donatello's laundry list—you know, his receipts, where he lived when. I decided to study art in graduate school instead of pursuing art history.

I've been an inveterate self-documenter since I was a child. For example, I preserved carbon copies and early Xeroxes of all my letters from when I was a twenty-one-year-old grad student in the Feminist Art Program at CalArts and working on Womanhouse. I read them at the F-Word conference at CalArts in 1998, and I've included some of them in *A Decade*, in a chapter titled "Miss Elizabeth Bennett Goes to Feminist Boot Camp." I'm kind of amazed at how articulate and outspoken I was as a twenty-one-year-old, and how much the character of my writing voice was already in place. It's at times highly critical, but also passionate and politically engaged.

If I don't paint over a period time, I start to go crazy. Painting is a primary language that I need to "speak" and "hear" in order to survive at a very deep level of my existence. I love the process of drawing and painting, and I love creating images, but I can't imagine not writing—it would be like not thinking or speaking.

— *As told to Lauren O'Neill-Butler*

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A Mind in a Body in a Landscape

THE ART AND LIFE OF MIRA SCHOR

BY NAOMI FRY



SEVERAL YEARS AGO, the Fine Arts Department at Parsons The New School for Design invited faculty and students to begin the school year with a small introductory self-portrait. Mira Schor, who has been teaching at the school since the late 1980s, used her contribution to this project to make sure her students understood, as she later wryly told me, that they were “not the only thing on my plate.” Schor’s multiple preoccupations and responsibilities are depicted as cartoon thought balloons, so crowded they seem near popping as they hover over her faintly smiling, bespectacled face. Prosaic drudgeries (“laundry”) are presented alongside familial responsibilities (“94 year old mother”), more lighthearted leisure pursuits (“food”; “Mets”), professorial duties (“Parsons MFA”), and intellectual obligations (“other lectures etc....”), suggesting in toto that a woman’s work really *is* never done.

ABOVE: SELF-PORTRAIT, 2005, INK ON DENRIL, 9.5 BY 8.5 INCHES

44 PROVINCETOWNARTS 2010

Provincetown Arts

2010

1/8



Schor's depiction is clearly anti-spectacular in its stress on the workaday quality of an artist's existence, and palpably democratic. The balloons, both in size and placement, seem at first glance interchangeable, and their arrangement nonhierarchical. This may owe a debt to Schor's longtime refusal, as a feminist critical thinker, to privilege the so-called central over the marginal. Moreover, in this self-portrait Schor introduces us to the extraordinary scope of her work, as a painter, writer, editor, and educator. As she told me when we first met, she finds this self-portrait so much more representative than many more conventional photos that she has ended up using it as her public avatar, most recently on Facebook.

An attractive woman whose vividly framed reading glasses are perennially perched atop her short, spiky hairdo, Schor can appear by turns tart and warm, anxious and assured, reflecting the complex combination of self-effacement and directness, irony and honesty that characterizes her work. As we spoke over tea and cookies in her downtown loft, moving between what I sensed were the space's two symbolic hearths—the open kitchen, adorned with colorful Mexican ceramics, and Schor's large desktop Mac—the scope of her career and the unique position she has held in the art world began coming into sharper focus. Schor, I learned, not only is both a painter and a writer—a hybrid stance that, as she's written, often makes people suspicious (“what *is* she, really?”)—but has also often taken up a role that most aren't in any hurry to fill: that of the person who speaks truth to power. This, I found, has been for Schor an almost unavoidable ethical reaction. Over the course of her career, she hasn't shied away from expressing her deeply felt political convictions, has openly criticized those who she felt abuse their positions of authority or influence, and has consistently worked to subvert the sort of self-congratulatory, cautious-to-a-fault stances that often characterize the contemporary art world.

But despite the art world adversaries that the bold expression of her opinions has earned her, it should be emphasized that Schor is no silenced, marginal figure. As an editor, she was for many years, along with the painter Susan Bee, the cofounder and coeditor of the highly respected art critical journal *M/E/A/N/I/N/G*. As a writer, she is the author of two collections of essays, both published by Duke University Press—the first, *Wet: On Painting, Feminism, and Art Culture*, has been in print ever since its initial publication in 1997, and is consistently assigned to painting and criticism syllabi across the country, while the second, *A Decade of Negative Thinking: Essays on Art, Politics, and Daily Life*, published in 2009, has already been receiving laudatory reviews. She is also the editor of two volumes, most recently *The Extreme of the Middle: Writings of Jack Tworok*, published by Yale University Press. She is a recipient of the College Art Association's Frank Jewett Mather Award in art criticism and, just this past year, a Creative Capital/Andy Warhol Foundation Arts Writers Grant. As a painter, despite her chronic overextendedness, she has consistently produced an inventive and accomplished body of work, for which she has been awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship, and which has been shown, among many other venues, at P.S.1 Museum, the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum in Connecticut, the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, and most recently in a well-received show at Momenta gallery in Brooklyn. This spring saw the launch of her blog about art and culture, “A Year of Positive Thinking,” (ayearofpositivethinking.com), and in fall 2010, she will have her first solo show in Los Angeles at CBI Gallery.

This is an especially good moment, then, to take stock of Schor's work—to reaffirm the recognition she has received, and to puzzle out whatever misconceptions it has inspired. This puzzling out, however, should hopefully serve to clarify the dilemmas that animate Schor's oeuvre, rather than erase them: this because Schor's interest in and insistence upon retaining a tension between positions that could seem (and *have* seemed, for many other artists and thinkers) to reside on opposite sides of various spectra, has played a broad generative role in her body of work. By challenging—if not necessarily completely collapsing—the binaries between the



SHOE, MARCH 5, 1972, GOUACHE ON PAPER, C. 7.25 BY 9 INCHES

essential and the constructed, the corporeal and the intellectual, the familial and the personal, craft and art, the native and the foreign, the painterly and the political, Schor has created a deeply original dialect, which, whatever its variable manifestations over the course of her career, has always retained the distinctive beauty of that which rejects comfortable resolution.



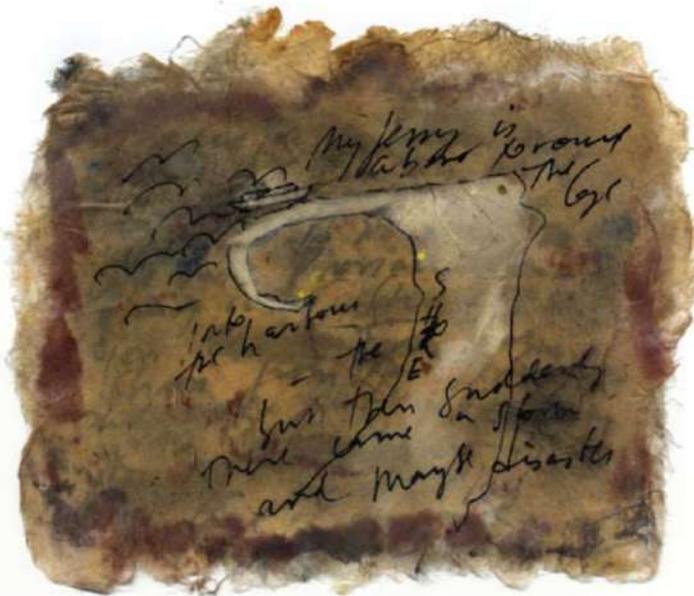
The recipe could read as follows: mix Hasidic Eastern European Ancestors, European artist parents, a French education, New York School of Painting family friends, add a splash of H. W. Janson, stir in a shot of Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro, a cup of conceptual art, simmer, and before serving, pepper with critical theory.

— from the Introduction of *Wet*

SCHOR WAS BORN in 1950 to Resia and Ilya Schor, Jewish-Polish artists who in 1941 fled from Hitler's Europe to the United States. Although both Schor and her older sister, Naomi, were born in America, the household they grew up in retained a multilingual, cosmopolitan air, influenced not only by the family's immersion and interest in Western European culture



THE TWO MIRAS, 1973, GOUACHE ON PAPER, 22 BY 30 INCHES



POSTCARD, 1976, INK, DRY PIGMENT AND MEDIA ON RICE PAPER, C. 5.5 BY 6.5 INCHES

(Resia and Ilya had lived in Paris before arriving in New York; Naomi and Mira were both educated at Manhattan's Lycée Français), but also by its strong Eastern European roots. Ilya Schor was a painter and sculptor, but, most recognizably, a jeweler and Judaica artist, and his delicate, gorgeous pieces, made mostly in silver and gold, represented the humble lifestyle and manner of the shtetl both literally and figuratively. Literally, by having his work feature everyday Hasidic village existence and interactions; figuratively, in the choice of medium and genre: representational, small-scale craft rather than abstract, large-scale Art. His artist's stamp—a small, lightly sketched bird—signaled this essential modesty.

Resia Schor was also an artist—a painter; but after Ilya's death in 1961, in order to keep the family afloat financially, she picked up the tools of his trade and found in his materials the medium that truly challenged and engaged her talents. In contrast to her husband's work, Resia's jewelry and Judaica pieces were bolder and heavier, more abstract and muscular, suggesting not only the disparity of styles available within the language of a supposedly minor art form, but also what Schor herself has identified as a curious gender reversal among her parents' aesthetic sensibilities.

