

Lisa Yuskavage, *The Ones That Don't Want To: Bad Baby*, 1991, oil on linen, 34x30 in. Elizabeth Koury Gallery, New York.

sive, the fantastic. (Recognizing the exhaustion of the modernist critique of the aesthetic, the impossibility of standing outside, answering it with something *uncontrollable*.)

Luce Irigaray: "To arrive at the constitution of an ethics of sexual difference, we must at least return to what is for Descartes the first passion: *wonder*. This passion is not opposed to, or in conflict with anything else, and exists always as though for the first time. Whatever identifications are possible, one will never exactly fill the place of the other — the one is irreducible to the other:

"When — states Descartes — our first encounter with some object surprises us and we find it novel, or very different from what we formerly knew or from what we supposed it ought to be, this causes us to wonder and to be astonished at it. Since all this may happen before we know whether the object is beneficial to us, I regard wonder as the first of all passions." □

Zoe Leonard

I am often mistaken for a man; at first glance, in casual encounters, on the street.

If I speak, my voice usually clears up the confusion and there ensues an awkward exchange during which

they apologize and I am expected to reassure.

What makes the difference in making me identifiable? An extra inch of hair, a thin T-shirt, a couple of extra pounds to round me out.

It is startling to see how the way I get treated shifts so rapidly depending on my assumed gender. Without anyone even calling me "Mister," I can now tell when someone takes me for a man.

As a man, I'm more anonymous. People don't speak to me on the street. No groping, no comments. Gay men cruise me. Silently. With their eyes. Men are casual with me; they ask me for money with a gruff camaraderie: "hey guy" or "brother." There is a looseness

to my encounters with deli men, or in hardware stores (until they figure it out, if they do).

Once I was kissing my girlfriend goodnight and a car full of men yelled "faggots."

Passing as a woman, the stroll is transformed. I get asked to "smile." Get flattering attention if considered pretty. My body and clothes are commented on many many times in one day. You know the score. Often the comments are rude, offensive, jarring. Sometimes scary. Threatening. The physical space around me shrinks.

Once I was walking behind a woman on the street at night. As I caught up with her, she started and turned and I saw the fear in her face, recognized it and said "don't worry, I'm a woman." We both knew what that meant. She relaxed and smiled.

The most uncomfortable encounters are when people can't tell if I'm a man or a woman. They just aren't sure and there is panic in their eyes. Why do they need

to know? So they know how to treat me? Why do female artists get asked what it's like to be — a female artist?

Do male artists get asked how gender enters their work?

Gender enters through the back door. I don't set out to make work about being a woman, but my experience of the world is female. Therefore, it's part of the point of view from which I make work. □

Lisa Yuskavage

I want to expose a specific state of mind that I have experienced as female: the flight from reality through wallowing in one's fantasies and suffocating in the sticky, candy-flavored sentiment that springs up around this state of mind. It's an extreme case of vertigo — the fear, not of falling, but of the knowledge that you want to fall.

I was born as a painter when I woke and found myself drenched in this saccharin-goo. Simultaneously, I was immersed in the traditional painting



Zoe Leonard, *Seated Anatomical Model*, 1991-92, gelatin silver print, 19³/₄x13¹/₂ in.

theory and technique of the big art Daddies. Instead of looking elsewhere, I opted to make my work out of personal experiences and desires: shame, guilt, fear, self-loathing, the longing for romance, flowers, a Barbie-doll body, a perfect painting surface and pretty colors.

By exploiting my private knowledge I am taking on the role of victimizer as well as victim of my own ambition.

What I'm describing may not be flattering to womankind, but making something artificially heroic, the strapping-on-a-dildo method of art-making or the relegation of being a good girl making quilts doesn't work for me.

I offer no solution. I don't believe there is one. □

Elaine Reichek

I've never been big on the boy's idea of art heaven, the one where all good painters and sculptors go. I've always had an alternative posterity in mind. From the very beginning, then, partly out of conceptual ambition but just as much out of gut response, I have made my work in opposition to mainstream considerations of appropriate materials, content, and form. I knit, I sew, I handpaint other people's photographs. These alternatives, of course, are all gendered ones. I have always tried to open up avenues of inclusion, so that the discourse of art

would embrace what had earlier been marginalized and devalued. But what is marginal has a way of becoming the center, and now I find myself being described as someone who uses "interesting" materials and subject matter.

