

**FEMINIST  
PERSPECTIVES  
IN ARTISTIC PRODUCTIONS  
AND THEORIES OF ART**

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**WITCHES AS OTHERS - FEMINISM AND  
VISUAL ARTS IN THE 1970s FRANCE**



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To answer to the question of the fabric of a feminist art history, I am going to speak about the results of my PhD. It aims to know and understand what had occurred in art during the period of claim of the Women's Liberation Movement, second feminist wave centered on the rights related to the women's bodies. This history of women artists had remained almost unknown in his historical and social French context. This PhD has been reworked and published under the title *Witches as others* (Dumont 2014), a title that echoes the stories of women and feminism, in plural, in the 1970s in France, which had not been written yet, a counter-history, a story of witches, in the meaning of people that do not match standards. All the work in painting, textile, multimedia, video, performance, and all combined work, the artists' careers, the feminist collectives are part of this multifaceted, plural herstory.

Finally, publishing an anthology of Anglo-American feminist texts before this book, called *The Rebellion of the Second Sex*, I wanted to convey analysis tools into French history in order to take together the dominant feminist theory and that of undervalued ones, to give access to a more complex vision of the 1970s that is taking into account various legacies, memories, histories or cultures. To understand the revolt of women artists, we must understand their position on the French art scene, so I made a large sociological study of their place on the Parisian artistic scene, bringing new figures. I will then present the different groups of women artists who joined and rebelled against this situation. Finally, with the reflexive perspective on all the material accumulated over 15 years on the subject, I will detail several types of works chosen among hundreds of artists, from recurring issues that reflect the spirit of this time.

## FRENCH HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The period considered starts with May 1968 revolt until the arrival of the left in power with the election of François Mitterrand in 1981. The principal claims were the decriminalization of homosexuality, the refunding of abortion, the legalization of immigrants and the creation of local free radios. This political takeover was accompanied by a cultural takeover and represents the victory of art forms which up to that point were undervalued. Concerning the arts, the Seventies saw the blossoming of a myriad of tendencies which divided the artistic scene, from the deconstructions of the canvas by *Supports/Surfaces* to the political claims of the collectives of the Salon of the Young Painting (Salon de la Jeune Peinture). The artistic magazines echoed of debates and choices, as well as the main exhibitions centers. The various social movements which crossed the society during this decade acted towards taking control of their living conditions by various groups.

The feminist movement re-appeared following May 1968, facing the impossibility for women to have their voice heard within the mixed political groups. The protests are linked with sexuality by the laws on abortion, contraception, physically abused women or raped women, but also with social claims such as the law for equal wages and recruitment. The idea of non-vaginal and non-heterosexual female sexuality starts to be more recognized. The fights of the Seventies will precisely relate to the separation of sexuality and procreation. They were influenced by antifascists and anticolonialists protests emphasizing the right of the people to decide for themselves, even if they are not conscious. They fought against a hierarchy of social roles based on sexual discrimination. Feminists showed the existing link between the public and private spheres, making domestic economy a key of the political field for the exploitation of women. Women artists center much more their work on their specificities of woman subject. Recording daily life is a recurring element of these practices; they carry out investigations on themselves, include their emotions in the process, and connect it with their social role. From the collective recognition of patriarchal oppression, they develop new analytical tools making it possible to understand their situation. It is in this context of opening and changes of mentalities that it is necessary to put in perspective this history of women artists. The presages of the feminist movement are also felt in the mid-1960s, when many women artists break with their past practice and get involved in the feminist movement.

Niki de Saint Phalle creates her first Nanas in 1964 ; the same year, Nicola destroys her abstract paintings to create environments ; and ORLAN makes her first photographic performances ; in 1968, Tania Mouraud burns her old paintings and creates installations, Monique Frydman stops painting and participates in MLAC, a feminist movement for contraception and abortion, pushed to choose "between painting or fighting" ; Gina Pane makes her first action in the nature ; Lea Lublin moves from a figurative painting to a question about the system of perception ; in 1969, Françoise Janicot puts wire on her monochromes and goes out in the street, etc. These acts of rupture indicate an



awareness of the changes taking place in relation to art and social relations. The visual artists are involved in the creative energy of the protest period, express their own concerns, which disrupt their means of expression and renew them.

