

Exhibition Guide

Touched: A Space of Relations

**an exhibition exploring the sense of touch as a metaphor
of bodily presence and an extension across boundary**

bitforms gallery nyc

Feb 26 - April 16, 2011

curated by Laura Blereau



Lygia Clark
Structuring the Self, 1976-1988

“Clark’s experiences tend to merge the body’s interior and exterior spaces, stressing the direct connection between the body’s physical and psychological dimensions. The pure optical emphasis of her geometric abstract paintings from the 1950s are transformed by “Nostalgia of the Body” into sensory explorations of texture, weight, scale, temperature, sound and movement. These sensations are the basis of a non-verbal language employed both in the processes of self-discovery and collective explorations among a group of participants. There is a significant conceptual link between these collaborative explorations and the characteristic of telecommunications art Roy Ascott calls “distributed authorship”. Clark’s collective creations became her main focus during the period she lived in Paris.

...In the last phase of her work, Clark employed a vocabulary of “relational objects” for the purposes of emotional healing. Objects made of simple materials such as plastic bags, stones, air, shells, water, sand, styrofoam, fabric, and nylon stocking acquired meaning only in relation to the participant. Continuing to approach art experimentally, Clark made no attempt to establish boundaries between therapeutic practice and artistic experience, and was even less concerned with preserving her status as artist. The physical sensations caused by the relational objects as she used them on the patient’s body, communicated primarily through touch, stimulated connections among the senses and awakened the body’s memory. Clark’s use of relational objects in a therapeutic context aimed at the promotion of emotional balance.”

- Text excerpted from “Performing the Archive” by Simone Osthoff, 2009, pps 113-115

- Photo Courtesy of the Lygia Clark Foundation, Rio



Annette Messenger

My Trophies (Mes Trophies) (hand/spider), 1986-88

“In a group of works made from 1986 to 1988 titled “My Trophies”, Messenger drew upon the less-regarded arts of tattooing, palmistry, chiromancy, and children’s book illustration, as well as medieval manuscript illumination, to create photographs of body parts that were drawn over with whimsical figures, arcane symbols, and decorative marks. These appear to be fragments of bodies, but are estranged and transformed through drastic changes in scale.

Hung up high on the wall and tipped out at the top to loom over the viewer, or small and isolated so they appear very precious, work in this series by Messenger is removed from immediate experience. Some are transformed into other things through the covering up or the enhancement of their own characteristics: buttocks become a primitive face, a nose a small hut, the palm of a hand a landscape. Each one becomes an object of curiosity or devotion; reminiscent of reliquaries or ex-votos, they are a point of departure for reverence and reverie, curious meditations on physicality and transformation.”

- Text excerpted from the 1995 publication “Annette Messenger” produced in conjunction with a solo exhibition organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and The Museum of Modern Art, New York

- The 1995 exhibition featured other examples from the “My Trophies” series. Provenance details for this specific piece are as follows: Private Collection, New York; 1991 Galerie Crousel-Robelin, Paris



Janine Antoni
Conduit, 2009

Antoni's small copper sculpture takes the form of a gargoyle. The object is hollow in the center and conforms to the shape of a woman's body; it can be used as a device to allow a woman to urinate standing up. An accompanying photograph of the artist captures her using the gargoyle from a great height. The architecture acts as a pedestal for this exuberant gesture.

- Please see the artist's 2009 interview with Douglas Dreishpoon in [Art in America](#) the gallery's front desk for more information about this piece.

- Artwork Courtesy: Luhring Augustine, New York



Lynn Hershman Leeson

Kathe Kollwitz, a founder of the Guerilla Girls (Sighing), 2008

Kathe Kollwitz is the pseudonym of an anonymous woman who, along with others, founded the Guerilla Girls in 1985. Fighting against sexism and racism in politics and culture at large, this collective continues to attract attention for the issues they champion and the mysteries surrounding their identity. Founded on the occasion of MoMA's exhibition "An International Survey of Painting and Sculpture", which included only 13 women out of a selection of 169 artists, they are feminist counterparts to the mostly male tradition of anonymous do-gooders like Robin Hood, Batman, and the Lone Ranger.

This masked portrait was shot by Lynn Hershman Leeson as part of production for "Women Art Revolution", a documentary more than 40 years in the making about the a history of the American Feminist Art Movement.

