

girls on film

ZWIRNER & WIRTH

July 7 – September 2, 2005

Curated by Kristine Bell

Works by: **John Bock, Katharina Bosse, Carol Bove, Bozidar Brazda, Candice Breitz, Charles Cohen, John Currin, Marlene Dumas, Jacob Dyrenforth, Martin Eder, Dr. Lakra, Graham Little, Christian Marclay, Paul McCarthy, Josephine Meckseper, Wangechi Mutu, Elizabeth Peyton, Paul Pfeiffer, Francis Picabia, Richard Prince, Mel Ramos, Martha Rosler, Thomas Ruff, Christoph Schmidberger, Cindy Sherman, John Stezaker, Larry Sultan, Francesco Vezzoli, Andy Warhol, Franz West, and Lisa Yuskavage.**

Titled ***Girls on Film***, this exhibition features a selection of established and emerging artists whose work appropriates images of women taken from a variety of pop-cultural sources. Exploring society's long-running obsession with images distributed through magazines, advertisements, and the cinema, the works in this exhibition depict, manipulate, and examine three historical female archetypes: **the starlet, the pinup, and the fashion model**. The artists included in ***Girls on Film*** uniquely deconstruct or elaborate upon many of the cultural mythologies at the heart of our continued fascination with images of women found in the popular media.

As a starting point for the exhibition, we present two paintings by **Francis Picabia**: *L'élégante* (1942-43) and *Femme aux Chrysanthèmes* (ca. 1942). During World War II, Picabia painted images of starlets, nudes and fashionable women that he found in popular magazines and, in particular, erotic magazines of the 1930s. Picabia faithfully copied these images of women altering little from the original photographs. Signs of the photographic origins of his paintings - the harsh artificial lighting and snap-shot effects - were left deliberately obvious. Moreover, Picabia frequently chose images in which the female anatomy was distorted by sharp camera angles which he left uncorrected in his painted versions. He also seductively translated black and white images into color of his own choosing underscoring his fascination with the colors and textures of the female body. However, in spite of the fact that the women he chose often existed in a realm of stereotypical poses and cheap eroticism, Picabia's paintings of women in the 1940s demonstrate his interest in the fundamental differences between the genres of painting and photography. Each image selected and copied is implicated into this dialogue.



Francis Picabia
L'élégante
1942-43

L'élégante depicts an elegantly dressed woman with a period coif

that astutely captures the “style” of the 1940s. Since style can be considered as “one of the most immediate of historical deposits,” fashion - or the fashion world - as a subject in art can speak volumes about contemporary culture and history. The works in the front gallery mine fashion magazines and fashion advertisements seeking in their individual formats to explore why fashion remains a highly influential force on image-making in Western society. **John Currin’s** *The Cripple* (1997) depicts a smiling young woman clad in a sexy, sleeveless dress, posed in a typical contraposto fashion pose frequently employed in fashion editorials. Yet she is handicapped and leaning on a cane. **Wangechi Mutu’s** collage / *Am Your Brokenhearted Fantasy* (2003) fuses cutouts of women from fashion magazines with images culled from National Geographic and ethnographic and natural history books. Mutu’s compression of disparate images underscores not seamlessness but dissonance. Her excavation of Western media imagery creates figures that are “victimized by cultural contaminations.” As mutilation meets decoration and fashion models become hybrid animal creatures, typical tropes of femininity collide while traditional notions of race and beauty are destroyed. Similarly, in the photomontage *Cargo Cult* (1965-1974), **Martha Rosler**, whose work has been scrutinizing the ideologies that shape our social and cultural experiences since the early 1960s, offers a commentary on the reduction of women to their body parts used by advertisers to sell products. **Josephine Meckseper’s** hand-crafted surface-meets-substance assemblages incorporate appropriated fashion magazine advertisements for luxury goods with political images depicting scenes from what she refers to as “demonstration culture.” Mining magazines from the 1960s and 1970s, **Carol Bove’s** sensual ink wash drawing *Lee* (2005) draws us towards a woman stolen from a past generation. Bove, a collector of images and objects from a bygone era explores how the cultural significance of these women from the past is very different in today’s historical and political framework. By copying the image Bove moves toward fully possessing it in the present. However, our fantasies of the past are never fulfilled. **Graham Little**, whose drawing *Untitled* (2005), also copies an image of a woman found in a 1980s fashion advertisement, moves in the opposite direction, tying the fashion plate to the tradition of allegorical portraiture. Through Little’s intervention, the fashion model steps out of her 1980s stylishness, becoming a dream-like apparition of a lost goddess.