## SITUATION OF WOMEN ARTISTS ON THE ARTISTIC SCENE

Let us see now the situation of women artists on the Parisian artistic scene. I will quickly recall professional path followed by the artists since their formation at the Art School until their international recognition, using figures resulting from my own counting.

Women entered tardily to the Art School of Paris (École des Beaux-Arts), but formed already from forty to fifty per cent of the pupils and the proportion increase towards the end of the decade. On the other hand, almost none of them occupy a post of teacher. The difficulties are rather to locate side of the integration of internal limits at the fact of becoming wholly an artist, and restricted possibilities of integration to the networks of inter-knowledge of the art world. And the abyss opens when their presence in the galleries, exhibitions and art magazines are analyzed. General art magazines (such as *Cimaise*, *XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, *Opus International*, *Chroniques de l'art Vivant*, and so on) or more avant-gardist ones (*Robho*, *Artitudes*, *Art Press*, *Docks*, and so on) do not grant more than five per cent of their space to work of women artists, oscillating between nothing and a little more than twenty per cent depending on the magazine. Their visibility is almost non-existent there.

For the exhibitions, the main shows counted between fourteen and twenty per cent women artists. Famous and discussed exhibition 'Twelve years of contemporary art in France' organized in 1972 to show the interest of Georges Pompidou for modern art, counted only four women out of 106 artists (3.77 per cent). In the same way, a place with strong visibility and dynamics such as the ARC, related to the Museum of Modern Art of the City of Paris, counts only 13.57 per cent of women, collective and individual exhibitions included, and was considered as a place engaged in favour of unknown women artists.

For the national collections, either it is the National Museum of Modern Art (Centre Pompidou), the National Fund of Contemporary Art (FNAC) or the Museum of Modern Art of the City of Paris, women artists account for 12 % of the work displayed over the period 1970-1982, the remaining works of this period (88 %) being of men artists. Lastly, and to close this disastrous chapter, the international exhibitions (Documenta, Biennale of Venice) presented some approximately 10 %, and the indicator of notoriety of the artists of Kunst Kompass 5 % (the figures cover all the exhibitions of the decade, but only 1974 for the Kunst Kompass). The rarity of the presence of the women artists is obvious and leads thirty years later to their disappearance of the memories.

If no apparent discrimination appears in the basic courses, it turns out that it exists at the beginning of the journey many differences in projection in mentalities, often interiorized. The difference becomes obvious when entering the artistic scene. Shows and national exhibitions materialize also the glass ceiling, international exhibitions confirm it and the history of recent exhibitions on the subject confirms the historicisation of their invisibility, until *elles@centrepompidou* in 2009 tries to fill the gap. It is in this context that women's anger and the creation of groups of artists to fight this discrimination has to be interpreted.

## THE CREATION OF A PARALLEL NETWORK: THE GROUPS

In a second time, facing the obvious and revolting discrimination lived in this art world, artists started to meet and set up groups of women artists to reflect on their situation and to propose solutions. The only public source existing was an article of Aline Ballier, unfortunately incomplete, but never worked over again and enriched before (Ballier 1978). It was supplemented by about seventy talks and systematic examination of twenty artistic magazines and twenty-five feminist ones, without counting all the catalogues of exhibitions, many books and private archives. Seven important groups thus were listed and analyzed, showing action and theorization characteristics.

The first group results from the one of the oldest shows of women created in 1881, the Union of the Women Painters and Sculptors (UFPS), and which will be renovated in 1975 by Christiane de Casteras, bringing a scission and the birth of Feminine Dialogue (Féminie-Dialogue).



