

Pin-Up Grrrls

FEMINISM, SEXUALITY, POPULAR CULTURE



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Printed in the United States of

America on acid-free paper ∞

Designed by C. H. Westmoreland

Typeset in Bembo

by Tseng Information Systems, Inc.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-

Publication Data appear on the last

printed page of this book.

INTRODUCTION

Defining/Defending the “Feminist Pin-Up”

In 2000, I attended a lecture at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in which the legendary art historian Linda Nochlin addressed the issue of the nude. She approached the subject through her life experience as both a scholar and a feminist, which has informed her tastes in and fascination with its representation. Reading from her essay “Offbeat and Naked,” Nochlin said: “I like any nude that isn’t classical, any naked body that doesn’t look like Michelangelo’s *David* or the *Apollo Belvedere*. For me, as for the poet-critic, Baudelaire in the 19th century, the classical nude is dead, and deathly. What is alive? The offbeat, the ugly, the other, the excessive.”¹ Her perspective intrigued me: at work on this book, investigating the feminist history of the pin-up, I felt that my fascination with the genre came from a similar place. Afterward, I asked Nochlin where, if anywhere, she felt the pin-up genre belonged in this aesthetic of the offbeat. To the surprise of the audience, and without hesitation, she began an impromptu paean to perhaps the most famous pin-up in the history of the genre—Alberto Vargas’s “Varga Girl” (fig. 1). Nochlin recounted how, as a child during the Second World War, she would rifle through her uncles’ *Esquire* magazines to marvel at the grotesque beau-



1: Alberto Vargas, watercolor painting published as the January calendar girl, *Esquire* 1942 Calendar. (The Spencer Museum of Art, The University of Kansas, Gift of Esquire, Inc.)

2: Ali Smith, portrait of Janeane Garofalo, from the book *Laws of the Bandit Queens*. (© Ali Smith, 2000, courtesy of the artist)



ties within. Those endless legs! Those bowed feet! Those fetish fashions! Absolute freaks of nature!, she enthused with a mischievous grin.²

The pin-up continues to impress young feminists with her aggressive sexuality, imperious attitude, and frightening physique—an ideal that Joanna Frueh has appropriately dubbed "monster/beauty": "Monster/beauty is a condition, and it can also describe an individual. Because extremity is immoderation—deviation from convention in behavior, appearance, or representation—and starkly different from standard cultural expectations for particular groups of people, monster/beauty departs radically from normative, ideal representations of beauty. Monster/beauty is artifice, pleasure/discipline, cultural invention, and it is extravagant and generous."³ As such, the similarities between photographer Ali Smith's recent portrait of a popular young feminist icon, comedian Janeane Garofalo, and a 1942 Vargas pin-up should come as unsurprising (fig. 2). Posed in the reversed but otherwise exact manner of a 1942 Vargas *Esquire* calendar girl, the portrait manifests many of the complex issues surrounding the feminist appropriation of the pin-up genre. The irony is palpable as the militant antiglamour girl Garofalo poses with the sultry come-hither stare of the classic pin-up. Of Garofalo's pose and most prominent accessory—a comical pair of satin ears one instantly associates with *Esquire's* post-World War II cheesecake successor, *Playboy*—photographer Smith said: "I envisioned that perhaps she had knocked a *Playboy* bunny down, stolen her ears, and was smoking a cigarette in victory." Yet, it can also be argued that Garofalo has never looked so sexy, so confident, or so intimidating, which Smith acknowledged when she elaborated on her choice to photograph Garofalo because "she is a beautiful woman in a very real, cool, un-Hollywood way, [who has] managed to help punch a hole in standards of Hollywood beauty. . . . her sexuality in [this] picture is based on her exuding confidence, which is more traditionally why men are considered sexy. Her sexuality comes across to me as totally in her control and that is the key."⁴ Although her rumpled garb and hairdo counter the Varga Girl's polished femininity, Garofalo's candy-apple-red lipstick and suggestively handled cigarette reflect not only those same superficial aspects of the original, but also its sense of audacity, artifice, and control. Young feminists may poke fun at the pin-up, but they do so in ways that betray affinities with, even affection for the genre itself.

