POST

Boys & Girls

Nine Painters

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Introduction

*Post-Boys&Girls: Nine Painters* is not a show for Jesse Helms, nor the Cincinnati kids who went after Dennis Barrie, nor the troops massing against the NEA. All of them would be offended by at least some of the paintings exhibited, and are hereby forewarned to stay home. And too bad for them. Rich with visual pleasures, this show means to stimulate people's thinking about what men and women are supposed to be, and about what a painter in 1990 can say about that.

The nine artists I have gathered together are all painting their way out of gendered corners. Additionally, their work challenges the notion that only the media arts can mount social critique, that a painting is simply too precious, too tradition-bound to make a difference. Some of the work wrestles with authority in the forms of the father, king or hero; the museum installation; or the minimalist painting that refuses to communicate. Some works assert the existence of gendered subjectivities that have mostly been ignored or suppressed: feminine, Puerto Rican, gay, lesbian, Asian-American. Other paintings invite us with their seductive illusionism and sensuality to freely desire even while social injunctions keep saying “NO.” Yet other works turn the tables on language that has been used to restrain, discriminate against, or belittle, in relation to sex and gender.

No stylistic line dominates. Formal strategies range from abstraction to appropriation, romantic realism to cool conceptualism, expressionism to process art. Nor is any value attached to “pure” painting and drawing accomplished without the aid of photography; most of these artists use photographs or slides in the creation of their work.

This choice of using paint now comes at a price. To make paintings has been, with few
exceptions, the exclusive activity of white men, some of whom could then choose other white men to assume the title “artist-genius.” For painters expecting to subvert or at least challenge the social order, participating in—or being shut out by—that old boy network triggers enormous conflicts. Despite all the satisfactions of making paintings and the medium’s rich history, we can’t avoid painting’s identification with privilege, racism, sexism, Eurocentrism.

The artists in Post-Boys & Girls: Nine Painters all confront these contradictions; they get their hands dirty. While the look of each artist’s work is distinct, all share the hope that painting can produce new freedoms for yesterday’s boys and girls.

I would like to thank the four writers, Carol Zemel, Michal Kimmel, Renée Green and James Saslow, whose essays contribute enormously to the meaning and pleasure of this show. My conversations with each of them have been stimulating and formative in shaping the exhibition as well as my own artwork.

There are many others whose comments, suggestions and support have been helpful to me. Marcia Tucker first suggested how an exhibition that includes painting can shape our ideas about gender with her show The Other Man: Alternative Representations of Masculinity at The New Museum in 1987. Her belief and interest in my work has set a high standard for me, and her ideas for this show have greatly enriched it. Connie Butler has been encouraging, accommodating and eager to join with me in making the show a success, as have Susan Wyatt and the staff at Artists Space. My special thanks to Laura Miller for this catalogue’s thoughtful, fresh design. Others whose input I gratefully acknowledge are Robert Atkins, Carol Becker, Nancy Gonchar, Kellie Jones, Susana Leval, Melissa Myer, Lowery Stokes Sims, and Ann Snitow and fellow members of her enor-

mously stimulating seminar “Sex, Gender, and Consumer Culture” at NYU’s Institute for the Humanities. Eunice Lipton, my resident critic, confidante, and cohort has profoundly influenced both my painting and my work on this project with her incandescent thoughts, passionate feminism, humor, commitment, and rigorous intellect. I’d be lost without her.

Finally, my gratitude goes to all the artists for their participation. The lively exchanges I’ve had with each of them about their work and mine, and about this show have made the experience a deeply satisfying one. This is the artworld I hoped to find when, as a graduate student in 1973, I moved to New York City: smart artists and writers feverishly creating work that made you overexcited, and talking to each other about it all with delight.

—Ken Aptekar

Post-Boys & Girls: The Return of the Suppressed
by Carol Zemel

A decade after progressive critics proclaimed the “end of painting” and denounced the conservatism of neo-expressionist styles, painting-with-a-politics has reemerged with a complex and challenging agenda. In some respects Post-Boys & Girls suggests a modish impudence towards serious categories of oppression and constraint. But within this playful posture, the exhibition sets the issues squarely before us. A lively range of pictorial strategies refutes the so-called bankruptcy of painting and offers a stirring cultural politics of gender, race, and ethnicity.

Because they are insistently political, the arguments against painting are worth reviewing. Briefly, painting as a practice was construed in class terms as a parade of styles produced by bourgeois artists for a capitalist market. Thus, painting, and specifically the return to figuration in the late ’70s and ’80s, was deemed a conservative impulse designed to perpetuate oppressive cultural hierarchies and forms. Neo-expressionist painting in particular, with its display of angst-filled, heroic subjects and its veneration of the master’s “hand” seemed, like European figurative art after WWI, to repeat a reactionary flight from the problems of the present and to substitute a Reagan-esque nostalgia for traditional values, myths and hierarchies. For many artists, the way beyond the impasse of painting’s recapture by bourgeois culture was through deconstructive textual strategies, site-specific installations and mass cultural, photo-based techniques.