Family history is arguably significant to look at vis-à-vis any artist's work, but in Schor's case, it's crucial. To gain an initial understanding of this artist's own aesthetic sensibility, one might find much of its beginnings in the early breeding ground described above. The parents' work laid the foundation for the daughter's own work's negotiation between ambition and modesty, small scale and monumentality, and, of course, its engagement with a feminist model, as well its belief in the importance of a daily art practice as a redeeming force. Ilya Schor's nimble dance between craftsmanship and art, and his insistence that material labor need not be divorced from attention to the human element; Resia Schor's quietly heroic plight as a woman who by necessity was able to alchemically turn art into work, transforming the tragedy of widowhood into a fiercely independent and engaged art practice; and, perhaps most of all, simply the lesson that art and life are not mutually exclusive but can exist and even flourish, side by side, in a cramped, residential Upper West Side apartment, in circumstances that pose a corrective to artistic grandiosity—all of these shaped Schor's outlook as an artist in crucial ways.

A case in point is Schor's "shoe" series—painted in 1972, in her first year as an MFA candidate at CalArts. Shocking pink or red or lavender, bow-tied or dotted, open-toed or pointy, the ladies' shoes in Schor's gouache on paper paintings initially seem to arrive from the minor sphere of the fashion sketch, not unlike Warhol's commercial illustrations of the 1950s. Indeed, this practical starting point is never completely rejected. These accoutrements

of femininity are treated lovingly and with attention not despite but because of their supposedly marginal design associations. Cut off at the ankle, the feet Schor paints stand handsomely, as busts on pedestals—the stepped-on now stepping up—and the vibrant flatness of the artist's gouache renders them festive, while also according them a certain bold-lined gravitas.

But though the influence of Schor's early environment is clear here (indeed, we can almost literally see the trace of Ilya Schor's hand, as the daughter's signature is accompanied in this early series by her late father's bird emblem), this is not the only context through which we should view even these very early works. Rather, the strand that begins to emerge here, and that will go on to make an appearance in one form or another throughout Schor's entire oeuvre, is her desire, as she wrote in *Wet*, "to bring my experience of living inside a female body—with a mind—into high art in as intact a form as possible." This feminist agenda was influenced by the general 1970s zeitgeist of second-wave American feminism and, more specifically, by the influence of her sister, Naomi Schor, a brilliant scholar and feminist theorist, and by her formative year at the Feminist Art Program at CalArts, helmed by Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro.

After receiving a bachelor's degree in art history at New York University, Schor decided to pursue her art practice more fully at CalArts. With the encouragement of Naomi Schor's close friend Sheila Levant de Bretteville, who was then creating a feminist design program at CalArts, she joined Chicago's and Schapiro's Feminist Art Program, which stressed the exploration of embodied female experience, consciousness-raising in a communal context, and the rethinking of traditional educational authority structures. Schor took part in the seminal 1972 *Womanhouse* exhibition, in which the members of the feminist program took over a dilapidated house in Hollywood, where they organized an installation and performance-heavy show of their work (Schor was one of the very few painters to contribute to the project—as she explained in *Negative Thinking*, feminist art making has tended to disregard most painting, as it "had a degree of inherent abstraction that made it less useful than the real in the elaboration of a political thematic"). She then remained in the program for the duration of her first year at CalArts. During that period, she began investigating in earnest what it means to be a woman making art—both personally and politically.

At CalArts in 1972-73, Schor worked on what she called "Story Paintings"—figurative small-scale works done in gouache on paper—which depicted intimate, colorful, and often dream-like narratives in which she herself served as the protagonist. Combining the flatness of early Renaissance paintings, the haunting quality of Surrealist aesthetics, and the vividness of Rajput miniatures, Schor represented stages in her sexual, psychological, and artistic development as a way to observe female subjectivity, both concretely and symbolically. In *The Two Miras* (1973), the artist is pictured twice—once with her back turned to the spectator, and once, bare-breasted, facing front. Framed by engorged desert plants, reminiscent of the California sandy landscape as much as of *Little Shop of Horrors*-like flora, the doubled Schor is herself an ambiguous figure: both retiring and blunt, a body and an idea, a material and a metaphor, an external "front" and a concealed "back," not one of which is necessarily privileged over the other.

These early works can be seen as mounting a feminist critique of patriarchal power, in terms of both content and form. The embodied feminine is thrust unapologetically to the forefront, and, what's more, this is done in a method and format that quietly but pointedly negate the forcefully male-sanctioned AbEx technique of oil on large-scale canvas. Additionally, the insertion of a woman's own personal story into public discourse—deeming it worth representing by the woman herself, as both author and model—is an approach that was not just advanced generally in early 1970s feminist politics, but also lay more specifically at the core of the feminist program itself.

The fact that Schor had created most of these feminist paintings after she had left Schapiro and Chicago's program speaks not only to her enduring belief in its ideals, but also to her ultimate independence from its more



constricting aspects. Significantly, despite her (then burgeoning, now long-standing) commitment to feminist thought and praxis, Schor's eventual resistance to fall in completely with the ethos of this program is another essential point to consider when assessing her trajectory as artist and thinker. Schor decided to leave the program at the end of her first year at CalArts, feeling that the negative effects of its insular stance as well as the aggressive personality clashes within it were outweighing the considerable benefits it offered. In a 1972 letter to her sister, Naomi, which she excerpts in her essay "Miss Elizabeth Bennet Goes to Feminist Boot Camp," Schor describes a tense encounter with Chicago:

I told her that I was allergic to her and she told me that she felt pretty much the same way about me. . . . She believes that she has had the single vision of a liberated woman artist and we must trust her with our lives for the next few months and she will lead us to the Promised Land. I told her that I thought she was using [us] as tools to create her vision and was very upset when we tried anything on our own. She didn't like that too much.

Besides the almost comical directness of the student in this exchange with her teacher—a frankness that will come to characterize Schor's writing later on—what is important to note here is her insistence on her right to occupy an ambivalent, multifaceted stance as an artist as well as a woman. She is, indeed, "two Miras," if not three or four or five, refusing to consent to any "molding," as she calls it in the same letter, through "violent methods." Indeed, this contention that there is not one but multiple ways to attain the "promised land"—that is, that a woman's subjectivity is a complex, variable thing—may itself stand at the core of feminism's demand for a recognition of that very subjectivity.

In 1974, back in New York, Schor developed her preoccupation with this issue further in her "empty dress" series. Once more using her interest in women's fashion as a starting point, Schor began following the logic of form more radically than she had before. Rejecting the figure/ground template of traditional painting, she reduced the dress to its abstract, bare-bones shape, using gouache on paper, tearing away the ground to reach the desired result. Schor was among the earliest artists to work on the image of the dress as an emblem of femininity, along with artists including Judith



as
re
All
of these women were seeking to create specifically feminist artwork that would speak to the experience of being a woman in society. In the case of Schor's empty dresses, the category of "woman" is defined by her encasing, the purportedly essentializing outline of her clothing. The very emptiness of this figure is what allows for multiplicity, both politically and aesthetically. In the "empty dress" works, we can see Schor first taking up fully her lifelong concern with art as an arena in which content colludes with form. Schor's dresses recall political content extrinsic to art, yes; but they do so through formal, aesthetic cues beginning with the artist's hand ripping away and thus authoring the ground of the painting, making it synonymous with the woman's figure.

Later that year, Schor was hired to teach at Nova Scotia College of Art & Design in Halifax, Nova Scotia, then, along with CalArts, one of the most advanced art schools in North America. Schor was again a feminist pioneer: in her early twenties, she was the only woman on a fourteen-man fine arts faculty. The school was notable for its strong early commitment to conceptual art. Here she had a chance to develop the vocabulary of her work even further and incorporate aspects of conceptual art-making into her feminist-inspired dress works. For the first time employing the technique of applying dry pigment and ink on both sides of fragile rice paper, she began to work on a series of "fans," in which she refined the abstract V shape that had defined the general shape of the empty dresses. Those were also the first works in which Schor began to use language in the form of her handwriting as image, and this, of course, had political implications: as Hélène Cixous has famously written of the notion of *écriture féminine*, "Woman must write herself. . . . woman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement." But it also has aesthetic ones: the fan's V shape signals at motion and transcendence, the double-sidedness of the paper signals at the metaphorical multiplicity of that which is represented, while the writing, in Schor's own words, is "elegantly indecipherable." Its rendering on both sides of the paper, which is then folded up to resemble a lady's fan, emphasizes its formal qualities—language as purely graphic, rather than a specific meaning imparting medium.

Language passes through the hand and so the body, but it is also an intellectual rather than a merely atavistic endeavor. Even if incommunicable, or not readily reducible to a single thing, a woman is full of—in fact overflowing with—thoughts. In *Book of Pages* (1976), Schor took on a major—though, importantly, fragmented rather than large-scale—project. Working on a series of rice paper sheets, employing ink, pigment, and paint on both sides of each notebook-sized page, Schor then layered these one on top of the other. The marks on one page often embossed or transferred onto another, making the sheets both separable and yet part of a whole. Throughout this accrual, the writing is sometimes legible, but often not. The fact that the whole project is comprised of letters to a resistant lover—a male muse—both matters and doesn't. To borrow Barthes's terms from the field of photography, it might be important to consider this piece's *studium*—an unrequited love affair—but it's even more significant to pay attention to the punctum—the actual mark on the page, made by a hand, at a certain point in time, ready to be reanimated and considered by a spectator's gaze.