To those who view the feminist movement as a cadre of humorless harpies, repelled to a one by sex, pleasure, and pop culture, feminist thinkers' interest in the pin-up must seem surprising, if not completely implausible. But this limited view ignores several facts about the long history of the women's movement. First, as feminism has always been premised on fighting for equality between the sexes, the role of sexuality in sexual inequality has inevitably been addressed by all generations of the movement. Second, although feminist thinkers have consistently drawn upon women's sexuality as a site of oppression, so too have they posited the nurturance of women's sexual freedom and pleasure as an antidote to the same. Third, as a movement driven by the need to reach, educate, and persuade the masses, popular culture has not been viewed by feminists solely as a reserve of conservative messages to rage against, but also as a powerful tool for offering progressive alternatives to these very messages. For all these reasons, alongside the protectionist and anti-pornography feminist voices who have rightfully challenged men's historical dominance over and access to women's sexuality, anticensorship and prosex voices have existed in the women's movement since its origins to posit women's agency over and right to express their own sexuality as a different kind of challenge to male supremacy. Although many shades of opinion and a range of activist positions exist between the anti-pornography and "sex radical" stances in contemporary feminism, all these positions in today's debate existed long before the second wave of the feminist movement visibly dragged them into academic, political, and popular discourses in the 1960s and 1970s. Although this generation's use of and impact upon popular culture led to the very interpretive and appropriative strategies of feminists like Nochlin, which in turn led to uses of the pin-up by younger feminists like Smith, the fact is that feminist uses of the genre long predate the popular women's liberation movement. Alas, no thoroughgoing survey exists to track the history and evolution of feminist uses of the sexualized woman in popular culture to both reflect and affect the larger fight for women's rights. This book is an effort to fill that void.

Contrary to the popular belief—held by many within, outside of, and even against the movement—that a "feminist pin-up" is an oxymoron, it is no more so than "feminist painting" or "feminist sculpture," or "feminist porn" for that matter: these are all media and genres historically

used and appreciated primarily by men, about which nothing is inherently sexist, but which have all been both kept from women and used to create images that inscribe, normalize, or bolster notions of women as inferior to men. While this fact has been recognized by many feminist thinkers—indeed, many such media and genres have been *avoided* by certain feminist artists for these very reasons—few would deny that the same have been and may be strategically used by women to subvert the sexism with which they have historically been associated. Yet the pin-up—because of its simultaneous ubiquity and invisibility, prurient appeal and prudery, artistry and commercialism—has not been so readily granted a feminist interpretation. The genre is a slippery one: it doesn't represent sex so much as suggest it, and these politely suggestive qualities have as a result always lent it to a commercial culture of which feminists have justifiably been wary for its need to cultivate the kind of desire and dissatisfaction that leads to consumption.

But the feminist movement itself has historically been dedicated to the cultivation of desire and dissatisfaction—in its own case, leading to dissent. As such, we should be unsurprised that both the visibility and persuasiveness of the pin-up might be used by a feminist movement that has always sought to inspire broad cultural change. As a genre associated almost exclusively with women—due, of course, to its creation and prominence in cultures where women's rather than men's sexuality is considered acceptable for scrutiny—the pin-up has, no less than (indeed, perhaps more than) any other cultural representation of women, reflected women's roles in the cultures and subcultures in which it is created. Because the pin-up is always a sexualized woman whose image is not only mass-reproduced, but mass-reproduced because intended for wide display, the genre is an interesting barometer for Western cultural responses to women's sexuality in popular arts since the Industrial Revolution, as well as feminist responses to the same. Indeed, the pin-up seems an excellent place to track the history of both heated disagreements and remarkable similarities within and between feminist generations precisely because of its longevity, prominence, and mixed meanings in pop culture since the rise of the feminist movement. When feminist history is viewed through the lens of the popular pin-up, what emerges is a picture of the myriad ways in which women have defined, politicized, and represented their own sexuality in the public eye. And

when the pin-up's popularity is viewed through the lens of feminist history, what emerges is a picture of the myriad ways in which feminist thought has profoundly affected women's sexuality both within and beyond the women's movement.