At the heart of these warnings is an idealist belief in the fixed or essential meaning of styles. Seen in these terms, a style is so laden with historical associations that it is immutably bound to its period of origin, with every later incarnation signifying nostalgia or decadence. If post-modernism has shown us anything, however, it is that style can be deployed as a fluid, critical language with new meaning in its present usages, and as such, it can decode and disrupt those older values and mythologies. To be sure, critics acknowledge that time and circumstance shape the significance of these methods. But can we effectively decode these painterly revisions through the usual formal analyses and assessments of style? From what “official” perspective is the neo-Cubism produced in Moscow in 1985 deemed stylistically naive, retrograde, or derivative? Does a vehement, gestural style produced by an Asian-American woman in this exhibition signify the same narcissistic withdrawal that it did in the hands of German men?

The sites of conflict in contemporary culture have also shifted drastically in recent years. The Euro-centric polarities—West-East, bourgeois-socialist, realism-abstraction—that structured the battles and victories of modernism have been supplanted by a political and cultural mapping of First, Second and Third World zones. In exhibitions as far-flung as the recent Soho/Harlem-sited Decade Show and the Havana Biennale, the issue is not the “end of painting,” but rather how various de-constructs and reconstructions of familiar media enable and voice a variety of gendered and multi-cultural points of view.

The painter who invokes a past style does not simply yearn for past traditions and histories. An elegant Deco-Surrealism, as Greg Drasar uses it for pictures of mannered bedroom interiors, produces uneasy attention to the “safeties” of the boudoir, the dreams of the bourgeoisie, and the private sanctuaries of class. The intricately patterned medievalism that surrounds Aptekar’s armored knights renders ironic the splendor of
that chivalric masculinity. Seen this way, what might appear as guiltily eclectic—"eclectic-neo" is Hal Foster's term, 4 or "re-inventing the Beaux-Arts" as New Museum curators Laura Trippi and Gary Sangster put it 5—is evidence instead of an elaborate conceptual repertoire that allows emblematic designs (Davidson, Davidek, Machida) and image-text combinations (Morse, Aptekar) to appear comfortably in company with pictorial fragments adopted from photographic and mass media practices (Davidek, Wilson) and allegorical reprises of historical styles (Drsaler, Mulero). In each case, stylistic manipulations have a critical dimension, emphatically linking the personal and private to cultural and social forms.

No less crucial in this exhibition are the pleasures in the medium the pictures allow. For those critical of painting, old master methods meant old master pleasures, and expert play of materials constituted seductive domination over what was shown. Some artists banished such pleasure to escape this power play. The pleasures of picture return here—albeit with a purpose. Neither titillating nor narrowly "aesthetic", these visceral and immediate sensations direct the pictures' impact and social meanings. Nancy Davidson's oil stick rubbings of quotidian objects like ironing boards and rugs, for example, monumentalize the fragile intimacies of a sensuously rubbed and caressed surface. Holly Morse's pictures combine sinuously curled texts with juicy fruit-laden hats. But pleasure at this level is also, in a sense, polymorphous perverse. It can attract and engulf in order to revulse; the pleasures of pigment can coax us close to more repellent imagery. For example, delicate shadows and highlights in oil and watercolor stage the grotesque dimensions of Lee Gordon's pictured masculinities, attracting us to the hooded costume's sensual folds. Margo Machida's thick facette invets her stark black, white and red figures with ominous fury. And bright patterns bring both a festive air and edgy tension to Lillian Mulero's primitivist icons.

But what adds special meaning to these pictures is the gendered position of the maker and the way viewers are challenged to engage the work in these terms. Indeed, the critique of painting has been lodged largely by white male critics, speaking from and about a masculine "mainstream." Acknowledging the need to end the universalizing myth of the artist-creator, critics proposed a "death of the author" position adopted from literary criticism, rather than a multiplicity of artist-subject positions. The argument assumes a simplified wholeness for "painting" as a category, and slams the door on a more inclusive painting practice. 6 But gender, race and ethnic issues introduced and made central by feminism have significantly revitalized picture-making, despite some critical anxiety that pluralism risks the loss of a cutting edge, 7 or that the "new tribalism," as the New York Times calls it, will produce art "suffocated by the requirement that nobody be either offended or excluded." 8 One wonders, given this logic, just who it is that now feels lost in the crowd. In the face of such resistance, there is all the more reason to recognize the growing multi-cultural presence and success.

The fiction of a unitary subject is addressed in Millie Wilson's installation about lesbian painter Romaine Brooks, The Artist that is Not One. The title derives from French feminist Luce Irigaray's characterization of women as This Sex which is not one, and alludes to Natalie Barney's lesbian novel The One Who is Legion, which Brooks illustrated. Wilson's design splits portrait images and arranges blocks of paint and text in an asymmetric sequence that precludes any visual center or "core." As elements of Brooks' ex-patriate, androgynous, artistic, and lesbian "identity," these parts display the facets of a utopian lesbian milieu, while insisting that viewers not force the subject—or ourselves—into any simple, single category.