As in *The Two Miras*, the depth and fullness of a woman's psychology is represented here—but this time, more formally and conceptually. In *Book of Pages*, as well as in stand-alone postcards Schor worked on over the same time period, doubleness is once again used to productive effect: pigment, ink, and paint coming from one side often highlight or erase a word written on the other, creating, say, a white halo or blotting out selectively in cobalt, violet, and crimson, and so pressing further on language's synaesthetic flow into abstraction. Increasingly, the half-legible language of dreams is used, as well as snippets of family history. On one *Book of Pages* sheet, Schor jotted down a comparative table, standing for two emblematic sides of her



TOP: TEN MASKS, #9 (FRONT), JULY 13, 1977, INK AND JAPAN GOLD SIZE ON RICE PAPER, 14 BY 7.5 INCHES; ABOVE: BOOK OF PAGES, "PORTUGAL AND AUSCHWITZ," 1976, MIXED MEDIA ON RICE PAPER, C.12 BY 20 BY 1 INCHES



RED HALF, 1981, DRY PIGMENT AND MEDIUM ON RICE PAPER, 14.75 BY 26.25 INCHES
COURTESY CARNEGIE ART MUSEUM COLLECTION, CITY OF ONTARIO, GIFT OF THE LANIANN FOUNDATION

personality: on one side the lusty, life-loving "Portugal"; on the other the fearsome, paranoid "Auschwitz"—referencing a link to her parents' journey from occupied Paris to the vibrant, free Portugal en route to America. In another postcard (reiterated the same year in *Book of Pages*) a shore (a clear homophone of "Schor") is sketched as part of a dreamscape, with a ferry approaching Provincetown harbor. But, as it often does in dreams, this idyllic scene comes to an abrupt and ominous end, as Auschwitz once again disrupts Portugal: "Then suddenly came a storm and maybe disaster."

In the late 1970s, Schor began working on the "dress books," another major group of pieces in which the figure of the empty dress was melded to the V-shape of the fan, and took on the layered function of her books. In this series, sheets of rice paper—made translucent and then painted on from both sides with pigment and pastel—were attached in open-ended layers to make a life-sized book in the shape of a woman's dress. Marrying the dress with her interest in writing, legibility, and reception, Schor created works that were fragile in their materiality, but also, somehow, aggressive in their fragility. The viewer could approach them (and they were installed to tally with a male viewer's average height), but he couldn't touch them (too delicate!) and he certainly couldn't completely understand them (too illegible!). These ciphers certainly meant something—they were saying so much, after all—but what, exactly?

This question was developed but not completely answered (or rather, developed by not being completely answered) in Schor's "mask" series from 1977. In multiple rice paper "heads"—hovering somewhere between Marie Antoinette ballroom accessories, tribal costumes, and Halloween garb—Schor was playful and experimental, coming at the task once again from both sides. Sometimes the masks had open mouths, and sometimes no mouths at all. Often they looked as if they'd been burned, or patched, or collaged in layers; they wore glasses, or frazzled paper "hair"; sometimes their hollowed-out eyes were ringed with kohl-like ink; often they had cursive writing lining their flatness. Sometimes they opened up into perspectival depth, bearing architectural elements—Piranesi-like staircases leading to invariably shut doors. Schor has admitted in conversation that for a long while, she felt a bit embarrassed by this body of work—by its possibly clichéd and primitivist associations. Only now, she says, has she

come to appreciate it as an important precursor to her recent work, in which a mask finally meets the dress—in which the head finally meets the body.



I BEGAN this essay by calling Schor a New York artist, and this is certainly accurate. Born and bred on the Upper West Side, Schor has lived in the same lower Manhattan loft since the late 1970s. But Schor is also a Provincetown artist. She first came to Provincetown with her parents when she was seven years old. The Schors had tried some of the other summer art colonies in the Northeast, Rockport and Woodstock, where they were friendly with Philip Guston and his family, but finally took to Provincetown, where they enjoyed friendships with many people, including the families of Jack Tworkov and of Chaim Gross. Schor fell in love with the place, the landscape of the bay and the ocean, a passion that has grown into a major part of her life, over the course of the summers she spent there, first as

a child, with her parents and sister, and later with her mother and sometimes her sister in the house in the East End that Resia Schor bought in 1969. Resia worked in a small space downstairs, while Mira worked upstairs; Naomi, and then later Mira, wrote at a desk with a view of the bay. The summer of 2010 will mark Schor's fortieth summer in her beloved house on Anthony Street.

Provincetown has had an effect on Schor's work and perspective from the very first, not only as another early example of a space where artistic endeavors could exist alongside everyday life, but also because of the passionate attachment Schor has for its ravishing natural world. Indeed, in the early 1980s, Schor turned explicitly to that landscape in her work. Her preoccupation with the figure became more overtly a preoccupation with the figure in landscape, and in a series of paintings—done in gouache and pigment, once again on both sides of rice paper—the colors, outlines, and textures of Provincetown's physical environment came to the forefront. Schor herself speaks of this period as a "seduction"—away from more explicit political commitments and toward a closer conversation not only with landscape as such, but also with the tradition of American landscape painting, represented by artists such as Marsden Hartley and Arthur Dove. Yet in Schor's oeuvre, the engagement with the body and with material—even when unaccompanied by a linguistic component—is always in itself political.

By this I mean that the centrality of the powerful female body within landscape, even if abstract, could certainly be taken as a feminist statement. In works such as *Red Half* (1981) or *Two Suns* (1986), Schor uses the template of a skate egg—a pod-like sac found littering the Provincetown shoreline. Though snakelike, potent, and purposeful in both works, this form does not follow the phallic model. In some ways, it is the body of Schor herself, swimming in Provincetown's waters. And the anti-perspectival flatness of Schor's compositions, coupled with the working in concert of the paper's front and back, create an equalized environment in which what matters is not one shape over the other, but the enveloping motion of the artist's own hand: rubbing, stroking, and layering.

While these developments were going on in Schor's own landscape, the broader cultural landscape was also shifting rapidly—but in a different direction altogether. It was now the 1980s, and the postmodernist appropriation artists—dubbed "The Pictures Generation"—were achieving critical success



DICKHEADS OF THE SEVEN DWARFS, 1989, OIL ON CANNAS, 20 BY 16 INCHES EACH, INSTALLATION 20 BY 112 INCHES

and market prominence. In political terms, the conversation had shifted: as Schor herself said in *Negative Thinking*, 1970s feminism was now considered “old-hat, marginal and irrelevant,” while painting was thought equally *démodé*, especially for women artists. For Schor, the representative of this trend was David Salle, whom she knew at CalArts. In opposition to Schor’s implicit critique of the phallus in her landscapes—both through the positioning of a strong corporeal female presence in her compositions, as well as by using the “feminine” paper and gouache, rather than the more “masculine” apparatuses of oil on canvas—Salle was, as she saw it, using painting only strategically, while upholding phallic representations to misogynist ends, and being critically and economically celebrated rather than critiqued for it.

But as they say (or if they don’t, they certainly should), there is no phallus mightier than the pen. And 1986 marked Schor’s return to language, but this time, in order to write *about*—rather than within the sphere of—aesthetics: specifically, a scathing, direct appraisal of what she saw as the objectifying, commodifying, and ultimately degrading representation of women in Salle’s painting. In tandem with the adoption of this new critical medium, two things happened: first, Schor joined forces with a friend, the feminist artist Susan Bee, to form the contemporary art journal *M/E/A/N/I/N/G*. In the journal, Bee and Schor were reacting against the flattening of meaning in the age of postmodern art criticism, while recognizing that the holding of an essential, totalized position was also no longer completely possible (hence, the fragmenting virgules in the journal’s title). And second, Schor began, for the first time, to paint in oil on canvas. After fifteen years of refusing the so-called master medium, Schor suddenly found herself in the role of the guardian of painting over and against the critics and artists who were announcing its demise in the age of “art after modernism.”

This was, of course, deeply ironic. Even though Schor’s love for painting as a medium never wavered (as she states in the closing passage of *Wet*, “My heart rests in the ultimately nonlinguistic, ineffable pleasure and deep meaning of the figure/ground interaction, of the visual language of paint”), oil on canvas was not the most predictable choice for her to make, as an artist and thinker who had consistently attempted to claim a space for feminist painting apart from the grandiose ejaculation of oil on canvas. And yet, it also made perfect sense. Learning the language of the opposition in order to subvert it was something that had always interested Schor, and her admiration for the work of a Provincetown family friend and noted member of the AbEx generation, Jack Tworkov, was a case in point. As she states in her introduction to Tworkov’s recently published writings,

I am the first to note the deep strangeness of my serving as the mediating voice for a patriarchal figure who was critical of the content and medium of my early work. As a feminist I am deeply invested in a critique of the kind of power structures that Tworkov represented to me in my youth. However, as an artist, I was instructed deeply in the beliefs of the system that wished to exclude me.

In getting to know painting even more intimately, then, Schor was enacting what she has called a “survival strategy”—wresting the conversation back from the cultural capitalists, and redefining it on her own terms.

In groundbreaking essays such as “Figure/Ground” and “Researching Visual Pleasure” (later collected in *Wet*), Schor linked up formal questions about painting in the post-studio era with a gender critique. In “Figure/Ground,” she positions herself against *October*’s gang of “aesthetics terrorists,” who, she suggests, portray painting as a primitive, animalistic, and, ultimately, feminized endeavor. Those critics, she writes, would like “. . . an art that would be pure, architectural, that would dispense with the wetness of figure. . . . (this desire) may find a source in a deeply rooted fear of liquidity, of viscousness, of goo.”