Both proposed annual exhibitions of women with 200 artists approximately, with the aim of showing work, without feminist option, even if the second group is more opened to this issue. Thanks to the intervention of Aline Dallier, it will show a corpus of works related to textile art, still little known in France but worked by many artists. In 1972 was born The Spiral (La Spirale), under the aegis of Charlotte Calmis, who thinks from an esoteric point of view of women's capacity of creation, organizing only one exhibition, with more traditional works.

In reaction to the international women's year and the exhibition of Féminie-Dialogue sets up itself Women in fight (Femmes en lutte), a group related to the Salon of the Young Painting (Salon de la Jeune Peinture), where they carry out a collective exhibition showing stereotyped images of women in the media and denouncing domestic conditioning. It was anonymously presented, because they did not want to expose personal work collectively, but to think of the situation of women in the society and make common proposals. Also in reaction to this exhibition of Féminie-Dialogue, and in reaction to the cancellation of a great exhibition of women having to take place in the Museum of Modern Art of the City of Paris, was created in 1976 the Women/Art (Collectif Femmes/Art). They carry out small exhibitions of members throughout their existence, publishing three bulletins of thoughts and animating meetings on these topics. Like the other groups, there were meetings between artists and they create friendly supportive networks, as well as a theoretical work and exhibitions. Their attention was directed towards graphics and painting, even if some actions took place in the group. The principal theorist was Françoise Eliet, and one feels the dominant psychoanalytical influence of her approach.

In 1978 was created the group Art and Women's Gaze (Art et Regard des Femmes), which organized meetings and was the only one to set up a place used as a gallery, a workshop, a formation and discussion space. Creations wanted to be interdisciplinary there, but were mainly centered on visual arts. Nicole Millet, Danièle Blanchelande, Mariette Teisse-renc and Ody Saban ensured the dynamics. Many self-educated or very isolated women came there. Another place made it possible to show works of women, the space of the tea-library animated by Yolaine Simha, and the bookshop-magazine-gallery Des Femmes of Antoinette Fouque. Lastly, the feminist magazine *Sorcieres* (Witches), directed by Xavière Gauthier, made it possible for the work to reach a larger audience, filling a little the lack of diffusion in the feminist press, which almost did not retransmit what occurred on the artistic scene. All these groups were linked by the principal protagonists to the main political and feminist tendencies, but that was little showed.

These various regroupings made it possible for artists to meet, leave their isolation of woman and artist, to show their works, to discuss, and to exhibit them. All these activities will cease at the beginning of the 1980s. If institutional repercussions were less evident, personal repercussions of artist's identity construction were real. The artists reported, during the talks which I had with them, the importance of the impulse that the participation in these groups gave to their creative life, installing a confidence in themselves. At the same time appeared theories concerning the production of works by women artists in articles and books. Opinions diverge on the subject, but one clearly feels the intellectual effervescence around these questions.

## THE ANALYSIS OF WORKS

The two last parts of my study analyses the works of a hundred artists, classified in two large blocks, one concerning works without obvious criticism, the other works criticizing the stereotypes spread in the society. Only some examples will be given here, in order to show what was at stake in several ways in the artists' work, which borrow from all techniques and styles. I am going to operate like a little walk in the production of these years.

### An abstract way

A first series of studies consider this issue in an abstract way, putting attention to the sequences of time and to the registration of their experiences in traditional mediums. Liliane Camier draws frames of unbound textile that are floating in space and telling a story about the rise and fall of desire. Among the words that accompany the sewing threads, we read "urban tissue, muscle tissue, tissue that are



unraveled”, words that are playing with the material represented and the support of the canvas, but also with the textile work that was then assigned to women. The learning of weaving merges with the learning that frames our lives.

