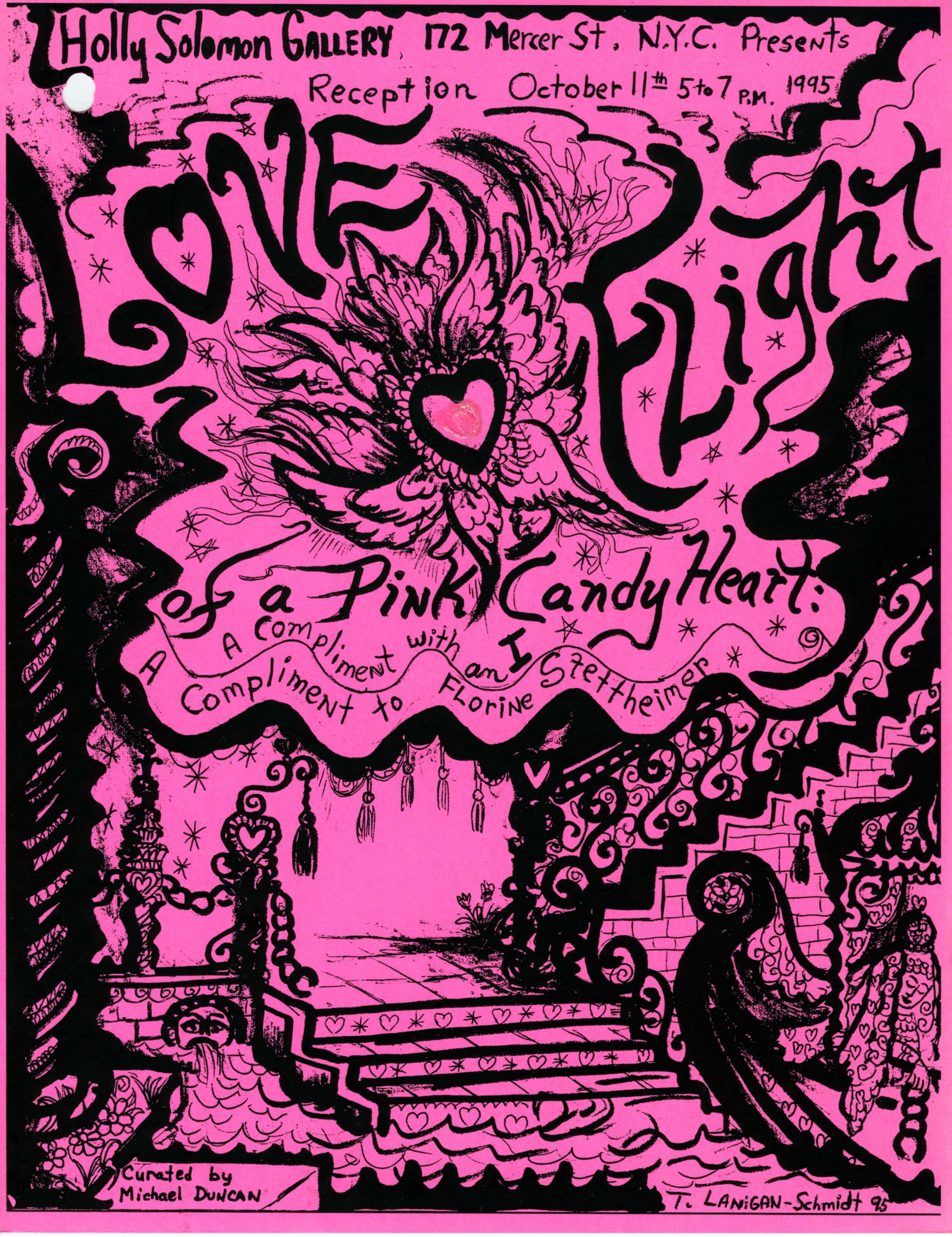
Holly Solomon Gallery 172 Mercer St. N.Y.C. Presents
Reception October 11th 5 to 7 P.M. 1995
Love Light
of a Pink Candy Heart:
A Compliment with an I
A Compliment to Florine Stettheimer
Curated by
Michael DUNCAN
T. LANIGAN-Schmidt 95

selections from
Crystal Flowers,
poetry by Florine
Stettheimer
with pages by
exhibition artists

Dear Florine:

Your beautiful white impasto chandeliers and laces, lemon yellow seas, pale pink air, hot orange nights — the intense sensuality of a woman's vision — the celebratory salons of New York Society and its art world — all give great joy in painting. Cole Porter would agree:

"You're the purple light of a summer night in Spain
You're the National Gallery
You're Garbo's salary
You're cellophane!"

