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WOMEN OF POP

By

Jourdan Cunningham
BFA, University of Alabama at Birmingham, 2015

A Thesis

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College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville
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Curatorial Studies

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August 2020

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Thesis Approved on

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ABSTRACT

WOMEN OF POP

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The hegemonic values that were represented in 1960s mass media were heavily reinforced by the Pop Art movement. Male Pop artists have often been viewed as genius, while the women were pushed aside to reside within the margins of the Pop canon. This thesis emphasizes the work of four female artists who participated in the Pop Art movement and were largely overlooked throughout Pop's discourse. By analyzing their "popness" and Feminist viewpoints, it allows for the imbalance that has resulted from women Pop artists neglect throughout Pop's discourse to be readdressed. In the Introduction I analyze the background of the Pop Art movement along with factors that contributed to the erasure of women Pop artists within art history. The rest of the thesis discusses the soft autobiographical sculptures of Jann Haworth, the collages of Martha Rosler, Kiki Kogelnik's human machines, and Evelyne Axell's plastic paintings of erotic nude figures.

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INTRODUCTION

“More than any post-World War II art movement, Pop Art has been represented by two handfuls of American and British male painters. Female artists shown in the first Pop exhibitions have been neglected to the margins of history, with the exception of Marisol and only more recently with the revised reputations of Pauline Boty, Rosalyn Drexler, and Jann Haworth.”

Sid Sachs¹

What began as characteristics applied to modern popular culture, consisting of advertisements, comics, movies and objects, Pop quickly flourished into a style representative of an overt coolness. The term was coined by the Independent Group (I.G.) in London during the 1950s, an organization that was made up of critics, artists, and architects such as Lawrence Alloway, Reyner Banham, Richard Hamilton, and Alison and Peter Smithson to name a few. It was not until the late 1950s and early 1960s that “Pop” began to represent a new style of art.² Pop Art experienced two births, the first in England and then almost a decade later in the heart of America’s art scene, New York City.³

¹ Sid Sachs, “Beyond the Surface,” *Seductive Subversion*, 18.

² Hal Foster, “Survey,” *Pop*, (New York: Phaidon Press, 2005), 16-17.

³ Lucy Lippard, *Pop Art*, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc., 1966), 9.

In the early 1950s, Britain was coming off of the economic downturn of World War II and therefore experiencing a push and pull between new and old cultures. To them, the bold world of American commodity and consumerism was appealing, and this led I.G. artists to perpetuate their images accordingly. A decade later, when Pop Art emerged in New York, American artists possessed a different perspective. "The Brits were attracted to new commodities as harbingers of the future, while Americans sometimes represented products that were slightly dated, already touched by nostalgia," states Hal Foster in his survey *Pop*.⁴ Having already experienced the introduction of new industry and commodities, American Pop depicted a sentimentality towards mass production and fetishization of the American dream.

Pop at its essence is not restricted to a single moment in history, but it does exist between two important points of the twentieth-century: the decline of Modernism and the rise of Postmodernism.⁵ At the dawn of the mid-century, Hollywood and Disneyland illustrated American family life as an exaggerated cliché. Magazines and advertisements reflected this attitude, leaving behind a past dependency on European archetypes, and embracing the nature of the everyday. Pop was centered around an American idiom, Banham recalled that, "American films and magazines were the only live culture we knew as kids. We returned to Pop in the early fifties like Behans going to Dublin or Thomasses to Llaregub, back to our native literature, our native arts."⁶ The Brits were, in a way, close to American culture, but far enough away to question the absurdity of the imagery that was being projected. Pop Art characterized the American

⁴ Hal Foster, "Survey," *Pop*, (New York: Phaidon Press, 2005), 18.

⁵ Mark Francis, "Preface," *Pop*, (New York: Phaidon Press, 2005), 11.

⁶ Hal Foster, "Survey," *Pop*, (New York: Phaidon Press, 2005), 20.

lifestyle as mass-produced, inflated, futuristic nostalgia with its overtly sexualized and fetishized ambiguous iconography.

Instantly appealing to young people, Pop Art maintained an extroverted, clean cut and masculine coolness. It brought attention to the insignificant and the trivial, the banal and the everyday. The Pop Art movement signaled a detachment from and a hostility towards contemporary values. Founded upon a no-nonsense sensibility, the movement embraced the self-abasing characteristics of consumerism, fed by the culture that manifested it.

Pop Art has repeatedly been widely represented by a tight grouping of American and British male painters, leading some to question, “Who are Pop’s women?” Although a few female artists were included in the first Pop Art exhibitions most were later neglected, left out of the art historical canon, and replaced with newer models. Media representations within popular culture reflected the hegemonic values of the 1950s and in turn, projected a hostility towards women. In terms of their representation within Pop Art women were more often than not stripped of their visibility and compelled to their ill-fated prescribed domestic roles within the home. In *Seductive Subversion: Female Pop Artists*, Sid Sachs describes this phenomenon: “Conscripted into home drudgery, women became the invisible men of the period.”⁷

The 1960s provided a paradoxical situation for women: they were the primary marketing targets while also being viewed as objects of desire. Female representation was diminished to purchasing consumer goods and appeasing the male gender. Industry and mass production required a sense of conformity and desire. Women could

⁷ Sid Sachs, “Beyond the Surface: Women and Pop Art 1958-1968,” *Seductive Subversion: Women Pop Artists, 1958-1968*, (New York: Abbeville Press, 2010)20-29.

be objectified by the media, but they could not claim control over their own imagery. In her essay "The Figure of the Artist, Martha Rosler states:

In the West, also, the predicament of the postwar world was theorized on male terms, as a failure of autonomy of a powerful and controlling (masterful, patriarchal) self, a sense of impaired potency. This failure of the personal was related to the evident rout from the private (family) sphere of patriarchal power in favor of overarching and impersonal power of the corporations and the State. Yet if blame was assigned for the depotentiation of the male, typically it was women who were held guilty. Women were identified with domesticity and domestication - pacification - yet they themselves would not be pacified.⁸

Between 1950 and 1960, the amount of imagery that referred to women as objects within the media doubled, pushing Pop, a movement that relied on popular culture and advertising, into the territory of outright sexism.⁹ It was Tom Wesslemann's nudes, Warhol's Marilyns, Peter Blake's starlet collages, Lichtenstein's comic strip heroines, and James Rosenquist's displaced feminine smiles and legs that made up the women of Pop. Reduced to nothing but male fantasies - domesticated or sexualized - the female population that comprised Pop Art further highlighted not only women artists' absence from the genre, but the erasure of women in and of themselves.