Judith Wolfe is also interested in textile in its relationship to the canvas, but using the pictorial medium. In the context of the women's movement, the artist begins to work freely with the canvas, out of the chassis, out of the frame, with cut papers that reproduce large figures that she called totems. These totems are revealed in an exhibition at the Art and Women's Gaze Gallery (Art et Regard des femmes) in 1980. The presence of the body has become more tenuous, more ghostly in these violent tears that divide the color space and pass their strength on us. The canvas is also used literally for the threads which compose it.

Pierrette Bloch thus gives up painting and creates a series of stitches in the 1970s, claiming that the work is resurfacing a buried memory that she allows herself the right to let appear. She offers a meditation on time by the repetition of actions that vary depending on her state and gives rise to a linear writing in his hand-knitting of threads in volume. She uses a range of nodes and threads that evokes ancient treasures and creates an abstract space with simple formalism that takes us in her history, in her sequences of time and in her very organic material that always changes with light and is made with subtle densities. Pierrette Bloch carries this feminine learning to another level of achievement.

Bernadette Bour also creates from the frame of textile or canvas and she plays on its proximity to human skin. She uses different variations of this game between painting and canvas. Canvas or blotting paper is scratched, patterned with the sewing machine, painted over, left raw, in a real game with the material that evokes the human skin. The red canvas is made using large strips of canvas and wrapping tissue pasted on, then the artist sew holes and ups and down dots with a sewing machine. Then she applies painting that penetrates through the holes. The steps are sometimes repeated several times, a process that plays on the clarity or the obscurity of the work, giving an impression of depth or of flatness. The symbolism of this sewing taught to girls, with the penetration of the needle, the flow of painting in the edges of the holes, is obviously related to issues that drive the feminist movement. For the artist, the interest lies in the deconstruction of the frame and in the thread, which is also the thread of life, which symbolizes the hidden female work.

## A peaceful vision of women

In these abstract works, aware of their quotations, critical of the dominant media, artists refer to specific social conditions that they exceed to inscribe these legacies in the field of contemporary art and collective memory. Between avant-garde art and a feminist point of view that is calling it into question; something of the patriarchal order is undoing itself. Other artists will explore a peaceful vision of women and explore body as landscapes on the edge of abstraction, more oriented towards the spiritual. Myriam Bat-Yosef is as much interested in the mystical experience as in women in her paintings which cover entirely the canvas, objects or bodies. Influenced by Taoism, Tantra and cabbala, she tries to restore the balance between masculine and feminine polarities. Of Jewish origin, she is marked by the history of Jerusalem, about which she proposes a game, *Les Boules de Jérusalem* (the balls of Jerusalem, 1971), a painted object made of ten balls that you have to maintain together in order to unify and pacify the city. Balance is also present in *Fer femelle* (the female Iron, about 1964), which replies to *Cadeau* (gift, 1921) by Man Ray. To the sole trimmed with nails, Myriam Bat- Yosef opposes colored interlacing drawings that evoke a female vagina. Other objects, such *Stool for her* (1969), are manipulable and evoke a female pleasure. Women can place it between their legs while sitting and give themselves pleasure through shoetree attached to the seat. Like this, male connoted objects are diverted from their first use. This pictorial system that combines humor and sensuality is afterwards extended to the body during performances.

The body is also the vector for the revaluation of technical and social roles of women, especially in work marked by an ambivalence made of both acceptance and revolt. Thus, Christiane de Casteras and Andrée Marquet create soft sculptures from recycled textiles that are valuating female figures. They are exhibited in various exhibitions of Féminie-Dialogue. *Au fil des jours* (throughout the day) is one of the first artworks of this kind in 1976. Two recumbent statues lie side by side, in honor of the death of one of the parents of an artist. Clothes have an emotional charge that is valued by a patient sewing to mark this passage of time. *La Guerre* (war, about 1979) highlights the human fragility of these bodies given to the war and that have become rag dolls and lifeless body. *La Grand-mère* (the grandmother, about



1977) is another of these soft sculptures, which honors the daily work of women before the age grasps them and leaves them without occupation. Sewing becomes for these two artists a means to denounce or to reevaluate.

