

A COMPANION TO
FRIEZE LONDON & FRIEZE MASTERS 2017

Frieze Week



This page
Mary Beth Edelson, *Hounds of Hell*,
from the series 'Woman Rising', 1973
Oil and marker on silver gelatin print, 25 x 20 cm
Courtesy: the artist and David Lewis, New York

Opposite page
Penny Slinger, *Rosegasm*, 1970–1977
Photo collage, 34 x 51 cm. Courtesy: the artist
and Blum & Poe, Los Angeles/New York/Tokyo
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*'This chapter of art history informs
our understanding of the
"sex positivity" debate today'*



RM: How do you think this ‘sex positive’ work is relevant again to today’s audiences?

AG: My generation took for granted the achievements of feminism – our ambivalence took for granted the hard-fought battles won for women’s rights and freedom of sexual speech. In working on this project, I began to realize how many women of our generation – myself included! – had demonstrated an internalised misogyny towards women artists and did not recognise the role they played in this corner of the revolutions of the ‘60s and ‘70s, and in giving rise to the ‘sex positivity’ that dominates a lot of pop culture today.

This chapter of art history informs our understanding of ‘sex positivity’ and the debates around it today. Likewise, the very expression ‘sex work’ is an inherently politicized idiom. As an umbrella term, it stakes a pro-sex position that legitimizes the trade of prostitution and other sexual transactions – a divisive subject for contemporary society and a new wave of feminists.

Take pornography in the age of its internet ubiquity. Can it be empowering for a certain kind of ‘sex positive’ woman, or is the form inherently exploitive? TV shows such as Lena Dunham’s *Girls* have reignited old debates about sex positivity because of the female protagonists’ unregretful assertion of their sexual autonomy, and even

libertine explorations. On the opposite side of the spectrum, old patriarchal symbols like the Pirelli Calendar have, just this year, revised their objectifying paradigm of having overtly sexualized models as their pin-up girls in favour of showcasing women of a diversity of age, race, and sexualities, fully clothed, and selected less for their physical charms than their array of impressive professional achievements.

The artists in *Sex Work* have been instrumental in making the case for erotic representation, sexual empowerment, and the usefulness of pornography to disturb normative attitudes towards gender roles. While often considered as straying from the feminist flock, today they provide essential performative, discursive and iconographic precedents for a host of art practices and pop cultural phenomena that explore audacious, sex-positive terrain.

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Sex Work: Feminist Art & Radical Politics, curated by Alison Gingeras, is on view at Frieze London every day of the fair. For a full list of presentations, see p.124, and for more information, go to frieze.com