Schor is a fierce writer. Her words are animated by a theoretical framework, but they also have the plain-spokenness of true conviction. In her eyes,



SLIT OF PAINT, 1984, OIL ON LINEN, 12 BY 16 INCHES

pigment is political, whether you accept or reject its use, and the decision to subsume sensual material to depersonalized, mediated aesthetic forms has implications. In articulating a resistance to the perspectives advocated by some of the most influential critics and historians in the art world, Schor took career risks in order to defend painting in a way that drew on both feminism and theory, giving many painters who read her words support and courage. Her ability to identify the mechanisms of validation and meaning-making in the art world is inimitable. In essays such as “Patrilineage,” in which she bitingly questioned the overwhelming importance of male artist forebears to art canon formation, or “Recipe Art,” where she mockingly lamented the “high-concept” way in which much art is made nowadays (“something from popular culture + something from art history + something appropriated + something weird or expressive – useful promotional sound bite”) Schor’s writing is sophisticated, art-theoretically inflected, but always approachable. Mostly, it just wallops you with its honesty.

Not a complete surprise, then, that at the time when she began her writing career, the metaphorical seizing of the phallus was also taking place in her actual artistic practice. The “dick paintings” (or, “my penises,” as the artist has dryly called them), which Schor began to paint at that point in oil on canvas, were direct descendants of her earlier landscape studies. In 1987, she taught for a semester at UC Berkeley, and took many sketches of the northern California natural environment. And just as figure evolved into landscape in her work of the late 1970s and early 1980s, landscape slowly began to morph back into bodies in the late 1980s. Shrubs sprouted breasts and sloping bellies and vulvas; trees trailed penises and testicles from their branches. And gradually, the framework of landscape fell away, and the unadorned body itself took center stage. In 1989, she painted *Seven Dwarfs (Dickheads)*, comprised of seven paintings—like *Book of Pages*, it was a major work arrived at through the joining of modest-sized fragments. Red penis heads are rendered in oil on canvas, using the medium of painting to make a political point about power, mediation, and gender. As Schor wrote in *Wet*,

That these were in the full sense of both terms *political paintings* was exactly what I was trying to achieve: a visual and conceptual experience whose political content was all the more powerful given that the message of the challenging image was embedded in the seductive potential of oil paint, painting not as “eye candy” but as a synergic honey-trap for contemporary discourse.

Some of Schor’s “dickheads” are adorned with ears (in fact, to my eyes, more than one is presciently reminiscent of George W. Bush’s person!). Condoms are attached to others, like little red caps, or perhaps more menacingly, like missile heads, stained in blood. Their paint is glazed and

glossy, creating tension between comfortable finish and uncomfortable content. Schor's granting these "dickheads" the status of self-important portrait sitters is an act that is simultaneously comical and critical.

The term "dick" stands for several things. The crassness of the signifier suggests the aggression attached to its signified, which is certainly the body/the penis itself, but, also, the phallus: the location the body occupies in language, and following that, in ideology. And indeed, in this period of Schor's career, the question of engagement between language and the body reemerges. This time, however, both are made less personal and more political. A penis, an ear, a breast—all of these body parts become receptacles and transmitters for language, and, thus, of meaning. In multiple canvas works such as *Alterity* (1991) or *War Frieze* (1991-1994), language flows like liquid through the body and out into the world, where it eventually enters and affects the ground of the body once again.

Gender politics are at play here, certainly: in a panel of *Alterity*, for instance, penis and breast, "mama" and "dada," are collaborators in the transmission of language, but also adversaries: the penis and the ear form a handgun-like contraption, turning the faint ribbon of "mama" milk delivered from the breast into the forceful, darker script of "dada." Schor's paintings from this period mark theory and the conceptual as spaces useful for both the feminine and the painterly. In paintings such as *Slit of Paint* (1994), Schor signals at the separation between the corporeal and linguistic by layering punctuation marks in her paint. The lexicon of references that these works suggest could extend anywhere from art historical figures such as Jasper Johns, Judy Chicago, and Mary Kelly, or literary influences such as the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets, including Charles Bernstein, the husband of Schor's coeditor Bee. In these works, Schor is reconfiguring feminist art as well as, importantly, the story of modernism.

Indeed, as Schor notes as an aside to herself across several panels of *War Frieze*: "It's Modernism, Stupid." After years of battling the macho AbEx masters of oil, she was now appropriating their medium confidently and immersively, and experimenting more freely with her painting process. *War Frieze*, for instance—which she began working on at the inception of the first, "quickie" Gulf War, but which took her three years to fully complete—was comprised of dozens of small canvases creating a continuous, two-hundred-running-foot piece, with language itself the main form in which this painterly experimentation proceeded. Words and letters are repeated ("Joy" is one recurring figure at the end of the entire work), but their material manifestation is extremely variable: sometimes glazed and cracked, sometimes glossy, sometimes coagulated, and sometimes barely covering the raw linen. Wetness and dryness, thickness and thinness, deliberation and happenstance, scraping and layering, and the general changeability of the figure/ground relationship were occupying Schor much more in this period than they ever had before.

In choosing the words she will paint, Schor often employs her own form of appropriation from the culture around her, selecting words or sentences because of their potential multiple meanings. Thus, in *War Frieze*, Schor represented the words "area of denial," the name of a type of weapon described on *Nightline*, which Schor felt alluded to the body as an area of denial, and even the body of *painting* as an area of denial in the contemporary art world she was engaged in. Schor draws attention to the sentence and opens it up to further interpretation, while at the same time, the depicted words become empty hangers for the aesthetic—vessels whose meaning would compel the viewer to look at them initially, only to then drop away, highlighting the abstraction and painterliness of their form.

After completing *War Frieze* in 1994, Schor turned to a more specific concentration on the meeting point between painting and writing. In the mid- to late- 1990s, she literally collapsed the two into each other, by simultaneously writing color and painting language, in works such as *Flesh*, in which she inscribed the word itself into thickly set, flesh-colored paint. By this point in her career, Schor's command of oil paint's variability became reminiscent of her control of gouache and rice paper, achieved in her double-sided works of the 1970s and '80s.

For Schor, paint on canvas has depth—sometimes literally, but also metaphorically. The body, seemingly set aside in the works of the mid- to late-1990s for a more formal exploration of language, is still here. Flesh is flesh, even if it's unattached to an actual body, and even more deeply, oil paint, as well as writing, *are* for Schor the body—albeit a body that is often mediated



A LIFE, 2008. INK, GRAPHITE, AND GESSO ON LINEN, 10 BY 12 INCHES

by language and abstraction. In word installations such as *Personal Writing* (1994) and *Sexual Pleasure* (1998), Schor explored exactly this mediation by painting these titular phrases in her own free handwriting, a letter per panel, and installing the canvases alongside others on which the proper cursive writing that she'd learned at the Lycée Français was painted. Ironically, of course, at the very moment when the unfettered work of the hand is juxtaposed against its institutional counterpart, one realizes that the purported free body here is anything but, as even the handwritten letters are blown up and traced deliberately. Adding an additional layer of complication to these works is the element of paint, in which the body suddenly reappears. In *Sexual Pleasure*, the corporeal possibility of the term is expressed not in the lettering, but in the vibrantly luxurious reds, pinks, and yellows. The first S of one of the "sexual pleasure" iterations is a juicy crimson depression in creamy scarlet paint, another is a bright marigold monochrome, while yet another is a damp trace of red smeared atop a white background.

This visual dialect of the hazy trace continued to play a part in Schor's work of the early 2000s. In pieces that were exploring the concept of repetition with a difference—with the artist's handwriting enlarged and traced twice in ink, one iteration bleeding through, though not dissolving into, the other over gesso on white canvas as well as on paper—Schor was doing some of her most personal work to date. Teaching, attempting to write a follow-up book to 1997's *Wet*, taking care of her nonagenarian mother, and painting, Schor often felt that she was juggling too many balls. She was sometimes concerned she would not be able to complete all the projects she was working on (particularly her second book: at one point, she thought she'd have to just paint the ideas for the book as one-sentence headlines!). This sense of insufficiency was reflected in a series of paintings in which the phrase "There's No Time to Make Art" is repeated; in several other works, the word "Trace" is featured, its meaning reflected in the delicate, ghostly line with which it's drawn. The need to create, Schor suggests, is the need to leave a trace of oneself—no matter how modest.

And, as Schor's essay "Modest Painting" proposes, this modesty is a goal rather than a failing. Painting need not be monumental, flashy, or self-branding in order to leave a lasting impression. Quite the opposite: the



existence of reticent, careful painting that doesn't ostentatiously announce its own importance, helps to "(sharpen) our perception of images in a softer light." In the booming, hyperkinetic art market of the early aughts, this was an especially valid political point.



"Then suddenly came a storm or maybe disaster": from 2001 on, Schor began reusing this early snippet from *Book of Pages* in a truncated form. The word "Suddenly," painted on canvas in a handwriting identical to that used in the earlier work, became an emblem of a state of being that Schor knew intimately from childhood, but that was reconfirmed to her by the events of that year. As she wrote in *Negative Thinking*, "I read once that people who lost their parents as children always have a certain attitude called 'and suddenly.'" Coming from a family of Holocaust refugees and losing her father at a young age had made "shocking loss (seem) familiar." But the events of the first half of the new decade proved especially trying. September 11 came first—a disaster that Schor witnessed at close range, as her Tribeca loft is located only fourteen blocks north of the World Trade Center towers. Three months later came Naomi Schor's sudden death from a cerebral hemorrhage; and, finally, in 2006, Resia Schor's passing. Schor was now "the only person left of (her) beloved and interesting family."