Women are no longer to be considered little tootsey wootseys who have nothing to do but look pretty. They are determined to take an active part in the community and look pretty too.

—Lydia Commander, 1909

We can be feminine
And still knock boots.

—Salt 'n' Pepa, NAACP Awards, 1996

Few issues have caused more debate within feminism's history than the sexualized representation of women. The arguments that bookend this debate generally hold that the identification/representation of woman as a sexual subject and sexual object either coexist or operate independently of one another. Feminist activists and scholars have long tangled with the issue of whether images liberate women from or enforce traditional patriarchal notions of female sexuality. From Laura Mulvey's psychoanalytical construction of the "masculine gaze" to Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon's longstanding appeals to broaden both cultural and legal definitions of pornography, there is a wide and influential range of contemporary feminist discourse on the ways in which women are manipulated and victimized through various cultural representations. These have led to a popular stereotype of the "feminist view" (if there ever were such a monolith) of the sexualized woman as a consistently negative one. However, the history and evolution of the women's movement problematizes this stereotype, as women have actively demanded the right to act as free and discerning sexual subjects even as they may be interpreted or serve as another's object of desire. As the decades that yawn between the statements of Lydia Commander and Salt 'n' Pepa demonstrate, this position has been complicated and consistent in modern women's history.

Frueh has articulated this desire succinctly in her writing on the rele-

vance of sexuality to the feminist movement: "As long as I am an erotic subject, I am not averse to being an erotic object."⁵ The problem with this conflation of subject/object is in constructing and representing a feminist identity that is both subversive and alluring (as well as accommodating to what is by nature the highly individualized yet powerful realm of sexual pleasure). As bell hooks puts this conundrum: "It has been a simple task for women to describe and criticize negative aspects of sexuality as it has been socially constructed in sexist society; to expose male objectification and dehumanization of women; to denounce rape, pornography, sexualized violence, incest, etc. It has been a far more difficult task for women to envision new sexual paradigms, to change the norms of sexuality."⁶ Part of this challenge has been the drive toward creating representations that disrupt the patriarchal subjugation of women yet retain the right to use familiar conventions of representing women's beauty and desirability to make this disruption more accessible.

Contemporary artists as varied as Judy Chicago and Renée Cox, Cindy Sherman and Lisa Yuskavage have appropriated icons, objects, and stereotypes that speak to traditions of representing women as sexual creatures. However, all these artists effectively subvert these methods and image types to assert the pleasure and power feminist women may find in them—a clever bait-and-switch process perhaps best described by art historian Kate Linker as "seduce, then intercept."⁷ Naturally, finding visual languages that perform this task as it relates to women's sexuality and pleasure has been difficult. Historical constructions of female sexuality in both the art world and popular culture have frequently represented womanhood according to patriarchal myths that feminism has sought to deny. Yet many feminist constructs of female sexuality—in a desire to depart from sexist constructs—have resulted in a visual language pointedly hostile to both sexual desire and women for whom a radical denial of traditional feminine signifiers is itself oppressive. Surely echoing the frustration of many feminists in this position, artist Barbara Kruger asks: "How do I as a woman and an artist work against the marketplace of the spectacle while residing within it?"⁸

As a ubiquitous signifier for the sexualized female in contemporary visual culture, the pin-up provides us with a starting point through which to study feminist attempts to answer this question. On the one

hand, the (not entirely correct) assumption that the genre exists as a catalyst for heterosexual male desire has made it a kind of visual shorthand for the desirable female. On the other, the genre also has a history of representing and accepting seemingly contradictory elements—traditional as well as transgressive female sexualities—by imaging ordinarily taboo behaviors in a fashion acceptable to mass cultural consumption and display. While many pin-ups are indeed silly caricatures of women that mean to construct their humiliation and passivity as turn-ons, the genre has also represented the sexualized woman as self-aware, assertive, strong, and independent. As such, it should come as no surprise that in their search for a mediating image between the roles of subject and object, and the languages of transgression and tradition, many contemporary feminist artists have looked to this genre as a mode of self-expression.

pin-up (pin'up) *U.S. Colloq.* n. That which is affixed to a board or wall for scrutiny or perusal; specifically, a clipping or photograph, usually of an attractive young woman.—adj. Designating a photograph, clipping, or drawing used in this manner, or a person who models such picture.