The Asian faces and figures in Margo Machida's paintings hurtle towards the viewer with disquieting configurations of an ethnic femininity. These glaring matrons, gnarling men, demure daughters and anguished nudes seem caught in some unspecified turbulence; staring back, they engage us in a grim familial and cultural authority. The presentation of a racially specific sexuality is particularly challenging in Lillian Mulero's image of a tattooed nude, positioned in the painting field like a dusky-skinned anthropological object. Fondling his penis and grinning broadly, the figure confronts male and female viewers with a provocative layering of exoticism and eroticized "othernesses".

Inverting the conventional emphasis on the female body, Post-Boys & Girls highlights the male nude as a deconstructive signifier of masculinity. In Self-Portrait as Nude Woman with a Clown Nose (both guises are indignities), Lee Gordon dislocates the body's gender marks. The presumed femininity of a passive figure, arms hidden, the pale breasts almost like musculature, the genitals bisitined and hidden—all of this cast sexual identities exquisitely adrift and invite us to speculate on their certainties. Greg Davidek also plays with gender's visual language by fragmenting masculine "wholeness" and distributing parts of the male body into panels of primer-like signs. These and other pictures in the exhibition—even Drasler's jaunty fedoras tossed in the breeze, suggest a masculinity ill at ease with its own authority, and self-consciously so.

Suspicious woman that I am, I face these images with pleasure and a wary curiosity. They resonate with familiarly male combinations of power, vulnerability and charm. But they also call up another dilemma: the place of bourgeois masculinity in the chorus of multi-cultural subjectivities. Is this claim to critique the very masculinity that empowers them not disingenuous? 9 Can white men have anything to say about masculine authority and its patriarchal construction that is not simply a guilty confession or a chastened, petulant whine? Is Aptekar's painted chivalric conversation, Fuck me! Fuck you. more than a pretty patterned joke? Or do these hooded monsters, armored knights, and flying fedoras disturb the macho assumptions of power they invoke?

Engaging gender issues in these ways, Post-Boys & Girls avoids a utopian complacency and struggles for equal ground. No doubt, as white bourgeois masculinity loses some of its privilege, it will tighten its grip with even more vicious racisms and misogynies—the comedy routines of Andrew Dice Clay or the rap-taunts of 2 Live Crew are two current examples. But with this show as evidence, it is important to see an other term in this gender discourse, and to recognize the humor, pain and confusion embedded in "new masculinities."

The exhibition thus stakes out charged and risky territory, even as it is threatened with loss. For if debates about "cultural tribalism" persist, coinciding with media representation of Middle Eastern "tribalisms", we will surely be Bush-whacked with more cultural muddling in the democracy's name. For the moment, painting is alive, well and still kicking, Post-Boys & Girls extends its possibilities with humor and urgency.


2. Buchloh made this argument about work by Chia, Clemente, Kiefer. "Figures of Authority."
Post-Boys & Girls: Men & Women?
by Michael S. Kimmel

The title of this exhibition, Post-Boys & Girls, suggests several possible interpretations. It could mean that we’re beyond our childhoods, grown men and women, taking on the adult responsibilities of producing adult art. Or it could refer to some new “post” movement, as if we are the post-modern, post-structuralist post-boys and post-girls.

I’m struck by another meaning of the phrase. To declare the exhibition “Post-Boys & Girls” is to suggest a way of seeing ourselves that goes beyond thinking that who we are is stamped indelibly on us the moment some doctor announces “it’s a boy” or “it’s a girl.” Our personalities, our experiences and our interactions with one another have more to do with the cultural meanings attached to our reproductive biology than with that biological equipment itself. It’s as though these artists are claiming that we must see beyond boys and girls, beyond male and female, to those creatures whose lives are shaped by the cultures in which they live. Let’s call them men and women.

Gender is one of the central axes around which our social life revolves. Not “sex,” the biological given, but “gender,” the set of meanings that cultures give to those biological facts. Gender is as critical in establishing and expressing our identities as class or race, a foundation upon which individual personalities are built.

What’s more, our gender identities, our experience of masculinity and femininity proceeds not from biological imperatives — boys will be boys — but from those cultural expectations. Gender is socially constructed. “One is not born a woman,” claimed Simone de Beauvoir. “One becomes a woman.” And we become women and men by learning the culturally prescribed roles that women and men are assigned in our culture.

It’s not a unitary process, of course, and there isn’t just one version of masculinity and femininity that everyone embraces. One version — white, middle class, heterosexual — is set up as the standard against which all other masculinities and femininities are measured, and the power of this hegemonic version marginalizes others, and makes them appear “deviant” or “problematic.” Engendering is thus about power — about the power of men over women, and the power of some versions of masculinity or femininity over other versions.

Which means that gender is political. If gender is socially constructed, it means that we are not simply the passive objects upon which some abstraction called “society” inscribes its gender codes. We actively participate in the process, modifying the script, challenging it, transforming it. The enormous vitality of both the feminist and the gay and lesbian movements comes in part from the thrill of revolt against prescribed roles. If our masculinity and femininity are socially constructed, they can also be deconstructed — taken apart, re-examined and reconstructed.