Schor described to me how she felt as she was grieving, first over her sister and later over her mother: "People would ask me how I was, and there were literally no words for me to express how I was feeling." When saying and meaning prove useless, what does an artist who has been engaged with language in one form or another since the inception of her career do? Schor began painting empty speech bubbles, reflecting the sense of "deep existential loneliness" that she was experiencing. The summer of 2007, after her mother's death, she worked in Provincetown, not only on canvas, but also in notebooks, once again using small-scale paper sheets as intimate spaces for exploration of new territory. Employing mostly black and white, with sudden flashes of yellow and orange, these works were in some ways the exact antithesis of *Book of Pages*. Woman was no longer full of words, but completely devoid of them. Oftentimes, the rounded forms Schor painted are blacked out, like heavy lead balloons; sometimes they're filled with abstract lines (perhaps a darker version of the speech of Snoopy's little friend, Woodstock the bird); and sometimes they're ghostly white. In the ironic *Portrait of My Brain* (2007), yellowish gunk aggressively, thickly, shades a speech bubble on a black background. The mind has now become a depository for useless matter, an abstraction that does not open up to utopian possibilities but is rather a type of endgame.

By the summer of 2008, Schor was slightly less overwhelmed by grief, and language began to creep back minimally into her compositions. Before their respective deaths, Resia and Naomi had attempted to trace their family's lineage in the form of a family tree. That summer, Schor resumed that project from her own perspective. Listing the names of her many deceased relatives and pinning them to the wall, she then formalized the memory of these people, most of whom she never knew, a family lineage of which she was effectively the only remaining descendant. Instead of actual names, now Schor's speech bubbles began to contain the handwritten words "a life."

This might seem a grim project, and in some ways, it was. These people had lived once, and they were no longer living. Most devastatingly for Schor, now Ilya, Naomi, and Resia were gone. But at the same time, by repeating those words over and over again, Schor was not only affirming that "a life" was something that had happened and was worth commemorating, but also that *her* life would go on. Toward the end of that same summer, Schor painted the work *Cool Guy*, in which a brownish balloon links up to another, white balloon, sporting a pair of comically large, brown sunglasses. The sprouting of a buoyant human figure out of blocked brown sludge reflects how Schor's sense of humor and hope could emerge even from the most melancholy of circumstances. The fact that this work was meant at least in part as a portrait of Barack Obama, also signals an opening up to the world and its possibilities beyond personal devastation. Once more, Auschwitz and Portugal negotiated a productive if not completely easy partnership.

In 2009, Schor began painting the full figure for the first time since her "Story Paintings" of the early 1970s. In paintings on paper and canvas, in ink and slicks of oil paint, she imagined herself as a stick figure—head



A WALK, 2008, INK AND GESSO ON LINEN, 16 BY 20 INCHES

and body combined—striding across a white expanse often dotted with pitfalls. In *A Walk*, she creates a sense of movement by drawing her line several times, in different-colored inks, each slightly separated from the other and bleeding through layers of gesso. This time, the bespectacled figure is no longer Obama, but a skirt-wearing stand-in for Schor herself. A figure in peril, she is surrounded on all sides by foreboding, darkened speech bubbles, one stick leg almost stumbling into an open grave lying in her path. Again, this would be a disheartening painting if it weren't for the comic, near-slapstick element here. The square-headed Schor, her glasses oversized, her face featureless, is as blank as a Buster Keaton/Harold Lloyd hybrid. But the character's vulnerability, coupled with her obvious momentum forward (who knows—maybe she'll evade the trap at the last moment?) make us root for her, laughing a little as we dab at a secret tear.

Because this is the thing about Schor. "A life"—and, more to the point, an intensely *creative* life—will keep on being lived. Paintings will get painted; writings will be written. And if the prone, swimming figure of a woman in the multiple landscape paintings she made this past year sometimes looks as if she's dead or dying, in fact she's just floating on her back. She's looking up, contemplating the gorgeous Provincetown sky through her dark glasses, feeling the warm sun and the green slickness of the water on her skin, and thinking of an idea for a new essay or a new painting, or, perhaps, of a new balloon to sprout out of her self-portrait.

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ILYA, MIRA, AND RESIA SCHOR, PROVINCETOWN, 1967



PRINT SEPTEMBER 1990

ARTFORUM



Girls will be Girls

Mira Schor



This page, top: Guerrilla Girls, "The Banana Report: The Guerrilla Girls Review the Whitney," installation view at the Cloisters, New York, April-May 1987. Bottom: Guerrilla Girls poster in SoHo, 1990. Opposite: Guerrilla Girls; publicity photo, 1990.

Intervention" is the buzzword that defined and prescribed the kind of political act considered effective and correct during the 1980s. In the culture at large, cynicism and exhaustion numbered survivors of the political activism of the '60s and '70s; at the same time, within the academy, aspects of simulation and deconstruction theories destabilized "humanistic" concepts of identity and action, contributing to a sense of moral equivocation. In the political arena internationally, easily visible and identifiable white, Western males did not fare too well fighting against often not white, seemingly invisible, unidentifiable guerrillas (or terrorists) fighting carefully chosen limited engagements. Nationally, single-issue candidates or issues predominated: prochoice, prolife, animal rights, the environment, "read-my-lips." Across the political spectrum, only small "interventions," therefore, were believed possible, always already understood by their initiators as ephemeral and of limited effectiveness.

"Guerrilla Girls—Conscience of the Art World." The name and Homeric epithet immediately indicate both the timeliness and the character of their chosen form of intervention. These self-styled "Guerrillas" chose as their subject and target, sexism and racism in the art world, and as primary site for their ambushes, the SoHo and Tribeca neighborhoods of Manhattan. Further, recuperating the word "conscience" might in itself be seen as an intervention. During a notably materialistic and selfish era, GG recalled to public notice the strategies and values of earlier political groups: isn't conscience dated as a concept? Naive, religious even? The Guerrilla Girl's adoption of it was characteristically tongue-in-cheek and sincere (another retro trait in the 1980s).

Since an intervention is meant to be brief, site- and instant-specific, it is amazing that Guerrilla Girls, formed in 1985, is still active. A press release dated 6 May 1985 announces the appearance in SoHo of "posters pointing to the inadequate numbers of women artists represented in leading New York galleries," and, further, states that "Guerrilla Girls plans to continue its campaign throughout the next weeks and next season, drawing attention to the retrograde attitudes toward women artists that characterize certain segments of the art world of the mid-80's." There is something touching about "next weeks and next season"—not seasons, mind you. No spontaneously formed underground group could imagine that something done out of righteous anger and as a lark could last five years and counting. Their fifth anniversary may be the appropriate moment to consider what Guerrilla Girls is and what Guerrilla Girls has done and does, rather than that perennially asked question, *who* are the Guerrilla Girls? (Sophisticated players in the political game of intervention, the GG, as we enter the '90s, are assuredly involved



in their own process of self-evaluation.)

In June 1984 the Museum of Modern Art was picketed by demonstrators protesting the lamentable underrepresentation of women artists in the "International Survey of Painting and Sculpture" exhibition that had reopened the enlarged, "trumped-up" museum. Of 169 artists chosen, only 19 were women. This gender percentage symbolized either how few inroads had been made by women into the bedrock mainstream (to be oxymoronic) of the art world, or the degree of backlash and slippage that had taken place as a decade of noisy activism gave way to complacency and careerism even among women artists. Public pressure on mainstream institutions had let up. MoMA could act with impunity, and Leo Castelli could say, in response to GG's protests, that they suffered from a "chip that some women have on their shoulders. There is absolutely no discrimination against good women artists. There are just fewer women artists." The art world certainly needed a conscience—especially a gendered one. Guerrilla Girls began early in 1985.

GG's first two posters pointed the finger at specific galleries ("THESE GALLERIES SHOW NO MORE THAN 10% WOMEN ARTISTS OR NONE AT ALL") and named names ("WHAT DO THESE ARTISTS HAVE IN COMMON?"). Twenty major galleries from BlumHelman, Mary Boone, Castelli, and Marlborough to Tony Shafrazi, Ed Thorp, and Washburn, and 42 male artists from Arman, Francesco Clemente, and Eric Fischl to Bill Jensen and Richard Serra were depicted as either actively responsible for or, in the case of the artists, complicit in the egregious sexism of the art world. The naming of institutions and individuals continued into 1986: "ONLY 4 OF THE 42 ARTISTS IN THE CARNEGIE INTERNATIONAL ARE WOMEN," "THE GUGGENHEIM TRANSFORMED 4 DECADES OF SCULPTURE BY EXCLUDING WOMEN ARTISTS. ONLY 5 OF THE 58 ARTISTS CHOSEN BY DIANE WALDMAN FOR 'TRANSFORMATIONS IN SCULPTURE: 4 DECADES OF EUROPEAN AND AMERICAN ART' ARE WOMEN." That year GG was

unrelenting, posting at least eight "public service messages" bringing the art world to task. At the same time, a "HITS" list at Printed Matter of "people [who] are making things better for women artists" provided a positive counterpoint to the steady barrage of negative statistics, commending, among others, the gallerists Brooke Alexander, Paula Cooper, and Robert Miller, and the critics Barbara Kruger, Jeanne Silverthorne, and Judd Tully. GG placed major museums "UNDER SURVEILLANCE," indicating an ironic understanding of the group's own marginality and powerlessness, and, paradoxically, its awareness that the art community was becoming sensitive to its critiques. After a suitable pause: "IT'S EVEN WORSE IN EUROPE" (ba-ba-boom!).

Who were these women? Excuse me, *Girls*? Their "victims" wanted to know. Like that "damned elusive Pimpernel," they seek them here, they seek them there, and some threatened to sue if only their individual identities could be revealed. To this day, however, the precise identities and numbers of the Guerrilla Girls are unknown.