In this proto-feminist era, a substantial lack of support for women prevailed within the art world. Even female critics and dealers believed they were not obliged to back women artists. Subjected to the margins of a patriarchal society, most faded into the background of their male counterparts. American art historian Cindy Nemser recounts that:

All over the country, professional women have mobilized to fight sexism in their specialized fields... While it is true that a few women have reached the top, overcoming almost insurmountable obstacles, most women artists find

⁸ Martha Rosler, "The Figure of the Artist, The Figure of the Woman," *Seductive Subversion: Women Pop Artists, 1958-1968*, (New York: Abbeville Press, 2010), 176.

⁹ Sid Sachs, "Beyond the Surface: Women and Pop Art 1958-1968," *Seductive Subversion: Women Pop Artists, 1958-1968*, (New York: Abbeville Press, 2010)20-29.

themselves outside the highest art world circles, excluded from the most prestigious exhibitions and denied access to financial recompense in the form of grants, teaching positions, ability to command high sales prices, etc. Even more damaging, at every turn, the male art world acts to undermine women's confidence in their ability to make outstanding art.

It would not be until 1971, during the pinnacle of Women's Liberation and the Sexual Revolution, that attention would be brought to the double standards facing women within the art historical world. Linda Nochlin's essay "Why Have there Been No Great Women Artists?" adorned the opening pages of *ARTNews*. Calling upon art historians to question the ideological basis that led to the erasure of women artists, Nochlin claimed that the blame could be pointed towards the educational systems and structures, stating that since the beginning, women have been denied access over and over again.¹⁰ In turn, the art world established somewhat of a "boy's club" where the men were viewed as Genius, and women were seen only as exceptions or "the wife of."

Addressing the inequality within the Pop Art canon and the objectivity in the iconography is an important step in the inclusion of a handful of female participants. I am asking for a revision of the canon and arguing for questioning the definition of Pop as well as a reassessment of the exclusion of women Pop artists in Feminist art history and Pop Art's discourse. Contradicting what most have defined as the "impersonality" of Pop, women Pop artists carry with them a varying degree of "popness" as well as humor and Feminist concerns. With the exception of Marisol, and occasionally Pauline Boty, most women Pop artists have remained excluded from surveys and essays celebrating Pop Art's icons. Whether it be through Jann Haworth's soft sculptures, Martha Rosler and Kiki Kogelnik's feminine figures, or Evelyne Axell's erotic paintings, my hope is that

¹⁰ Rachel Middleman, "The Feminist Movement and 'Women's Art'," *Radical Eroticism*, (California: University of California Press, 2018), 17, 20-21.

by highlighting the erasure of women artists within the predominately heterogenous phenomenon that is Pop, that their work will assist in reinforcing the need to continuously redefine Pop.

CHAPTER 1

THE SOFT SCULPTURES OF JANN HAWORTH

“If Pop mimicked and celebrated the flattening out of mass-media imagery during the 1960s, then Haworth pumped it back up and filled its hollow core. The guys may have done the ironing, but it's the girl who worked out how to fold and package the clothes.”

Mark Rappolt¹¹

Jann Haworth grew up in the center of American popular culture, Los Angeles, California. A child of divorced parents (her father worked in Hollywood and her mother was a ceramic artist), Haworth was discouraged from accepting the role of housewife at an early age. Her parents highly encouraged her to go to college and find her own personal vocation.¹² Haworth moved to London in 1961 to attend the Slade School of Fine Art. Carrying with her an American confidence, she remained somewhat naive in the beginning to the objectification

¹¹ Mark Rappolt, “Jann Haworth,” *Power Up: Female Pop Art*, (Austria: KUNSTHALLE wien, 2010), 215.

¹² John A. Walker, “Over Here: American Artists in Britain,” *Cultural Offensive: America’s Impact on British Art Since 1945*, 183.

that she would face during her time in England. She recalled, “I was told by a Slade tutor that they didn’t need to look at the portfolios submitted by women hoping to attend the Slade... they just needed to look at their photographs,” and that the girls were there to “keep the boys happy.” Such sentiment would profoundly impact her work, stating that “I was not thinking so much of my gender as much as of a gender war.”¹³ Haworth desired to find a style that she could call her own that would not be one-upped by any of her male counterparts. Having learned to sew at the age of eight, Haworth migrated towards the use of fabric. By embracing a medium that was traditionally gendered, she allowed herself to use her femininity as a weapon against conventional sexualized stereotypes as well as question the definition of Pop Art and women’s roles within the genre.

Intertwined in her work is the mass-produced everyday with the banality and materiality of cloth. Haworth subverted the notion of “high” and “low” art, a characteristic of Pop, by taking it a step further and repairing the gap between popular culture and craft by including a vernacular of feminine folk art. Appropriating techniques passed down through matriarchal lineage, and traditionally devalued as feminine, Haworth removed the object from the pedestal and positioned it under the “ordinary” while replicating it in similarly ordinary materials. By resorting to the softness of fabric as a proto-feminist anti-art gesture, she in effect, challenged the permanence of traditional sculptural material as well as the machine aesthetics of the most revered Pop sculpture. Of course, men had dabbled in the use of domestic imagery in their work (Warhol, Lichtenstein, Oldenburg to name a few), but most women artists tended to avoid it out of

¹³ Mark Rappolt, “Jann Haworth,” *Power Up: Female Pop Art*, (Austria: KUNSTHALLE wien, 2010), 213- 215.

fear of being labeled as just another woman artist. “If the first major Pop artists had been women, the movement might never have gotten out of the kitchen. Then it would have struck those same critics who welcomed and eulogized Pop Art as women making more genre art,” said Lucy Lippard when discussing domestic imagery in art in her book *The Pink Glass Swan*.¹⁴ While the men were concerned with the depersonalization of industry, Jann Haworth made a conscious choice to question the asymmetry within Pop Art by evoking a sense of autobiographical sensitivity while bringing attention to her American roots and her experience as a woman.