The process of deconstruction, of disassembly, is serious business and exhilarating fun. Many of the works in this exhibition provide thoughtful meditation on the centrality of gender in our lives, and offer angry retorts to the ways in which gender-as-power is deployed against some of us. Nancy Davidson’s rubbings of everyday items in women’s lives — the ironing board, the oval rug — extracts surprising textures from ordinary objects, reminding us that even surfaces have depth. Margo Machida exposes the mechanisms of male intrusiveness in women’s experience, either by surveillance, direct intervention, or distortion. Lee Gordon’s version of masculinity and male sexuality is rendered even more menacing by concealing its human face; behind these black leather masks, clown faces, and white hoods lurk danger and terror. Even in his self-portrait, where he appropriates femininity as a badge of vulnerability, he conceals and distorts his own features. This is a dark, frightening work, a chilling and visceral portrayal of men’s capacity for violence.

Other artists expose the contradictions of gender by toying with them. There’s a gleeful to our collective giggling at these works, solidarity cemented by shared laughter at the ridiculousness of the conventions which have been forced down our throats, recognition of common resistance. Take, for example, Greg Drasler’s hilarious paintings of men so laden down with the tools of their trade that they could not possibly perform the roles that are suggested by their equipment. Or Greg David’s playful depiction of the male tendency to compartmentalize, to separate head from body. Or Ken Aptekar’s brilliant painting of a standoff between two faceless armored soldiers — two genuinely empty suits. By juxtaposing contemporary language Aptekar reveals the time-less insanity of that gendered discourse.

The works in Post-Boys & Girls hold the mirrors of gender up to us — some stark and honest, even brutal, others impishly distorted as in a fun house. And they invite us to explore the extraordinary hold that gender exerts in our lives, to deconstruct what it has meant to be boys and girls, so that we may reconstruct ourselves as responsible and caring men and women.
What's Painting Got to Do with It? Representing Gender & Sexuality in the Age of Post-Mechanical Reproduction
by Renée Green

Politically conscious artists, some old, nanging questions could be put off no longer. What public could one conceivably reach? What methods might be used most effectively to reach it? What media were most appropriate to one's messages? What messages should take priority? And most important, of what significance could anything one had to say be to one's imagined audience?

Such questions had occupied my thoughts since my undergraduate years, especially in relation to "race" and feminism — and had propelled my own odyssey away from painting, which began long before I ceased to paint. Perhaps an account of my experience will help illuminate the very different path taken by the artists in Post-Boys & Girls: Nine Painters.

It would be wrong to presume that my being black and a woman were causes sufficient to shape my concerns. My lifetime sense of opposition to the dominant order — my rebelliousness — may as easily be considered a personality trait as a sociological given. And the sociology of my background is more complex than the words black and woman might immediately suggest: Jim Crow, the Civil Rights movement, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Black Power, Lorraine Hansbury, Jimi Hendrix, cultural nationalism, gospel music, rock & roll, black Christianity, urban public schools, the Isley Brothers, the black middle class, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, the Beatles, Woodstock, Jack Kerouac, Hermann Hesse, upper-middle-class suburbs, private school, piano lessons, ballet class, ski club (to provide a short list) were all factors which had affected me by the time I arrived at college.

At Wesleyan University I was exposed to conceptual art, African-American studies, Women's Studies, semiotics, structuralism and post-structuralism, all during the first semester. This was in 1977. When I arrived at college I considered myself an artist, specializing in no particular area. My most ambitious art-related project that year was the production of a play, which I wrote and directed.

I grew interested in conceptual art, and had difficulty sustaining interest in drawing classes. I had to transfer to the School of Visual Arts in New York to take painting and sculpture because I couldn't win a position in the lottery for these classes at Wesleyan (where I studied the political economics and literature of "Third World" countries instead). When I interviewed at SVA it was assumed that as a black person I would go into illustration, but I stressed my interest in fine arts and was admitted to that program. I soon became frustrated by what seemed to be an archaic curriculum — figure painting, for example, and still-lifes in the manner of Cezanne. On my own, I went to galleries; in the library I read of contemporary artists and "Post-Movement" art. I tried to incorporate these contemporary ideas into my own art practice, but was exasperated by the traditional categories into which my classes were divided.

In desperation I returned to Wesleyan, where I fortuitously participated in a seminar in which we wrote the catalogue essays for an exhibition of the Sol LeWitt Collection in conjunction with the Wadsworth Athenaeum. Through that project, I was able to re-establish a connection with conceptual art. But figuring out how to give form to my own concepts was another story entirely.

Upon graduating, I decided to pursue a career in publishing simultaneously with one in art; I hoped to keep the demands of the marketplace separate from my art production, so that I would be free to experiment. During this time of casing about, I was influenced by various projects by women artists that experimented with installations, performance and diaristic formats. Some of my models were Eva Hesse, Ree Morton and Adrian Piper.

I began studying video and super 8 film, but because of work and financial demands I needed a more expedient art form. I started doing mural-sized paintings on paper, which I thought of as conceptual pieces because the ideas behind them came out of literary theory and semiotics. The thought of these works being associated with the Neo-Expressionist art craze made me cringe, and I provided lengthy theoretical explanations when asked to discuss the paintings.

I left New York and lived in Mexico for eight months. There I had my first opportunity to read and think uninteruptedly since college. While I was there I painted small works which were emotional responses to my experiences of alienation and of my perplexity at the way the indigenous people were lauded as having given the country its cultural heritage, yet abused in the streets. I spent a lot of time at anthropological museums and became very curious about epistemology.

