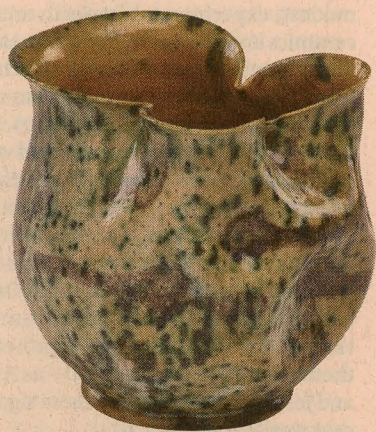


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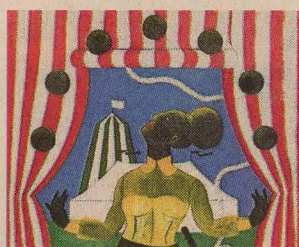
Collecting

Frieze week



Curiosity cabinets
Fair booths are getting ever more eclectic

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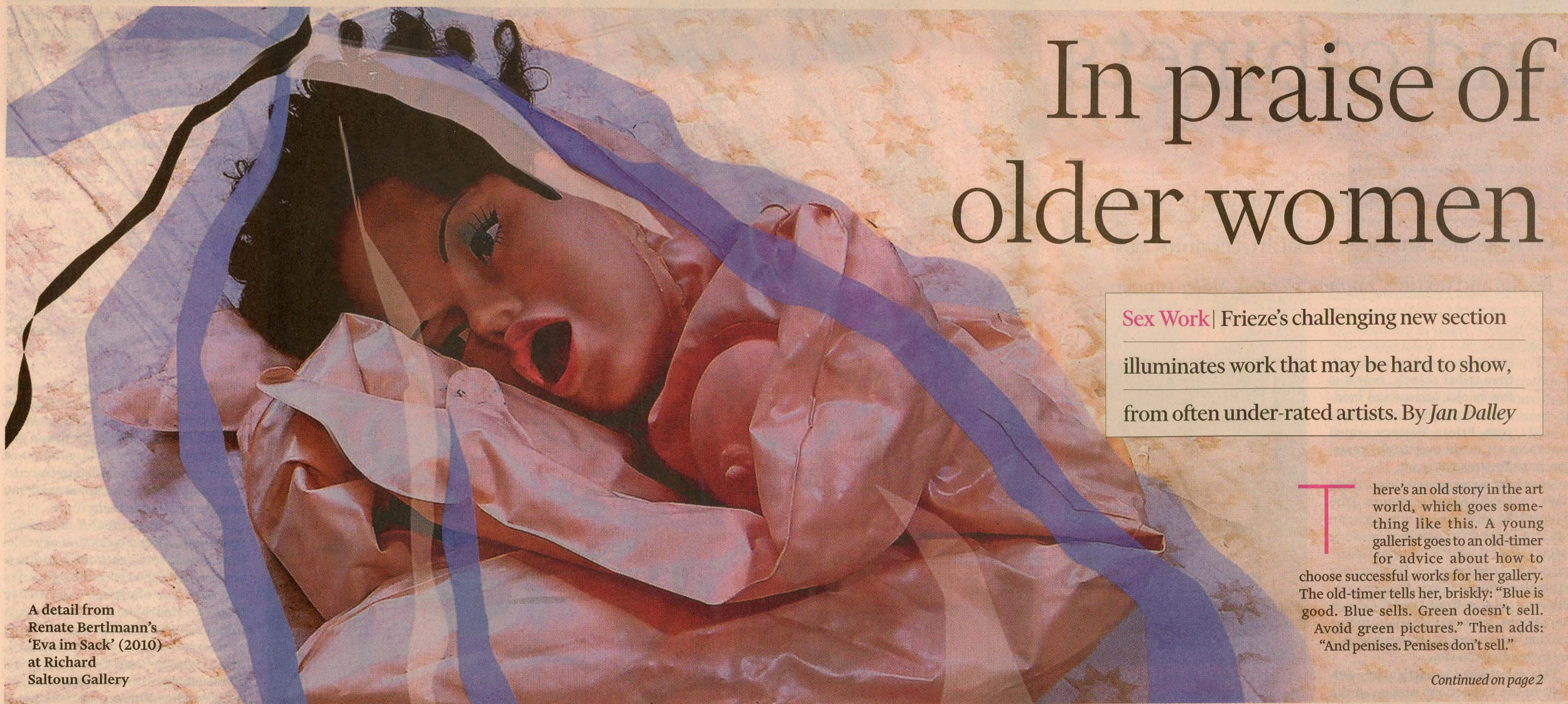


