



## Frisky Business - Sex Work at Frieze 2017



Penny Slinger Bitter Lemons – Homage to Lawrence Durrell, 1973 Painted wax life cast Two parts; 3 1/2 x 2 1/4 x 2 1/4 inches each (8.9 x 5.7 x 5.7 centimeters)



Carmen Herrera, Amarillo

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Christie Lee

With their playful wit, and, more pertinent and kindness, these female artists whose works times.

TEXT: Christie Lee

IMAGES: Courtesy of the artists and Frieze 2017

It's no secret that there's been a trend to give mid-century female artist their due.

Carmen Herrera's Whitney retrospective proved that she was every bit as vital as the likes of Frank Stella and Ellsworth Kelly to the contemporary art discourse. The Museum of Modern Art zoomed into Louise Bourgeois' printed oeuvre in *Louise Bourgeois: An Unfolding Portrait*. Last March, Hauser & Wirth dedicated their Los Angeles space to a group of female abstract sculptors, and most recently, Hammer Museum opened *Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960-1985* as part of the Getty's Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA last month.

(Whether the above is helping the feminist cause is of course, debatable. Many have lauded the system-wide re-evaluation effort but there are those who will say that singling out female artists for their sex is essentially misogynistic. Georgia O'Keeffe, who famously declared that she was the best painter, rather than best female painter, of her generation, comes to mind.)





Carmen Herrera, *Amarillo "Dos"*, 1971. Maria Graciela and Luis Alfonso Oberto Collection © Carmen Herrera.

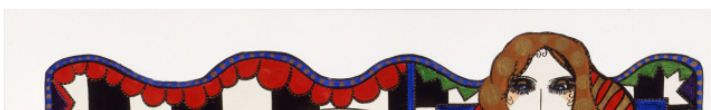


Louise Bourgeois, No. 5 of 14 from the installation set *À l'infini*, 2008. Soft ground etching, with selective wiping, watercolor, gouache, pencil, colored pencil, and watercolor wash additions, 40 x 60" (101.6 x 152.4 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchased with funds provided by Agnes Gund, Marie-Josée and Henry R. Kravis, Marlene Hess and James D. Zirin, Maja Oeri and Hans Bodenmann, and Katherine Farley and Jerry Speyer, and Richard S. Zeisler Bequest (by exchange). © 2017 The Easton Foundation/Licensed by VAGA, NY.

Frieze London was the latest institution to jump onto the bandwagon, with *Sex Work: Radical Feminists & Radical Politics* from Oct 3 – 8. Curated by Alison M. Gingeras, *Sex Work* features nine solo exhibitions of women artists active from the 1960s to present.

There is a wide range of mediums on display, from drawings and paintings to video and installation art. This group of female artists weren't only champions of female sexual liberation, but also of various art movements, from Penny Slinger's embrace of Surrealism, to Natalia LL's experimentation with the video art form.

Stylistically, pop art, Byzantine mosaic and Klimt coalesce in Dorothy Iannone's art, but the expression is the artist's own, as evidenced in *I Was Thinking of You II* (1975/2005), where a video monitor projects the close-up of the artist's face as she giddily masturbates. Meanwhile, *Wiggle your ass for me* (1970) and *Courting Ajaxander* (1990) are expressions of the female sexuality at its more exuberant. At the end of the booth, the text-heavy *The Story of Bern (or) Showing Colours* (1970) recounts the time when the artist's work was being censored at the Freunde group show at Bern's Kunsthalle, laying bare the conservatism that existed at the heart of the art world during the late 60s and early 70s.





Dorothy Iannone, *Wiggle Your Ass For Me*, 1970. Acrylic on canvas mounted on canvas, 190 x 150 cm © All rights reserved Courtesy of the artist and Air de Paris, Paris.



Dorothy Iannone, *Courting Ajaxander*, 1990. Acrylic and gouache on synthetic board, 105 x 128 cm, without frame 101 x 124 cm © photo Jochen Littkemann, Berlin courtesy Air de Paris, Paris.

Yet, it's equally important to note that while Iannone was encountering opposition from institutions – many of whom were directed or chaired by men – her aesthetic was also rejected by Second Wave Feminism, noted for the hardline stance it took against pornography and prostitution during the 1960s and 70s.

Iannone's art wasn't the only thing that was 'purged'. In 1961, her copy of Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*



was seized at US customs, as A.I.K. gallery's timeline, which ran alongside the exhibition, reminds us. Mapping out seminal moments in the careers of these female artists, the timeline provides context for the whole exhibition. After years of censorship, the 2007-08 years were encouraging. *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* was staged at the Museum of Contemporary Art in LA in 2007 and Judith Bernstein, whose charcoal drawings are displayed at The Box and Karma International, ended her decades-long absence from the exhibition circuit, with *Signature and Phallic Drawings: 1966-2008*, at New York's Mitchell Algu Gallery in 2008.



