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Identity

in collaboration with the Women's Caucus for Art



Figure 1: Sarah Maple, *Untitled with Skirt Up*, oil on board, 15.9 x 20 in | 40.5 x 51 cm

In a world dominated by pop culture, society and the media – how is identity defined?

In collaboration with gallery nine5, Karen Gutfreund, Exhibitions Director of the Women's Caucus for Art, is pleased to announce an international exhibition of 25 works from 21 female artists.

Identity seeks to expose the extremism of a consumer culture dominated by Western notions of beauty and the pursuit of idealized feminine perfection by exploring themes of power, representation and objectification. Female artists, in particular, face the challenge of identifying themselves amidst a society determined to do it for them. The artists featured in *Identity* attempt to manipulate the boundaries of authority and dominance and explore deeper themes of control. The viewer is challenged to confront his or her own gaze on the body and reflect on the psychological aspects of the female persona. Drawing from a feminist perspective, the selected works aim to define gender and identity through the artist's terms, whether through accepting or rejecting society's view, and voicing their individual definitions of the powerful feminine.





Figure 2: Sarah Maple, *Untitled with Skirt Up*, oil on board, 15.9 x 20 in | 40.5 x 51 cm

[Untitled, Skirts Up]

Irreverent and cheeky, Sarah Maple's work directly confronts the unflinching narratives of what it means to be a woman and a Muslim in the 21st century. Delivered with humor and sincerity, Maple boldly creates an unapologetically authentic account of her experience in a way that is deliciously shocking.

"*Untitled with Skirts up* is inspired by how there is never a perfect age to be a woman. When they are children there is a need by the media to sexualise them or for them to grow up before their time. Then when women get to adulthood the need is for us to remain young, be that through 'sexy school girl outfits', 'turn back time' de-ageing cream or by the obsession with us removing all of our body hair. I believe society enforces this in a subconscious way. We are encouraged to diet to stay small and childlike, never to mature, never to take up too much space in the world, never to be strong and powerful. I see this as a subconscious way of keeping us in our place."



Figure 3: Jessica Maria Manley, *The Castle*, Digital c-print, 30 x 40 in | 76.2 x 101.6 cm

[The Castle]

With delicate and steely purpose, Jessica Maria captures the transitional moment of a child becoming a young woman. The subject of her photographs is wise, with a maturity beyond her years, conscious of her sexual "power" but still fragile and vulnerable, her naivety disappearing from the landscape. With vivid, ephemeral and dreamlike large-scale C-prints, Jessica Maria Manley reflects on the effects the ever-present pressures to grow up quickly can have on children, especially young girls. Her work speaks to a certain type of "pornification" that is robbing innocence and creating a civilization where "childhood" is an endangered species.

Manley says of this series, "In a world dominated by pop culture and the media, I create photographs with the intent of provoking internal questioning regarding our own identity. Adults have ascertained a set of values and a moral code of conduct in an effort to neatly blend into the world around them. It is only when images disturb our own values and norms that individuals are made to feel ill at ease. What is viewed as odd or disturbing can be linked to the disruption of the moral code, ingrained both in the observer and the observed."



Figure 4: Cristina Velazquez, *Women Must Be Good Lovers*, dress and black thread, 28 x 51 1/4 in | 71 x 130.2 cm

[Women Must be Good Lovers]

Cristina Velazquez has created a series of garments that address the issues of gender equality, detailing the constructs of a strict, traditional society with expected and enforced roles for women. Poses from the Karma Sutra are delicately embroidered on a flaming red silk negligée, revealing a larger story of gender and identity. *Women Must Be Saints*, another dress covered in objects common to the religious female vernacular such as a bible, crucifix, rosaries, medals, holy water and scapulars,, wryly observes without judgment the gender expectations of the “good, faithful, obedient woman”.

Velazquez says, “Everything is a must—I must accomplish many chores in my life, in order to keep other people’s life going. These responsibilities are like aprons that I must wear over my dress; I put one on then take it off and replace it with a different one. There is a dress for every occasion in my life. Each represents a task or an attitude I must possess in order to be a complete woman. In this body of work I exposed all the different roles I must be successful at as a woman. Although different religions and cultures impose these same ideas on women in different parts of the world, I too must follow each and every one of them. They follow me like ghosts. I must always be something for someone because I was born a woman and must fulfill my roles.”

