

IT'S TIME FOR ACTION (THERE'S NO OPTION) About Feminism

26th August – 22nd October 2006

Patty Chang – Cosey Fanni Tutti – Mary Beth Edelson – Mathilde ter Heijne – Manon
Yoko Ono – Pipilotti Rist – Katharina Sieverding – Annie Sprinkle
Performance by Anat Ben-David

The exhibition title «It's Time For Action (There's No Option)» quotes Yoko Ono's song of the same name recorded in 2000 and stands for the common attitude shared by the female artists of the group exhibition. The exhibition has gathered works of various generations that have distinguished themselves by dint of a self confident, non conformist position. From the beginning of her artistic activity in the early 1960s, before the official term feminism became currency, the Japanese artist Yoko Ono dealt with gender specific role patterns and rebelled against the outmoded hierarchical and patriarchal structures. Nonetheless she avoided the term feminism – even during its heyday in the 1970s. But she fought, as with many of the artists whose works are exhibited here, for the abolishing and deconstruction of boundaries in artistic, societal and political areas, and pleaded in a Beauvoirian sense for the acceptance of many identities.

The artist **Katharina Sieverding** (*1944) is known for her large format photographs as well as for works which can be positioned in the fields of Body Art, Performance and experimental film. Already in the 1970s Sieverding, contrary to the ideas of many artists who regarded photography purely as a documentary means for actions and performances, had discovered photography for herself and used it as a major medium. Thematically complex and multi-layered, her works revolve around questions of identity and the subject in the weave of societal structures - also fed from the context of feminism, when she experiments with gender and role displacement. Usually at the centre is a reflexive gaze at her own physiognomy. Her works deal at the intersection point between society and the individual, reacting precisely to prevailing societal conditions. In provocative images such as «Deutschland wird deutscher» (Germany becomes more German) in which she reacted to incidents involving right wing extremists after the Fall of the Wall Sieverding provoked a political and public scandal. The work «**Transformer**» (1973) is a double exposure displaying a likeness of the artist, superimposed with that of her partner Klaus Mettig creating a fictive, androgynous face, which by dint of various exposures, poses and contrasts, continually changes. With each minimal change a new facet of expression is revealed. The face appears sphinx-like, a ghostly mask or androgynous, indeterminate essence, in the process of an incessant transformation of changing identities.

Mathilde ter Heijne (*1969) works primarily with video and installations and is interested in psychological and socio-political subjects, collective dramas and tragedies, in which the essential point is invariably the female subject. The linking of fiction and real documentary material to a broken narration winds strategically through the artist's work, like a red thread. The title of the work «**Women To Go**» (2006) can be understood literally: the visitors can choose between 300 postcard motifs and take some copies with them. The front side of the card shows portrait photographs of anonymous women who lived or were born between 1800 and 1900. On the rear side can be read brief biographies of women from the same epoch, lives which, for those times, can be described as remarkable. The work throws out the question, why is it that women, in spite of great achievements in historiography have not found an adequate place within it. As the image and biography do not belong to one another, an additional point becomes clear regarding the constructed models for woman of today who, once again, are free products circulating in the world of commodities.

Mary Beth Edelson (*1933) is one of the female artists whose work is bound up in the most pointed feminist debate. Edelson works intensely on general themes and media: the investigation of non-traditional forms for the representation of women and the feminine body shapes the major theme of her artistic work. Edelson's works are distinguished by a personal visual and textual (meta) language: she implements strategies of the appropriation of found image materials which are then used and decontextualised. She handles the content she chooses at a humorous level. Celtic myths,

philosophy, spiritual themes, European art history, political and feminist theories as well as the Hollywood film divas all find ways into her work, where they are disassembled, deconstructed and newly contextualised. In the famous work **«Some Living American Women Artists / Last Supper»** (1972), in which she acquires Leonardo Da Vinci's «Last Supper» as a model, Edelson cuts the heads of the male figures out and substitutes them with the heads of female artists. Here the male saints are deterritorialised, the received, male authorised domain of the divine and the heavenly is revealed and the real conditions of institutionalised religion and its inherent patriarchal structures are drawn inextricably to attention.