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All the fun of the fair
Performance, literature, theatre and installation

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In praise of older women

Sex Work | Frieze's challenging new section illuminates work that may be hard to show, from often under-rated artists. *By Jan Dalley*

There's an old story in the art world, which goes something like this. A young gallerist goes to an old-timer for advice about how to choose successful works for her gallery. The old-timer tells her, briskly: "Blue is good. Blue sells. Green doesn't sell. Avoid green pictures." Then adds: "And penises. Penises don't sell."

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A detail from Renate Bertlmann's 'Eva im Sack' (2010) at Richard Saltoun Gallery

In praise of older women

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That issue – the difficulty of showing, let alone selling, explicit sexual material – gets the full frontal treatment at Frieze's new section for 2017. Entitled Sex Work, it brings together the work of radical and feminist artists who choose to make art that is not just frank and fearless about sex and bodily depiction, but positively transgressive. Definitely not for family viewing.

All are women, none are young. Marilyn Minter, at 69, is the baby of the group; three are over 80. These artists are survivors. Kicking against the sometimes prudish aspects of sexual politics,

Apart from the question of whether there's a market for this art, Sex Work is in tune with a wider trend

they proved too raunchy for museum shows – thus, as the years went by, they were often left out of the narrative even of radical feminist art.

This injustice is something curator Alison Gingeras aims to put right. She sees artists such as Renate Bertlmann, Penny Slinger, Betty Tompkins and the others as pioneers rather than outliers, unrecognised rather than marginal. And indeed they look especially relevant right now, when questions surrounding feminism's relationship to pornography are being newly explored.

There are nine women artists under the Sex Work umbrella, shown in the fair by a dozen galleries (Marilyn Minter is exhibited by no fewer than three). Often these galleries have supported their artists through thick and thin over the years, and Gingeras is keen to pay them tribute for a steadfastness that is,

sadly, not too common in the art world.

Apart from the question of whether there's much of a market for this art, Sex Work is powerfully in tune with a wider trend of rediscovering older women artists. In the past few years, OWAs have been making a vigorous comeback: an extreme example is Carmen Herrera, who last year opened Lisson's New York gallery with her first US solo show in many decades – at the amazing age of 101. Others, such as Bridget Riley (86, recently picked up by mega-gallery David Zwirner), Gillian Ayres (87, currently conquering China) or Geta Bratescu (91, representing her native Romania at this year's Venice Biennale) display the U-shaped career typical of so many women in the creative arts: a high of early success, followed by long years in the middle-aged dip, re-emerging (longevity permitting) for a brilliant late run.

What's noticeable, though, is that it's *only* their gender and their age range that unites these artists. And in the case of the Sex Work artists, a certain attitude to subject matter. Apart from that, the work could hardly be more various. Herrera's fierce geometric abstraction could not be further from the monstrous, aggressive sexual appendages made by Judith Bernstein (b.1942), the jauntily bright shapes depicted by Ayres, the quasi-surreal, cartoon-inspired creations of Beth Edelson, the wincingly lurid super-bright images of Marilyn Minter.

Which only shows us what we already know: women are capable of anything.

October 5-8, frieze.com

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Frieze week coverage

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from Thursday next week