Haworth emitted an attitude of banal indifference towards her subject matter, stating that, “Pop has never meant much more to me than a look at a new bunch of stuff to consider as art.”¹⁵ Pop sculpture frequently consisted of an industrial quality that Haworth’s mechanically sewn figures lacked in physicality but emulated conceptually. Utilizing mundane materials that possessed feminine qualities, Haworth’s sculptures created a simulacrum to their real counterparts, mimicking commonplace objects and personalities such as movie stars, cowboys, surfers, cheerleaders, and the elderly. She attempted to redefine the notion of Pop sculpture by embracing the artistic inventiveness of conventional “women’s work” that often went ignored in the realm of “high-art.”

In the Spring of 1962, Haworth developed her first soft sculpture, *Flowers* (figure 1). The concept was conceived after she wanted a bouquet of tulips but lacked the money to purchase them. “The first thing I made was a bouquet of flowers. I tried wood,

¹⁴ Lucy R. Lippard, “Household Images in Art,” *The Pink Glass Swan*, (New York: The New Press, 1995), 62.

¹⁵ Mark Rappolt, “Jann Haworth,” *Power Up: Female Pop Art*, (Austria: KUNSTHALLE wien, 2010), 215.

but that was too rigid for the softness of the flowers, cloth came by a process of elimination,” she stated. Hand-sewn and occasionally hand-painted, *Flowers* (1962) is made up of rigid fabrics such as canvas and calico that were then stuffed with kapoki and held in place with wool wire.¹⁶ The bouquet is a sensual yet allegorical still-life, with upon closer inspection, reveal packed fingers sprouting from gloves, unzipped pockets, piping, and knitted tongues placed into a found object turned vase. Haworth was primarily attentive to the structural vitality of pieced together quilts with their geometric designs and the artistic dexterity of women’s work that had gone unacknowledged throughout art history as well as the Pop Art movement.¹⁷ Passed down through generations, quilt patterns were also published in magazines during the nineteenth century similar to the way in which modern fashion is today. Innovative quilt makers would create patterns that would act as frameworks similar to contemporary paintings.

¹⁶ Kalliopi Minioudaki, *Women In Pop*, 281-283.

¹⁷ Kalliopi Minioudaki, “Pop Proto-Feminisms,” *Seductive Subversion*, 105-106.



Figure 1. Jann Haworth, American, 1942, *Flowers*, 1962

The delicate “stuffed-ness” and abstract vague-ness of the floral forms bear a slight similarity to the soft objects of male Pop counterpart Claes Oldenburg, but according to Haworth, they precede in date. Kalliopi Minioudaki explains in her essay, *Women In Pop*, that

By contrast, stuffing, for Haworth, seems the ancillary means to inflate the fabric epidermis of her sartorial constructions with soft - still vulnerable to the touch yet comparatively predetermined, rather than undulating - sculptural mass; the softness of Haworth’s work relies thus on the haptic sensuousness and textural variety of their fabrics as inherently soft materials rather than on the mutability of their sculptural shapes.¹⁸

Charm Bracelet White (c. 1964) (figure 2) and *Charm Bracelet Gold* (c. 1964-65) (figure 3) are comically oversized representations of traditional girl’s charm bracelets. Each individual charm was made from pieces of cardboard that were wrapped in fabric

¹⁸ Kalliopi Minioudaki, *Women In Pop*, (Michigan: UMI, 2009), 284.

and then stuffed. The charm bracelet was a popular piece of fashion jewelry for young girls during the 1950s and 1960s, with each charm usually symbolizing an experience, memory, or rite of passage in a young girl's life. Similar to the actual bracelets, Haworth's charms commemorated memories from her childhood and teen years in America. Evoking a quality akin to quilts, the charm bracelet represents a form of storytelling and a juxtaposition of American girly pop culture with personal intimacy that can be passed down through generations from mother to daughter and so on.



Figure 2. Jann Haworth, American, 1942, *Charm Bracelet (White)*, 1964



Figure 3. Jann Haworth, American, 1942, *Charm Bracelet (Gold)*, 1964-65

Haworth began experimenting with literal quilt making techniques in her *LA Times* series. The pieces in the series depict selected frames of her favorite comics from the comic's section of the paper. Featuring mainly all white quilts, the series infuses images of contemporary mass culture within a Pop narrative. *LA Times Bedspread* (1965) (figure 4) is an enlarged quilted form of a double page spread extracted from the *LA Times* newspaper. The piece blends mass media, fine art, as well as craft into an object that can either function as a practical bed covering or be hung on the wall. In his book *Cultural Offensive: America's Impact on British Art Since 1945*, John Walker quotes Marco Livingston:

...the images in the individual strip-frames are discernible only as ghostly contours, all colour having been expunged, but they are clearly labelled with the familiar titles of the strips [for example, Dick Tracy and Little Orphan Annie] from which they are copied. A faithfully transcribed advertisement for a pink telephone

is literally 'dropped in' as a jarringly realistic note within a surface that otherwise seems virtually abstract in its reticence.¹⁹

Traditionally dubbed "Sunday funnies" in American culture, the comics serve as a reference back to Haworth's cultural identity and an iconographic Pop object that was loved by many British Pop artists. The quilts consisted of two to three layers of fabric and padding, achieving a multitude of surfaces. While she relied on mechanical stitching to craft her narratives, she often invented her own variations of stitching, further perpetuating the juxtaposition between high and low arts.²⁰



Figure 4. Jann Haworth, American, 1942, *LA Times Bedspread*, 1965

¹⁹ John A. Walker, "Over Here: American Artists in Britain," *Cultural Offensive: America's Impact on British Art Since 1945*, 184.

²⁰ Kalliopi Minioudaki, "Pop Proto-Feminisms: Beyond the Paradox of the Woman Pop Artist," *Seductive Subversion: Women Pop Artists, 1958-1968*, (New York: Abbeville Press, 2010), 106.