Danièle Blanchelande actively participates in *Art et Regard des femmes* (Art and Women's Gaze) and broadcasts her work in the magazine *Sorcières* (witches). Through textile work, she endeavors to represent a sensory image of everyday life. In the series *Mémoires en blanc* (memories in white, 1979-1982), sheets reflect childhood, because her mother's illness required to change them very often. The artist is marked by permanent metamorphoses of this canvas, which keeps track of human presence, of these modest domestic activities that are undervalued, which also reflect sensuality, a mirror of the wrinkled skin. This issue of the recognition of domestic work as well as the exploration and expression of sexuality are clearly inscribed in the feminist movement.

Agnes Stacke also draws bodies of women in which desire and fusion predominate, which are also broadcasted by *Sorcières* (witches). Thin strokes emphasize anatomy, specific experiences in a fluid motion that leads us to the heart of intimacy. In a more humorous vein, the 1970s are an opportunity for Trille Bedarrides to bring out a series of drawings of hybrid women, who take possession of the world with great facetiae, humor. Kinds of "Gullivertes", these giant women are a version of *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) by Jonathan Swift, as they play with small men with great pleasure.

## More disturbing works

Besides these visions of the world that are rather playful, some artists produce more disturbing works, with an impression of fear. Claude Cehes carves very mortal bodies, seen from the inside. Shackled by chains, the bodies seem destined to torture, such as in *La Maternité* (Motherhood), which reveals a whitish fetus. These sculptures are made in transparent resin, polyester and bone to evoke the camps and their atrocities, memories that are still very present in France. Similarly, Alina Szapocznikow, who lives in France, presents a terrifying organic world, but she combines it with an eroticized pop culture. Haunted by the Holocaust and the disease, she develops sexualized objects, body parts that oscillate between death and eroticism, between a playful seduction and a memorial commemoration.

Distorted bodies made by Monique Frydman are part of this process of reclaiming women's bodies, following her participation in the liberation movement of abortion and contraception (MLAC). Her drawings in chalk and charcoal depict bodies that are tipping over into the void, in search of her identity as a woman artist. The sinister dance of the bodies on the wall of her workshop creates terror, discomfort in front of the distorted limbs. Monique Frydman is trying to find an instinctual territory that makes her need to paint after a total stop around 1968. The discussions that arise about sexuality, then repressed, echo this work that presents bodies escaped from dark.

Lou Perdu stages dolls with empty eye orbits, mutilated bodies in decorations that are more maternal in her series *Perdue d'elle* (lost of herself), which is broadcast by *Sorcières* (witches). The dolls come from flea markets and live stories related to maternity, successively disturbing and sensual, where the abandonment shows just beneath the surface, but they live also traumatic events, rape and violent crime, or women's taboo experiences, such as menstruation. The series *Poupons* (baby dolls) and *Bedans-dehors* (inside-outside) include these ambiguous symbols, between sweetness and violence, as this baby whose umbilical and nourishing cord seems to strangle him and prevents him to talk.

This atmosphere of dread is also present in the dolls made by Eva Aeppli since the late 1960s. Through this, she expurgates the trauma of World War II. *Augusta* (1972) is dressed in red, sitting on a chair and crossing her long slender fingers. She features a skull with black orbits, similar to blinded craters. Similarly, *Kaya* features so ridiculous female symbols, a red flower on the side of her face and lips very painted with makeup. The death introduces itself in these presences, recalling the vanity of beauty. Arisen from the thickness of the night, these figures vary between seduction and death, as the figures or those of Alina Szapocznikow, Christiane de Casteras and Andrée Marquet.

The anguish and loneliness also arise in hyper-realistic paintings by Sabine Monirys, starting from a news item reported in the newspapers. The sentence extracted from an article questions the meaning of the scene represented by the gap introduced between the image and the words. If *La personne ne répond pas aux questions* (the person does not answer the questions, 1978), is it not that she committed suicide?