- Artwork Courtesy: bitforms gallery nyc



Annette Messenger

My Trophies (Mes Trophies) (nipple), 1986-88

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-Text excerpted from the 1995 publication “Annette Messenger” produced in conjunction with a solo exhibition organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and The Museum of Modern Art, New York

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Lynn Hershman Leeson
Self Portrait as Another Person, 1966-68

A predecessor of Lynn Hershman Leeson's influential "Roberta Breitmore" series, "Self Portrait as Another Person" features a wax cast of the artist's face that was made in 1966. Characteristic of similar pieces created by the artist in this period, the face is framed by a wig with tousled hair. Calling up the ancient ritual of masking, make-up is applied to the face.

This work investigates identity construction in the modern era - specifically during the Civil Rights Movement. Using a black pigmented wax, Hershman's portrait is reconstructed with a dark skin tone, underscoring racial ambiguity.

A very early example of sculpture that integrates pre-recorded sound, a tape recorder with the artist's voice was added to the installation in 1968. At that time it was activated by a foot sensor as visitors approached the sculpture. In its present configuration, the tape recorder originally used is archived within the vitrine at the height of the figure's chest.

An object that is completed by the interaction of participants, this portrait asks questions and probes the viewer: "What did you say? Who are you? How do you spell your name? What was your first sexual encounter? I'd like to know you better. Are you in love with anybody? Can you trust me?".

- Artwork Courtesy: bitforms gallery nyc



Annette Messenger

My Little Effigies (Mes Petites Effigies), 1989-90

“In 1988, Messenger began working with groups of used stuffed toys, combining them with black and white photographs of body parts and bits of text in works titled “My Little Effigies”. Most often these works were installations, with the animals scattered across a wall, each necklaced with a photograph and shadowed by a word repeatedly crayoned on the wall....

The use of toys is reminiscent of the paradoxical nature of childhood, suggesting both a beloved familiarity and an unsettling sadism. Messenger is interested in this paradox, but where animals can often symbolize a darker, masturbatory childhood, replete with forbidden activity, Messenger's stuffed animals recall a broader range of childhood playacting and ritual.

These works are ambivalent: her animals can be talismans of youthful invention as well as the discarded accomplices of a maturing child. One of Messenger's intentions is that by drawing attention to the magical qualities of objects used in Western societies, the objects might recoup some of the status and even magic of objects used in daily rituals in other parts of the world.”

-Excerpted from the 1995 publication “Annette Messenger” produced in conjunction with a solo exhibition organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and The Museum of Modern Art, New York

- The 1995 exhibition featured other examples from the “My Little Effigies” series. Provenance details for this specific piece are as follows: Private Collection, New York; 1993 Josh Baer Gallery, New York



Lynn Hershman Leeson
Home Front – Cycles of Contention, 1993-2011

“Home Front – Cycles of Contention” operates as a miniature soap opera that is set within a gray dollhouse fashioned in the American style of Carpenter Gothic. Telling its story on two screens, one set within a kitchen and another positioned externally, the relationship of a married couple takes focus. The story of their presumed idyllic Saturday morning slowly erupts into a scene of domestic violence.

Two viewpoints of this narrative are examined: an objective private moment and a subjective recounting of this action afterward - bringing up conflicting memories. An unseen psychologist in the exterior world probes each character to remember the event differently, and eventually a pledge is made to remain committed in the relationship. Repeating in a 26 minute loop and positioned to contrast the fiction of memory with actual events, this installation enacts a drama reflective of destructive behavioral cycles, in which one continually vies for power.

- Artwork Courtesy bitforms gallery nyc



Janine Antoni
Up Against, 2009

Up Against continues the Antoni's exploration of the body as measure, and aligns it with the interior of an architectural structure. Through the space of a window, an unidentified part of the artist's body is visibly pressed into the bedroom furniture of a dollhouse.

- Artwork Courtesy: Luhring Augustine, New York



Lynn Hershman Leeson
Alchemist Wand for the 21st Century, 2011

An interactive sculpture, "Alchemist Wand for the 21st Century", identifies potentially lethal elements in its immediate surroundings. Part of a series of cleansing tools containing bristles plated in 24 karat gold, the wand senses invisible irritants in the air. During this exhibition, the piece will specifically detect alcohol. Different wands in the series, however, can detect ozone, carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide, natural gas, and a range of volatile organic compounds. A gateway to immortality, the broom symbolizes the universal solvent or philosopher's stone, and a life that is balanced through a thoughtful mix of witchcraft and science.

