

JURORS STATEMENT

In jurying “Identity,” we were struck by how persistent certain themes and issues were in the submitted works. We selected pieces addressing the central issues posed by the exhibition announcement about how and in what ways women represent identity today “when artists manipulate the boundaries of power and explore deeper themes of control, fetishism, and objectification, [and] the viewer is challenged to confront his or her own gaze on the body and to reflect on aspects of the female persona [...] from a feminist perspective.” The themes we noted 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, 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, taking to heart the National Women’s Caucus for Art’s call for artists to “push the envelope.”

As jurors, we limited ourselves—in both the exhibition and catalogue—to works explicitly relating to the show’s prospectus. Our choices included artists concerned with commonalities in identity, in myriad manifestations, while other artists emphasized individual identity in local detail, while still others looked more symbolically at identity. We focused on the notion that simply representing a woman doesn’t make an artwork *about* a woman’s identity. Sometimes the artists used conventional markers, like the home, flowers, or the heart. Sometimes, they relied on less typical modes, such as distortion, contradiction, or doubling. The resurgence in contemporary feminist art towards looking to Surrealist theory and strategies for influence was clearly reflected in several works. We were also drawn to works that expressed the range of ways artists showcase relationships to significant people in our lives, which selected examples did in moving, wacky and even creepy ways. Ultimately, we were bowled over by the level of invention in media and content in the submissions for this exhibition.

The challenge for us was in the selection process. We went through the National WCA’s record-breaking number of submissions for this show, and found many outstanding works that are visually compelling and thought-provoking. However, both the theme and gallery’s space limitations necessitated a very short list for the exhibition’s final set of works. As such, we were grateful to the WCA for the opportunity to reproduce many other truly worthy pieces in the catalogue, which reflect both the diversity and number of pertinent work under consideration. Since we didn’t know the artists’ identities in the jurying process, we looked at the representations, references, and forms, seeking as broad a range as we could of the works where the conceptions of identity issues were the most

emphatic.

Feminism remains both a personal and public political statement, with the submitted art in evidence of that still-pertinent point of the movement. We appreciated the opportunity for any woman-identified artist to submit and noted several submissions dealing with queerness, but longed for more such meditations. The new pertinence of

social media and transgender identities in constructing the contemporary self were welcome subjects in selected examples for this show. We look forward to future exhibitions of the National WCA that encourage a larger range of art dealing with a more diverse set of queered subjects and lesbian experiences. For the WCA to support some survey of lesbian- and gender-queer oriented content, especially by emergent artists, makes sense at this point in its storied history, and in the meantime were thrilled to include several excellent works exploring such perspectives. It is interesting to us that, despite its importance to so many feminist artists that there was little art dealing with the environment in terms of identity. Similarly, we didn't see as many meditations or critiques of technology, which is another area we hope finds its way into a future WCA exhibition. We were surprised by the small number of digital or web-based projects as well.

That said, we happily worked with the selections available, given to us in digital forms to jury. The limitations of the gallery space meant that we had to give thought to the scale of the works available, but we found that, in the end, scale and size didn't end up playing a role in our determinations and selections. We are glad that a few works in series were submitted so they could give slightly different perspectives on the artist's image, although in several cases we relied on the catalogue to flesh out these serial works more fully. We were thrilled that an excellent DIY "take-away" project and a performance were available to us in the jurying process. Much of the submitted work was figurative and representational, and so the abstract pieces we chose were particularly satisfying reflections on the range of issues embodied in identity.

Our own respective scholarship on feminist art and activism centers on the image of woman as she evolves, as she looks both outward and inward, which is apparent in many of our selections. Popular culture and stereotypes are evident, alongside meditations on art history, and how visual culture in the broadest sense shapes our identities. Critiques of past feminist art occurred less frequently, but still occur in ways we found alternately comical and melancholy. Sex, sexuality, and the self-portrait sometimes show up in conjunction or separately. We were concerned with diversity and wanted to

include art that showed images of the widest range of people. Most of all, we were pleased by the works using humor to confront grave and serious subjects such as religion, culture, health, and trauma. A sense of humor in art always warms our feminist hearts, and we are pleased that the power of laughter and play reverberate throughout the exhibition's myriad explorations of "Identity."

Maria Elena Buszek and Anne Swartz