Female stars were a favored subject within Pop, but an issue with feminists alike. Contrasting to their male counterparts, women Pop artists represented these stars in such ways that depicted the sexual politics that lie within their Feminist views of popular culture. Instead of taking part in the recycling of Marilyn Monroe imagery, Haworth chose to sculpt Mae West. “Justifying her choice of West as a counter-Marilyn blonde - not pretty, but smart and confrontational - Haworth echoes the early feminist embrace of West by Colette (who saw her as non-compliant, anti-Hollywood beauty) rather than the recent embrace of West’s own campy promotion of female sexuality,” states Minioudaki in *Seductive Subversion. Mae West (Dressing Table)* (1965) (figure 5), features a delicately stuffed twin of the star sitting at her dressing table, encased in a hollow niche behind the “mirror” made of transparent glass. Haworth achieved the simulation by placing identical objects in front of and behind the glass.²¹ Lit up by the dressing table lights, the piece acts as a shrine to the great days of Hollywood stardom and the institution of itself. Never having been mesmerized by stardom due to her upbringing within the reality of Hollywood and film, Haworth possessed the ability to present West as somewhat of a figment of popular culture, a “double without a sitter, a simulacrum without original.”²²

²¹ John A. Walker, “Over Here: American Artists in Britain,” *Cultural Offensive: America’s Impact on British Art Since 1945*, 184.

²² Kalliopi Minioudaki, “Pop Proto-Feminisms: Beyond the Paradox of the Woman Pop Artist,” *Seductive Subversion: Women Pop Artists, 1958-1968*, (New York: Abbeville Press, 2010), 114.



Figure 5. Jann Haworth, American, 1942, *Mae West (Dressing Table)*, 1965

Historically written into the margins as the wife of Peter Blake and a creator of “women’s art,” Jann Haworth reinvented the perception of Pop sculpture by speaking within the feminine and embracing ordinary, everyday materials and techniques that were traditionally coined as female. Materializing female subjectivity into Feminist autobiographical sculptures, Haworth was able to revolt against patriarchal connotations and the privilege of the preferred male genius. Unlike her male contemporaries, she preconceived her sculptures through the imagination of patternmaking, knowledge that was recognizable to many women, in turn arguing for the value of “women’s work” within the world of high art. While Pop’s superstars utilized hard materials such as plastic, Haworth introduced a softness and femininity to sculpture in a Feminist and anti-art gesture.

CHAPTER 2

MARTHA ROSLER'S FEMINIST COLLAGES

"It is important to recall, ceaselessly, that feminism has represented, at its best, not women demanding simply a high place at the table. Women did not demand to be knighted or anointed as kings. I claim confidently that, as a body and as individuals, women artists were working, fighting, and theorizing to produce a significant art, and art of criticality, an art of open-ended questioning and recognition of difference."

*Martha Rosler*²³

Known primarily for confronting political topics like the Vietnam War and middle-class America in her series *House Beautiful, Bringing the War Home 1967-72*, Martha Rosler has also tackled the subjects of gender identity, inequality, and the representation and objectification of women within the popular media. *Body Beautiful, Beauty Knows No Pain*, is a series of cut and paste photomontages and collages created by Rosler from 1966-1972, during the uprising of the Feminist Movement. Many of the pieces in the series were never

²³ Carol Armstrong, "Martha Rosler," *Women Artists at the Millennium*, (London: MIT Press, 2006), 141.

displayed in art institutions, and most were hung up in Rosler's home or studio until recent years. The images used in the works were cut from men's magazines such as *Playboy* and feature women in the nude or fragmented naked female body parts.



Figure 6. Martha Rosler, American, 1943, *Woman With A Vacuum (Vacuuming Pop Art)*, 1966-72

Produced a few years prior to Nochlin's essay, and one of the first pieces in her *Body Beautiful* series, *Woman With A Vacuum (Vacuuming Pop Art)* (1966-72) (figure 6) confronts prescribed domestic labor that women were subjected to within American homes. A woman vacuums a claustrophobic hallway; walls adorned with several works of recognizable art, such as posters by Marcel Duchamp and Robert Indiana, and a painting off to the right that resembles the work of fellow female artist Kiki Kogelnik.²⁴

²⁴ Sid Sachs, "Beyond the Surface: Women and Pop Art 1958-1968," *Seductive Subversion: Women Pop Artists, 1958-1968*, (New York: Abbeville Press, 2010), 78.

The woman, poised and seemingly content, stands at close physical proximity to the art but in reality, has very limited access. She has the ability to purchase and live within a space decorated with popular works (interior decorating was viewed as feminine and in relation to “hobby art” because it was tied to domesticity and the act of taking care of the home), but she does not possess the ability to participate in their creation.

Woman With A Vacuum is not only a comment on the overall notion of female representation within the imagery of Pop, but more specifically representation of women artists in the Pop Art movement and art historical canon. Rosler herself has stated:

There was no space for women in pop. Its main tasks required a silencing of women that was related to its ambiguous theater of mastery through the transcoding and rearrangement of magical images, many of them women...there was no room for the voicing of a different, ‘truly’ female, subjectivity, although pop rejected the mastering maleness of abstract expressionism and toyed with the femaleness of surrender... In pop, the female appears as a sign, deconstructed and reconstructed as a series of fascinating fields of view with its own fetishized allure. The figure of the woman was assimilated both to the desire attached to the publicized commodity form and to the figure of the home... In both locales she is the masquerade of faceless capital whose origin is in the boardroom but which is projected into the home... Yet, as a sign, the female is indeed conquered in pop, as she was in expressionism.²⁵

In 2010, Kim Levin tackled this topic with her online publication for ArtNews.com, “Where are the Great Women Pop Artists?” In her article, Levin proposes several interesting points, suggesting that the more we look at some of these women artists that we would normally categorize as Pop artists, the more we can see that they cannot be compared to their male counterparts, therefore further suggesting that the conventional definition of Pop be reconsidered. Levin states:

Pop art in the hands and minds of women artists is intricately linked to the rise of feminist art, political and sociological art, art that involves decoration and craft and female sexuality—and thus the subsequent future of 20th-century art. These

²⁵ Kalliopi Minioudaki, *Women In Pop*, (Michigan: UMI, 2009), 58.

artists weren't tangential: they were crucial. And what is most interesting about their work can be found in its disparities and divergences from Pop.

Levin goes on to suggest in her article that while women artists were looking towards the future, and in doing so, potentially redefining the meaning of Pop, the men were complacent in time-honored tradition.²⁶ Mainstream Pop was typically banal and detached while women Pop artists were focused on subverting the genre by introducing a feminine intimacy and highlighting gender inequality. In an interview conducted with Tate Modern in London during the exhibition, *The World Goes Pop*, Rosler recalls that *Woman With A Vacuum*, “announces the theme I would pursue for quite a few years. It is a retrograde image of a happy housewife with a snaky appliance, which implicitly compares the bright colours of Pop art – embodied by images of women and romance – with the professional, almost claustrophobic decor.”²⁷ The playful humor that is woven into Pop Art presents a distinct variation to the bland and limiting spaces they adorned.

