



Danielle St. Laurent, Andres Serrano in Oracle, 2002



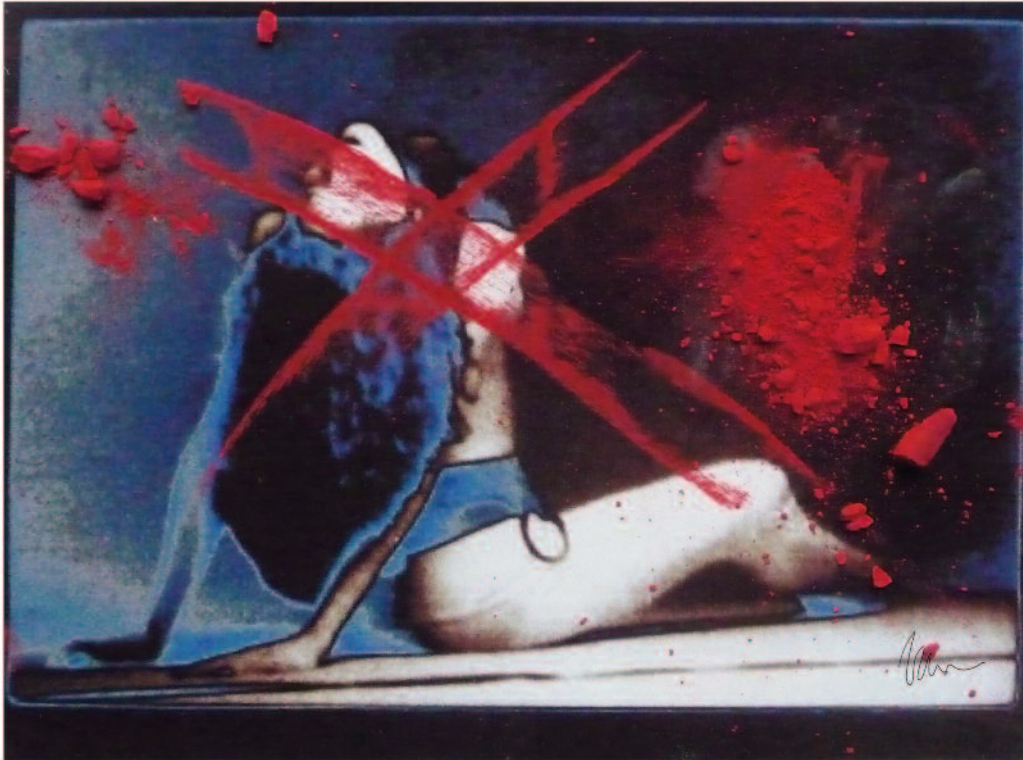
D. Dominick Lombardi, Exotic Dancer with Tumor (bust), 2002, mixed media wall-mounted sculpture, 32" x 22" x 6"



Heide Hatry, Maria, 2009, still from DVD



Martha Wilson, Suicide, 1974, photo



Mark Weiner, *Still Life in Red*, 1981, archival pigment prints on Hahnemühle, 13 x 19"

The Sacred Geometry of the Feminine

Black Madonna at HP Garcia Gallery in New York

by Edward Rubin

Black Madonna has as its signature image Mark Wiener's *Still Life in Red* (2009), a 1981 photograph of the nude pop star Madonna violently slashed with a red X. There is a lot of nakedness in this wonderful exhibit, a raw intensity not typically on view in Chelsea, which is why the near Times Square location of HP Garcia Gallery is particularly appropriate. The nudity isn't only in the flesh that was once indigenous to this neighborhood, but the precise stripped down focus of curators Lisa Paul Streitfeld and H.P. Garcia.

This multimedia exhibition of 41 international artists brings in a bold new discussion of feminism (neo, post or whatever) into the 21st century –

this time with a bevy of male artists as well as female. The tight focus weaves together the unknown with the famous – Carolee Schneemann, Kate Millet, Martha Wilson, Mike Bidlo, Rick Prol, Marshall Arisman and Richard Move – and the newest darlings of the art world, Richard Humann and Heide Hatry. Humann's jaw dropping sculpture *Electrical Bumper Cars* (2008), in reality miniature electric chairs presented as amusement park entertainment, holds center court in the main gallery, while uber provocateur Heide Hatry's characteristically brilliant 2009 video *Maria*, a macabre talking pig skin head, looking a lot like Angelina Jolie, echoes the exhibition's hidden theme, "You don't understand."

