

sarah **bedford**

mia **brownell**

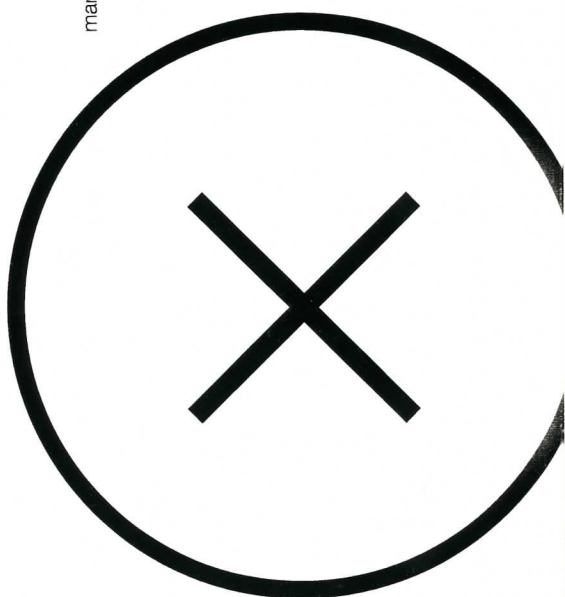
elizabeth **demaray**

angela **dufresne**

mandy **morrison**

erin **weckerle**

simone **dilaura**



grrrls!

untitled (space) gallery
may 23-june 30 2001

grrrls, gurls, gyrls

This show focuses on the categories of girl and girlhood as sources of postfeminist empowerment. Contrary to popular belief, postfeminism isn't a recent development, a badgirl backlash against some notion of political correctness. On the contrary, the term dates back to the late 1960s and describes the many strands of feminism dedicated to identity as difference rather than sisterly unity or biological sameness. While postfeminism has developed as a dynamic movement within universities, it has been misunderstood outside the academy as a form of anti-feminism. No wonder hardly anyone embraces the label "postfeminist" to describe herself. At its most basic, the term represents a rejection of fixed or stable feminine identity.

Postfeminism also offers a wealth of divergent strategies for understanding and expressing sexual identity, including:

- × Exploration of the fusion of language/culture and body in experience.
- × Resistance to Master Discourses, and/or acknowledgement that all discourses are grounded in historically and culturally specific subject positions.
- × Confrontation and/or embodiment of the hysteria that Sigmund Freud labeled as woman's central sex-oriented psychic disorder.
- × Women's and girls' fantasy, pleasure and libido posed as alternatives both to the male phallus and to the "lack" that psychoanalysis attributes to women instead of a phallus (On the internet, for example, young women have discovered that the word "girl" has been colonized by purveyors of male-oriented pornography. They use the word "gyrl" to navigate spaces for internet communication and exploration outside the domain of male desire).
- × Exploration of female narcissism and polymorphous sexuality, encompassing multiple erogenous zones, plural sexual orientations and practices, and pre-adolescent as well as mature sexuality.
- × Abjection: a transgressive parade of taboo materials such as menstrual blood, breast milk, snot and urine—or girly materials such as lace, glitter, needlework and spangles—that may (or may not) be seen as standing for the repressed feminine in culture.
- × Disruption of traditional roles, i.e. woman as childbearer, homemaker, virgin, whore, innocent child or pin-up. The rejection of these roles leads to possible new roles: woman who can reproduce without men or even sex, or women who can be part-child, part-animal or part-machine. In art, this disruptive impulse often results in the impression of girls' play or women's work gone awry or taken to extremes.
- × identification with pre-existing cultural roles as a range of exploitable and enactable fictions, a.k.a. masquerade. While some feminists want to thwart voyeurism, scopophilia or fetishism, many Postfeminist artists deliberately enact these processes. In performative identification, artists can take on culturally unacceptable female emotions such as revenge, jealousy or rage, and they can enact and alternate at whim the roles of victim and oppressor.