Swiss artist **Manon** has concerned herself since 1974 with themes of identity and self presentation. Manon (re)presents herself through and with props, insignia and environments, which convey her personal cosmos. The liberalisation of sexuality and the liberation from societal rules are the foundation pillars of her work. Through her environments Manon attained a place in art history as one of the first Swiss female performance artist and often took part in her own performances or employed up to 60 male and female extras in various roles. Created in 1974 her **«Das lachsfarbene Boudoir»**, (The Salmon-coloured Boudoir) was her very first art action and has been reconstructed for the first time for the exhibition in the migros museum für gegenwartskunst. The boudoir is a replica of Manon's bedroom (at that time) which the artist made public. Then the displaying of the intimate space of a female artist was - in the male-dominated art world – an unprecedented action and provocation, which was made even more acute by giving the space the title “Boudoir”: in historical terms the boudoir was the embodiment of feminine architecture and as a possible private retreat, served as a pendant to the male study. The boudoir, which at the turn from the 19th to the 20th century, gradually disappeared, had been a room that idealised and embodied the intimacy of the feminine - a panopticon of feminine topography. Manon's cabinet like, luxuriously lined and erotically charged space reveals, via letters and photographs, the autobiographic moment which transforms the room into an architectonic embodiment of Manon.

Cosey Fanni Tutti (*1951), has worked as a photo model for men's magazines and as a professional strip tease artist, makes of her experiences in the sex industry and the implications bound up in them her artistic works. The artist became internationally renowned with Throbbing Gristle, an industrial noise band, as well as for being a member in the early 1970s of the performance group COUM. The group provoked both the British public and the art scene with political and sexual transgressions, which reached a highpoint in 1976 with the legendary exhibition at the London ICA «Prostitution». Tutti displayed images of herself as a nude model published in magazines and designated them legitimate «Performance Art». In so doing the images on the one hand are raised to the level of artwork and simultaneously practice a kind of art criticism. Tutti, who understood her work as pin up model as role-play, concerns herself in her art with terms such as authenticity and masquerade and the construction of multiple feminine identities. Tutti's individual work met with incomprehension by the critics: it became marginalised by male critics – feminist critics found it counter productive.

The multimedia artist **Annie Sprinkle** (*1954), became known in the art world through her performance «Public Cervix Announcement», in which she invited the audience to observe the neck of her uterus by means of a speculum and hand torch in order to “demystify the female body”. In linking art and pornography and working most explicitly with her own body Sprinkle provoked the most controversial discussion in the sub cultural art establishment as well as in the mainstream scene. Sprinkle researches and investigates sexuality intensely in all its forms. Her findings are made accessible in her extraordinary films, photographic works, performance shows as well as in workshops and readings. Additionally Sprinkle campaigns for the rights of sex workers and their health care. She was one of the central protagonists in the feminist «Sex-Positive» movement of the 1980s.

Her artistic work remains indebted in some measure to the humorous and ironic levels of Dada and the Fluxus movement, which she herself has stated has been the motivation for the continuation in art of her former work in the porn industry. She, as a strategy, rewrites her own profession of «whore» as honourable and thus turns the historically injurious connotations of the term playfully around. In the black and white photo series **«Bosom Ballet»** (1984-1991) Annie Sprinkle, her hands clad in black opera gloves, forms an imaginary ballet with her breasts. The mannered and artificial interaction with her breasts transforms her upper body into a sculptural, aestheticized torso. The photographic work was created from her Performance show of the same name in which Sprinkle set her dancing breasts to music.

Since the mid 1980s **Pipilotti Rist** (*1962), has been a pioneer in the field of Swiss video art, known for producing acoustic and colour alienated films, via technological effects. Her works are distinguished by a delight in optical, acoustic and haptic sensuality. Quite early on in her video work

Rist took up themes like sexuality, gender difference and the feminine body and situated herself within the feminist discourse. She became internationally renowned with «Pickelporno» (1992), which revolves around the theme of the feminine body and sexual arousal: the camera moves very closely along the bodies of a naked couple – the camera movement resembling the flight of a bumble bee became an aesthetic hallmark of Rist's filmic achievements. The images are solarized and dipped in intense colours, so the body forms make the visual experience for the spectator seem alien, sensuous and ambiguous. The film, for Rist, was an approach she was able to implement to experiment with feminine pornography.