The curators' background in sacred geometry, a visual form of mathematics, make superb use of the gallery's elegant, cross-shaped space. Nowhere is this more evident than in Vincent Baldassano's female *Nude on a Cross* (2009) gouache which replaces Christ with Mary Magdalene, the

ultimate "fallen woman." The up and coming Russian artist Yuliya Lanina – an everywhere presence in this exhibition via video, collages, and highly sculptured assemblage – transmits this theme into a new form of fairytale in which the feminine triumphs on its own terms. D. Dominick Lombardi's *Post Apocalyptic Pop* deformed females, *Exotic Dancer with Tumor* and *Twister* (2002), get new life here as gargoyles guarding the exhibition's bold new narrative. Appropriately, Arisman's mystical *Rainbow Dancers* (2004), a lushly painted oil and gold leaf triptych, resembling the cave paintings of Altamira, provides a timeless foundation with its fusion of beast and human complete with rainbow aura.

Other striking works relate a rich and complicated history of the feminine in single images. *Falling Woman* (2009), Tatyana Stepanova's diptych presents a free floating female figure which appears to be a thought emanating from the head of an oriental woman. Danielle St. Laurent's *Andres Serrano in*

Oracle (2002) a portrait of the photographer succinctly captures the bad boy innocence that launched the culture wars. In his photographic panorama *Age of Reason* (2008), Michael Zansky sums up patriarchal projection with a demon dancing before a classical bust of Voltaire while Michael Manning reveals an exposed American mythology of Sally Hemmings in his multilayered *Mr. Jefferson* (2008), a painting style which brings to mind Basquiat. Another ingenious stroke is the curators' inclusion of Rick Pro's demonic females (1982) painted in the very style that defined the early 1980s East Village movement.

Streitfeld, widely known for her writings on the avant-garde, has bravely included the boundary smashing wunderkinds of dance – Karen Bernard, who runs the downtown *Performance Mix Festival* and Richard Move, made famous as the “Underground Martha Graham.” Here Move, in his first gallery show, presents his powerful documentary *Bloodwork: The Story of Ana Mendieta*, the “fallen woman” of the art world. Pushing the dialogue further, the artist presents *Red Cicciolina* (2009), a photographic series taken from his public performance last summer. For those who forget, Cicciolina, once a porno star and Italian Senator, is now known as Jeff Koon's discarded ex-wife and muse.

If this exhibition is saying it is time for a change, then it is also showing the way to a new gender dialogue. *Black Madonna's* penetrating images of the female figure honor the awakened serpent that Carolee Schneemann made famous through her *Eye Body: 36 Transformative Actions* (1963) in which she merged her own body with the environment of her painting/constructions. An arresting photograph of the artist appearing dead with a snake crawling up her stomach, documenting this seminal event, is poignantly placed beneath Iris Schieferstein's *I can be who I want as long as I know* (2008), an ambiguous photograph of the naked artist lying face down in a bathtub with

set of wings sprouting from her back. It could be suicide, because the water is red.

On the other hand, Martha Wilson's 1974 photo/text *Suicide* is a brutally satiric mock self-portrait complete with “suicide note.” The resurrection of this iconic work after a 34-year self-imposed suppression brings up a crucial point – the necessity of time and space for the feminine to evolve beyond the all too common role

of “victim.” This is born out by Kate Millett's striking pair of 1995 text/drawings *Crazy and Waiting*. Following the same trajectory, these speak of the forbidden realm – desire and insanity – pulling at all artists plundering these depths. Yet, in her multilayered digital photograph *Rear Window* (2007), an obvious nod to Hitchcock, Carla Gannis declares a new breed of feminism in the “fallen