Love from Mira Schor

"Love Flight of a Pink Candy Heart"

Curated by Michael Duncan

Entrance gallery
right to left

Ree Morton
Something in the Wind, 1975
Acrylic, marker and mixed media on nylon flags
each 23 1/2 x 30 1/2 inches
Courtesy Alexander and Bonin

Florine Stettheimer
Andre Brook (front view), 1916
Oil on canvas
28 1/4 x 29 5/8 inches
Courtesy Columbia University in the City of New York

Robert Greene
Captive, 1990
Oil on canvas
55 x 55 inches
Courtesy Robert Miller Gallery, New York

Florine Stettheimer
Bathers, c. 1927
Oil on canvas
25 1/2 x 29 5/8 inches
Courtesy Columbia University in the City of New York

Thomas Trosch
Musical Comedy Medley #4 with Lyrics By Harburg, Porter, Bishop and Moliere with Various Book and Play Titles, 1995
Oil and graphite on linen
70 x 84 inches
Courtesy Jose Freire Fine Art

Florine Stettheimer
Study for Love Flight of a Pink Candy Heart, c. 1930
Oil and ink on paper
30 x 21 3/4 inches
Courtesy Columbia University in the City of New York

Rebecca Howland
Flame, 1994
Oil on canvas
48 x 29 inches

Laura Cooper
Dress for Flying Dream, 1995
Nylon, tulle, resin
Dimensions variable

Small front gallery

Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt
Aztec Valentine: the center of the flower belongs to Tezcatlipoca, god of the here and now: Seducer of Maidens! Creator of Courtesans! He plays with our destiny like a little rubber ball bounced between his hands and rolled between his fingers. The barkless dog could not warn the stingless bee, as it flew into the flower, 1995
Refracting tape, scotch tape, staples, tissue paper, pipe cleaners, florist bees, magic marker, foil, theatrical gels, cellophane, plastic food wrappers, kodex reproductions, paper towels, perfumed oils
Dimensions variable

Main gallery
left to right

Faith Ringgold
Dinner at Gertrude Stein's from The French Collection #10, 1991
Acrylic on canvas with pieced fabric border
79 x 84 inches

David Levinthal
Untitled (photographs of Stettheimer dollhouse), 1995
Cibachrome
7 1/2 x 9 1/2 inches
Editions of 8

Frances Strain
Four Saints in Three Acts: Introducing St. Ignatius, 1934
Oil on canvas
36 x 30 inches
Courtesy MIchael Rosenfeld Gallery

Izhar Patkin
Felicity (The Blacks), 1986
Enamel on chromecoat paper
92 1/2 x 41 1/2 inches
Virtue (The Blacks), 1986
Enamel on chromecoat paper
92 1/2 x 41 1/2 inches

Lari Pittman
Transformational and Needy, 1990
Acrylic and enamel on mahogany panel
66 x 82 inches
Courtesy Jay Gorney Modern Art

Barbara Zucker
Harlequin Poles, 1977
Painted aluminum pipe, anodized sheetmetal
each pole 132 inches high (height variable)

Jane Kaplowitz
Portrait of Florine, 1995
Acrylic on canvas with wood frame
57 1/2 x 47 1/2 inches
Courtesy Jason McCoy, Inc.