"Indeed, I would venture to guess that Anon, who wrote so many poems without signing them, was often a woman."²³ If anonymity reflects the traditional condition of feminine accomplishment, or the pressure to choose between anger and self-repression, there may be a significant difference between enforced and chosen anonymity. Whereas in the past anonymity has been a curse on female artistic creativity, the Guerrilla Girls have embraced the strategic benefits of their covert existence. Since no one knows who is a GG, *anyone* may be one: Kirk Varnedoe's secretary, or David Salle's studio assistant. There is strength in the potential threat of an unknown "Big Sister." But there are also poignant undertones in what the GG have said about being anonymous: "Publishing our names would destroy our anonymity, and therefore both our effectivity and our careers as artists would be gone, be dead,"²⁴ and "We gain a lot of leverage by being anonymous. The dealers and collectors don't know who among their friends is a Guerrilla Girl so they can't single anyone out and say, it's just sour grapes."²⁵ The fear of mockery and retribution indicates that perhaps their anonymity, like Anon's, has *not* been so freely chosen.

Curiosity about the Guerrilla Girls, a wish to tear off the gorilla masks, seems deeply rooted in a desire to interfere with women's privacy and either to diminish or to appropriate and co-opt their activities, even when the curiosity passes for good will. This spring, for example, a male student of mine, newly interested in feminism, wanted to "help" the GG—an act of chivalry perhaps, or a wish to absorb some of the glamour, the "feminine mystique," of the group (as if dodging armed guards in SoHo at 4 A.M. while carrying pots of glue

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text, or text and imagery, such pieces have been posted in the streets. . . . Yet these prints do not furnish the clear information we expect in a traditional poster.¹³ [My emphases.]

Included in "Committed to Print" were works involving language: Holzer's *Truths*, Haacke's *Tiffany Cares*; street works by Holzer and Christy Rupp; and feminist works such as Ilona Granet's *Curb Your Animal Instincts*. Collectives were included: Group Material and the Guerrilla Art Action Group among others. All or none or some of this work may be considered art, depending on one's generation or one's esthetic education. What is certain is that the formal strategies, the media employed, its visual appearance, and the degree of political content were identical to those in GG posters. So while the implied reason for the GG's exclusion may have been the spurious notion that what they do is not "art," it seems more likely that they were omitted because of their chosen target — the art world, including, of course, MoMA itself.

Other artists and collectives making comparable work have been more easily accepted by art institutions than have GG. Holzer's oeuvre exists perhaps more in the realm of fiction than politics, and she has moved to more permanent and expensive materials than posters. Many of the artists in "Committed to Print" were protesting the Vietnam War, which by 1988 was a comparatively safe subject for museum display. It is, perhaps, precisely their disregard for individual career concerns and their persistent lack of politesse regarding art-world matters that assures the Guerrilla Girls' critical position and their relatively gritty marginality. Under the stress of recent forces of suppression, however, new, angrier, more confrontational, and messily embodied groups are forming. Among them are SisterSerpents, also anonymous, also self-identified as "guerrillas in the war against sexism."¹⁴ New political situations inevitably call for new interventions, and this group's choice of raw, sexual representational imagery and language — said a poster at a recent show they organized at ABC No Rio, "For all you folks who consider a fetus more valuable than a woman, Fuck a Fetus" — provide an interesting contrast to GG's coolly provocative ironies and statistics (which, after all, have made it to the pages of the *New York Times* and *Artforum*).

It must also be admitted that not all of the GG's interventions, especially their public performances, are equally effective. Two not very articulate GGs disappointed a packed house at the San Francisco Art Institute in 1987 with a poor-quality video and off-putting, "Oh sure. The art world's a pit, but I want an equal opportunity to climb into that pit!"¹⁵ answers to questions from audience members stuck on the problem of art-world "fairness" to anyone, male or female. These par-

ticular Girls seemed unable to step back from the art world as presently constituted, to engage in a more sophisticated analysis of patterns of success and failure, including the art world's calibrated hierarchy of "permissible" transgressions. Most distressingly, they failed to educate an audience intrigued by their posters. Other public performances have presented similar lapses.

GG's poster work, on the other hand, has been more consistently satisfying. It is almost unfortunate that they have chosen to move on from where one might want, even need, them to stay. "The Banana Report: The Guerrilla Girls Review the Whitney," 1987, was one of GG's most ambitious projects, filling the Clocktower with a very complete analysis of the Whitney's curatorial and acquisitional practices. Surely this type of report

RELAX SENATOR HELMS, THE ART WORLD IS YOUR KIND OF PLACE!

- The number of blacks at an art opening is about the same as at one of your garden parties.
- Many museum trustees are at least as conservative as Ronald Reagan.
- Because sexist quality standards abound, there's never been a need for Affirmative Action in museums or galleries.
- Most art collectors, like most successful artists, are white males.
- Women artists have their place: after all, they earn less than 1/3 of what male artists earn.
- Museums are separate but equal. No female black painter or sculptor has been in a Whitney Biennial since 1972. Instead, they can show at the Studio Museum in Harlem or the Women's Museum in Washington.
- Since most women artists don't make a living from their work and there's no maternity leave or childcare in the art world, they rarely choose both career and motherhood.
- The sexual imagery in most respected works of art is the expression of wholesome heterosexual studies.
- Unchecked by government interference, art is one of the last unregulated markets. Why there isn't even any self-regulation!
- The majority of exposed pictures in major museums belong to the Billy Beets.

Photo and text courtesy of the Guerrilla Girls. **GUERRILLA GIRLS** (DEFINITION OF THE ART WORLD) Guerrilla Girls, poster, 1980.

needs continual updating, as the art world, ever threatening to slip backward, demands continual vigilance. Roberta Smith points to improvements in the Whitney's gender percentages in her recent *New York Times* article on the Guerrilla Girls,¹⁶ but finds merely "worth noting," in a recent review of new galleries in SoHo, that "except for Eva Hesse and Agnes Martin . . . there is not a woman among them."¹⁷ As they say in France, "Plus ça change" (*plus c'est la même chose*).

Recently GG has tackled the hypocrisy that underscores the art world's holier-than-thou reactions to efforts to destroy the National Endowment for the Arts and censor controversial art: "RELAX SENATOR HELMS, THE ART WORLD IS YOUR KIND OF PLACE!" (segregated and sexist), "GUERRILLA GIRLS' DEFINITION OF A

HYPOCRITE" ("An art collector who buys white male art at benefits for liberal causes, but never buys art by women or artists of color"), and a poster that uses GG's "cute" but acidic tone to perfection, "GUERRILLA GIRLS' POP QUIZ." The answer to "What happens ten months of the year in the art world?" is printed upside down, like a newspaper quiz, and one can just hear the mixture of condescension, sarcasm, cloying sweetness, and triumph in the answer: "Discrimination."

Any criticisms of GG must be understood as backseat driving on my part. For I've grown accustomed — if not to their faces — to their impertinent "interventions" which so often continue to hit the mark. The external force of reaction on all fronts may well impell GG to grow politically beyond the narrow confines of the art world, although in doing so they would risk losing their acuity, specificity, and their particular constituency.

At the end of *A Room of One's Own* Virginia Woolf speaks of the importance of anonymous forerunners to the development of women artists: "But I maintain that she [the dead poet who was Shakespeare's sister] would come if we worked for her, and that so to work, even in poverty and obscurity, is worth while."¹⁸ Guerrilla Girls works for me and for countless other women artists, by keeping the voice of feminism and social justice alive with a leavening of humor. I treasure my copy of "THE ADVANTAGES OF BEING A WOMAN ARTIST." Except for appearing "in the art magazines wearing a gorilla suit," how true to my life — too true — that poster is, and how nice to have it on a wall in my neighborhood, to be read, perhaps, by the "geniuses" who "choke on those big cigars or paint in Italian suits."¹⁹

Mira Schor is a painter who lives in New York. She is the coeditor of M/E/A/N/I/N/G, a journal of contemporary art.

1. Quoted by Patricia Lyden, "The Art of Protest," *New York Women*, September 1987, p. 31. A look at Castro's notes proves that he puts his money where his mouth is. In the *Art in America Annual Guide to Museums, Galleries + Artists, 1990-91*, Castello lists 18 male artists and no women.
2. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, 1929, New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1987, p. 51.
3. Quoted by Paul Taylor, "Where the Girls Are," *Corporate Culture*, April 1987, p. 178.
4. Quoted by Lyden, p. 31.
5. The Guerrilla Girls were awarded a grant by Art Matters, Inc., 1980; Honorable Mention in the Visual Arts, Manhattan Borough President's Award, 1987; and a New York Foundation for the Arts Grant, 1988.
6. See Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.
7. Quoted by Mark Wapstruff, "Artwork: Monday Business," *Fast*, April 1989, p. 45.
8. Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Pornography, Film, and Fiction*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987, pp. 23-24.
9. Lyden, p. 11.
10. "Queen Kang," *Playboy* 26 no. 7, July 1989, p. 13.
11. Only my handwriting knows for sure.
12. Joyce Kozloff, "From the Other Side: Public Artists on Public Art," *Art Journal* 48 no. 4, Winter 1989, p. 370.
13. Patricia C. Phillips, "Temporality and Public Art," *ibid.*, p. 332.
14. *ibid.*, p. 334.
15. Deborah Wyt, *Committed to Print*, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1988, pp. 8-9.
16. Arlene Raven, "ABC No Lady," *The Village Voice*, 19 June 1990, p. 116.
17. Quoted by Myra Ruthven, "Guerrilla Girls Unmask Sexism in the Art World," *Mother Jones*, August-September 1987, p. 15.
18. Roberta Smith, "Waging Guerrilla Warfare Against the Art World," *The New York Times*, 17 June 1986, pp. C1 and C31.
19. Roberta Smith, "So Big and So Dressed Up, New Galleries Bloom in SoHo," *The New York Times*, 11 May 1990, p. C1.
20. Woolf, p. 116.





