



Betsy Damon, *Body Masks*, 1976/2021. Performance photograph, 24 x 36 in.
Courtesy of the artist and Monika Fabijanska Contemporary Art Projects.

Feminism and the Legacy of Surrealism

Betsy Damon, Brenda Goodman, June Leaf, Jeanne Liotta, Caitlin Keogh, Anne Minich, Elizabeth Murray, and Elaine Stocki

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The artists in this show have been brought together by their affinity for the artistic and conceptual strategies of surrealism, using them to articulate a feminist perspective grounded in personal experience. While not surrealists themselves, they are a part of its legacy, taking up surrealism - which produced more important women artists than any other modernist movement - in its ability to tap into the unconscious. The paintings, drawings, films, sculptures, and performance photographs on view - by **Betsy Damon, Brenda Goodman, June Leaf, Jeanne Liotta, Caitlin Keogh, Anne Minich, Elizabeth Murray, and Elaine Stocki** - play with a private symbolism that merges elements of subjectivity with dream imagery and references to mass media. Seen together, the works in this show display a biting wit in the visceral quality of both their images and materiality.

The objects in **Caitlin Keogh's** *Waxing Year 2* (2020), painted individually with perfect precision, exhibit something uncanny in their total arrangement. They feel like discarded ephemera, often alluding to cultural signs of femininity, which have been excised from various sources and collaged together by the artist. **Elaine Stocki's** grouping of small, black-and-white photographs (2013) show three female nudes moving a large, nondescript canvas. The dark shadows cast by the protagonists and the illegibility of their action - its seeming lack of purpose - evokes a sense of ritual secrecy. Both Keogh and Stocki create enigmas: works that estrange reality and reveal the subterranean links between the imagination and visual objects.

In her large-scale self-portrait from 1973, **Brenda Goodman** depicts herself at work in the studio. Like an ouroboros, multiple arms jut out from the artist's mouth, some painting her likeness while others forcibly gorge her. This feeling of psychological stress remains palpable in her more recent work, visible in the incisions used to generate the now-abstract vocabulary of her paintings.

For Murray and Leaf, the repetitive nature of film plays a similar role, allowing them to fixate on a single moment and, by means of repetition, to extract its hidden suggestions. The kinetic sculptures of **June Leaf**, for example, are concerned with the infinite deferral of an instance of happiness. In **Elizabeth Murray's** painting from 1972, Cézanne's portrait of his wife becomes the occasion for a slapstick routine, with a stiff Madame Cézanne falling out of her chair, revealing the absurdity of the scene by using a sequence of comic strip cells.

The other artists in this show - Damon, Liotta, and Minich - are united by the visionary, archetypal character of their work. In the photographs that document **Betsy Damon's** *Body Masks* (1976) - a performative session in the artist's studio - two women are adorned with an armor of feathers and palm husks that suggest exaggerated female genitalia. They stand, like fertility idols, headless, their torsos filling the frame. **Jeanne Liotta's** film *Loretta* (2003) has a similar visceral quality, turning the projector's bulb into the source of a kind of nuclear holocaust, silhouettes of figures, arms raised, flashing across the screen before being consumed by light. Finally, the work of **Anne Minich** is bound up with the creation of a personal mythos that attaches a spiritual, otherworldly significance to a certain period of the artist's life. Borrowing its composition from church architecture, *Aqua Bride* (mid-1970s) is a double self-portrait that delves into the eros and corpus of Catholic theology, identifying Minich herself with the passion of Joan of Arc.

Made through an intuitive process that translates the mental state of the artist into visual forms, the artworks on view are charged with a libidinal energy. If, as psychoanalysis claims, the experience of modern life is one in which unconscious desires are ubiquitously denied - especially those of women - then these artists show how repression can be wielded for the sake of its opposite: to create works with a psychic force of their own.