View of Judith Bernstein's *Birth of the universe*: 18 new paintings (2010-2013) at the Box. Images courtesy of The Box, Los Angeles.

Over at the David Lewis booth, Mary Beth Edelson shows *Woman Rising* (1973-74), where the Chicago-born artist altered nude self-portraits, transforming herself into Kali, the Hindu goddess that embodies fertility, creativity and fearlessness, in one and William Blake's *Tyger*, fiery & sublime figure from the poet's 1794 poem by the same name, in another.

Placing herself in the role of both artist and muse, Penny Slinger's art explores the female psyche at Blum and Poe. In a series of photo collages and installations, lips and breasts are co-mingled with a variety of unexpected objects – pearl, fruits and the like – to conjure bizarre imagery that disorients the mind. For *An Exorcism* (1977) – conceived with the artist's then partner Peter Whitehead – Slinger inserts black and white photographs of her naked body amid various settings in and around a derelict mansion in Northamptonshire. A powerful vulnerability cuts through the jumble of surrealist motifs. The body forms the center piece of Slinger's art, but unlike Iannone's playful drawings, which celebrate the flesh in its full glory, Slinger is preoccupied with the body as 'interface' between the psyche and the surroundings.





Penny Slinger, *Rosegasm*, 1970-1977. Photo collage, 13 3/8 x 20 inches (34 x 50.8 centimeters).



Penny Slinger, *Bitter Lemons - Homage to Lawrence Durrell*, 1973. Painted wax life cast, Two parts; 3 1/2 x 2 1/4 x 2 1/4 inches each (8.9 x 5.7 x 5.7 centimeters).



Penny Slinger, *Consider the Lilies*, 1973. Photo collage 16 x 12 inches (40.6 x 30.5 centimeters)

To say that *Sex Work* has moved the needle in any way would be fanciful – (and honestly, what exhibition at an art fair does?) but it is a fitting tribute to this group of art provocateurs who celebrated the female body and psyche in all their vitality, vulnerability, resilience and above all, complexity.

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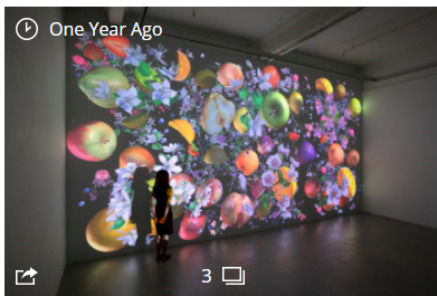


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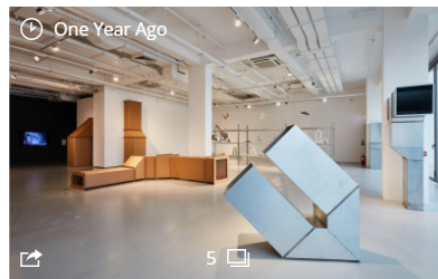
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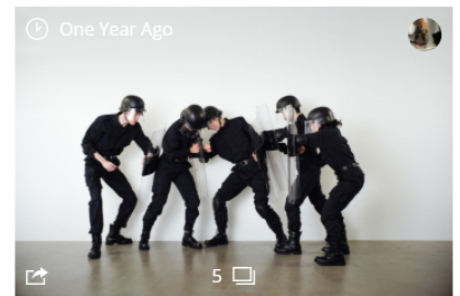
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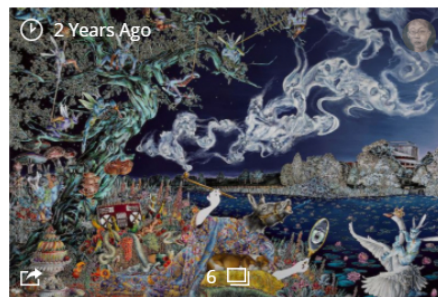
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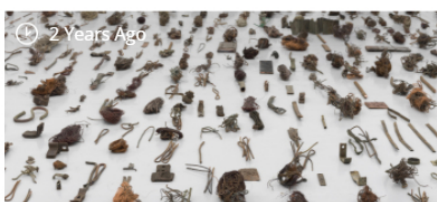
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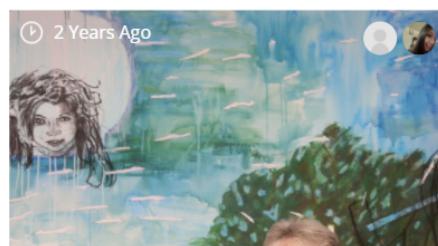
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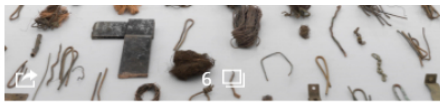
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