According to the recent *Webster's* definition—little-changed since it first appeared in the dictionary in 1941—the pin-up is an image of an individual meant for display and concentrated observation. Implied in the dictionary's almost humorously formal description is that the image also generally represents a woman as the subject of such public "scrutiny." This idea reflects the popular understanding of such representations' association with women, as a sort of publicly displayed and consumed genre of feminine portraiture (regardless of the scores of advertising and Hollywood-generated male pin-ups that would seem to indicate otherwise).⁹ While this definition is indeed accurate in its description of the now-universal understanding of this fairly modern genre, its representational form actually originated much earlier than its contemporary definition implies.

Pin-up connoisseur Mark Gabor locates the genre's origins alongside the development of Western print media in the fifteenth century.

The circulation of print imagery allowed for the creation of images that could be mass-produced, distributed, and displayed among publics larger than those with the means to afford singular imagery, such as sculpture or painting, for display and perusal.¹⁰ From the earliest widely circulated prints and advertisements of the Renaissance, the images reproduced or reflected the period's "high art" conventions of depicting the female nude: generally mythological or allegorical representations of women, or women in various states of undress engaged in subtly sexualized poses or narratives. Gabor astutely locates the pin-up's origins in the proliferation of popular prints, through which the genre's traditional distinction from the realm of the fine arts is articulated and which made it accessible to lower-to-middle-class audiences. But these "pin-ups" from the fifteenth to the early nineteenth century generally lack the contemporaneity, ubiquity, and display-worthy modesty that define the modern genre. It would not be until the Industrial Revolution—with its explosion of mass-reproductive print technology and the rise of a formidable middle class in America and Europe to purchase them—that a "true" pin-up genre would emerge to both negotiate a space for itself between the fine and popular arts and define itself through the representation of a pointedly contemporary female sexuality.

Writer and cultural historian Casey Finch has observed that as the near-obsessive representation of the solitary female in European painting of the nineteenth century rose in visibility and popularity, so too did technological developments in print media, allowing such works to be reproduced and distributed widely and cheaply. As these fine-art images came to be copied, circulated, and popularized in prints and illustrations, the easily obtained knock-offs became the ideal for what would become the pin-up genre.¹¹ This fact calls into question the notion that the modern pin-up's origins lie entirely outside of the realm of art history, lending logic not just to its conflicted reception by audiences in the nineteenth century, but to the later fine-art appropriations that will be addressed here. In Edith Wharton's novel *The Age of Innocence*, the narrator's appalled description of an unabashedly sexual and tenuously historicized Adolphe-William Bouguereau nude on a prominent wall of the nouveau-riche Beaufort family's salon re-

minds us why deluxe chromolithographic reproductions of the period's academic nymphs also hung behind bartenders at Victorian and Edwardian saloons. Moreover, Wharton's description of generations-old New York families taking offense at the painting's blatant display in a public room of the house is used as a sign of the Beaufort's "vulgar" bourgeois tastes, unrefined by old-money modesty, which are exposed in their patronage of such a fashionably naughty contemporary work — exposing in turn the designations of class that both the Industrial Revolution and the pin-up would problematize.¹²

Art historian Abigail Solomon-Godeau more succinctly articulates Finch's linking of the academic nude and the pin-up. She also draws stronger parallels between the pin-up's defining conflation of "high" and "low" cultures and consumption practices in the nineteenth century. In this period, she argues, photographic and illustrated prints in Europe and the United States reflected more than just the expanding spectrum of what both "art" and "class" meant in Western society; they also reflected a new spectrum of sexual moralities between earlier binaries as well as the establishment of a "fully evolved commodity culture" that often blurred the lines between the classes.¹³ Simultaneously, developments in the work of the period's avant-garde increasingly posited the female body as the ultimate signifier of modernity, an understanding of which was imperative to the tastes of both fine-art and mass-cultural audiences.