Throughout the mid-sixties and early seventies, Rosler continued to confront the topic of female objectification within mass-production and commodification in the *Body Beautiful* series with *Cold Meat I*, *Cold Meat II*, *Hot Meat* (figure 7), and *Damp Meat* (figure 8). Juxtaposing images of nude female body parts cut from popular men's magazines with everyday household kitchen appliances such as a stove, refrigerator, and freezer, the artist makes a comparison between the female flesh and food consumption. In her book, *The Pink Glass Swan*, Lucy Lippard recalls that Rosler,

²⁶ Kim Levin, “Where Are The Great Women Pop Artists?” *ArtNews*, 2010, <http://www.artnews.com/2010/11/01/where-are-the-great-women-pop-artists/>.

²⁷ “Martha Rosler,” *Tate Modern*, 2015, <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/ey-exhibition-world-goes-pop/artist-interview/martha-rosler>.

“...concentrated on the uses and abuses of food - as fashion, as international political pawn, as a metaphor for a consumer society to which both culture and women seem to be just another mouthful in an endless meal.”²⁸

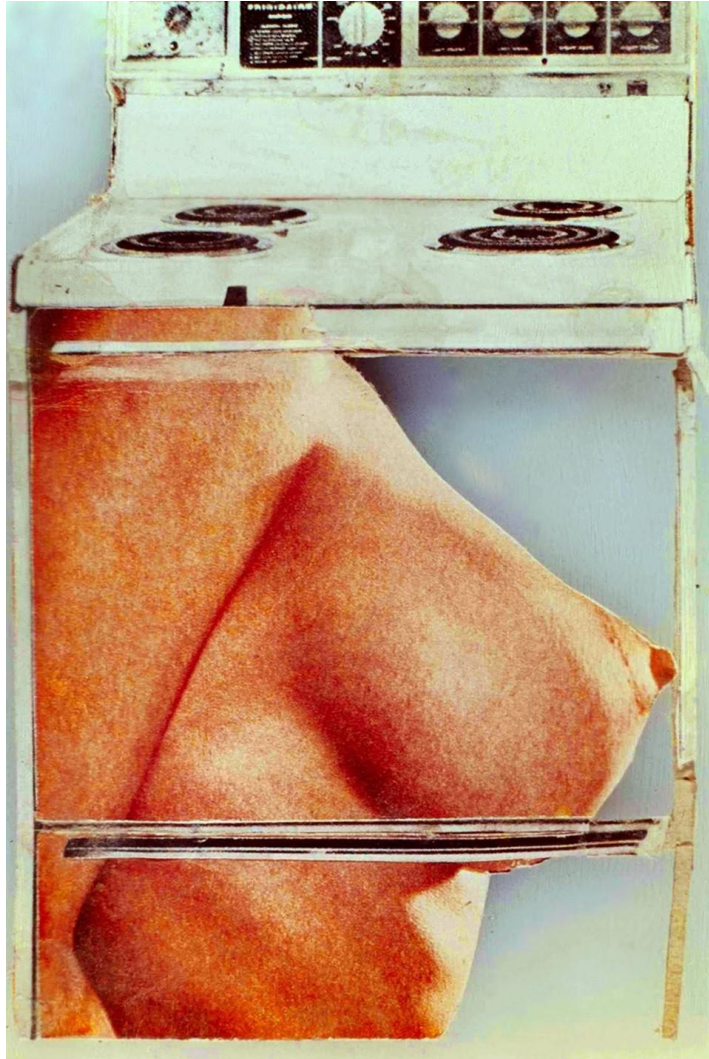


Figure 7. Martha Rosler, American, 1943, *Hot Meat*, 1966-1972

²⁸ Lucy Lippard, “Issue and Taboo,” *The Pink Glass Swan*, (New York: The New Press, 1995), 167.



Figure 8. Martha Rosler, American, 1943, *Damp Meat*, 1966-1972

When looking at Laura Mulvey's essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, we are provided with a few possible explanations as to why sex in the media sells and why a female body is in higher demand. While she mostly focuses on film, her ideas can be applied to other forms of media such as art and advertising. Mulvey first begins her discussion with the idea of *scopophilia*, or the pleasure of looking. Introduced by Freud in his *Three Essays on Sexuality*, scopophilia has been determined to be the base of eroticism for finding pleasure in a person as an object, therefore diminishing their

human qualities. This can lead to someone gaining sexual satisfaction from having control over watching another person, the one being objectified. Second, through an analysis of Lacan's mirror stage, Mulvey determines that we acquire pleasure by identifying with an image viewed on the screen. Initially the two processes seem to depict the visual pleasure of both men and women in the same way. Mulvey however argues that due to the fact that men cannot be the bearer of the burden that sexual objectification produces, he (the male viewer) diverts his gaze between the object and the narrative.²⁹ By eliminating the faces and focusing on the sexual parts of the female body, Rosler takes away the woman's identity and makes it easier to see her as an object, rather than an actual person. She goes even further as to place the images on kitchen appliances. These man-made machines, representative of domesticity and food preparation, allude to the idea that women are readily available for consumption and pleasure. Linda Nochlin discusses the idea of plenty in her essay "Running on Empty" in *Seductive Subversion*:

What is interesting about the society of consumption (which now of course is in a possibly more exaggerated form than it was in the sixties), is that despite its emphasis on plenty, even plentitude, there is actually never enough. The society of consumption is really the society of Lack, in both the Lacanian and more ordinary senses.³⁰

The objects, as well as the women, fulfill their duties whether it be food preparation, household chores, or even sex, only to be discarded and replaced once they wear out.

²⁹ Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism Second Edition* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010), 2086.

³⁰ Linda Nochlin, "Running on Empty," *Seductive Subversion: Women Pop Artists, 1958-1968*, (New York: Abbeville Press, 2010), 14.

