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symbols in all art, beginning with children's poems, such as Robert Louis Stevenson's *Land of Counterpane*:

*When I was sick and lay a-bed
I had two pillows at my head,
And all my toys beside me lay
To keep me happy all the day.*

*And sometimes for an hour or so
I watched my leaden soldiers go,
With different uniforms and drills,
Among the bedclothes, through the hills;*

*And sometimes sent my ships in fleets
All up and down among the sheets;
Or brought my trees and houses out,
And planted cities all about.*

*I was the giant great and still
That sits upon the pillow-hill,
And sees before him, dale and plain
The pleasant land of counterpane.*

I have several times attempted to inject Land-of-Counterpane analysis into the art of the age of AIDS. A strong escapist impulse, wild fluxes of scale of imagination, comforting regression, grand reverie: this is how the mind of the sick person works. A great unstable expansionism of the imagination is invested when one is sick. When people get sick, they rarely get political: usually they escape, they get creative, they make peace, they cry, they watch TV, they grasp at routines, they try risky tests and go for miracles, they want treats, they cultivate art and beauty. Much of the art of this century was born in a sickbed: Matisse, Schwitters, Klee, Warhol, Beuys, and many others first cultivated art impulses in a childhood sickbed. Many, Matisse and Schwitters again, ended up with *altestil* periods in a sickbed too. This is the truth of the situation: at least for hospice phases of illnesses. Beds, reconstructed in any creative way (moved in other rooms, remade, plumped up, all the rituals of comforting the sick) represent release of the imagination from workaday drudgeries.

Rubins' mattresses have a rough street look, and hog-tied up like that suggest bindlestiff bedrolls fashioned out of the materials at hand, as well. To me the piece said: the homeless and the sick are human, and have imaginations. A rich tradition linked to the forensic evidence of the piece, therefore, lifts it up to a higher level. This then is my reality check: by checking on the reality of the object, in the real world, interpretation is turned in the right direction. *Mattresses and Cakes* stood out in New York in 1993, and holds more possibility for meaning than Elizabeth Hess's commentary on the fashion of bulimia. ■

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BY MIRA SCHOR

Recently it seems that the grip of psychoanalytic theory on feminist art has weakened. Terms such as "phallus" and "lack" are disappearing from art writing, which is not to say that the forces underpinning these categories have diminished. If anything, phallus and lack reassert themselves as defining positions as their critical analysis retreats into cultural unconscious. In this new occulting, phallus wins. As a recent perfume ad proclaims: "BRUT: Men Are Back!"

Mira Schor is a painter living in New York. She is the co-editor of *M/E/A/N/I/N/G*, a journal of contemporary art issues. She is the recipient of a 1992 Guggenheim Fellowship in Painting and exhibited her work at Horodner Romley Gallery in New York in October 1993.

The Rest of Her Life

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During the 1980s when phallus and lack were the words of the Zeitgeist, and feminist discourse was dominated by antiessentialism, it was felt that women artists who tried to create "original" images of women were deluding themselves. Such efforts were doomed to relapse into unconscious stereotypes created by patriarchy. The best strategy was to consciously cull images from patriarchy's repertory and deconstruct them through ingenious juxtapositions and changed contexts. Representations by women were permissible only if they were of and about representation, mediated by culture; so to paint and traditional sculpture media were only acceptable if they were mediated through a critical screen. This discourse, sometimes referred to as academic feminism, was text-based and text-driven and the art works which were admired and supported were either based on text or could easily be assimilated by it. Among the women artists favored by this discourse were Barbara Kruger, Sherrie Levine, Cindy Sherman, and Mary Kelly.

The early '90s have witnessed an apparent collapse of these references and terms. Women working in traditional sculpture and painting media, depicting women in a very essentialist victim position, are receiving a great deal of attention, without being targets of any antiessentialist critique. Representations of women by women as victims, as "abject," are suddenly popular without being analyzed for

what they naturalize about women. In May 1992, Kiki Smith exhibited a life-size female figure on all fours dragging a trail of feces across the gallery floor (*Tale*, 1992, at the Fawbush Gallery in New York), while Sue Williams placed on the floor an abused, beaten and branded life-like female figure (*Irresistible*, 1992, at 303 Gallery). These works evidenced a return, albeit refreshed and updated, to realistic figurative sculpture and to a created, rather than appropriated, representation of femininity. The theoretical rigor and visual minimalism of an artist like Mary Kelly seemed eons past.