Already in the 1950s Japanese artist **Yoko Ono** (*1933) staged happenings and performances and was one of the avant garde female artists who was a driving force of the Fluxus movement. Many of her works can be situated within the fields of concept art and body art. As an active multi media artist she has created not only installations, sculptures, films and photography but has made a name for herself for her multifaceted musical works. The diversity of her work demonstrates how Ono has always attempted to break through the limits of categories within art and formulate them anew. One of her famous performance was «Cut Piece» (1964/65): emotionless and passive Yoko Ono kneeled in a traditional Japanese feminine pose before the public and demanded their participation, meaning they should use a pair of scissors and each cut a piece of her garment away until she was almost naked. This performance secured for her a place in the art history of performance and in terms of content forced great attention on the gender specific gaze. Today the performance is described as proto-feminist conceptualism. The song «**Walking on Thin Ice**» was produced in New York in 1980, by Yoko Ono with John Lennon - just before his murder – for the album “Double Fantasy”. In 1981 the song was taken from the album and released as a single and in an extremely short time catapulted into the top ten of the US charts thus becoming Ono's “pop masterpiece”. The energetic song is a combination of cool “New Wave” and through the catchy bass and rock guitar beat also “Dance”. The video shows Ono in wintry grey New York. Private films of the Lennon family are continually inserted. The intimate, voyeuristic images of the partnership with Lennon contrasted with the cool sound of the song and the sad atmosphere of the urbane surroundings creates an emotionally charged mood.

The artist **Patty Chang** (*1972) became known for her solo performances, in which the psychological inner and the physical exterior of the body form the centre point. In the performances Chang carries out everyday activities which she decontextualises and in each case stretches the borders of the visually bearable. The observer oscillates between nausea and voyeurism. In her video work «**Melons (At a Loss)** » (1998) Chang gazes – dressed in a tight bodice – front on, into the camera and tells of her aunt who died of breast cancer. Using a knife she cuts through the cup of the bra, however, instead of a mutilated breast, a sliced melon becomes visible. With a spoon she begins to noisily scoop out the melon and eat its flesh, striving to continue to speak. The fruit of the melon functions as a metaphoric sign and bearer of associations, whereas the body and its representation so intertwined makes the action take on a truly grotesque character.

!PERFORMANCE ANAT BEN-DAVID!

The artist Anat Ben-David will stage a performance in the migros museum für gegenwartskunst on Friday, 20th October, at 10pm. Born 1970 in Jerusalem she has lived in London since 1999. In her music performances she works with electro and punk rock elements. Alongside her solo projects she is an occasional member of the band “Chicks on Speed”.

!LONG NIGHT OF THE MUSEUM!

Saturday, 2nd September 2006, 7pm-2am with a bar serving drinks and Möslang/Göldin/Gatsas-DJ-Set from 9pm.

!KINOAPPARATOM PRESENTS: MARTHA ROSLER AT MIGROS MUSEUM FÜR GEGENWARTSKUNST!

On Thursday, 14th September 2006, 7pm Kinoapparatom presents films by Martha Rosler. Kinoapparatom is an instant-cinema, organised by Simone Schardt and Wolf Schmelter. This presentation is a cooperation between Kinoapparatom and the migros museum für gegenwartskunst, Zürich.

!PUBLIC TOURS!

Sunday, 27th August and 24th September, 15th and 22nd October, 3pm, as well as Thursday 5th October, 6.30pm.

Opening hours: Tues / Wed / Fri Midday–6pm, Thursday Midday-8pm, Sat/Sun 11am-5pm.

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The migros museum für gegenwartskunst is an institution of the Migros Culture Percentage.

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