- Please ask the gallery for assistance in activating this piece.

- Artwork Courtesy: bitforms gallery nyc

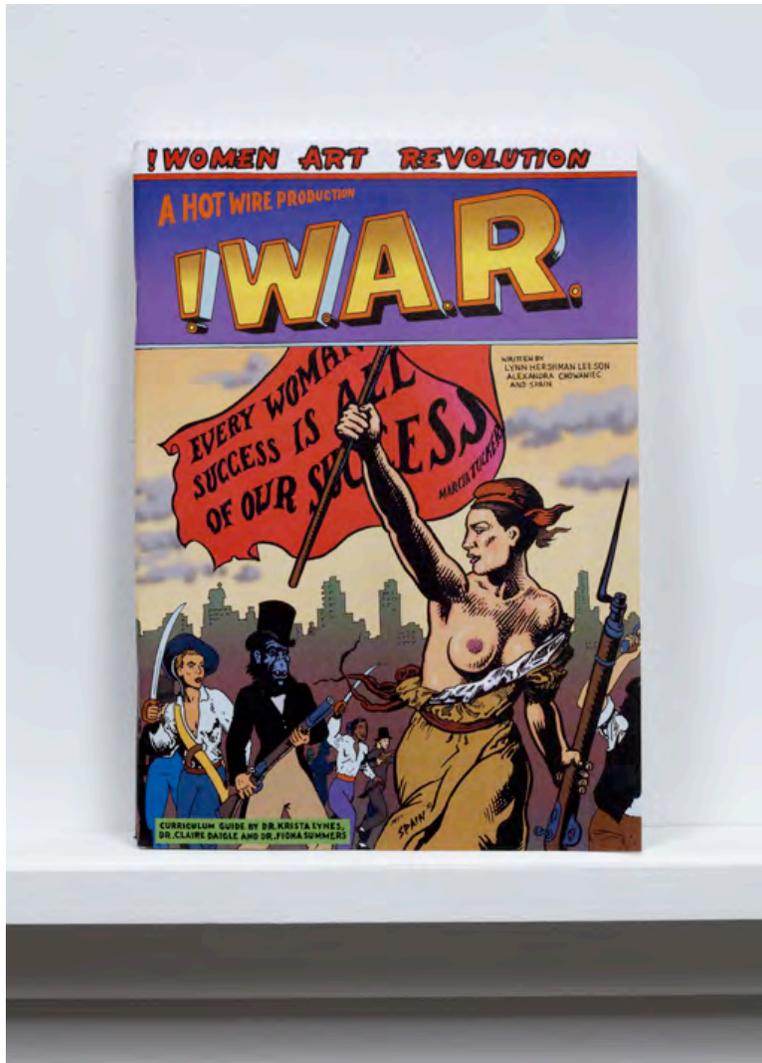


Janine Antoni
Ingrown, 1998

“This photograph of paralyzing, hypertrophic fingernails is rich with associations. It calls to mind vampires, hydras, or werewolves—monsters perched on the far side of sex appeal. At the same time, long nails are often a sign of beauty and distinction, and have served as status symbols in working-class America, imperial China, and Buddhist India (where it is men who cultivate them). The soft appearance of the fingers and hands here emphasizes a distance from manual labor (ironic for a sculptor), while the high-gloss, scarlet finish of the nails conventionalizes the image of women as idle, sensual objects. Clearly, the artist could not both make or photograph the work and wear them, and removing these narcissistic manacles requires further help or an act of wrenching pain. *Ingrown* encapsulates a renunciation of creative agency and, beyond that, the seductive attractions of human bondage.” —Matthew S. Witkovsky

- Text excerpted from the 2004 exhibition *Speaking with Hands: Photographs from The Buhl Collection* at the Guggenheim Museum

- Artwork Courtesy: Luhring Augustine, New York



Lynn Hershman Leeson
!WAR Graphic Novel and Curriculum Guide, 2010

Lynn Hershman Leeson produced a graphic novel and curriculum guide to serve as a complement her recent documentary, " !Women Art Revolution". In the words of the artist, "I invited legendary cartoonist Spain Rodriguez to draw upon some highlights of the incongruous and irrational episodes in the feminist art movement's fragmented history that were included in '!WAR', and create a graphic outline of that tumultuous era. That many of these incidents now appear ludicrous is a testament to how far we have come and, poignantly, how far we still need to go."

- Copies are available at the gallery's front desk for \$30