When I returned to New York the art scene had changed. The painting-based East Village art boom was nearing its height. I was introduced as a painter at parties and openings full of painters. I felt uncomfortable with the designation, that it didn't encompass all that I wanted to do creatively, but I continued experimenting with this form to see what I could do with it.

It was during this time that I became aware of a loose-knit movement of artists engaged in a practice different from anything I'd known before, though they shared my feminist concerns. It was at the New Museum's Difference show in 1984 that I first became acquainted with the work of Mary Kelly and other artists (British as well as American) engaged in a critique of media revolving around the issues of sexuality and representation. Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parker commented on the media that appeared in the show.
New Moves in an Old Game
by James M. Saslow

Don’t talk to me about gender, honey. I may be a tweedy bearded art professor, but once a year I ride on a Gay Pride parade float wearing my signature white Empire gown and lace-fringed Russian tiara. And let me tell you, those counter-demonstrators outside St. Patrick’s have plenty to say about my gender identity — not to mention my moral right to exist on this planet. So I look at this exhibition, and it’s fabulous to see how many artists have woken up to gender as an aesthetic and political issue. But I also ask, When is the rest of the world going to smell the coffee? Since “Adam delved and Eve span,” the West has propounded a mythic history with profound implications for conventions of masculine and feminine roles and emotions. These pervasive rules of decorum are now as archaic as the King James language in which we learned them; but until the Renaissance, the visual arts did not much question them. Unsurprisingly, most artists reproduced prevailing norms: Madonnas were motherly or queenly, Jupiter suitably butch. And art critics were concerned with policing, not problematizing: In his 16th-century treatise L’Aretino, Ludovico Dolce praised Raphael for painting the proper physical distinctions between boys and girls and slapped Michelangelo, who “does not know or will not observe those differences.”

At about the same time, however, artists began carving out some small conceptual space for alternative consciousness. One tool, still evident in the present exhibit, was humor. Giorgio Vasari tells us in his Lives about an irreverent artist named Nunziato who, when asked for a Madonna that would not incite lust in parishioners, painted her with a mustache — a prank repeated centuries later by Marcel Duchamp on the Mona Lisa. A more subversive method was to sneak some personal element into the interstices of official iconography. The androgynous grace of Botticelli’s and Leonardo’s adolescent angels takes on new meaning in light of their arrests for committing sodomy with boy apprentices. In the Baroque era, Artemisia Gentileschi’s empathetic portrayals of the biblical murderess Judith served as a private revenge fantasy for her own experience of rape.

However gleefully (and productively) modern historians are rediscovering such embryonic gender-variant artists, we should not expect to find in them the full-blown self-consciousness of a later time. Walter Pater, the 19th-century English critic who first alerted us to the wistful androgyny of Botticelli and Leonardo, was himself a closeted homosexual; his reading of the past, however sensitive, tells as much about his own search for coded alternatives to Victorianism as about the Renaissance. Not until Pater’s own day could the realist Rosa Bonheur, who painted disguised self-portraits in drag, begin to imagine — and live — an alternative gender identity as a woman trying to move in the male sphere. Yet even she, ever ambivalent about the cost of nonconformity, preserved her lucrative ties with officialdom.

Only in the modern era has the artist shifted definitively from being an agent of society to being its adversary. And postmodernist culture, as Lyotard and his fellow post-structuralists have defined it, is characterized by a profound distrust toward our own sacred historical narratives, whether Adam-and-Eve or the progress of reason. Whereas earlier artists played by the rules of the dominant social-aesthetic discourse, artists like those in this exhibit aim not simply to make new moves within the old rules, but to question, even to change the rules of that game. They deconstruct those aptly named “master narratives” with humor, and lan-

Renée Green is an artist and writer whose multi-media installation, Anatomy of Escape, was exhibited at the Clocktower Gallery, May-June, 1980. She is currently working on a year-long installation for the upcoming exhibition Out Of Site at the P.S. 1 Museum.
guage, and unlikely juxtapositions; and Duchamp’s nose-thumbing alter ego, Rose Sélavy, is the grandmother of us all.

As an index of this change, compare Jean-Baptiste Greuze’s famous Metropolitan Museum picture Broken Eggs to Holly Morse’s Dirty. Both are about “deflowering,” but the 18th-century man assumes his complicity in his allegorized melodrama of lost virginity, while the 20th-century woman spells out the allegory, opening it for discussion. The etched pane over Ken Apteke’s painted “pansy” makes even more explicit how we “see” reality through a glass darkly—a glass of learned verbal narratives. Both artists seek to unravel the nexus of negative, even hostile associations between flowers, sex, femininity, and homosexuality.

Some of these artists seek substitute archetypes for the ancient gods and heroes; others question the very notion of historical precedent. Greg Davidik’s “King” and “Centaur” dismember these antique symbols of male power and sexuality; in contrast, Margo Machida, like Bonheur, has been fascinated with the male image, in pictures (not shown here) of the sexually ambiguous author Yukio Mishima. Millie Wilson’s mock-heroic academese about Romaine Brooks and friends simultaneously honors a lesbian artistic forerunner and lampoons the formulaic archithorical pedigree.