In *Small Wonder*, 1972 and *Transparent Box*, 1966-72, Rosler takes cut outs of body parts from *Playboy* magazine and pastes them onto lingerie ads. In doing so, she removes from the lingerie the obscure elements and bluntly exposes the sexual fantasy that the ad was alluding to. All three works are a nod to the *Mad Men* age of advertising when agencies were dominated by male art directors and what was seen as beautiful was light skin, a small waist, a made-up face, and large breasts.



Figure 9. Martha Rosler, American, 1943, *Small Wonder*, 1972



Figure 10. Martha Rosler, American, 1943, *Transparent Box*, 1966-72

Martha Rosler's work challenges the notions of female objectivity and gender inequality as represented throughout the male dominated iconography of Pop Art and advertising. Subverting the traditional masculine gaze and critiquing the fetishization of mass-produced commodity, Rosler's collages address the inequality of gender representation throughout the media and Pop imagery.

CHAPTER 3

KIKI KOGELNIK'S HUMAN MACHINES

“Since then, the brightly-coloured camouflage of pop culture has dominated not only the world of commodities, but also our visual culture in the most minute detail, duly colonising every last recess of the private sphere, saturated by enterprise and false claims, pumped up with ‘infotainment’, messages, slogans and symbols. The most tragic expression of this affects our very bodies that have unwittingly become the advertisements of a commodity world’s promise of redemption.”

Florian Waldvogel³¹

Austrian artist Kiki Kogelnik also tackled the female form and concepts of femininity as well as gender identity, and while her thesis was similar to Rosler’s, her approach was one of its own. Thomas Miessgang suggests in his essay “Kiki Kogelnik” in *Power Up: Female Pop Art* that “From Pop she took over the general attitude of cool and its pleasure in garish plays of color, but not its fixation on image languages from the world of consumerism (such as Warhol’s Brillo boxes),

³¹ Florian Waldvogel, “All dreams are in us prophetic,” *Kiki Kogelnik*, (Hamburg: Snoeck Verlagsgesellschaft mbH, 2012), 41.

its fascination with the star system (Marilyn Monroe, Elvis Presley), and its enthusiasm for comics as popular mythologems (Roy Lichtenstein).³² Uninterested in the banality of mass-production iconography and consumerism in the conventional Pop approach, Kogelnik instead chose to focus on the bizarre and futuristic forms of humans as machines. Her inclusion of ornately bold colors as well as inclusion of found objects and mechanical forms speaks to the traditional characteristics of Pop.



Figure 11. Kiki Kogelnik, Austrian, 1935-1997, *Space Angel*, 1965

Arriving in Manhattan in 1961 at the height of the Space Race, Kogelnik was infatuated with space exploration, rockets, and robots and often referred to her own

³² Thomas Miessgang, "Kiki Kogelnik," *Power Up: Female Pop Art*, (Austria: KUNSTHALLE wien, 2010), 185.

practice as “Space Art.”³³ Her use of cheap, manufactured materials that she would often find throughout shops and restaurant supply companies around Manhattan would often make themselves present in her paintings, such as *Space Angel* (1965) (figure 11) where a plastic egg container is positioned on a silver silhouette, acting as a stand-in for female reproductive organs. Ambiguous robot-like arms float over top of the form as if performing a procedure, piecing the body together to construct an ideal figure. Kogelnik was interested in the unnatural and inauthentic and viewed the human body as a form that could be “plugged in and turned on;” something that could be manufactured.³⁴

As Kogelnik began drifting further away from Abstract Expressionism and into the realm of Pop, she began making what she referred to as her “cut-outs;” full body-tracings of herself as well as friends and acquaintances made on brown pattern paper. These cut-outs would act as the basis for the majority of her paintings, being duplicated, flipped, and severed, creating a heightened sense of anonymity to the figures. Throughout her career, Kogelnik displayed a drive to challenge gender roles and ideals of femininity. In her *Hangings* series, Kogelnik utilized forms from her cut-outs to create deflated vinyl feminine shapes. *Untitled (Hanging with Hands)* (c. 1969) features a double-sided yellow and purple arm, draped over a hanger that is placed at the top of an outline of a female body. Kogelnik exploited the hanger motif in several of her works, symbolizing the fight to legalize abortion. *Chandelier Hanging* (1970) (figure 12), another piece in the series, includes dainty female silhouettes in various garish colors dangling by their heads from a pink lingerie hanger. Playing with the implication that

³³ Dana Miller, “Leaving an Impression: The Art of Kiki Kogelnik,” *Kogelnik*, (New York: Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 2019), 11.

³⁴ Dana Miller, “Leaving an Impression: The Art of Kiki Kogelnik,” *Kogelnik*, (New York: Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 2019), 8-10.

women are often given the lesser treatment and are regarded as delicate, she portrays her lifeless deflated bodies like pieces in a department store, always available and ready for the taking. Producing a viable depiction of a notion that she became all too familiar with during her career, Kogelnik's work, much like the rest of her female contemporaries, was not taken seriously. Critics instead choose to focus on her physical appearance, reducing her down to a beautiful woman who produces art instead of a woman artist. "A woman can seduce one man to come - she can even do it with 2 or 3. But she can't seduce all the men to come - and even women... to see her paintings," she stated in response to the criticism that she received regarding her appearance.³⁵ Like most women who participated in the Pop Art movement, Kogelnik would be pushed aside and excluded from the canon.



Figure 12. Kiki Kogelnik, Austrian, 1935-1997, *Chandelier Hanging*, 1970

³⁵ Dana Miller, "Leaving an Impression: The Art of Kiki Kogelnik," *Kogelnik*, (New York: Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 2019), 15-16.

Kogelnik focused heavily on the human body and the experience of self-perception and the way we are perceived by others. Her famous slogan, “I have seen the future,” represents a body that surpassed any past aesthetic canon and consumer fetishism that was traditionally Pop.

Kiki Kogelnik anticipates the exploratory quests in the field of body politics before they were sequestered by the feminist movement and this refers to the phantasmal projections of modernism and pan-European engagement with the topic of man, machine and doll inaugurated at the dawn of the twentieth century,

states Angela Stief in her essay “TOUCH! Attraction and Repulsion in Kiki Kogelnik’s painting from the 1960s” in *Kiki Kogelnik*.³⁶ Kogelnik’s process focused on the fabrication itself and the intention of a figure and potential gender that has yet to be produced.