Solomon-Godeau asserts: "Once this equivalence was secured, at a historical moment already consumed by the Baudelairean 'cult of images,' it was at least doubly determined that the distinctive forms of modern mass consumer culture would adapt the image of feminine desirability as its most powerful icon."¹⁴ Reflecting both the period's avant-garde obsession with the female body and its consumer-culture obsession with up-to-the-minute contemporaneity, the pin-up by the mid-nineteenth century had developed as an image of modern female sexuality that was instantly recognizable, culturally acceptable, and eminently purchasable. Solomon-Godeau defines the resulting genre as "an image type that could be relatively deluxe or relatively crude, but in either case was predicated on the relative isolation of its feminine motif through the reduction or outright elimination of narrative, literary, or mythological allusion [and a] decontextualization, reduction, or dis-

lives. Media-savvy, she also recognizes that “contemporary issues are much more captivating when the victim is portrayed as a modelesque woman.”⁹¹ Works from her 2001–2 series of pin-ups inspired by World War II-era *Esquire* illustration show a convergence of the artist’s interests. Using the verse style of Alberto Vargas’s Varga Girl pin-ups, and cleverly appropriating the signature style of George Petty, Honig fashioned works like *Bruiser* and *Ruby Ribbons*, which give a sense of her bait-and-switch style. *Bruiser* presents what seems at first glance a vintage glamour girl caught off-guard after bathing, but on closer inspection is actually a young bride who has been freshly battered by her husband—a fact that the accompanying verse confirms. The Petty-inspired phone at her feet is here not a connection to her sugar daddy, but very likely a lifeline that she may have attempted to use before caught and frightened by her attacker—a role that Honig forces the viewer to play in this disturbing scenario. *Ruby Ribbons* suggests a far more subtle and complicated scene of sexual degradation, in which she paints a painfully thin stripper on her knees, seemingly edging toward a club audience for more dollar bills to hang from her garter. Although the image is a familiar one that the artist derived from fashion photography, the accompanying verse indicates a dark narrative that, interestingly, links the glamorous world of modeling to the shadier one of stripping: the frequent drug addictions of its female professionals.⁹²

Another contemporary third-wave artist to draw on the dark side of the pin-up’s sexuality is the painter Lisa Yuskavage. But whereas both Honig and Yuskavage use the genre for its potential to unsettle, Yuskavage’s pin-ups are less pointedly political and far more personal. She herself has claimed to be drawn to the genre because it conjures feelings about her own sexuality that she has always been “uncomfortable with and embarrassed by”⁹³—and painting, she argues, is the “ultimate transference object.”⁹⁴ Since 1995, Yuskavage’s work has toyed with a perverse juxtaposition of art history and trash culture perhaps befitting the dramatically shifting environment of a working-class girl raised in Philadelphia who, through her remarkable gifts as a painter and intellectual, went on to graduate study at Yale. In interviews she insightfully speaks of Jacopo Pontormo, Georges Bataille, and Margaret Keane’s sad-eyed “Keane Kids” with equal affection. Yet rather than suggesting affinities between these worlds, in her seamless, Old Master-inspired style she in-

stead underscores the tensions and violence between them. Similarly, she seeks ways to depict such contradictions and tensions within oneself—particularly women, the display of whose sexualized bodies may be one of the few things shared across cultural divides.