The artists in "Grrrls!" play across a spectrum of ideas. Many of the works foreground a performative, theatrical subjectivity. Although a piece may propose an author or narrator who is girly, slutty, butch, bitchy, obsessive or desperate to be loved, this character doesn't necessarily stand in for the artist. This has been an ongoing problem in the reception of controversial art by women; people assume that the persona presented in the work is the artist's and judge her accordingly. In the past, such work has sometimes been viewed as childish, self-indulgent, attention-seeking or dangerously apolitical. A postfeminist context allows us to weigh these interpretations against other, more provocative and generative options.

—**lucy soutter**, co-curator

artists in the exhibition

sarah bedford produces small to medium-sized collages using a number of girly materials including plastic trinkets, cake decorations, icing sugar and other bobbles. Her collages are beautiful, abstract and formally mature. Works using girly materials draw power from the idea that girls are a special category of humanity, and that the materials girls love most—bright, shiny, spangly, delicate things—can trigger a special kind of energy that has yet to be sufficiently explored. Pre-sexual, yet tingling with desire, these materials have a talismanic force when brought together with the ultra-concentrated care that girls bring to their play.

mia brownell's paintings take the comfort out of comfort food. Drawing attention to the anxieties connected to the production of the food we eat, the paintings strike at the heart of traditional female roles. For how can a gal make a nurturing, cozy contribution in the kitchen if the ingredients are hormone-basted, genetically modified and tainted with manure? With her beautifully crafted surfaces, Brownell refers to a history of nature painting (one of the few domains within painting in which women have excelled for centuries), though her acid colors and dramatic compositions take dark enjoyment in the fact that nothing is safely "natural" anymore.

elizabeth demaray uses both high and low-tech media to make objects that confront issues of nesting and nurturing. Her upholstered rock pieces combine the softness of sewing with the hardness of stone. Her "Hand Up Project" uses computerized rapid prototyping technology and stereo lithography laser carving to produce miniature three-dimensional plastic dwellings for hermit crabs. Based on the work of 1920s Fascist architect Giuseppe Terragni, as well as the research of a paleontologist and mechanical engineer, the crab homes involve a pointed overexpenditure of theorization, effort and resources to house a life-form that usually chooses to live in any piece of garbage that happens to fit.

simone dilaura produces portraits in which the critique of the male objectifying gaze has given way to a pleasurable complicity. Each posed figure looks at herself and us through the seductive lens of advertising, women's magazines and television. She mimics the beauty and allure generated in the way these sources caress their young female subjects. At the same time, the blotchy surfaces of the paintings and the slightly distorted perspective short-circuit the production of envy and desire—we are kept awkwardly aware of the subject's performance of looking and being looked at.

angela dufresne works from memory, family photos, sports magazines and imagination. She describes the women in her large-scale drawings as "the footsoldiers of a beautiful war that takes lovers not prisoners, the pirates and pilgrims of a wanderlust race of women who are guided by intuition, passion, even capriciousness, not ambition."

mandy morrison's "Desperado" video combines aggression and hilarious gender-bending parody. The artist masquerades as John Wayne while sporting a horrific hybrid phallus/externalized vagina, an appendage that dangles dangerously while s/he struts about and rides a mechanical bronco. Morrison's "Flower Bed Frau" has a very different tone. Nestled into an installation of colorful murals and a large kitty bed, the video combines pastoral Alpine beauty with disturbing implications of Aryan sexual violence and perversion.

erin weckerle explores the formal, material and metaphorical possibilities of fabric and trimmings. She wraps traditionally male objects such as drum kits and motorcycles with vintage domestic and fashion textiles, smothering function under draped surfaces of checks, flowers, cherubs, rhinestones and denim. Her padded "pillow" canvases carry this aesthetic onto the wall. Embellished with colored beads or big, orphaned buttons, the canvases negotiate between the optical pleasures of painting and the tactile comforts of the bedroom. Weckerle's installation invites the viewer into a lair of homey kitsch. Ringed by a tangle of cheap, gaudy thrift-store lamps, this cozy warmth is a mere short circuit away from an inferno.

for further readings on postfeminism, see Sophia Phoca and Rebecca Wright, *Introducing Postfeminism* (New York: Totem Books, 1999), and Ann Brooks, *Postfeminisms: Feminism, Cultural Theory and Cultural Forms* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997).