Figure 13. Kiki Kogelnik, Austrian, 1935-1997, *Womans Lib*, 1971

³⁶ Angela Stief, “TOUCH! Attraction and Repulsion in Kiki Kogelnik’s painting from the 1960s,” *Kiki Kogelnik*, (Hamburg: Snoeck Verlagsgesellschaft mbH, 2012), 76.

In her essay *Gender Trouble*, Butler stresses the theory that gender is a social construct made up to support masculine dominance. She also states that the notion of identity is suffocating. In the “Interiority to Gender Performatives” section of her essay, Butler says,

If the body is not a ‘being,’ but a variable boundary, a surface whose permeability is politically regulated, a signifying practice within a cultural field of gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality, then what language is left for understanding this corporeal enactment, gender, that constitutes its ‘interior’ signification on its surface? ...I suggest that gendered bodies are so many ‘styles of the flesh.’ These styles are never fully self-styled, for styles have a history, and those histories condition and limit the possibilities. Consider gender, for instance, as a corporeal style, an ‘act,’ as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where ‘performative’ suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning.³⁷

Kogelnik’s ambiguous forms allude to futuristic figures that have the potential to be something more. Humans that are human-made and defy the gender binary. Speaking to a similar discourse as Donna Haraway and her cyborgs, a “hybrid of machine and organism,” Kogelnik’s bodily forms take on a presence of figures that could be seen throughout science fiction.³⁸

Kogelnik’s *Women’s Lib* works span from the late 1960s throughout the 1970s, a time when feminist art was still trying to find its footing. The pieces are aggressive, ironic stylizations of traditional glamour poses, often introducing the scissor motif as a symbol of female liberation, potentially referring to the castration complex. *Womans Lib*

³⁷ Judith Butler, “Gender Trouble,” *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism Second Edition* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010), 2551.

³⁸ Donna Haraway, “A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s,” *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism Second Edition*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010), 2190.

(1971) (figure 13) depicts the artist in sunglasses, an oversized hat, and trench coat, employing comically massive scissors between her legs. Bright red gloves cover her hands as she maneuvers the scissors. Her cut-outs lay lifeless, scattered along the ground. Similarly, in *Superwoman* (1973) (figure 14), Kogelnik illustrates herself in the same posture, with a change of clothes. Now donning sunglasses, an aviator hat, combat boots and a jumpsuit, the scissors are clutched in her hands that are armed with the same blood red gloves. The scissors are present to assist in asserting her female power, while giving the middle finger to her male contemporaries and critics.



Figure 14. Kiki Kogelnik, Austrian, 1935-1997, *Superwoman*, 1973

Kogelnik eventually moved away from ambiguous bodily forms and towards the traditional archetypes of femininity formulated by the media. She began to focus on the highly sexualized female, vulnerable, with their mouths open and their eyes concealed by large sunglasses. Keeping with the concept of the unnatural, Kogelnik viewed her female subjects as those “constructed by culture, not born from nature.” She is noted stating, “Fashion imagery relates directly to our fantasy expectations of the world...My paintings are about women - about illusions women have of themselves.”³⁹

³⁹ Dana Miller, “Leaving an Impression: The Art of Kiki Kogelnik,” *Kogelnik*, (New York: Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 2019), 17-18.

CHAPTER 4

THE EROTIC POP PAINTINGS OF EVELYNE AXELL

“With their upfront sexual imagery, the use of bright colors and manufactured plastic materials, their intense monochromatic surfaces and canvases shaped like large sign posts and public tableaux, Axell’s paintings owned the immediacy and commonality of Pop.”

Anke Kempkes⁴⁰

Eventually changing her name to the gender neutral “Axell,” Belgian born Evelyne Axell was one of the few female artists during the Pop movement to take on Pop Art as her primary focus. Her selected iconography aligned with that of her mostly male Pop counterparts, diverging into a new primarily female precept. Her work pertains to popular and mass culture, but through a Feminist lens. In the end, Axell’s universe would consist of an unadulterated all-female space, uninterrupted by the patriarchal mastery of the visual. Instead of becoming one of Pop’s great icons of the 1960s, her provocatively innovative work in the field of erotic art received dismissive reviews from male critics.

⁴⁰ Anke Kempkes, “Evelyn Axell,” *Power Up: Female Pop Art*, (Austria: KUNSTHALLE wien, 2010), 51.

In 1966, Hilton Kramer, the art critic for the *New York Times*, prompted the public that a “new deluge of erotic art” would penetrate the New York art scene. He predicted that the season would be a commercial success, stating that “the art world... loves nothing so much as a new and saleable commodity.”⁴¹ Defying the conventionally idealized representations of women’s sexuality within commercial pornography and figurative art (established by men), new contexts materialized within erotic art. Women artists that expressed eroticism within their work confronted the traditional notion that the primary targets were heterosexual men, a notion that problematized the imagery of erotic art. Intrigued by the modern cultural movements in cities such as London, Paris, and New York, Axell established a Feminist, provocative and erotic perspective of the world around her. “My motive is clear: nudity and femininity reflect a vision of the world in favor of a bio-botanical freedom, that is freedom that resists both frustration and gradual binding, and one that is willing to accept only the restrictions it imposes upon itself,” she declared.⁴² Though Axell was introduced to painting through the use of oil paints, she eventually transformed her process. Her signature sixties style involved using transparent sheets of plastic to create silhouettes of her sensuous (homo)erotic female figures engaging in the delicate moments of female desire and pleasure. She would then cut the silhouettes out, paint the front and back, and mount them onto panels to create layered, dreamlike figures.⁴³

⁴¹ Rachel Middleman, *Radical Eroticism*, (California: University of California Press, 2018), 1.

⁴² Anke Kempkes, “Evelyn Axell,” *Power Up: Female Pop Art*, (Austria: KUNSTHALLE wien, 2010), 51.

⁴³ Anke Kempkes, “Evelyn Axell,” *Power Up: Female Pop Art*, (Austria: KUNSTHALLE wien, 2010), 51.

One of her earlier works, *Ice Cream* (1964) (figure 15) illustrates a feminine visage with fiery red hair gripping an ice cream cone. The figure lustfully licks the cone as it drips down her hand. Positioned in front of a psychedelic background, Axell's figure portrays a dynamic statement of female sexuality and pleasure. The mouth, with its tongue thrust out, challenges the forced fetishized smiles seen in numerous pieces of Pop Art over the years. The cone, with its blatant phallic symbolism, transforms into an object of consumerism not only of gastronomic but female erotic desire. Thwarting the notions of Wayne Thiebaud's passive girls with ice cream cones, Axell's dirty humor fulfills active female pleasures and desires through an illustration of gratification and consumption.