Recent works like *Day and Night* (plates 8 and 9) show us these tensions in play. In poses allegedly derived from vintage 1970s *Penthouse* images but painted with a remarkable mastery of light and form that reflect her study of Vermeer and Fragonard, Yuskavage presents us with familiar clichés from the pin-up's history: in this case, the girl-next-door spied on unaware while undressing. However, gone are the bubbly or dreamy personalities of the *Penthouse* "pets," replaced here by a thick sense of anxiety reflected in the exaggerated vulgarity of the models—where every hip curve and bobbed nose is inflated and angled—as well as in the sense of melancholy their poses and expressions reflect. Although each woman at first appears to be admiring herself, a closer look indicates that they are scrutinizing their bodies with a combined sense of awe and disapproval. The dramatic lighting and thick atmosphere that Yuskavage expertly renders only add to the tension that feels bloated rather than explosive. Her pin-ups neither critique nor celebrate the genre, but as Robin Rice observed, seem instead to ask "a series of questions: Who are these divas of desire? How far do you have to go to be one? Exactly when does a *Penthouse* Pet turn into a sideshow freak?"¹⁰ Rather than cheerleading for the confident dominatrix in every feminist, Yuskavage's work reminds us of the internalized shame that many have for their own sexuality when it fails to measure up to its alleged reflection in popular culture—as well as how we both compound and confront that shame by compulsively returning to those images in movies, television, and fashion magazines. Like many of her contemporaries, a sense of pleasure permeates her appropriation of these pin-ups, but hers is a pleasure shot through with longing and guilt.

Yuskavage has herself spoken of this tortured ambivalence that she (and most) women inevitably feels in our sexualized surroundings—part playground, part marketplace: "I think, 'good for her!,' 'I hate her guts,' 'I wish I was her,' and 'how come I'm not more like that?'"¹¹ Rather than taking sides, Yuskavage presents but does not judge these contradictions. This choice is a luxury afforded the third wave by their second-wave predecessors: a confident and complicated recognition of the ways

in which women relate to and express their sexual selves—as well as their classed, raced, and even gendered selves—not only because of the political and personal freedoms that the second wave ushered into the women's movement, but because of the plurality of this same legacy. Yuskavage's works are also a challenge to traditional second-wave politics in their refusal to comfortably offer a conclusive intention along an easily read "feminist" line. Yet the inconclusive work of Yuskavage leads one to some interesting conclusions about both our present moment of feminism and its relationship to art history.

tion). One of the U.S. curators associated the show's title with contemporary feminist artists who are "irreverent, anti-ideological, non-doctrinaire, non-didactic, unpolemical and thoroughly unladylike," and the catalog suggested a "lineage" of feminists in popular culture ranging from Annie Oakley to Chaka Khan.² Although the initial exhibitions—*Bad Girls East*, in New York City, and *Bad Girls West*, in Los Angeles—were popular enough with feminist artists and curators to have spawned several regional spin-offs in both the United States and England, the shows were near-uniformly pummeled by the art press.³ In the years since, the exhibitions' title has stuck for third-wave artists whose work has subsequently tapped into the same "anti-ideological" and "unladylike" vein that the *Bad Girls* shows mined. Similar to *Time* magazine writer Ginia Bellafante's short-sighted comparison of feminism past and present, the most vocal analyses are misinformed at best (and hypocritical at worst) about the work of these young artists in the continuum of feminist art history. Particularly surly and vitriolic attacks of this work have come from other women, whose headlines and attention-grabbing introductions give readers an immediate sense of where their affinities lie: "This isn't exactly what Betty Friedan had in mind."⁴ "What's so good about being bad?"⁵ "Q: How many Bad Girls does it take to screw in a light bulb? A. One, and she really wants to get screwed!"⁶

As we have seen, younger artists' preoccupation and comfort with addressing sexual issues is a large part of many critics' dismissal of their work. However, the criticism also reflects a newer and perhaps more pervasive issue: the legacy of feminism's second wave. Barbara Pollack's negative assessment of the third-wave work she refers to as part of the "Bad Girl" generation articulates this grievance: "Many wish they would give a nod to Mary Kelly or Sylvia Sleigh or Faith Wilding or Adrian Piper—all of whom created remarkably similar works 25 years ago."⁷ This analysis of younger feminist artists' work may be frequently true, but Pollack does not stop to wonder where the paeans to feminists past were in the work of these same artists, none of whom invented the women's movement from scratch. From Pollack's list, only Wilding—an artist whose participation in the Fresno Feminist Art Program and Los Angeles Woman's Building guaranteed her a foundation in women's history—directly acknowledged the influence of her predecessors consistently in her work. Yet even when addressing history, as Astrid Henry's