The artist showed a lot of irony in *Comment décrire le clair de lune ?* (how to describe the moon?, 1978), which seems a very problematic issue for this woman, who echoes the photograph *Woman of the High Plains* (1938) by Dorothea Lange. There is a sense of threat and absence in these paintings, where people are struggling with a dark world, echoing the feminist discussions on appearance, but also the specific dangers that women face in society. So *Voulez-vous visiter la serre?* (do you want to visit the greenhouse?, 1976) offers under an attractive title a scene where a hand raises a white sheet, from which emerges a hair, in a macabre atmosphere of police investigation. The unconscious is as ubiquitous in this work, especially in a series that foreshadows these tables, as *Passage* (1976), a huge chair in pop colors with armrests that evoke breasts, which cushion is covered with sperm and which disproportionate size is oppressive.

## More directly targeted tasks reserved for women

Raymonde Arcier and Andrée Marquet are more directly targeted tasks reserved for women, such as domestic works, echoing criticism of social roles that preserve the patriarchal organization of society. Andrée Marquet deals with this everyday life with humor in drawings where objects are piling up and take all the space, such as *Torchons* (dishcloths, around 1977) and *La vaisselle sale* (the dirty dishes, around 1979), to discuss the large scope of the domestic work. The confined space evokes the weight of these repeated tasks and the large distribution of appliances do not detract her work, as ironically highlights *L'âge d'or* (the Golden Age, 1976). Similarly, Raymonde Arcier was involved in the feminist movement, which gives her the courage to undertake as self-taught studies of sociology and to achieve great sculptures by crocheting wool, cotton and metal, which are symbols of domestic confinement. In this way, a large sweater, bags or dolls of two meters high are knitted. Metal knitting means to feminize a male artist material. In 1977, Raymonde Arcier made a huge woman who seems crucified with household and sexual tasks, *Au nom du père* (in the father's name), about which the artist speaks of female heritage or legacy. Both artists create symbols of domestic servitude and emphasize the ambivalence of attachment to female transmission and willingness to change the given, to change the order.

The question of desire is also a great concern among feminists and many artists strive to give their view of feminine desire, causing plural artworks. Among them, Jacqueline Dauriac and Dorothee Selz revisit pornographic images. Jacqueline Dauriac puts away the pornographic image by putting layers on subjects that imposes a distance face to the immediate consumption that characterizes pornography. The gendered attributes are floating, as in *L'homme aux bas et soutien-gorge* (the man with stockings and bra, 1974). Jacqueline Dauriac dissects the relationship between pleasure and gaze in this type of production, giving back to the models their intimacy that pornography would like to reveal in its entirety.

In 1974-1976, Dorothee Selz also questioned the images in the series *Mimétisme relatif* (limited mimetism), where she staged herself in an ironic posture modeled after a pornographic magazine. His copy highlights the inability to match these models and puts these images of calendar pinups girls towards the ridiculous. The use of sweet texture reinforces the artificial, deliberately kitsch of this world. The criticism is about the erotic image imposed on women that creates a split between their being and the idealized image.

## Liberators gestures

To undo these sclerosing links, others will use liberators gestures. Aline Ribière thus creates dresses, all of which are like ornaments used during ceremonies, supports for an experience that questions the relationship between the body and social space. Aline Ribière so lives in a red dress (*La Robe Rouge*, 1976-1977) that she compares to a home and that is a passageway to another identity. In 1978, she created a second skin, *Le Filet* (the net), which surrounds her body and allows her to draw liberation movements in space. Only the energy of anger allows her to reject the net, a sort of giant alga in which the body is stuck. The liberation energy and some sensuality emerge from this ritual without public, where the action transforms objects, between private and social space. In reclaiming women's cultural legacy, the fabrication of dresses, Aline Ribière associates them to sexual liberation, to the liberation of imposed roles, and keeps memory of women desires and revolts.