Figure 15. Evelyne Axell, Belgian, 1935-1972, *Ice Cream*, 1964

Claiming female desire back from the objectification of the mass media and popular culture, Axell further radicalized Pop's obsession with consumer objects. Her close friend and fellow artist, Rene Magritte, praised her work, stating that she succeeded in the use of the machine: "the 'objects' of the mechanized world, in their most contemporary aspects, must appear in some way other than of simple utility."⁴⁴ He was especially fond of Axell's *Erotomobiles* in which she constructs a world of "bachelor machines," transforming car parts into motifs of female desire. The automobile was a status symbol among the middle class; an indication of freedom. Among the many philosophers of the time who were fascinated with the role that the automobile played within society, Jean Baudrillard branded it the embodiment of the postindustrial consumerist society; an object that repudiates the stagnant joys of American family life, and pointed out its liberating fulfillment for men.⁴⁵ In Pop Art, the car was the ultimate motif of masculine power and usually advertised by women. Unlike Richard Hamilton's metaphors between cars and the female form, Axell disassembles her machines down to their clitoral and phallic shapes, juxtaposing them with female body parts.⁴⁶ Subtly subverting the appropriated eroticism of her figures, Axell presents them with a cognizant and emancipatory presence.

⁴⁴ Anke Kempkes, "Evelyn Axell," *Power Up: Female Pop Art*, (Austria: KUNSTHALLE wien, 2010), 52.

⁴⁵ Kalliopi Minioudaki, "Pop Proto-Feminisms," *Seductive Subversion: Women Pop Artists 1958-1968*, (New York: Abbeville Press, 2010), 123.

⁴⁶ Kalliopi Minioudaki, "Pop's Ladies and Bad Girls," *Oxford Art Journal*, 30.3, 2007, 418.



Figure 16. Evelyne Axell, Belgian, 1935-1972, *Axell-eration*, 1965

In *Axell-eration* (1965) (figure 16), Axell toys with wordplay, personifying herself as the driver, accelerating. Her bright red heels pushing down on the gas, claiming the aggressive and euphoric feeling of speed. She reclaims the masculine characteristics of independence and freedom and embodies them in an illustration of female empowerment. Perverting Pop's fetishization for female legs and omitting the male viewer from her voyeuristic scene, Axell dominates the space. *Changement de vitesse* (1965) (figure 17) depicts bright green cylinders protruding out of the picture plane with a yellow background. A white silhouette of a pair of feminine legs wrap around a stick-shift, capturing the thrill of penetration and female pleasure. Maintained in a realm of heterosexual framework, Axell's world of female pleasure is rendered susceptible to its visualization and passivity of a masculine byproduct. *Erotomobile* (1966) (figure 18) disrupts this heterosexual mindset with two nude women suspended in the moment before a kiss. Their faces are outlined by a red Michelin tire placed on a background of

blue. Through delicate, porn-like fantasies of hetero and homo/auto-erotic desire, Axell continuously discovered new vernaculars of desire and celebrated the existence of female sexuality and pleasure.



Figure 17. Evelyne Axell, Belgian, *Changement de vitesse*, 1965



Figure 18. Evelyne Axell, Belgian, 1935-1972, *Erotomobile*, 1966

Like her fellow female Pop artist, Kiki Kogelnik, Axell took an interest in space travel. A tribute to the first female cosmonaut Valentina Tereshkova, *Valentine* (1966) (figure 19) illustrates a voluptuous white silhouette and plastic helmet against a monochromatic golden background. The inclusion of a zipper symbolizes a brief exploration into the ready-made, disrupting the smooth surface and ultimately revealing an overtly sexualized body, while representing a space suit. Acting as a borderline pin-up, Axell's figure alludes to the historically voyeuristic hypocrisies of the nude within art history. Depicting a nude female form that represents a powerful female figure within the mid-century, Axell redefines definitions of sexuality and female empowerment within Pop Art.

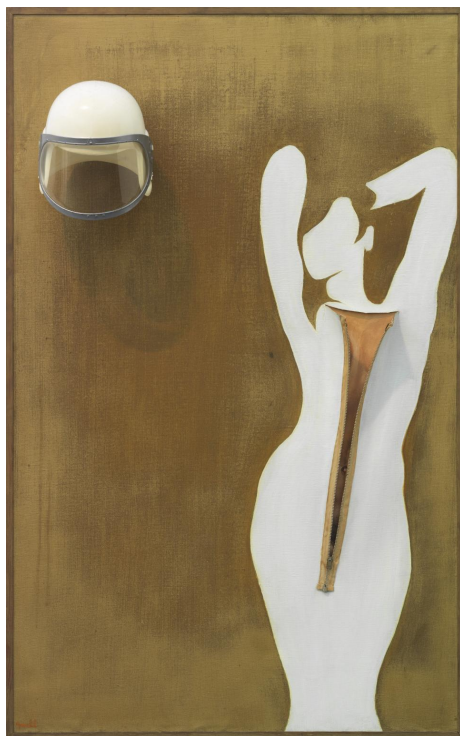


Figure 19. Evelyne Axell, Belgian, 1935-1972, *Valentine*, 1966

Valentine is indicative of Axell's response to the media, avoiding the use of pre-existing imagery, but repeatedly making references to them. In 1970, Axell envisioned that "The

Age of Plastic” had arrived, and she saw herself as its muse. In the mid-sixties, she began to cut out canvas silhouettes of female nudes wearing space helmets and floating in space. Axell took these cut-outs and sank them into plastic, creating a large-scale painting titled *Grande sortie dans l'espace (The Great Journey into Outer Space)* (1967).⁴⁷ The piece represents a space free of reference; a utopia of female desire that is free of patriarchal mastery, existing in a half-conscious state of being.

⁴⁷ Anke Kempkes, “Evelyn Axell,” *Power Up: Female Pop Art*, (Austria: KUNSTHALLE wien, 2010), 53.

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Co-Memory and the Motion of Falling Bodies
UAB Gallery
Birmingham, AL
December 2015

Inherited Scars: A Meditation on the Southern Gothic
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