CONCLUSION / COMMENCEMENT

Writing on a 1996 exhibition of Lisa Yuskavage's work. Sydney Pokorny located in it a provocation for dialogue typical of much feminist work since the 1980s: "These paintings ask, for instance, why women artists can't express an ambiguous relationship to their own and to other women's bodies. Why is it that for a woman artist to be considered acceptably feminist she must paint fleshy mounds of femaleness not as menacing she-devils but as loving representatives of some great goddess figure? Why shouldn't she be able, instead, to examine the construction of desire and the erotic in less than utopian ways?"¹ Why, indeed?

Both Pokorny's supportive critique of Yuskavage's work and her defense of the questions that it raises are rare. More typically, criticism of younger women artists like Yuskavage reflects the art press's limited knowledge of feminist history, as well as the broader lack of understanding with which these artists' attitudes toward art and sexuality are frequently met in culture at large. Such antipathy is perhaps best summarized by the recent backlash against such artists, whose complex, ambivalent address of both sexuality and popular culture has been the subject of much negative criticism in the last five years. These artists have recently been dubbed "Bad Girls" in the art press on the basis of a series of feminist art exhibitions of the same name, launched in 1993 (and before most of the artists thus labeled were brought to the media's at-

research reminds us, by generally reaching far back in history to choose first-wave predecessors for celebration, rather than older, living feminists in their midst, second-wave feminists did not choose “to confront an established feminist generation in their immediate present. The first wave of feminism was long since ‘dead’ by the time they emerged on the political scene. They could thus identify with feminists of the previous century without really having to contend with them.”⁹ Naturally, neither the “motherless” sensibilities nor selective historicity of these artists who came to feminist consciousness during the second wave diminished the feminist meanings in their work — indeed, many argued at the time that this approach was necessary for the very resuscitation of the women’s movement that they initiated. Why, then, would many of these same women feel that an explicit recognition of their own work be such a crucial one in the work of their successors?

Ironically, younger feminists familiar with, and even seeking to celebrate, the work of their predecessors run into as much criticism as those who do not directly acknowledge their influence. For example, in organizing *Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago’s Dinner Party in Feminist Art History* — an exhibition conceived as an intergenerational rediscovery of this monumental (and then homeless) second-wave work¹⁰ — Amelia Jones was shocked at the widespread antagonism that she encountered. Rather than excitement or support for her attempt to unify different feminist perspectives and generations through reminiscences and new analyses of Chicago’s piece, she instead found resistance from older feminists who both refused to participate in “what they perceive[d] as the heroicization of Chicago” and were angry at the hubris of a younger scholar attempting to add to the history of “their” work.¹¹ The experience led to a rude awakening: “It was made clear to me that certain kinds of revisionist thinking were not welcome and that, as someone who did not actively participate in earlier periods of the feminist art movement, my attempts at intervening in what I perceived to be rather reified narratives of feminist art history were viewed antagonistically by at least some of the women who had been active in the 1970s.”¹¹

This intergenerational tension was also documented by Amy Richards and Jennifer Baumgardner in *Manifesta*, where they describe the chaos that ensued at a 1990 reading of second-wave feminist classics by young feminists, which the pair organized to celebrate International Women’s