An inevitable question: are there any differences between the male and female agendas? Nancy Davidson’s medium of oilstick rubbing explores the current question whether women have a distinctively tactile sensibility; her process is as much about gender as are the domestic objects she depicts. Lilian Mulero also deals in traditionally feminine “decorative” pattern and fabric, subverting this cliché by treating a man as a pattern (and a flowered one, at that). The macho stance of her urinating woman, on the other hand, appropriates “Folk Art” to claim male prerogatives. By contrast, the men seem more concerned with the burden of maintaining that aggressive male mystique. Apteke’s knights are far too armored to make good on their verbal challenge of penetration; Greg Drasler’s smétier figures are entrapped in the symbols of their work; Lee Gordon’s masks render the homestay activity remote and ominous. As one transvestite put it in Mariette Allen’s recent book, Transformations, “Women have needed liberation to men need liberation from.”

One further complication: art and gender are not independent of ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation. Bonheur and Brooks were able to actualize their deviant fantasies largely because both were independently wealthy. Not that the connections are always so clear or simple. Mishima’s homosexuality was integral to his hypermasculine conception of samurai-style male love, which I’d like to think is relevant to Machida’s appropriations. But does she identify with him because he’s a man, or a homosexual, or an icon of her Japanese heritage?

Perhaps a little of each: her “Noli me tangere” asks about the Eastern body no less than the Western myth of Mary Magdalene. Come to think of it, my own imagery draws on both gender and ethnicity; too, and sometimes gender may not be uppermost in my mind—or in my viewers’. My drag persona, the Grand Duchess Anastasia Sazlova, was born as much from nostalgia for the land of my own forebears as from the Duchampian impulse toward genderfuck. Her picture once made the morning papers on the very day I was to start a new teaching job. I needn’t have worried: The dean turned out to teach Slavic languages, and—our contrasting notions of couture counting less to him than our shared love of things Russian—he cheerily greeted me as, “Ah, the Czarina!”

That’s as it should be—but all too seldom is. As the gender wars drag on and the discourse battles proliferate, this participant-observer is moved both to exult in the critical acumen and wit of the works here, and to lament how little territory such offensives have captured. Frankly, I’m tired of “problematicizing” gender, of analyzing oppression, of preaching the crusade of diversity. Why is the process of deconstruction and transformation taking so long? Why hasn’t every type-A corporate CEO long since felt the danger of heart attack in Drasler’s images of men literally imprisoned in their jobs? To borrow an overworn phrase from the Vietnam era, Why can’t we just declare victory and go home?

Well, in part because there’s a lot of cultural inertia to be overcome, dating back to when the Roman architect Vitruvius assigned male and female personas to the orders of classical architecture. And also because most people aren’t paying much attention, or at least not productive attention.

It is impossible to discuss the images in this show without acknowledging that the aesthetic and social space in which they circulate is painfully circumscribed. The avant-garde art world is only a thin layer of meat sandwiched between two heavier slabs of very white bread. Pressing down from the top is the officially sanctioned high culture of uptown museums and galleries; underneath is the thicker layer of popular culture—which, at least in the U.S., has historically lacked radical consciousness.

This mainstream culture has always sought to rope off the space in which potentially destabilizing alternative visions can circulate, and to draw the noose ever tighter. It maintains its hegemony by various means: censorship, prosecution, and not-so-benign neglect. And artists have long had to run the gauntlet of public tolerance. When Benvenuto Cellini proposed a statue of Jupiter wooing Ganymede, his archival Bandinelli denounced him as a “dirty sodomite.” Cellini coarsened his own by carving a touchingly erotic sculpture of Apollo with the young boy Hyacinth; but the swashbuckling artist, later sentenced to house arrest for sodomy, had learned enough to keep it in his own studio until his death.

And yet it’s not even talk about Jesse Helms, or the Art Institute student who painted Chicago’s mayor in a dress, bringing down a City Council order to lock up the picture; or Madame Mishima, who wouldn’t let Paul Schrader make a film about her late husband without narrowing the gay angle to the point of invisibility; or Robert Mapplethorpe’s, whose visual statement that the male body could be as beautiful as a calla lily was so threatening to Western Civilization that the Cincinnati police had to videotape it for court evidence.

You think that’s bad... just imagine if Her Imperial Highness Sazlova wanted to stage a performance art piece in conjunction with the current exhibition. Would she get an NEA grant? Or a measly review in the dailies, to say nothing of a profile in the Sunday Times?

Don’t hold your breath. If she were lucky, she’d be ignored; if not, she’d be videotaped for an obscenity trial. And heard or no heard, when the revolution comes from the right, this is one princess who doesn’t expect to be saved by male privilege.