All along, my methodology has included the replication of originals in such a way as to point out their spuriousness. For Judith Butler, gender is a learned construct; there is no "original" female role, only a "stylized repetition of acts." If this is so, then not just gender but the question of how we imagine our very identities as well as those of other cultures is put in

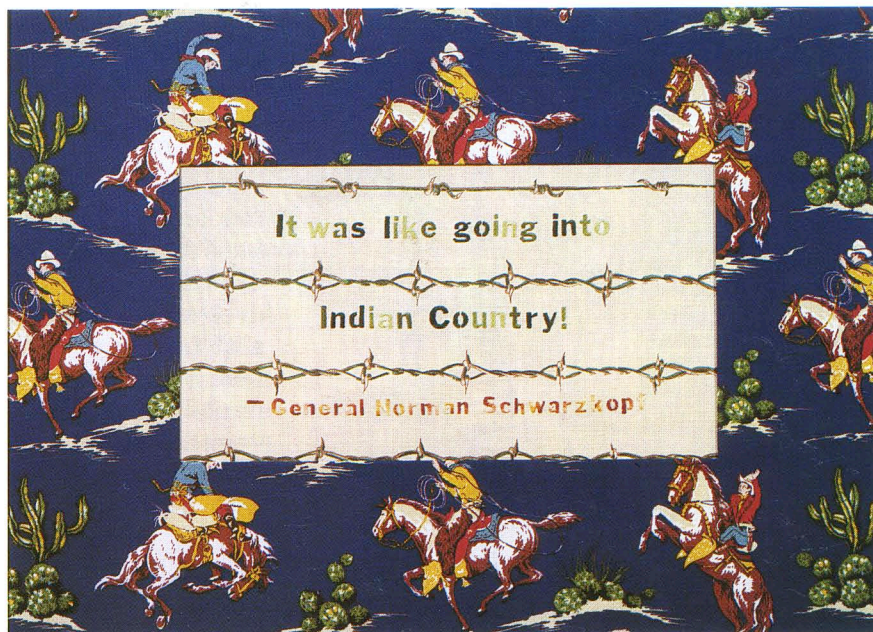
play. I see my repetitions of other people's representation of gender and culture as tools for questioning cultural norms.

For a recent body of work dealing with the codes of representation applied to Native Americans, I sewed a group of samplers adapted from original 19th century designs. Samplers taught whole generations of young girls what was valued in the society and what was valued in women. In one of my adaptations, *Home Sweet Home*, I substituted a teepee for the usual white cottage. I was asking, Just whose home is so sweet? And if home is really that sweet, why did women have to convince themselves of the fact by stitching it so laboriously? To return to Butler's terminology, this is what you might call a sampler in drag: "a different sort of repeating," a "breaking or subversive repetition of... style." □

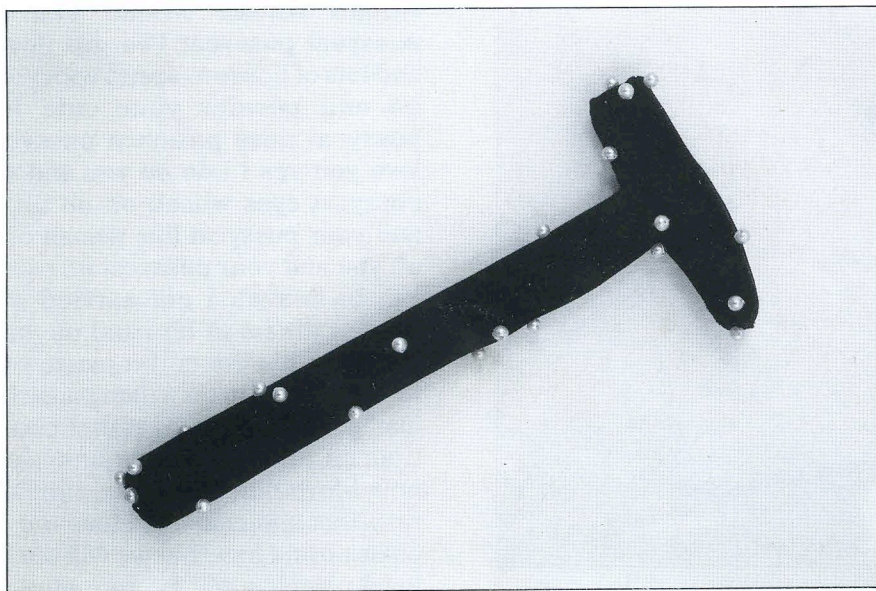
Judith Fleishman

Gender *n* [L *genus* birth, race, kind] 1. in many languages the grouping of nouns into a series of classes, such as masculine, feminine, neuter, etc.

Etcetera. Imagine you are born during the later half of the 20th century in an urban center of the industrialized West. It is near the end of the second millennium. You can almost



Elaine Reichek, *Yippe-Ei-O*, 1991, embroidery on cloth, 29¹/₄x40 in. Michael Klein Inc., New York.



Judith Fleishman, *The Velvet Hammer*, 1992, velvet, faux pearls, hammer, 13x5 in.