GUERRILLA GIRLS GO BACK TO THE JUNGLE.

Since the socially responsible, multi-cultural artworld of the 1990's has met the following demands, Guerrilla Girls are pleased to announce their retirement.

- All museums and galleries have publicly apologized for years of discrimination.
- The Far Right is undergoing psychoanalysis to determine the real source of its interest in Robert Mapplethorpe.
- Congress has legislated that sex is no longer obscene, but bailing out the Savings and Loan industry is.
- To fight art censorship, Sotheby's and Christie's have pledged 3% of their \$5 billion annual sales to finance the N.E.A.'s \$171 million budget.
- Guerrilla Girls have brokered the purchase of M.O.M.A. by a Japanese industrialist provided no more retrospectives be given to Frank Stella.
- *Artforum* has banned the following words: tough, virile, muscular, seminal, potent, genius, masterpiece, primitive and post-feminist.
- Leo Castelli, Mary Boone, Larry Gagosian, BlumHelman and Pace have endowed a foundation in our honor to eradicate chauvinism and racism in the artworld.

496 LaGuardia Pl. #237, NY 10012

GUERRILLA GIRLS ^{FORMER} CONSCIENCE OF THE ARTWORLD

ARTFORUM



PRINT SUMMER 1990

Troubleshooters Mira Schor on the Return of the Same

Until recently, there was no problem determining who were the subjects of history. They were the largely Caucasian males whose actions and thoughts were inscribed into a history whose very formulation as a science they defined. Discourse was a continuous loop of what the French philosopher Luce Irigaray has termed the "phallosensical homologue" of Western civilization.

Whether this system has been altered by three decades of liberation movements

was an issue tested by "Subjects of History: A Day of Discussion," a symposium presented in March 1990 at the Columns by the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York, "in conjunction with the exhibition *Interim* by Mary Kelly." This symposium—moderated by Hal Foster and including papers and comments by Kelly, British feminist theorists and art historians Laura Mulvey, Parveen Adams, and Griselda Pollock, American literary theorist Emily Apter, and British video- and filmmaker Isaac Julien—warrants analysis, separate from the exhibition, because it both illuminated the historical context of Kelly's work and the crisis in representation, and also because, unconsciously or unintentionally, it highlighted a theoretical/artistic movement's transition from vilified "other" to intellectual elite.

Mulvey and Pollock vividly recalled the initial work of the London Women's Liberation Art Workshop in the early '70s. "The importance of women's lives to become history, to be interpreted," said Pollock, led to a utopian search for the origin of women's oppression. A "history group" met for readings and discussions of texts by Engels, Freud, Lévi-Strauss, and of theories on sexual difference and the Oedipus. Mulvey concurred: "Theory was exciting," an "instrument for decipherment." Such activities are emblematic of differences between the American and British feminist art movements at their onset, which clearly prefigured contemporary rifts within feminism. In 1971 the Feminist Art Program at CalArts held consciousness-raising sessions about our periods, our mothers, our fathers, and researched neglected women artists of the past; in London, they were reading Engels. Both groups understood that the representation of women was a political field. The American approach was, generally, empirical: the

creation of new visual and textual representation. The British were discursively problematizing representation itself, and promoting "scripto-visual" subversive strategies, with the emphasis on "scripto."

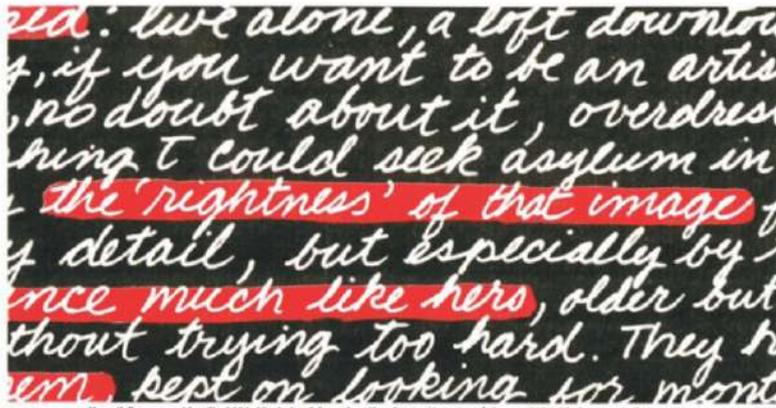
Pollock spoke of the "traps of visibility," condemning the traditional esthetic values of beauty and visual sensuality that have been dominant methods for turning women from potential subjects of history into objects of the male gaze. Adams developed these themes as they are expressed in *INTERIM* by positing a Loconian equation—*INTERIM* is to the viewer as the analyst is to the analysand. The work refuses to offer the viewer an idealized superego (as painting would). "The artist does not have the object any more than the analyst. . . . *INTERIM* will not make the spectator feel lovable. . . . These are pictures which work at the limit of the image."

However, both *INTERIM* and "Subjects of History"—constructed to mount a critical attack on the misuses of visual seduction—suggested, but did not satisfactorily admit to, some inherent contradictions. For example, by embedding a discourse on the aging of the female body (usually neglected or distorted in dominant representation) in a visual project that withholds any visual indication of age, the reality of age as subject was lost in a field of words. As individual pictorial elements, words have no age, and, in English at any rate, most often no gender. The symposium's emphasis on the "traps of visibility" and the potential of language as a critical tool may have served to perpetuate the lack of focus on female aging—Kelly's subject remained invisible.

Yet *INTERIM*'s critique of visual seduction is embedded in a visual project, and thus raises questions about the use of representation and the strategies of commodification for making aging desirable to History. But the panelists seemed only to offer arguments (albeit sophisticated) to explain why *INTERIM* succeeded in being visually frustrating. Further contradictions emerged and were suppressed: if, as Adams suggested, the strength of Kelly's work is in its uncompromising refusal to present the viewer with a seductive self-image, then the considerable elegance of her impeccably manufactured works may be problematic. Kelly, however, firmly



Rosemarie Trockel, *Balaclava*, 1986, black and white photograph, ca. 9 1/2 x 5 1/4".



Mary Kelly, *Interim* (detail), 1984-89. A detail from the "Supplication" section of *Corpus*, 1984-85, laminated photo positive, silk screen, and acrylic on Plexiglas, 30 panels, each 34 x 48".

redirected Mulvey's questions about the materiality of her work, detailing, instead, her intentions for each and every choice of material and typeface—intentions often not self-evident even to a reasonably well-informed viewer [confronted with photographs of folded clothing, subtitled "Extase," for example, not everyone will recall Jean Martin Charcot's iconography of hysteria]. The emphasis on authorial intention and predetermined interpretation seemed curious in the context of a work said to refuse an omniscient role, and at a time when the creative role of the reader/viewer is acknowledged. *INTERIM*'s relationship to conventional sculpture, its references to the work of Minimalist artists such as Richard Serra, David Smith, and Donald Judd, were avoided. And if the strength of the work is in its refusal to assume univocal mastery, then how does one explain the symposium's choice of Kelly as the only successful exponent of representation in crisis, positing and positioning her as the solution, the subject?

In the way in which baseball fans imagine ideal teams (made up of only short players, only Italian-American southpaws, etc.), the lack of oppositional voices on the panel, and the reduction of a movement to the work of one artist, suggested an endless list of alternate panelists whose presence might have enriched the discus-

sion. How about provoking a discourse between Modernism and feminism by having Rosalind Krauss on the panel? How about a Lacanian feminist from another generation and milieu, such as Jane Gallop? How about "others" within American art, such as Hung Liu or Trin T. Minh-ha, whose esthetic practices are not so different from Kelly's, who are as theory-adept, but who might have contributed to the "polyvocality" that Kelly believes *INTERIM* provides? Most important, the gracious presence of British filmmaker Isaac Julien as token "other" (conveniently conflating gay, black, and avant-garde) did not make up for the voices of women of color working in England in the late '70s and the '80s. Lubaina Himid or Sutapa Biswas, among others, were not invited or mentioned. Was the audience being presented with a retotalized version of the history of the London movement, whose actual discursive vitality and variety is evidenced in Pollock and Rozsika Parker's lively anthology of original documents, *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women's Movement 1970-1985*?

In fact, operating at the intersection of feminism, critical theory, and the crisis of representation, "Subjects of History" (presented to an almost all-white, middle-class, well-educated audience) managed to replace one system of exclusion with

another. Excluded were such representational strategies as painting, crafts, even language that is not theory language. One thinks of the works of the Reverend Howard Finster, Chéri Samba, or Faith Ringgold in this regard. "Subjects of

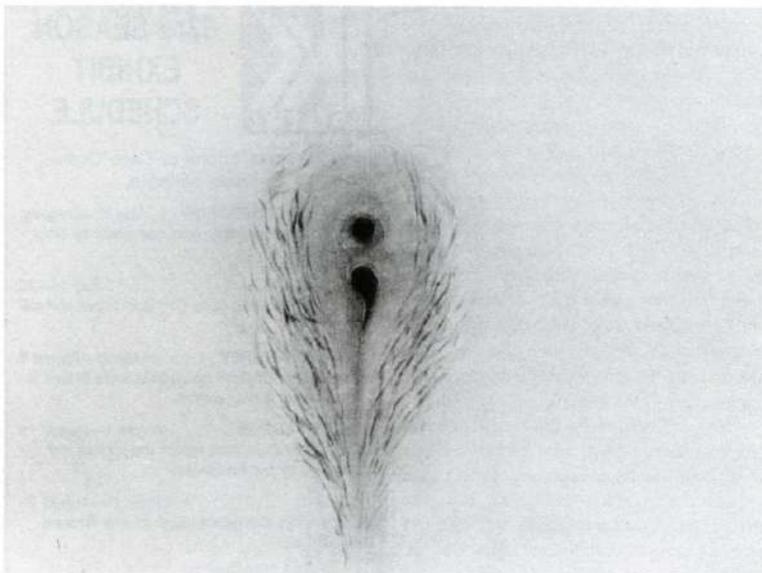
History"'s esthetic system would, by inference, consider a majority of third-world artists as primitives. Does one need an advanced degree in (white male) philosophy and psychoanalytic theory to be a subject of (the "new") History? The considerable value of critical theory is compromised if, when transferred to visual practice and discourse, it threatens to reinscribe colonialism.