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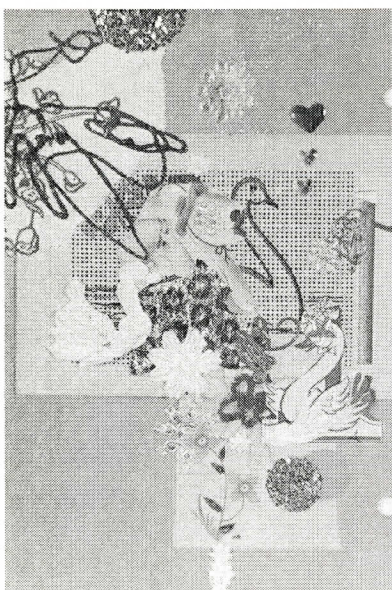
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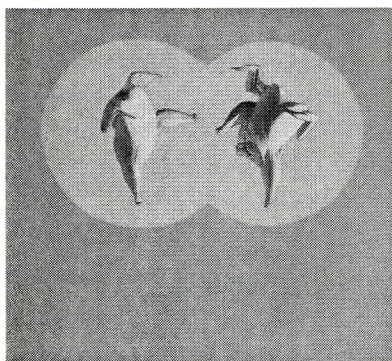
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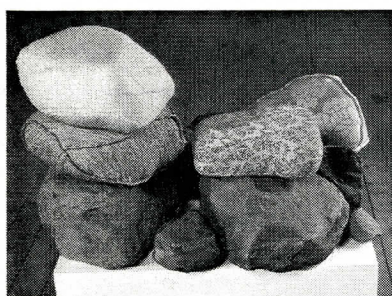
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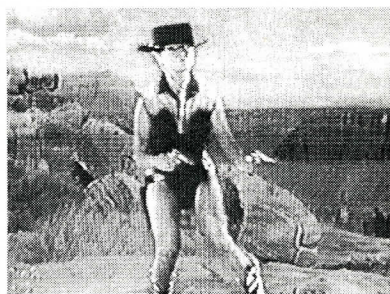
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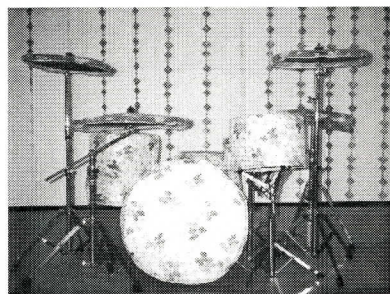
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7.

checklist for grrrls!

1. sarah **bedford**

#285, #287, #291, #282, collage on paper with icing sugar, glitter, trinkets, and bobbles, 8" x 12" each, 2001.

2. mia **brownell**

Wings, oil on canvases, 12 8" x 10" canvases, 2000.

Poultry Polka II, oil on canvas, 54" x 60", 2000.

Hash, oil on canvas, 36" x 36", 2000.

3. elizabeth **demaray**

Upholstered Stones, stones, upholstery material, batting and thread, 18" x 18" x 18", approx. 150 lbs. 2001.

The Shitty Birthday Series, discarded lump or brick and mortar, rock, birthday candles, dimensions variable, 2001.

Half, large format prints, 2000.

4. simone **dilaura**

Untitled-girl laughing, oil paint pressed on paper, 11" x 14" framed, 2000.

Untitled-portrait of a girl, oil paint pressed on paper, 8" x 10", 2001.

Girl 9 and Girl 13, oil paint pressed on paper, 11"x14" framed, 2000.

5. angela **dufresne**

Sanderika Kinsky, graphite on paper, 72" x 94", 2001.

Katerina Kinsky, graphite on paper, 48" x 72", 2001.

6. mandy **morrison**

Desperado, video installation, 3 minutes 45 seconds, 1997.

Flower Bed Frau, video installation, 9 minutes, 1996.

7. erin **weckerle**

drumkit, fabric, drumkit, 2001.

belly button, fabric, mixed media, 21"x 21", 2000-2001.

pillowy, fabric, mixed media, diptych, 24"x 24" each, 2000.

Untitled Room Sculpture, fabric, lamps, dimensions variable, 2001.

grrrls! is curated by **martin kruck** and **lucy soutter**.



untitled (space) ¹⁶.

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