Representations of men by men have followed a similar pattern: works by Mike Kelley and Paul McCarthy depict men as trapped in an infantile anal phase — an often reproduced photograph of a Mike Kelley performance work shows a naked man squatting and either smearing feces on his ass or wiping himself off — or obsessed with a mechanistic phallicism — in Paul McCarthy's mechanized hyper-real sculpture, *Cultural Gothic* (1992-1993), a boy sporadically fucks a goat while his father pats him on the shoulders, and in other works mechanized men fuck the earth and trees. These works may still be based on psychoanalytic theory, but certainly a cool "textual look" has given way to the mess of shit and food fights, mirroring the trend seen in works by Williams and Smith. And writings on these works never question the essentialist masculinity they naturalize.

My project in my own art practice has been to bring the experience of living *inside* a female body in our culture (rather than to describe its exterior appearance) in as intact a manner as possible into high art, primarily in painting. While I am an avid consumer of popular culture, I'm not interested in direct appropriation of representations of women from culture as a visual strategy. In recent years, however, I have appropriated fragments of language, from the news media for example. *War Frieze* is a painting conceived during the Gulf War: on a series of 8- to 25-foot horizontal segments, which are themselves composed of small modules of 12 x 16-inch canvases, I've cursorily spelled out "undue burden" (from the wording of the Supreme Court's *Webster* ruling on abortion limits) and "area of denial" (a type of weapon the U.S. developed and sold to Iraq before the War — bombs explode above ground, denying

oxygen to all life below the area of explosion), among other language fragments. These texts emerge from and reenter body parts and orifices, penises, breasts, and ears.

Since I'm part of the ubiquitous baby-boom generation, I am getting closer to a time in a woman's life particularly "lacking" from representation: the postmenopausal years. As Mary Kelly has so aptly noted, "*Being a woman is but a brief moment in one's life!*" * Because popular culture — films and novels in particular — has helped form my concept of femininity, at this moment in my life, despite my commitment to painting, I wish that I could create popular culture, rather than make high art commenting upon it. This spring, I saw, for the thousandth time, a film clip from the end of *Casablanca*, when Rick tells Ilsa that if she doesn't get on the plane with her husband, "You'll regret it, maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow, but soon and for the rest of your life." I was thunderstruck: what *was* the rest of Ilsa's life? I was consumed with the effort to imagine her story, once Rick and Captain Renault had happily walked off into the homosocial subtext of American fiction. I decided to pick up her life at another moment of crisis, widowhood. Picture a tracking shot of a pre-War style upper West Side apartment. Stop on a close-up of a late '60s *New York Times* obituary, "Victor Laszlo, 75, WWII Resistance Hero." I thought to place Ilsa at a crucial moment in political history: during the anti-war movement and the growth of the Women's Liberation Movement. That's as far as I got, then only questions came to me: Did she have children? A son or a daughter? I found that every story I'd begin to develop would drift instantly towards the story of the younger generation. All the standard plots concerned the decisions of men of a wide scope of age and of young women. I could imagine no others. One friend felt Ilsa had been satisfied with her marriage, had children, and would never get involved with feminism, another imagined her becoming a feminist heroine, played of course by Isabella Rossellini (I cast Vanessa Redgrave). A woman artist interested in dealing with representations of the menopausal body paradoxically found the whole idea depressing. Who would want to see such a movie, about an older woman? (turn to pg. 16)

*Mary Kelly, quoted in Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and Histories of Art*, London and New York: Routledge, 1988, p. 188.

Gerry Rowan is an artist and writer living in Pennsylvania. He is Chairman of the Art Department at Northampton Community College, which includes the Divisions of Fine Art and Media Art. He is presently coordinating a summer program for residencies in visual, literary and performing arts at Northampton.