Jack Smith
Stills from Flaming Creatures
Five 5 x 7 inch black and white prints
The Plaster Foundation, courtesy of P.S. 1 Museum, The Institute of Contemporary Art, Long Island City, New York
Flaming Creatures, videotape of 1963 film

Colette
To the return of the gown & with it Chivalry and good manners, 1992-'94
Mixed media
81 1/2 x 51 x 8 inches

Pavel Tchelitchew
Costume Design for Concerto: Femmes Corps de Ballet, 1942
Gouache and pencil on paper with fabric
11 1/2 x 14 1/2 inches
Courtesy Michael Rosenfeld Gallery

Mira Schor
Untitled (Self-Image), 1987
Oil on canvas
80 x 12 inches
Courtesy the artist and Horodner Romley Gallery

Mira Schor
Goodbye CalArts, 1972
Gouache on paper
22 x 30 inches
Courtesy the artist and Horodner Romley Gallery

Andrew Masullo
Various collages
Courtesy Andre Emmerich Gallery Inc.

E.M. Plunkett
Here Everyone Has Wings, 1979
Watercolor, ink, collage
Carnival Scene, 1968
Watercolor, ink, collage on paper
13 1/2 x 21 1/2 inches

Tom Knechtel
Lessons in The Theatre: Bachelorhood, 1991-92
Oil on panel, marker on metal and wood
54 x 29 3/4 inches
Courtesy Rosamund Felsen Gallery

Notes on the Exhibition

History is revised in complicated ways. Florine Stettheimer -- an artist seemingly fallen into obscurity -- has had over the years her own acolytes and secret admirers. Although Stettheimer's luscious and startling paintings have only occasionally been exhibited since her 1946 MOMA retrospective, they have had a surprising impact on several generations of iconoclastic artists.

One of Florine's close friends in the late years of her life, Pavel Tchelitchew often visited her studio and frequently proclaimed her "the greatest American painter." Although wildly different in tone, works by the two artists share a sense of theatricality and hermetic symbolism. Like Stettheimer, Tchelitchew created fantastic costumes and sets for stage productions, including many for Balanchine's ballets.

Joseph Cornell also visited Florine's studio, accompanied by Charles Henri-Ford. His works' use of personal symbolism and family memorabilia, as well as his unrestrained sense of fantasy, show affinities with Stettheimer's paintings. Here Cornell incorporates into collages a photograph of his grandfather's house and a bunny painted by his invalid brother Robert for whom the artist made many of his works.

Chicago artist Frances Strain was so impressed with seeing Florine's sets and costumes for the 1934 travelling production of Four Saints in Three Acts that she painted one of its scenes, "Introducing St. Ignatius." This painting along with a few photographs from the New York production stand as the only documentation of what has became a landmark of the American avant-garde.

Not long after he moved to New York, Edward Gorey saw the 1946 retrospective and was impressed with the work. Gorey's fantastic wit and sly satire, not to mention his characters' well-dressed languor, seem perfectly in tune with Florine. His production and costume design for a production of The Mikado share her taste for a kind of familiar exoticism.

In 1961 Henry Geldzahler helped win Andy Warhol's friendship by inviting him to see the Cathedral paintings in storage at the Metropolitan Museum. E.M. Plunkett -- whose own works revel in the hothouse fashions, fantasy landscapes, and gothic comedy of Stettheimer's age -- remembers conversations with Warhol in the 50s about Florine and the dollhouse designed by her sister Carrie.

In the early 70s, Cal Arts instructors in the Feminist Art Program, Miriam Schapiro and Paula Harper introduced works by Florine to a host of students, among whom included Mira Schor, Lari Pittman, and Tom

Knechtel. Pittman particularly recalls searching out the single Stettheimer (a stilllife) in the collection of the LA County Museum of Art and being impressed with its "willful and fantastic femininity." Pittman's work revels in personal symbols -- here in two alter-ego owls of mixed gender and overripe sexuality. Mira Schor's early "Story Paintings" directly picked up on Florine's elliptical symbolism; her recent works employ richly painted textures, texts, and attenuated forms that also seem in the Stettheimer mode. Tom Knechtel's complex works are staged theatrical extravaganzas, tapping into emotional depths -- here into the literal machinations of the heart. Like Florine, Knechtel casts his sexual confessions with both biographical and symbolic characters, balancing intimacy with poetic fiction.