Day. What was intended as an intergenerational love-in went awry for much the same reason as had the *Sexual Politics* exhibition. When Elizabeth Wurtzel took the stage to read one of her favorite pieces by the second-wave maverick Kate Millett (a passage from the rare, out-of-print *Flying*), Wurtzel responded to what she felt were rude shouts for her to read louder by sarcastically comforting the shouters to not worry about their inability to hear her, since she wasn't reading from Millett's best work. Although perhaps a true statement—as many women in attendance would concur after the event—it was taken as a slight by several older feminists, including Millett herself, who stormed the stage and demanded to read the book herself. As Richards and Baumgardner wrote of the event, it's "not that older women didn't agree with Elizabeth; it was her tone that they found offensive"—a typical and unproductive example of the movement's current tensions in which, as with Jones's *Sexual Politics* show, young feminists feel that they cannot win the ear or respect of the older feminists, even when they wish to pay homage to their legacy.¹² As Jones herself put this problem, these critics prove themselves "somewhat hypocritical in their simultaneous desire to regulate discourse while self-proclaiming their own marginality and alignment with the oppressed and the excluded."¹³

Thankfully, such intergenerational tensions do not apply to feminists across the board, and certainly not so in the art world. Many prominent, established feminists have gone out of their way to express their support for the work and ideas of their progeny, even when these young women push the envelope in terms of their representations of both feminist history and sexuality. In 1998 I interviewed the legendary feminist artist Joyce Kozloff—whose work is counted among the pioneers of second-wave feminism—about her *Pornament* series' influence on younger feminist artists, and the conversation naturally came around to the then-emerging "Bad Girl backlash." Kozloff lamented her contemporaries' public attacks on artists like Yuskavage, photographer Sam Taylor-Wood, installation artist Kara Walker, and painter Cecily Brown, all of whom were just then coming to prominence in the New York art world—an arena Kozloff knew well as a formidable figure in it since the earliest days of the popular women's movement. Singling out the imposing burlesque pin-ups of the painter (and her former student) Veronica Cross as exemplary of fierce new feminist work, Kozloff said

she felt a responsibility to remind her contemporaries: "Isn't that what we wanted? I mean, there are the mothers and the grandmothers and the daughters, and aren't we nurturing them? Do we want them to be exactly like us?"¹⁴ Similarly, in an article on the so-called Bad Girl phenomenon, Kozloff's contemporary Chicago asserted: "I think it's great that these women have internalized the freedom that the women in my generation had to fight for."¹⁵ Not surprisingly, art historian Linda Nochlin has also defended these artists, finding the aggressive sexuality of their work as indicative of "feistiness," "a sign of energy and unconventionality," and a reflection of feminism's success that in "a postmodern world like ours, badness is acceptable in women [whereas] in the 1970s it was deeply unacceptable."¹⁶

Nancy Spector, curator of contemporary art at the Guggenheim, is among the few feminists in the art world to point out the underlying double standard of third-wave artists' critics. She laments the fact that women "using their bodies and owning their sexuality have always been perceived as bad or dangerous. It has always been coded as body art when men do it and women's art when women do it." Whereas women's actions are viewed as loaded, men's "actions, however outrageous, have generally been discussed in neutral terms."¹⁷ Performance artist Carolee Schneemann gets to the heart of what the "Bad Girls" tag truly represents: a label invented and used not by the artists themselves, but by the art press in order to oversimplify our present and complex moment in feminist art history. Schneemann—herself no stranger to criticism from both within and outside of the movement for her sexually frank work—dismisses the term itself as "the commodification of a much tougher, stronger transformation that has occurred in the culture" of feminism.¹⁸ For the younger artists whose appropriations of the pin-up I have attempted to articulate here, this kind of support represents a welcome recognition of the ways in which they have built on their predecessors' ideas.

Amelia Jones—in her contribution to the nine views on contemporary art and feminism published in the October 2003 issue of *Artforum*—weighed in on the relevance of this recognition as it applies to not only feminism's future, but feminism's past, when she argued that if "we ignore works that have been determined (by feminists) to exemplify 'bad' feminist practices, then we are in danger of getting very confused

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Buszek, Maria Elena
 Pin-up grrrls : feminism, sexuality, popular culture /
 Maria Elena Buszek.
 p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-8223-3734-7 (cloth : alk. paper)

ISBN 0-8223-3746-0 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Pinup art. 2. Women in art. 3. Feminism in art.
 4. Feminism and art. I. Title: Pin-up girls. II. Title.

N7630.B87 2006

760'.04428—dc22 2005031756