James M. Sadow, Ph.D., teaches Art History at Queens College, The City University of New York. He is the author of Ganzmude in the Renaissance: Homosexuality in Art and Society and a contributor to The Advocate and other publications.
KEN APTEKAR

Born Detroit, Michigan
Lives New York, New York

Education
1975 Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, NY MFA
1973 University of Michigan, Ann Arbor BFA

Selected Exhibitions
1990 Critical Revisions
Bess Cutler Gallery
New York, NY

Ken Aptekar
Margulies-Taplin Gallery
North Miami, FL

1989 Ken Aptekar
Bess Cutler Gallery
New York, NY

Gender Fictions
SUNY Binghamton Art Museum
Binghamton, NY

Serious Fun, Truthful Lies
Randolph Street Gallery
Chicago, IL

1987 The Other Man, Alternative
Representations of Masculinity
The New Museum of
Contemporary Art
New York, NY

1986 Group Painting Exhibition
Art in General
New York, NY

Above:
Fuck Me Fuck You. 1990
oils on wood, sandblasted glass, bolts
Polyptych, 60x60 inches overall

Opposite:
Handsome 1990
oils on wood, sandblasted glass, bolts
30x30 inches
GREG DAVIDEK

Born Flint, Michigan
Lives Brooklyn, New York

Education
1983  Virginia Commonwealth University,
      Richmond  MFA
1980  Cleveland Institute of Art,
      Cleveland  BFA

Selected Exhibitions
1986  MASS
Group Material
The New Museum of
Contemporary Art
New York, NY

1985  The National Studio Program
      Exhibition
      P.S. 1
      Long Island City, NY

      Little Art By Big Thinkers
      Bess Cutler Gallery
      New York, NY

1984  34/83/84
      The Clocktower Gallery
      New York, NY

      Members Select
      1708
      Richmond, VA

      Contents Under Pressure
      Anton Gallery
      Washington, DC

      New Realism
      Robert L. Kidd Gallery
      Birmingham, MI

      Annual Juried Show
      Staten Island Museum of Art &
      Natural History
      Staten Island, NY

Above:
Centaur  1985-86
oil on canvas
84x50 inches

Opposite:
The King  1986-87
oil on canvas
66x36 inches
NANCY DAVIDSON

Born Chicago, Illinois
Lives Brooklyn, New York

Education
1975    School of the Art Institute of Chicago  MFA
1972    University of Illinois at Chicago Circle  BA
         Northeastern Illinois University, Chicago  BE

Selected Exhibitions
1990    Group Exhibition
         White Columns
         New York, NY
         Stained Sheet/Holy Shroud
         Krygier/Landau
         Los Angeles, CA
1989    Invitational
         Shea and Beker
         New York, NY
1988    Nancy Davidson
         Marianne Deson Gallery
         New York, NY
1985    Group Exhibition
         A.L.R. Gallery
         New York, NY
1984    Salon
         Gracie Mansion
         New York, NY
         Drawings
         Germans Van Eek
         New York, NY

Top:
Victoria Falls 1990
steel, cloth, paintstick
96x131 inches

Above left:
Victoria Falls 1990
detail

Opposite:
Ironing Board 1989
oilstick on vellum
58x36 inches
GREG DRASLER

Born Waukegan, Illinois
Lives Brooklyn, New York

Education
1983 University of Illinois, Champaign
     MFA
1980 University of Illinois, Champaign
     BFA

Selected Exhibitions
1990 Greg Drasler
    Center for Contemporary Art
    Chicago, IL

Greg Drasler
Shea & Beker Gallery
New York, NY

1989 Gender Fiction
University Art Museum
SUNY Binghamton
Binghamton, NY

Drasler, Minter, Morse
Shea & Beker Gallery
New York, NY

1988 Greg Drasler
Marianne Deson Gallery
Chicago, IL

The Legacy of Surrealism
Ben Shahn Galleries
William Paterson College
Wayne, NJ

1987 The Other Man, Alternate
Representations of Masculinity
The New Museum of Contemporary Art
New York, NY

The Self-Portrait:
Tangible Consciousness
Robeson Center Gallery
Rutgers University
Newark, NJ

1986 Greg Drasler
R.C. Erpf Gallery
New York, NY

Above:
Spare Bedroom with Shoes 1990
oil on canvas
40x32 inches

Opposite:
The Garden 1985
acrylic on canvas
70x60 inches
LEE GORDON

Born  Brooklyn, New York
Lives  New York, New York

Education
1982  Rutgers University,
      New Brunswick, NJ MFA
1979  University of Massachusetts,
      Amherst  BFA

Selected Exhibitions
1989  *Erotic America*
      Antoine Carolan Gallerie
      Paris, France
1987  *The Hooded Paintings*
      Grey Art Gallery
      New York, NY
      *The Other Man, Alternate*
      *Representations of Masculinity*
      The New Museum of
      Contemporary Art
      New York, NY
      *Floating Values*
      Hallwalls Center for
      Contemporary Art
      Buffalo, New York
1986  *Drawn and Quartered*
      White Columns
      New York, NY
      *Genre Painting*
      Hallwalls Center for
      Contemporary Art
      Buffalo, NY
      *Philadelphia Collects*
      Philadelphia Museum of Art
      Philadelphia, PA
1982  *Extended Sensibilities*
      The New Museum of
      Contemporary Art
      New York, NY

Above:
*Father Reading to Son* 1987
oil on white lead on canvas
32x40 inches

Opposite:
*Self-Portrait as a Woman with a Clown Nose* 1990, detail
watercolor, gouache on paper
18x24 inches
MARGO MACHIDA