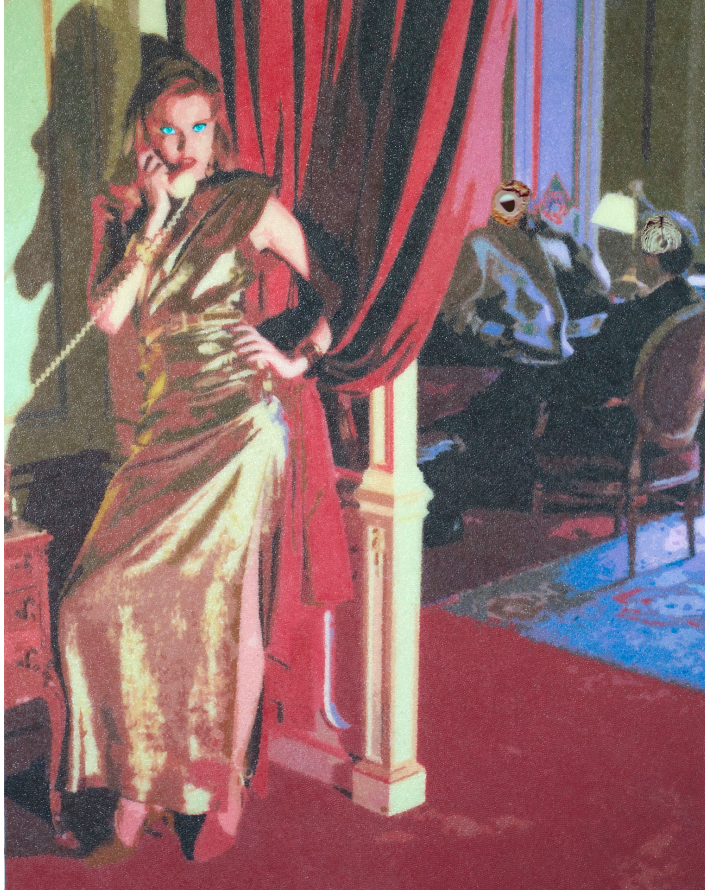


Figure 5: Shonagh Adelman, *The Conversation*, colored 4mm glass and acrylic crystals on canvas with embedded film loops, 68 x 54 in | 172.7 x 137 cm

[*The Conversation*]

Speaking to fetishes, femininity and the expectations placed on the female body, Shonagh Adelman meticulously affixes tens of thousands of Swarovski crystals and translucent acrylic beads on a canvas to create richly textured, iridescent surfaces that refract light as the viewer engages them. The characters, with direct gazes that come to life through their moving eyes, lips and tongues, breathe life into objectified poses, suggesting all is not as simple as it seems. The objectified are more than pretty objects.

Adelman says "The *Loopies* series uses 4mm colored glass crystals on canvas to give familiar gender tropes a new (and different) 'life'. As feminist authors have occasionally re-written the stories of female characters, the loopies are parodic reincarnations of their progenitors. Injecting the images with realism via film loops, moving body parts (lips, eyes, head etc.) breathe life into their stylized, static host bodies. The composure of still/zed figures is jarred by moving clichés of seduction--pursing, blinking, winking. Undermining and highlighting fetishistic femininity, the film loops transform those proverbial tropes into figures whose would-be self-determination turns on harnessing (by fulfilling the hypothetical expectations of the viewer) and defying, through hyperbole, those same expectations."

Twenty-five works for *Identity* are showcased in the gallery, with an additional 81 works online. Jurors Anne Swartz and Elena Maria Buszek say of the show's selection process, "Our respective scholarship on feminist art and activism centers on the image of woman as she evolves, as she looks both outward and inward. Popular culture and stereotypes are evident, alongside meditations on art history, and how visual culture in the broadest sense shapes our identities. Sex, sexuality, and the self-portrait sometimes show up in conjunction or separately."

"The themes throughout the many submissions included ideals of beauty and fashion, masquerade and concealment, social pressure, conforming to and rejecting religious standards, domestic and personal containment, sensuality and sexuality, and relationships with the mother, with the father, and with nature. The ways the artists define and present not just their gendered but their ethnic, racial, and sexual identity, and the spectrum of what the bodily-lived experience conveys struck us as dynamic, exciting, and engaging."

WCA Exhibition Director Karen Gutfreund said, "Art can be a powerful, productive force instrumental in sparking change or critical thinking. The Women's Caucus for Art is committed to supporting local, national, and global art activism to help us to understand what is happening in our society, who we are, where we come from and where we're going. Women have been written out of art history and are clearly underrepresented. My goal is to change that, one show at a time, focusing on "female only" shows until we see an equal playing field. The mission of the WCA is to create community through art, education, and social activism."

The artists in the exhibition at gallery nine⁵ are Shonagh Adelman, Chan & Mann, Sally Edelstein, Claire Joyce, Lauren Kalman, Beth Lakamp, Jessica Lichtenstein, Jessica Maria Manley, Meghan Mantia and Leone Reeves, Sarah Maple, Ellen Deitell Newman, Samantha Persons, Mei Xian Qiu, Jennifer Reeder, Phyllis Rosser, Sonal Shah, Erin Sparler, Joanne Ungar, Cristina Velazquez, and Meghan Willis.