

The New Museum is pleased to announce the first solo museum exhibition of the work of New York-based artist Judith Bernstein (b. 1942). For over forty years, Judith Bernstein has created expressive drawings and paintings that boldly critique militarism and machismo in a manner that is at once humorous and threatening. The exhibition at the New Museum will include a selection of works ranging from the '60s through the present, including a new site-specific rendition of Bernstein's Signature Piece (1986), painted in explosive gestural strokes directly onto the Lobby Gallery windows. For Bernstein, this piece, presented in counterpoint to her large-scale images within the gallery, proclaims her presence and confronts egotistical posturing of artists within the art world and society.

"Judith Bernstein: HARD" will be on view in the Lobby Gallery from October 10, 2012–January 20, 2013, and is curated by Margot Norton, Curatorial Associate. The exhibition's title, like Bernstein's work, carries an explicit meaning as a sexual reference. Yet it is also semantically elastic, conjuring up multiple associations within layers of political, personal, and artistic struggle.

As a student at Yale in the '60s, Bernstein developed a fascination with the graffiti she found in men's restrooms, images that would later inform the basis of her work. Within these crude sexual scrawlings, Bernstein discovered a window into the male subconscious as well as her own. Her works from this period, predating the wave of feminist artworks in the early '70s, assert female rights and address the underlying connection between sexual aggression and warfare. These mordant antiwar and antisexist statements bristle with the political activism and fury that characterized the Vietnam War era, and continue to resonate viscerally today.

Bernstein's most well-known artworks are her subsequent series of biomorphic screw drawings, which she began in 1969. These monumental pieces provocatively appropriate the image of the screw as a phallic symbol of oppression—as in the expression "being screwed"—and evoke ominous power. One of these works, HORIZONTAL (1973), was censored from the exhibition "FOCUS: Women's Work— American Art in 1974" at the Museum of the Philadelphia Civic Center for "lacking redeeming social value," phraseology commonly applied to pornography. At the time, a petition letter was issued in protest, signed by many significant artists, critics, and curators, including Clement Greenberg, Linda Nochlin, Lucy Lippard, Louise Bourgeois, and the New Museum's Founding Director, Marcia Tucker.

Bernstein was a founding member of A.I.R. Gallery (the first gallery devoted to showing female artists) where she had her first solo exhibition in 1973. She was an early member of many art and activist organizations including Guerrilla Girls, Art Workers' Coalition, and Fight Censorship.

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