The main galleries bring together a group of artists that explore the idea of the sexualized female nude, or the “pinup”. Picabia’s *Femme aux Chrysanthemes* depicts an innocent young woman shyly smelling a flower that she holds to her nose. Her gaze, however, seeks out the viewers’ with an unexpected intensity. **Martin Eder’s** *Don’t Trust Violence* (2003) also depicts a young naked woman holding a flower, but the blood-red background imbues the atmosphere with an unavoidable sense of sadness,

despite the contrasting coyness of her stare. Eder's work, done from photographs of models, is deeply informed by what he sees as second-hand experiences transmitted through the media, in this case via pornographic films. His watercolors of lasciviously posed girls are a result of what he terms "commercialized memories" informed by images that one absorbs over a lifetime. Like Picabia, the notion of the original is rendered obsolete. **Lisa Yuskavage's** consumption of Penthouse magazines as a school girl emerges in *Night* (1999-2000), based on a 1970s pornographic image where a bombshell blonde caresses her bottom in a dreamy self-pleasuring moment. Yuskavage's work, however, comes out of unspeakable places where erotic images of women are funneled through art history. The discomfort viewers feel is a result of the distinct dualities instilled in the figure where both the beautiful and the gruesome, and the seductive and the repulsive reside. A similar moment is captured in the painting *Resist Me – That's All I Need* (2005) by **Christoph Schmidberger**, which catches an adolescent teen girl daydreaming in a room filled with sexual symbols. In his analysis of existing images and a study of art historical compositional devices, Schmidberger asserts an awareness of both traditional and popular iconography.

Richard Prince's *Untitled (girlfriend)* (1993) spins the traditional American pinup girl of the 1950s on its head: the typically airbrushed-to-perfection bombshell, à la Marilyn Monroe is replaced with the gritty, scrawny biker girl awkwardly splayed out naked on a Harley Davidson motorcycle. Using appropriated images of 1950s pinup girls from Latin American magazines, **Dr. Lakra** tattoos his figures with elaborate designs. Their apparent naiveté creates an atmosphere of mystery but the images still carry tension. In her *Centerfold (Untitled #96)* (1991), **Cindy Sherman** further plays off the traditional centerfold girl found in Playboy - but not as an available sex object. In presenting herself dressed as an adolescent girl mysteriously lying on the floor, the limpid sexuality in her pose is overcome by a pronounced psychological disconnectedness. The emotional weightiness of the girl's expression denies the viewer any sense of visual titillation. In his *Nudes* series, **Thomas Ruff** gathers from the internet erotic and often pornographic images which he subsequently manipulates by digitally enlarging, blurring, and coloring them. The results are beautiful photographs with an abstract and ethereal quality which seems to belie their erotic content. With *Nudes ama12* (2000), which evokes art historical referents such as Courbet's *The Origin of the World* (1866), the viewer may be satisfied to linger upon the photograph's sumptuous surface quality, or they may accept Ruff's invitation to recreate the fantasy for themselves. Mining pornographic magazines for the source of their work's medium are artists **Franz West**, **Paul McCarthy** and **Carol Bove**. Speaking to our longings and expectations for something greater than the world in which we find ourselves, West's collages from the 1970s operate with sex-appeal and are even openly pornographic. They transport

societal clichés and ideals of masculinity and femininity. **Paul McCarthy** mixes clichés with conventions to break down the social architecture of stereotypes. His photo-collage *Yaa-Hoo* (1996) pointedly speaks of the symbolic violence of our social conditioning by the mass media and the contagion of everyday life by media imagery. Paying homage to **Martha Rosler** in a collage of superimposed cutouts from 1960s and 1970s porn magazines, **Carol Bove** intelligently represents the erotic conscience of an era that reshaped our culture.

Celebrity culture is explored in the work exhibited in the second floor galleries, including **Andy Warhol's** *Silver Liz* (1965), which depicts an iconic image of Elizabeth Taylor. The exhibition also includes a work from **Richard Prince's** *Untitled publicity* series, in which publicity stills of celebrities, models, and musicians collected and inscribed with signatures by the artist are placed side by side, complicating issues of identity and authenticity and revealing the mechanisms behind our cultural desires. A selection of new collages by **John Stezaker** is also on view, in which found celebrity photographs of different film stars from the 1950s are cut from their original points of reference, uncannily melding into one another, or into abstract silhouettes. An example of **Cindy Sherman's** *Untitled Film Stills*, like her *Centerfolds*, explores the appropriation of the models of femininity projected by the media. A similar theme is critically taken up by the multi-media artist **Candice Breitz** in the dual-channel video installations from her *Becoming* series (2003), which show the artist mimicking the hackneyed monologues of famous starlets performing in mainstream Hollywood films. The work of **Francesco Vezzoli** exemplifies the artist's obsessions with cinema, glamour, art history, and pop-culture icons: the exhibition presents a needlework depicting Catherine Deneuve, based on Vezzoli's recent film project titled *Comizi Di Non Amore - The Prequel* (2004). In her delicately rendered paintings and drawings, including *Chloe* (2000), which depicts the Indy starlet Chloe Sevigny posing on the red carpet, **Elizabeth Peyton** reveals her sentimental adoration of pop-culture icons, known to the artist only through their photographic images.

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