Françoise Janicot creates also a performance which symbolizes the liberation from the patriarchal shackles. This action comes tardily, after a period of abstract painting and photographic work on the hidden signs. Her reaction to the awakening of her isolation, of her confinement far from the concerns of other women, of her difficult situation to be an artist, mother and wife, was thrilling. In 1971-1972, she develops the *Encoconnage*, a performance that lasts approximately twenty minutes and puts the artist's body in situation of pain. Echoing the sound piece by Bernard Heidsieck, series of words spoken in different tones, the artist wraps herself with rope from feet to head, until she suffocates and cut the rope to be released. She was wrapped like Egyptian mummies which one wished to preserve from the attack of time. For Françoise Janicot, this action is a statement of how was her life and also a rite of passage to another condition. This action is literally the opposite of a striptease and doing this, she creates a piece of a great visual beauty, which contrasts with the violence of its content. Rolling up is like the cottony threads of the chrysalis, which will break its cocoon to fly away and become a butterfly, having broken its chains.

In 1976, ORLAN is also interested in the interface between the public space and the women's bodies. She is challenging standards by walking in the streets of Caldas da Rainha, a Portuguese city, wearing a dress that shows her naked body (*S'habiller de sa propre nudité / Dressing in his own nakedness*, 1976). More importantly, she dares violate the permission of the FIAC, the international contemporary art fair in Paris, and imposes its will by selling kisses to five francs. She made her body the place of a public discussion, fighting against the standards building the feminine and the masculine identities, which are exerted by social pressures on human body. The *Baiser de l'artiste* (Kiss of the artist, 1977) took place at the International Fair of Contemporary Art of Paris (FIAC). Standing on a white podium, beside a mannequin made of a photograph representing her as a Madonna, ORLAN awaits the volunteers. She has just written two texts with Hubert Besacier: *Face à une société de mères et de marchands* (Facing a society of mothers and merchants) and *Art-Prostitution*, where she claims the right to make a free use of her body and denounces the merchant art system. Her chest became a slot-machine collecting money. She challenges the public several hours per day: 'Come, come, come on my pedestal, that of the myths: the mother, the whore, the artist.' The public has the choice between offering a candle or buying a kiss. She played thus with the roles of virgin and whore in which the society locks up women, selling devotion or pleasure on the same plan. This reappropriated body becomes a transgressive tool, connecting Catholicism, prostitution and the status of woman artist.

Lea Lublin also transgresses social assignments, that she denounces by presenting her baby to the public in the salon de May in Paris in May 1968 (*Mon fils*, My son, 1968). The artist presents herself with her son in a cradle, places a portrait of the baby on the wall, in a Plexiglas picture, and a piece of its coverage, and then provides him care and plays with the child as she would have done at home. In this violent act, she confronts the reality and its representation, mixes his activity as a mother to the one as artist in order that the public questioned the relationship between creation and socio-cultural environment. In some of her projects, she is particularly interested in hidden aspects, in the unspoken of old paintings, in the deconstruction of the gaze that we put on the images. So she changes the vision we have of the painting *Judith décapitant Holopherne* (Judith Beheading Holofernes), painted by Artemisia Gentileschi in 1620. Small paintings emphasize the invisible traces of memory in the perceptual system proper to the seventeenth century (*Le milieu du tableau / the middle of the painting*, 1979). Instead of focusing on the beheading, Lea Lublin emphasizes the role of the sword as a phallus and the importance of the open legs from which flows a stream of blood, which evokes a rape, a castration, a defloration or childbirth. Influenced by psychoanalysis and the feminist movement, the artist shows the invisible content of the artworks. She also questions the discourse on art and women, for example when she carries a banner and throws it into the river Seine, during a day of action on the confinement that takes place in March 1978 in the workshop of Françoise Janicot.

"Is the woman a sexual victim? Is the woman an immaculate picture? Is the woman a holy mother? Is the woman a bag of sperm? Is the woman a private property? Is the woman the evil of the century? Is the woman the maid of all work?"

