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2002

REVIEWS

ATHENS: DESTE FOUNDATION

FUSION CUISINE

20 June – 30 October 2002

www.deste.gr

A presentation of current global feminist art would be interesting anywhere in the world. But in Athens, although women artists have established themselves in the contemporary Greek arena, female art practice has never been seriously addressed on a theoretical level. Any in-depth examination of gender issues in women's art has remained absent, thus curtailing the understanding and enjoyment of feminist creation. In *Fusion Cuisine*, with its medley of work by 21 artists from 13 countries, curator Katerina Gregos succeeds in redressing that imbalance.

Accustomed to seeing images of nude women created by and for men, we are now faced with women's notions of female sensuality reclaimed by the female gaze. Aptly, Sylvie Fleury's pink neon sign announces 'Pleasure' at the entrance to the exhibition, and much of this pleasure turns out to be subversive. In *Self-portrait*, Liza Lou glamorises a life-sized statue of herself with an opulent gold-beaded encrustation, transforming her body into an awesome fetish. Lou is known for covering mundane objects with tiny coloured beads, a technique referencing both art and labour-intensive women's handiwork.

The yellowed pages of *Little Women*, that classic work of girlhood awakening, with chapter headings such as Secrets, Confidential, and Burdens, support Eliza Jackson's guileless sketches of intimate auto- and homoerotic fantasies. Hilary Harkness also invites the viewer to scrutinise her meticulously painted stylised fictions of a hermetic, regimented military world without men. *Rearguard Action* shows a miniature cross-section of a submarine, in whose chambers identical, scantily clad girls perform a variety of ordinary and extraordinary tasks and bodily functions, including cleaning, peeing standing up, sex and surgery.

Fatimah Tuggar and Catherine Opie offer other domestic alternatives. Tuggar's photomontages and her video, from which the show takes its title, conflate and subvert cultural stereotypes surrounding cooking, serving and eating. On the other hand, Opie bends gender roles in her photographs of lesbian households. In Lina Theodorou's video *Archetypal*, the commonplace chores of bed-making and vacuuming morph into lyrical sequences of male and female

genitalia and lurking monsters.

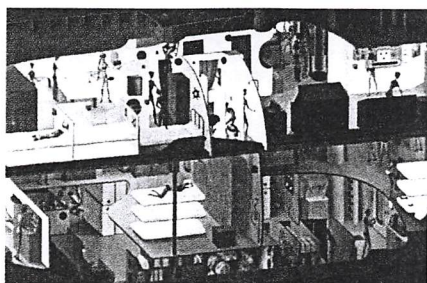
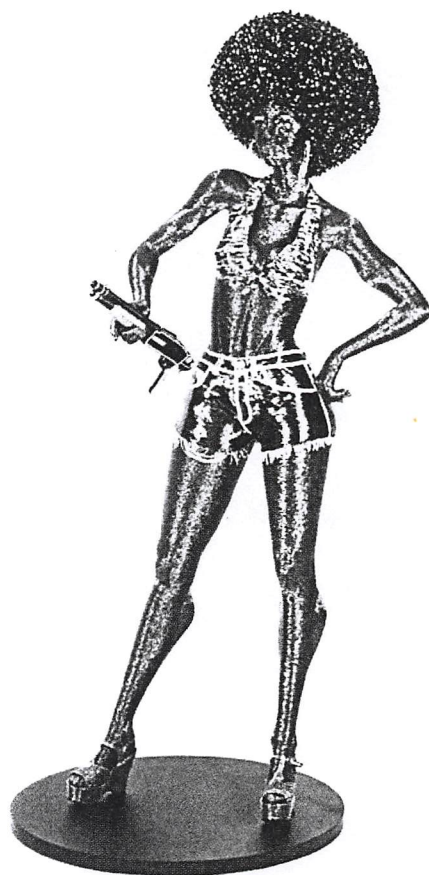
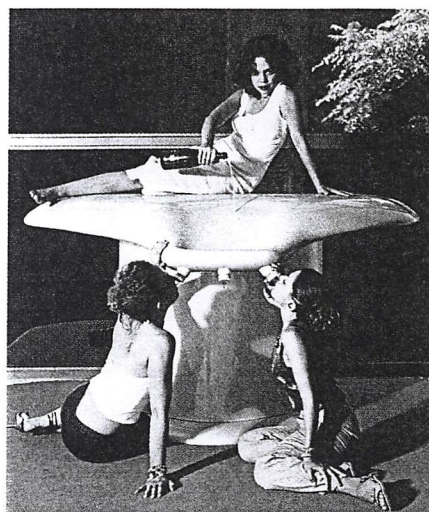
Unsurprisingly, much of this work is performative, with Tania Bruguera and Patty Chang appearing live during the course of the show. Both artists create psychologically disturbing and physically challenging scenarios. Chang dons missionary-style outfits, redolent of sexual repression, to act out ambiguous bodily functions (such as filling her mouth with hot dogs) which merge pleasure with pain. Janine Antoni's *Saddle* is a cast of the artist crawling abjectly on all fours, her body concealed by an animal hide exposed flayed side out.

One of the most provocative works in the show, Camilla Dahl's *Champagne Bar*, is both sculpture and interactive performance vehicle. Elevated on a pedestal is a slick platform reminiscent of a sixties Hollywood swimming pool: in the centre, a drain terminates in three baby-bottle teats. A pretty girl in a white dress, lounging seductively on the bar/pool top, pours champagne down the slope to viewers who squat awkwardly to suck on the teats. The champagne, which we would normally associate with pleasure, looks like foaming piss in this pool-turned-urinal. Then there are the teats: infantile gratification fused to sophisticated, adult activity, with overtones of sex, suckling, humiliation, delight, revulsion, and a host of other conflicting associations.

When the Women's Caucus for Art held its first meeting in New York in 1972, women artists were literally battling for their fundamental rights of equality and recognition in the last bastion of reactionary thought, the art world. At that time, the majority of artists in *Fusion Cuisine* were mere toddlers. Thirty years later, with the road paved by their valiant predecessors, this generation demonstrates the level of innovation and diversity in current female art practice.

Also in the exhibition are Cosima von Bonin, Monica Bonvicini, Lee Bul, Tracey Emin, Jitka Hanzlova, Elahe Massumi, Despina Meimaroglou, Maria Papadimitriou, Kiki Seror, and Lisa Yuskavage.

ANDREA GILBERT



clockwise from top left:

CAMILLA DAHL, *Champagne Bar*, 2001.
Courtesy: Dimitri Gigourtakis Collection

LIZA LOU, *Super Sister*, 1999.
Courtesy: the Dakis Joannou Collection, Athens

HILARY HARKNESS, *Taste of Salt*, 2000.
Courtesy: Bill Maynes Gallery, New York