



1
Giant Rooster, c. 1979
 Print on paper
 103.5 × 132.1 cm

2–4
Legal Gender, 1971
 Print on paper
 7 × 15,9 cm
 Ed. of 38

5
Bring it on, c. 2004–2008
 Collage on paper
 55.6 × 54.3 cm

6
Untitled, 1965
 35.6 × 27.9 cm framed

7
Untitled, n.d.
 Graphite and Xerox print
 21.6 × 28.9 cm

8
Untitled, n.d.
 Graphite, Xerox print,
 wallpaper
 38.1 × 50.8 cm

9
Untitled, n.d.
 Graphite, Xerox print
 and wallpaper
 38.1 × 50.8 cm

10
 Archive material

11
Let me count the ways,
 c. 1970s
 Print, pencil and ink on
 paper
 21.6 × 29.2 cm

12
 Preparatory collage for
Valentine to Brando
(Giant Women on New
York), ca. 1969–73
 Photo collage
 27.9 × 20.3 cm

13
 Preparatory collage for
Empire State
(Giant Women on
New York), ca. 1969–73
 Collage on silver
 gelatin print
 20.3 × 25.4 cm

14
Feminist Party poster,
 1971
 55.8 × 43 cm

15
Giant Lion, c. 1979
 Print on paper
 90.5 × 106.4 cm

16
Giant Zebras, c. 1979
 Print on paper
 94 × 109.9 cm

17
Untitled, 1964–1968
 Graphite on photo
 18.4 × 24.1 cm

18
 Archive material

19
Secret Members, n.d.
 Print
 26.4 × 39.8 cm

20
 Ray Johnson
Piece For Anita Steckel,
 n.d.
 Drawing, collage on paper
 35.5 × 28.5 cm

WONNERTH DEJACO

LUST

a solo exhibition
 on the work of
 Anita Steckel and
 series of readings
 by Constance Debré
 and Reba Maybury

Curated by
 Juliette Desorgues

8 September 2023 —
 14 October 2023

LUST

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For this year's Curated by festival, WONNERTH DEJACO presents the first European solo exhibition to focus on the work of American feminist artist, political satirist and activist Anita Steckel as well as a series of readings by French writer Constance Debré and British artist, writer and political dominatrix Reba Maybury. Curated by writer and curator Juliette Desorgues, LUST, a term suggestive of both desire and play, is an interdisciplinary programme, which places three transgenerational figures in dialogue to reflect on questions of power, gender and sexuality.

A key figure of the 1950s and 60s New York downtown scene, Anita Steckel developed an oeuvre consisting of photographic, collage- and drawing-based work that blossomed during the context of the Western women's liberation movement of the 1970s. In 1973, she co-founded the Fight Censorship collective with fellow New York-based feminist artists Judith Bernstein, Louise Bourgeois, Joan Semmel and Hannah Wilke amongst others, a group brought together through their common practice of sexually explicit art against a backdrop of prevailing sexism and puritanism in the art establishment.¹ Drawn from Steckel's archive and estate, the works presented in this exhibition

span five decades of her rich oeuvre, from the 1960s to the 2000s. Phallic symbolism is depicted throughout as a cypher of systemic patriarchal power that Steckel playfully subverts as both an object of satirical intent and an apparatus of sexual desire. The imposing naked bodies of women are also deployed as signifiers both of vulnerable unease and emancipatory release.

Constance Debré and Reba Maybury will perform readings of new and recent texts within the context of Steckel's exhibition for the opening weekend. Whilst Debré's style of writing piercingly chronicles her own personal life, the rejection of institutional bourgeois structures and exploration of her queer sexuality; Maybury's texts act as conceptual manifestos to her work as a political dominatrix which centres on subverting traditional gender power relations through and within sex work.

Echoing the feminist literary and artistic historical context in Vienna, from Elfriede Jelinek to Valie Export, each of these three voices confronts the systemic mechanisms of power, laying bare their structures and subverting their entrapments with humorous, raw and biting force. The self, as a lived and metaphorical entity, is deployed as a key trope to touch on wider questions of sexuality and gender, and especially, women's role within society. Desire, both imagined and embodied, comes to act as a central cue, one which serves as a form of unabashed disruption to the hegemony of the normative patriarchal public sphere.

The exhibition responds to the framing of this year's Curated by festival—“The Neutral”— as a provocation. Within the context of today's social and political upheavals, from the recent overturning of the Roe vs Wade decision in the United States to the denial of Transgender rights in numerous Western countries, any notion of neutrality is debunked when considering the on-going battles over the governance of bodies and the geo-political consequences of these power relations. And yet, given this context, what does it mean to consider the work of a first wave feminist figure such as Anita Steckel in a time of ‘heteropessimism’, as coined by writer Asa Seresin?² It is in the refusal towards ambivalence as a political and embodied stance, which marked Steckel's much overlooked life and work, that answers can be found.³ As with Steckel, the work of Debré and Maybury indeed also reveals how, in lieu of neutrality, a position may be taken, one which boldly asserts a self-determination that spits in the eye of conservative and repressive forces.

¹ Fight Censorship Group “Women Artists Join to Fight to Put Sex into Museums and Get Sexism and Puritanism Out”, 1973

² ‘On Heteropessimism: Heterosexuality is nobody's personal problem’, The New Inquiry, 9/10/2019, accessed <https://thenewinquiry.com/on-heteropessimism/> 28/07/2023.

³ See also Wendy Vogel's reading of Steckel's work in light of today's pressing concerns: ‘Reconsidering Anita Steckel in the Age of Heteropessimism’, Mousse Magazine, Issue 82, February 2023.

Acknowledgements

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