In her journal notes from the 70s presumably written after hearing a lecture about feminism, Ree Morton singled out Florine as a conventionally trained artist who "eventually said no to both the academic and the avant-garde modes, and went on to invent something of her own, something private, something that was called 'feminine.'" Morton's own work pushed minimalism into protean, ephemeral forms with an iconoclastic, feminist energy. As a way of making her 1916 Knoedler show a more intimate experience, Florine hung in the gallery a canopy similar to the one in her own bedroom. Similarly, Morton toyed with conventional ideas about how and where art can be displayed. "Something in the Wind" (1975) consists of banners with the names and symbols of her friends, originally made to be strung from the masts of a ship (the Lettie G. Howard, docked at the South Street Seaport) as a kind of celebratory group performance of their "relations-ship."

In 1977 fellow sculptor Barbara Zucker published an article in Art News, celebrating Stettheimer's work and reevaluating her career from the perspective of the feminist movement. In her own work, Zucker espoused Stettheimer's playfulness, adding comic, narrative, and decorative motifs to the austere discourse of minimalism.

Faith Ringgold, Rebecca Howland, and Hollis Sigler all recall taking notice of the reproductions of Florine's work in 70's histories of women artists published in the wake of the feminist movement. Ringgold's recent story quilts have been revisionist histories of modernist art, told from the perspective of the artist's alter-ego, a fictional African-American woman artist named Willia Marie Simone. With the ambition and scope of Stettheimer's Cathedral paintings, Ringgold combines satirical wit with earnest social commentary to shape a fantastical and personal, art-obsessed narrative of this century.

Like Florine's odd, symbolic stilllifes, Rebecca Howland's flower paintings are displaced confessions, revealing emotional and sexual intimacies. Her use of text poeticizes the images, enhancing their lyrical and fragile beauty. In her brilliantly colored paintings, Hollis Sigler presents stage settings for the drama of everyday life. Sigler locates her theater in our living rooms, kitchens and sickrooms, animating her drama with loaded props and explosive symbols. Like Stettheimer, she evokes a private life through poetic images, dynamic color, and fanciful emblems.

The 1973 Stettheimer exhibition at Columbia University confirmed Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt as a true believer. He was especially taken with the ritualistic activity in Florine's depictions of social events, her "royal but democratic" attitudes, and the "allegorical forms of yearning" which emerge in her work. Lanigan-Schmidt's glittery shrines revel in a kind of Catholo-paganism similar in mood and style to Florine's cellophane and lace decorations for Four Saints in Three Acts. Lanigan-Schmidt brought Stettheimer to the attention of his fellow artists at the Holly Solomon Gallery and introduced her to his friend Jack Smith whose films and photographs endorse Florine's faith in the appeal of dream-like, languid reverie and glittering ritual.

In the 80s enough references to Florine were in place to catch the eyes of artists looking for sensibilities outside the mainstream. Having seen only a couple of Stettheimer paintings, Andrew Masullo was quick to find out all he could about her work and add her to his own iconic pantheon -- alongside Forrest Bess and Joseph Cornell. His quirky collages seem to share her psychological intimacy, playful symbolism, and comic iconography. Another longtime fan, Jane Kaplowitz seems in awe of Stettheimer's vivid and sophisticated depictions of her social world. In her own work, Kaplowitz celebrates fantastic historical figures -- such as Stephen Tennant -- as well as the contemporary members of the artworld who form her social circle.

For a variety of other individualistic artists -- including Thomas Trosch, Colette, Robert Greene, and Laura Cooper -- the discovery of Florine has been a happy shock, locating an alternate source for painterly, fantastical, theatrical, and autobiographical impulses that have long been considered inappropriate by the artworld. Trosch's brilliantly painted art mavens and society ladies; Greene's densely colored, bucolic picnics and fetes on the lawn; Colette's fanciful and psychologically-charged personae; and Cooper's poetic, fairytale sculpture, all tap into aspects of the Stettheimer sensibility.

Florine's aesthetic was complex and completely formed -- no matter how removed from mainstream modernism. The 1995 Whitney retrospective finally confirms Stettheimer as an important figure of this century, a sophisticated modernist and virtuosic painter who dared to transgress expectations about color, composition, gender, portraiture, content, and tone.

- Michael Duncan