Untitled Notes

BY GERRY ROWAN

As I reflect on what has taken place in the arts in the last twelve years I have a number of observations. Among them is the important idea that in a post-eighties world, it is still the job of the artist to have ideas. These ideas are in fact human ideas: they define us, refine us, and describe us. The arts are not, in fact, weakened in a weak economy but are strengthened by the process of attrition that has taken place with the tightening of the economy. This "Aesthetic Darwinism" is a healthy clearing of the playing field. Weak ideas fall aside allowing those with real strength to come to the forefront.

Modernity is dead, and we are left with a post-modern culture to make sense of. Living in the information age has its unique responsibilities for the artist. One of the tenets of postmodern life seems to be "accessing information." The availability of information alone is meaningless. It is what we do with that information in a meaningful way which will determine our success. The industrial age left us as a culture which held singular ideas of ourselves. To a large degree, success was predicated on our ability to be a specialist (singularist).

For this information age to function we need to re-define and to reorient ourselves in a new way: as generalists (broad-based enough to render all this information meaningful; pluralists not singularists). To be functional as an artist in the next century will demand that we begin to become more whole. I would define wholeness as that ability which enables us to view the bigger picture, a more complete picture.

I see evidence even now that the lines between fine art, commercial (advertising) art, and craft are blurring. Let me explain myself. I see that the job of the artist is to design. Design is an intellectual process by which we make consistent, coherent, and aesthetic sense of the world. (turn to pg. 15)

Some thoughts on time (continued from pg. 15)

If we could but only see more closely, we might slowly find out why the most recent contemporary art esthetic investigations have turned to the mortal body. This fascination with the body has appeared in a form well past frailty — imprisoned in the psychological chains of corporeal illness; driven by compulsions, and wrought by terminal eating disorders, as well as impulsivity. The esthetic eye gazes upon a *pronated body*.

Art, in its earliest origin, meant to "window a space," a space which works a different time — futuristic, belated, drawn out, delayed. It looked still (a still life), and timeless (the goddesses of virtue; and virtuous abstraction). Much later, in what could be called the "esthetic science," psychoanalysis looked out the same window as art. But psychoanalysis has added another critical step besides the *observational* first glance; it has added the *interpretive* second glance. To the same esthetic gaze out, it has added the analytic gaze in.

With art and psychoanalysis, together with their critical theories that they engender, are the means of investigating the late Modernist patterns of a pathognomonic societal response to an exteriorized time. The experience of time has been split into two, with impulsivity on the one side; and infinite deferral on the other. A next step, to bring these two 'vanishing points' together to meet on the horizon of time, is to continue to elaborate what may best be called a *pragmatic critique*, where internal body, sense, and external object coincide. By adding further traces of evidence, we can begin to undertake an exploration, culturally, of what else could be done to better bind this neglected rift, of time. ■

The Rest of Her Life (continued from pg. 13)

My attempt to create a compelling popular narrative of mature womanhood unsuccessful, I filed away my Academy Awards acceptance speech and continued to paint! Recently I have been painting incarnated punctuation marks: cunts, breasts, and penises framed by quote marks; red commas and semicolons set into pubic hair, embedded in flesh. In the former, gender positions, no matter how gory their physicality, are put into question by the quotation marks. In the latter, markers of written language are sexualized, and text, which had been so dominant over visuality in feminist theory in the '80s, is re-presented for its visual seductivity.

If my initial project was to depict the interior experience of femininity, it has developed into the creation of visual images and painterly embodiments of the inside of a woman's mind. A complex synthetic vision of gender and sexuality in our culture, produced through a layered interaction with art history and feminist theories, this is what a woman in her early forties does. This is a fragment of what the rest of one's life can be. And what of phallus and lack? The next segment of *War Frieze* may well be a cursive depiction of the words "BRUT: Men Are Back!" on a field of blood red, emerging and returning to penises curled back into themselves in an image of inversion and enclosure. ■



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