

*The Egyptians appear to have reversed the ordinary practices of mankind. Women attend markets and are employed in trade, while men stay at home and do the weaving! Men in Egypt carry loads on their head, women on their shoulder. Women pass water standing up, men sitting down. To ease themselves, they go indoors, but eat outside on the streets, on the theory that what is unseemly, but necessary, should be done in private, and what is not unseemly should be done openly.*

(Herodotus II: 33-37)

Liliane Lijn (b. 1939, New York) began her practice as a young artist within a male world of kinetics and conceptual art. The kind of work she has become known for, as the result of being affiliated openly and consistently with artists that deal with space, light and matter, stands bold and fresh still today. Although it is language, through poetry and myths, that has lead her work and her philosophy throughout and has been the thread in all her work.

As she developed a language of her own during the early years of her career, work after work, Lijn has never stopped experimenting and pushing the limits of her practice. Merging science, technology with poetry, writing and performance, sculpture, video and painting she has built throughout the decades a very dense and coherently diverse corpus. She has always been an ‘un-feminist feminist’, referencing fields uncanonical to feminism, such as science and technology.

Since our collaboration began last year, when Lijn joined the gallery, it became apparent that our priority is to unravel and present the pioneering and historic works that she began making in the late 1960s and early 1970s leading up to today. Our first exhibition in London last spring brought together various works from the late 1970s towards the early 1990s. It presented the transformation that occurred in her language from the cosmic to the bodily, from abstraction to a type of figuration. Works that slowly and steadily started dealing with the body and the feminine, structures and forms that challenge paradigms in art; the Torn Heads, blown glass sculptures that portray different phases of woman’s condition, as well as the thick pastel paintings of the feminine archetype: The Bride, The Medusa, The Bird Lady, Darkness. Lastly a body of sculptures, totemic at first sight, that combine salvaged industrial and military material on designed metal structures, hermaphrodite and female.

After spending almost a decade composing *Crossing Map*, an epic book that defies genre as it lingers between prose and poetry, Lijn started to visualise the body in a completely new way. As she

moved through the early 1980s with renewed energy, not just cosmic but also personal and therefore artistic, myths and the notion of transformation started taking shape through contemporary culture, various media and the experiential. In *Crossing Map*, a woman who is an artist travels through time and via her memory experiences a series of events, eventually encountering the Last Man (in that world). Through this meeting she realises and accepts the end of a society built by man himself and reaches his absolute deconstruction. “Crossing Map explores the idea that the human mind is disposed of a vast supply of untapped energy. What would it be like, Lijn posits, to inhabit a world in which humans became light? Crossing is the point where meeting occurs. Meeting leads to exchange and that is the basis of all relationships.”(1)

The bold choreography of *Conjunction of the Opposites: The Woman of War (1986) and The Lady of the Wild Things (1983)* is an installation Lijn arrived at after a deep and long process of rediscovering the female. The two towering figures were ahead of their time: they are computer controlled, they use LED lights as well as a laser, smoke and a combination of high and low materials such as brush fibres. The connection between the sacred and modern industry is not an accidental one. Lijn observes that many of the holiest places consecrated to the Goddess in ancient times are now transformed into oil refineries and power stations and questions what archetypes might be hidden in the “bowels of steel mills or the endless intestines of oil refineries?” The two giant kore were made in different times and then became united; together they create a mesmerizing spiritual and sensual drama, staging an exchange of poetry and light in a cloud of artificial fog. *The Lady of the Wild Things (1983)*, a bird goddess, represents the lunar archetype and as a machine is activated by sound. Her head is made of a prism originally made for a Centurian tank, her red and green wings are studded with 250 LED lights; she “represents life in death and death in life.”(2) When Lijn made *The Woman of War* some years later (1986) she made her also as an archetype, in the form of a singing goddess that intones an angry, bold and audacious song. She felt that the song came straight through the earth to her mouth as she started to sing it, as if it was the Earth singing through her. She then realised that the two sculptures belonged together as one piece. A laser light connects them with a disembodied beam of red light bouncing between their heads. When they are on their own they sleep, while when encountered a six minute drama unravels that is sung in Lijn’s voice.

The two sculptures communicate on a symbolic level with references to female archetypes and mythological beings, embodied in elements of violence, seduction, power and spirituality. Facing each other, they completely reinvent binary notions of gender, establishing femininity as a fluid cosmic fact, which allows the integration and interchangeability of opposites on a physical and psychological level.

The idea for this work dates back to 1959, when Lijn lived in Paris and saw in the sunset the figure of the goddess made up of clouds. This goddess-like figure remained since then central to Lijn's work and her attempt to deconstruct and reconstruct this vision lies behind a large part of her artistic production. A selection of drawings further elaborates on the complex symbolic and metaphoric discourse delivered by *Conjunction of Opposites*. Realized between the early 1980s and the early 1990s, these works on paper amplify the visual vocabulary of symbolic and formal references compiled by the artist and reveal the depth of her lifelong commitment to pursue a radical notion of femininity on a psychological, intellectual and artistic level.

It has been a great honour to work with Liliane on bringing this historic piece to Rodeo Piraeus to mark the beginning of the new season and the second exhibition here. A body of work that is 35 years old that could not feel more contemporary and urgent in the current state of affairs; a work that screams out for transformation towards a state of mind and openness, on a collective level, to realise a society where feminine power rises again.

1 <http://www.lilianelijn.com/portfolio-item/crossing-map-book-1983/>

2 Melissa Budasz, *In Conversation with Liliane Lijn*, in *Art Verve*, Issue 5, March 2016.

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