ABSTRACT

Panel: Re-Territorializing Gender: Women Artists and Expatriation

Chair: Linda Kim, Drexel University
Respondent: Elizabeth Hutchinson, Barnard College

This panel insists on the importance of racial, economic, and sexual positions within and among subjects who chose to live abroad, to complicate the history of women artists and transnational movements. Women artists’ occupation of new national zones disrupted certain gendered essentialisms, while strategically mobilizing others.

Papers

TIRZA TRUE LATIMER, CALIFORNIA COLLEGE OF THE ARTS
"Foreigners Everywhere": Interwar Paris’s Lesbian Expats

The lesbian, a figure emerging in the popular imagination and on the streets of Paris between the two world wars, represented a sort of symbolic end-point in the feminist struggle for autonomy. Many who openly identified as sapphists were expats—escapees from the surveillance of biological families. Both figuratively and literally, lesbians played dramatic and usually disruptive roles in period debates about gender and sexuality. “The Lesbian” appeared, for better or worse, as the inevitable end logic of female emancipation. One of the themes that emerges in works of art and literature, scientific discourse, and popular culture produced by and/or about lesbians is that of alien identity. This paper examines the ways that lesbianism, feminism, and alien identity intertwined in Paris of the early twentieth century.

ANA PERRY, CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
Exiled from Nowhere: Situating Marisol Escobar between Alienation and Observation

Marisol Escobar’s ambiguity and mystery dominates the narrative that surrounds her work. She has been described as “a sphinx without a riddle” or a “beautiful enigma” and critics have worked tirelessly to find the truth behind her characteristic elusiveness. Contemporary scholars have noted the gendered implication of Marisol’s mystery. They complicate the ways in which she is positioned as a feminine counterpoint that reinforces Pop art’s cool, detached masculinity. However, few have delved into the way Marisol complicated her own femininity by performing an ambiguous ethnicity. By refusing to elucidate her biography, or speak about her nationality, others were tasked with the struggle of placing her within an understood national identity. Reviews of her work become a curious conglomeration of ethnic descriptors ranging from primitive, indigenous, and Spanish, to Egyptian and exotic.

This paper will explore the ways in which Marisol expanded upon this confusion throughout the earlier part of her career. Between the masks of her face she placed on her sculptures and her masked appearances on panels, Marisol performed multiple ethnicities that challenged notions of self-identity as rooted in place. Marisol’s silence complicates her marginality by refusing to answer questions about identity and, through this, highlights the efforts with which critics would go to
place her. In addition, I will argue that Marisol’s mythical exoticism further distinguishes her from her female contemporaries to create multiple levels of tokenism within the 1960s contemporary art scene.

SALEEMA WARAICh, SKIDMORE COLLEGE

Between Lahore and New York: Liminality in Contemporary Miniature Painting

This paper examines three contemporary female artists who trained at the National College of Arts in Lahore, Pakistan and subsequently moved to the United States. All presently reside in New York City. While sharing certain experiences in common, each artist negotiates issues related to migration and marginalization in distinctive ways. For example, two of the artists who relocated to the U.S. found opportunities for exploring and showcasing their work; for the third, moving to the U.S. meant losing the status and opportunities she enjoyed in Pakistan. All three artists trained in the “miniature” painting style, an artistic practice associated with several centuries of courtly painting in the South Asian subcontinent. The temporal and regional specificity of their practice often results in demands placed upon them to represent and produce “authentic” Pakistani art for audiences in the US and in Pakistan. Rather than choosing the terms of their marginalization, these artists as a result have faced multiple forms of alienation and even exclusion. I position their lives and work as increasingly layered and variously textured, as signifiers of thresholds (that is, "betwixt and between"), and as spaces for interrogating popular and essentialist attitudes toward Muslim women and "others."