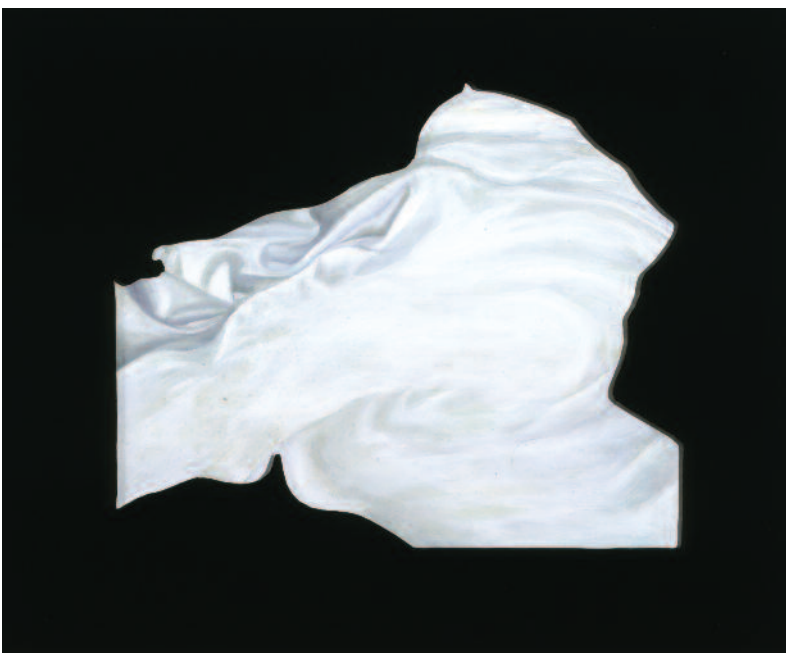
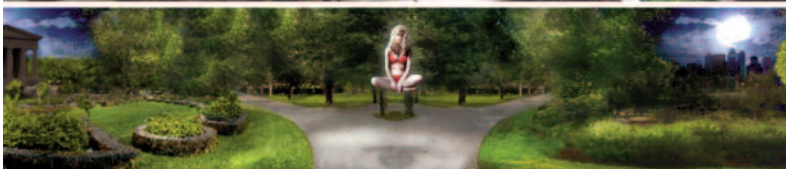


Above: Mike Bidlo, *Origin of the World*, 2008, acrylic on canvas, 18 x 24”
Top: Iris Schieferstein, *I can be who I want as long as I know*, 2008, photo

woman” archetype as a conscious choice in a critical crossroad. In each window women are seen going about their private lives. One window shows two masked men about to throw a woman out of the window. Below, a narrow predella features a young woman in an Arcadian setting – perhaps a stand in for the artist herself – contemplating her next move.

A focal point of the show, taking up an entire wall, is *Pentagram: Venus Revisited* (2009). This collaboration between co-curator H.P. Garcia and artist Mark Wiener is bordered by the artist’s 1982–2009 *The Black Madonna Series*, painted photographs of Madonna, many of which contain sacred geometric symbols overlaying the human figure. The centrally placed inspirational black pentagram also contains ghostly symbolic markings including a hexagram and serpentine wave. Here Venus returns as a holistic post-patriarchal Love Goddess.

Speaking of evolution in the gender wars, the supreme delight of this show is the pairing of Sophie Matisse – who crosses boundaries by birthright as the great granddaughter of the modernist pioneer and step-granddaughter of Duchamp – and provocateur Mike Bidlo, who painted his way through modernism to the de Kooning erasures. These two works, both titled *Origin of the World*, are hung one above the other. While each work represents the abstracted female nude figure, Matisse whose visual target is a lonely rumpled sheet, sans body, erases the female genitalia, leaving Mike Bidlo’s painting to go in for the kill. Here we get the ‘cradle of the world’ fully exposed. Both arrive, along with the viewer, at this shared vacant space in the female womb. Referencing Gustave Courbet, who shocked his contemporaries with his painting; these works launch a new discussion about the masculine-feminine energy exchange. Can it be conscious? This exhibition says yes, and therefore delivers a very positive view of the future of sex.



Top: Carla Gannis, *Rear Window*, 2007, archival digital pigment print, 49 x 47”

Above: Sophie Matisse, *Origin of the World*, 2003-09, oil on canvas in velvet case, 18” x 23.5”