Born  Hilo Hawaii,
Lives  Brooklyn, NY

Education
1978    Hunter College, New York, NY  MA
1976    New York University,  
        New York  BA

Selected Exhibitions
1990    The Decade Show
        Museum of Contemporary
        Hispanic Art
        New York, NY
1989    Bridges and Boundaries
        The Newhouse Center for
        Contemporary Art
        Snug Harbor Cultural Center
        Staten Island, NY
1988    Cultural Currents
        The San Diego Museum of Art
        San Diego, CA
        A Place in Art/History
        Henry Street Settlement
        Arts For Living Center
        New York, NY
        Autobiography In Her Own Image
        INTAR Gallery
        New York, NY
1987    Margo Machida
        Jerry Clifford Gallery
        Bronx Museum of the Arts
        New York, NY
1986    Two-person exhibition
        Asian Arts Institute
        New York, NY
        Transcultur/Transmedia
        Exit Art
        New York, NY
        Asian Artists of Brooklyn
        Brooklyn Museum
        New York, NY

Above:
Noli Me Tangere  1986
acrylic on canvas
60x84 inches

Opposite:
Make Room for Daddy  1990
acrylic and mixed media on canvas
56x36 inches
HOLLY MORSE

Born Newton, Massachusetts
Lives Brooklyn, New York

Education
1976  Tufts University, Medford, MA  BFA
1983  California Institute of the Arts,
      Valencia  MFA

Selected Exhibitions
1985  Group exhibition
      The Hudson Center
      New York, NY

1984  Group exhibition
      Southern Connecticut State
      University
      New Haven, CT

1983  Muse On Loan
      Kuprin Gallery
      Los Angeles, CA

Holly Morse
      California Institute of the Arts
      Valencia, CA

1981  Holly Morse
      Helen Schlein Gallery
      Boston, MA

1990  Group exhibition
      Helen Schlein Gallery
      Boston Center for the Arts
      Boston, MA

Above:
Bringing Home the Bacon  1980
oil on linen
24x24 inches

Opposite:
Dirty  1990
oil on linen
36x72 inches
LILLIAN MULERO

Born Brooklyn, New York
Lives Albany, New York

Education
1983 State University of New York,
Albany MFA

Selected Exhibitions
1990 The Decade Show
MASS Group Material
Studio Museum of Harlem
New York, NY
Vistas Latinas
Henry Street Settlement
New York, NY
1989 The Daughter Show
Ted Gallery
Albany, NY
1987 Head Sex
Feature Gallery
Chicago, IL
Chung, Mulero, Santos, Wirtz
Intar Gallery
New York, NY
Chain Paintings of Love
Colab Project
P.S. 122
New York, NY
1986 Toys ART Us
Longwood Project Gallery
Bronx, NY

Above:
Untitled
oil and gold leaf on canvas
63x53 inches

Opposite:
Folk Art 1990
oil on aluminum leaf on canvas
40x50 inches
MILLIE WILSON

Born Hot Springs, Arkansas
Lives Los Angeles, California

Education
1983 The University of Houston, MFA
1971 The University of Texas at
Austin, BFA

Selected Exhibitions
1990 Faute Semblant: Peter
(A Young English Girl)
San Francisco Camerawork
San Francisco, CA
All But The Obvious
L.A.C.E.
Los Angeles, CA
1989 Los Angeles Times Series
University Art Gallery
SUNY/Binghamton
Thick and Thin: Photographically
Inspired Paintings
Fahey/Klein Gallery
Los Angeles, CA
Loaded
Richard Kuhlenschmidt Gallery
Los Angeles, CA
Self-Evidence
L.A.C.E.
Los Angeles, CA
1988 Drawings By Ten
Mandeville Gallery
University of California
San Diego, CA
1987 Selections
Diverse Works
Houston, TX

Above and opposite:
installation, 3 views
Millie Wilson/Romaine Brooks
The Painter Who Is Not One 1990
paintings, photographs
13x25 feet

The Painter Who Is Not One is dedicated to Tony Greene.
Acknowledgments

I am very pleased that Artists Space is presenting *Post-Boys & Girls: Nine Painters* and am grateful to Ken Apteckar for his enthusiasm and clarity in proposing and organizing the exhibition.

Ken Apteckar is a painter whose work explores cultural myths surrounding gender. The ideas initiating *Post-Boys & Girls* originate from the existing critical discourse on gender issues in photography, video and graphic media. This exhibition challenges the notion of these as the only viable means of engaging in this discourse and argues the case for the critical capabilities of painting in this post-media climate. Not only is painting alive and well but the depth of its conceptual range is explored in this exhibition with renewed commitment. One suspects these artists have been painting all along.

On behalf of Millie Wilson, Artists Space would like to thank Art Matters, Inc. for their support of *The Painter Who Is Not One*. I would like to thank Robert Edelman and Bess Cutler for their support of the catalogue accompanying the exhibition and also Connie Butler, Artists Space Curator, whose able coordination helped to make *Post-Boys & Girls* a reality.

*Susan Wyatt*
*Executive Director*