(*Dissolution dans l'eau / dissolution in water*, 1978)

Lea Lublin argues that women are excluded from the civilization of the eye and she wants not only to have the right to speak, but also to deconstruct existing images.





This interest in the unconscious grows with the work of Maria Klonaris and Katerina Thomadaki, who are interested in the elements that constitute feminine identity within the film industry. They use tricks that highlight the performativity that governs the construction of female identity and introduce the concept of “bodily cinema” (“cinéma corporel”) to define their work. The projections include a whole staging, multiple screens, slides and films. For example, in *Soma* (1978), the movie is punctuated by the beat of the heart, the images of their bodies are invaded by red effusions and slides interpose on these scenes. Bodies become strange colorful landscapes, eroticized, on which artists operate. Through this rich plastic work, with still and moving images, sound, interaction between mediums, both artists take us to the heart of a fantasy, an experience that shows the articulated desire of living memories, embodied memories, that mixes dreams and fantasies in a visual frame. They complicate the idea of femininity by creating these new images that are fully involved in the feminist movement.

## The public space

In contrast to this work that is going in the depths, some will act directly in the public space to impose their figures, like Niki de Saint Phalle’s *Nanas*. The huge *Nanas* oscillate between joy and abjection. This period was also the one of the adventure of the *Red Coat (Le Manteau rouge)* made by Nicola, who proposed a collective experience in several European and American cities.

Finally, I wish to present a work of Nil Yalter, who is known for its video performance *The Headless Woman or Belly Dance (La femme sans tête ou La danse du ventre, 1974)*, which denounced the excision and values the female erotic pleasure. But she also worked at the confluence of feminist, immigrant and workers issues, a less known part of her work that I try to reevaluate in the monographic essay I am working on. In 1981, she performed with Nicole Croiset *Femmes au foyer, femmes au travail* (Housewives, working women), a project done in La Rochelle that has three parts, two of which are related to the work of women and a third is related to Turkish immigration, called *Toprak*. This last one is never mentioned. It nevertheless works on topics addressed by the artist in the 1970s, in *La yourte ou Topak-Ev* (the yurt or Topak-Ev, 1973), about the Turkish nomads, in *Les Habitations provisoires* (temporary dwellings, 1974-1978), about the precarious dwellings in European shanty towns, in *La Communauté des travailleurs turcs à Paris* (the Turkish community of workers in Paris, 1976-1977) and a series of videos, photographs and drawings that combine feminist, immigrant and workers issues. In the 1981’s project, a poster is placed at the place of advertisements on the bus route that brings women workers to the city, a performance mingled fragments of the real to actions to highlight all the different daily activities of these women. These two parts evoke the situation of women in the district of Mireuil in the suburb of La Rochelle. The third part, *Toprak*, which means the earth, is a video made in Villeneuve-les-Salines, another suburb of La Rochelle where a Turkish community is living. This video refers to their living conditions and aspirations. The situation of women is analyzed, shown in the wider context of work or immigrant life conditions. Articulating the views, the artist reaches a greater intelligibility of social relations.

## Towards a widespread herstory

We can say that there was a particular form of women movement in visual arts in France, it was parallel to the social one, heteroclitic and dynamic, and it was blotted out of memories. They disrupt the norms, they challenge the construction of identities that have been fixed and contribute to change the social and artistic paradigm. Measuring the influence of this movement is difficult, but it seems that it was, as the social one, vaster than the circles of groups and artists concerned, as women were not satisfied any more with their situation and were not recognizing themselves any more in the images forged in their intention, like perfect homemakers, devoted mothers, Muses or sex-symbols. These images of the roles assumed by human beings according to their biological sex changed, and women became aware of certain alienations, but it still remains a lot to do to obtain an equal treatment in the artistic world and in the society. To transmit this herstory, to deconstruct the dominant history, to give voice to unknown artists is still important for future generations.

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