The goals of the feminist movements in 1971, avowedly Kelly's as well, were to displace the (phallic) of the (male) universal, to inscribe other subjects into history, to reformulate what history could be, to break down the closed, exclusionary loop of discourse. Yet here we were subjected to a "return of the same"—the One—presented in an academic cryptography of theoretical language, without sufficient time for questions. A new system of exclusion and exclusivity, or misguided attempts at the kind of artist hagiography that Kelly's apologists claim her art refutes, does not serve the ideal of a new discourse of history. □

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Leonid Lamm, *The City of the Sun*, 1988-90, mixed media, 81 x 81".



MIRA SCHOR, "Semi-colon in Flesh," 1993
oil on linen, 12 x 16"
Collection: Jon Weaver

by Johanna Drucker

In the fall of 1993, Mira Schor's work was exhibited at the Horodner-Romley Gallery in New York. This was a choice opportunity to see Schor's work of the last few years installed to advantage. Whether presented individually or in sequentially ordered panels, her paintings display a jewel-like finish and meticulous worked quality, reminiscent of Flemish altarpieces, while the subject matter breaks new ground in contemporary theory. This seeming contradiction—between traditional painting and up-to-date concerns—is reconciled at the level of the medium.

Schor forges an inseparable bond between the facture of painterly treatment and the deconstructive critique of patriarchy and power to which she has long been committed. The very codes of mastery, fine finish, virtuoso control of oil, pigment, glaze, drafting skill and rendering ability are associated historically with a masculinist "old master" tradition. Thus Schor's use of these techniques inscribes her criticisms in a subversion of the medium through its own means—as Komar and Melamid, for instance, first inverted the terms of Socialist Realism through an appropriative gesture or Sherrie Levine pointedly focused the lens of the camera back onto the modern masters of photographic spectacle. Schor has long believed that painting is an arena in which an interrogation of the values of patriarchal and masculinist culture may be staged—as well as one in which an alternative vision may be rendered.

But painting, Schor's work continually re-

creating through symbolism. Painting is also a physical, bodily act, one in which the artist constructs a situation of pleasure, a practice of narcissistic self-involvement with material, sensuality of touch, movement, pressure and gesture—all of which are traced in the response of the pigment on the canvas. This sensuality, still available to the viewer as a nuanced play of surface treatments, textures, layering, veiling, and luminous glazes, manifests itself as the embodiment of a feminist gaze, one empowered by its own laws, permissions, and convictions. It is important to note here that Schor is not involved with some transcendent image of the feminine. Instead, she is engaged with a specific social and historical construction of a feminist critical position: "I want to engage with the metaphorically expressive possibilities of the materiality of painting, trusting in the complexity of visual language, in order to reinvest painting with the energy of a different politics, a politics of difference, and a different eroticism than that of the monocular penis."

In this recent show, Schor showed several long sections from *Area of Denial* and *War Frieze*. Major works, these are ambitious projects whose epic scale is perhaps belied at first glance through the small size of the panels sequentially assembled to form their whole. But the narrative content of *War Frieze* is well-integrated in the formal structure of the piece. Sequentially ordered panels (12 x 16") assembled into a frieze literally stretch a point across space, around

Mira Schor: Area of DENIAL

letter by
letter or word by word
through the modular units of painted surface. The writing as writing invokes metaphorically the processes by which history is constructed—until recently leaving out women, people of color, groups whose relation to the hegemonic center of power rendered them invisible to the official version of political and social events. Schor's painting serves as an interrogation and questioning of the authoritative statements of entrenched patriarchal power—in all their linguistic linearity. The visual form of the rendered words returns them to their materiality as a context, place or site of formation, while also distorting them from any easily formulaic transparency for ready readability and consumption. The statements, thus curved, looped, filled, and haloed only transmit their message through the well-massaged medium of the painted image, refusing easy translation into a disembodied meaning. The presence of language as a body—as a physical, fleshy form, dripped with blood, milk, cum, other bodily fluids—is a subversion of the classic distinction between the symbolic order of the linguistic law and the sensual pleasures of the semiotic body. Language here is bodily, a somatic excrescence, squeezed from the breast, flowing from the penis, or borrowed from an unstaunched wound.

Schor's current esthetic concern is a fundamental critique of the structure of patriarchal power through representation. She has been



lysts like Jacques Lacan went to such extremes to differentiate from the symbolic form of the phallus. Schor returns these two to their inevitable relation to each other. If the phallus, as the sign of difference, marks those distinctions by which male individuals gain access to power, then the symbolic function is largely repeated by the function of the penis—which is used to identify those who have phallic power. By insistently and repeatedly redrawing the penis as such a sign of phallic power, Schor has managed to destabilize the distinction between these two, calling attention over and over to the masculine character of patriarchy. Patriarchy, for Schor, is not a generalized abstraction, but a very real and very much lived feature of contemporary society. *War Frieze* and *Area of Denial* are both saturated with references to recent military campaigns on the part of the United States. The aggression of the imperialist nation, she implies, is not to be separated from the masculinist identity of its patriarchal order. By making use of highly sensual painterly surfaces, ones which gratify the viewer through the range of technical manipulations, Schor manages to engage—even seduce—the eye into the critical issues of the work.

The phrase, “area of denial,” came to Schor from military sources. The term is used technically to describe the space under an explosion of a bomb above ground which eliminates oxygen to the area below. This process achieves a suffocating destruction of all life in the zone while leaving property and structures unharmed. This is similar to the process of subjection of women in a patriarchal order whose structures function to eliminate possibilities for women. “So many things are an area of denial,” Schor said in a recent interview, “the body, its contingency and mortality, and the body of painting itself.”

Schor’s first penis imagery paintings were produced in 1987, followed by the images of an ear, a breast, and then various mutations of these into relations with each other. The image of the penis speaking into the ear, coming into the ear, finding its own pleased sexual release in an outpouring of stuff into the aperture of the Other as a form of domination as well as discourse, was a predominant motif of these earlier works. Schor’s positions are not simplistic, binaristic or ideologically rigid—she sees and presents the paradoxical mutations and processes by which language as a form of power and exchange is transmitted from mother to child, from maternal to paternal figures, according to a complex dynamics of gendered authority and relations. But her more recent paintings attach these analyses to a wider realm of concerns—both sexual/political and art historical/theoretical.

torical categorizations and positions. The long *War Frieze* is not only a work critiquing the general relation between phallic power and contemporary culture, but also between the masculinist terms of modernism and the more recent critical developments differentiating the current state of art from its antecedents. Modernism is literally flushed down the toilet, poured through the conduit of the phallic/penis form, run out as a liquid line of writing, as a term milked dry, a term squeezed from the organs and genitalia of an exhausted artistic milieu, only to find itself in the final embrace of cold porcelain—an ignoble if predictable termination. “It’s modernism stupid,” the work states, as if to reiterate for the *n*th time to some dull dim-wit still invested in the old terms that it is finished, done, and needs to be given up. The frustration, the insistence, the finality of the statement all intersect, and withal, are rendered in the slow, patient, careful touch of Schor’s exquisite painterly technique.

But if on the one hand Schor is clear about the need to reject the old tenets of modernism—especially its triumphant virility and abstract formalism—she is equally aware of her own ambivalent relation to the practice of modern art. As a painter she realizes, inevitably, that painting itself belongs to the traditions of modernism and that in confronting the received positions of that tradition she is still in her own way much involved in the modernist agenda with respect to painting.

Schor’s love of painting, of the pure pleasure of the activity of putting pigment onto canvas in various degrees of opacity, thickness, transparency, and delicacy is rarely sufficient justification for her to paint. In several single, individual panels, she comes closer to enjoying paint

for paint’s sake than in the large works where the same technical virtuosity is displayed, but in the context of a larger project. “Semicolon in Flesh” and “Breast” contain explicit body references. Red-lipped areas around the vaginal openings in “Semicolon” are surrounded with sensual skin tones and fine-lined pubic hair, but the actual opening is in the form of the punctuation mark, suggesting a strange conflict between the notion of language and sexuality, essential femininity and symbolic representation. “Spanish Painting” resonates with its title through the choice of rich color and lush paint, an echo of a tradition of excess in which emotional dramas of the spirit and the heart are played out through blood, tears, and religious ecstasy. Schor’s seductive surface and painterly pleasure are given full reign here, but there are no explicit thematic references outside of material treatment and the tones of the palette.

Schor has referred to the process of painting as an “endless deferral of pleasure and closure.” This is a feminine trope of the sexual pleasure of production, the pleasure of sexual production, the feminine erotics of a continual play—tactile, sensual, unbounded, here put at the service of a meaning which is critical, theoretical, linguistic, and yet embedded in the somatic physicality of paint. Schor very clearly states her own intentions when she says, “I think painting must operate at the intersection of the richness of its past and its materiality with the critique of painting, the challenge of the real.” ■

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