SHE BAM POW
POP WIZZ!
Les amazones du POP

October 3rd 2020 – March 28th 2021

MEDIATION FORM

Kiki Kogelnik, Miss Universe, 1963
Huile et acrylique sur toile, 152.15 × 121.92 cm
Courtesy Galerie Natalie Seroussi © 1963 Kogelnik Foundation. Reserved rights
PRESENTATION

The MAMAC features an exhibition dedicated to the female artists who contributed to the 1960's rise of POP culture. This exhibition tells the story of an emancipation. The magazine woman, the Hollywood woman, the angelic housewife, the heroic woman and many more: all these representations are upsetting and encourage a generation of artists to manifest themselves in order to revendicate alternative visions and strong positioning outside of this universe of artifices in which women are still constrained.

TOUR DURATION

- 1st grade - 5th grade 1H
- Middle School 1H
- High School - University 1H

GOALS

- Question the stereotypes and highlight the importance of women emancipation, civil rights and feminism
- Discover the figure of Niki de Saint Phalle
- Discover the aesthetics of 1960-1970
- Mirror the Pop Art movement with New Realism and unveil the link between France and the United States
- Tackle the notion of happening and reappropriation
- Woman at the center of the debate on mass consumption society

STEP OF THE VISIT

Using this information, the teacher should decide on artists and stages to focus on depending on the grade level and the availability of the artworks present in the museum. The stages can be articulated following the teacher's preferences. The preparation sheet should be completed in order to assist the tour.

Step 1: What is Pop Art?

Step 2: Dear Liberty

Step 3: Pop Iconography and image society

Step 4: What now?

ASSOCIATED KNOWLEDGE
STEP 1: What is POP ART?

AN INTERNATIONAL AND POPULAR CULTURE, TARGETING TEENAGERS

Pop Art is an artistic movement. However, before anything else, it is derived from the popular culture of an era which deployed itself at the international level during the 1960’s. With colonial war and massive industrialization in the background, social aspirations mingled with political claims. The post-war society transformed into consumer society as a way to rebuild itself. Thus, drawing their inspiration from popular culture, artists created a truly pop iconography: advertisement slogan, bright colors, and new materials were used as means of expression.

The exhibition *She Bam Pow POP Wizz ! Les amazones du Pop* aims at underlining such international mobilization but also female artists’ contribution to Pop Art and Pop culture. This exhibition offers itself as a re-reading of art history from 1960 to 1970, a male written history of which female artists were erased.

POP ART AESTHETIC FORMS

If the Pop Art movement wishes to become a pioneer of the topics it tackles, it also chooses innovative mediums. Now, creation materials come from the street, advertisement posters, popular culture with cinema and songs, design, or the industry itself, using plastic, vinyl, cardboard, or Plexiglas. Thus, Pop Art wants to reconcile art and life, and inevitably carries a vision, a democratic ideal based on the society of that time and deeply inscribed in its aesthetic form.

STEP 2: DEAR LIBERTY

LOVE, PLEASURE AND ROCK’N ROLL

This exhibition tells the story of women’s emancipation through the affirmation of their liberty and desires. Featuring floating bodies, comics heroines, powerful combatants, and smart girls, representations draw further from traditional Pop Art iconography and the hyper sexualized image provided by Pop artists. The revendication carried by the female artist participating in this movement are embodied in certain connoted items that they divert and appropriate for themselves. Handling irony and derision, these artists use and distort clichés as a way to denounce them better.

Whether it is Brigitte Bardot riding allusively her Harley Davidson or Niki de Saint Phalle using a rifle to execute her first 1961 shootings, sexist clichés are revisited in order to provide an alternative image of the woman by using various expression channels. Adopting the same approach, Evelyn Axell appropriates car fantasies and its banner of evasion in view of affirming a feminine sexuality and desire opposed to the prevailing conservatism.

Martha Rosler
Brooklyn, New York (Etats-Unis), 1943

*Isn’t it Nice or Baby Dolls, from the series Body Beautiful, or Beauty Knows No Pain*, ca. 1967-1972
61 x 51 cm
Photomontage
Courtesy de l’artiste et de la Galerie Nagel Draxler, Berlin/Cologne
AFFIRMATION OF FEMININE DESIRE AND SEXUALITY

In order to fully assume themselves as free and independent women, artists deal with desire and sexuality. In turn, taboo topics about feminine desire and the right of women to erotic pleasure are embraced by the artists. Women appropriate the "Male Gaze" (the process through which women are owned simply by a man looking at them) and claim the active character of feminine desire and pleasure. Three artists aim to show bodies in their nudity and sexuality without hyper sexualizing women's bodies. Carolee Schneeman, Dorothy Ianone and Niki de Saint Phalle all tell a love story by representing sexual intercourses.

THE ICON, THE HERO AND THE ARTIST

If some of these women affirm themselves very openly, others choose more diverted means, like irony or cynicism, in order to criticize the society they live in. By using in a caricatural way popular cinematic references, they highlight the injustice and the sexism of which they are victims as "objectified - characters", eroticized totems subjected to the male gaze. This is notably the case of France Cristini who, by reusing signature trademarks of horror movies, paints an image of the woman as a victim; Rosalyn Drexler interrogates the relationship of the woman with popular cinema (more particularly King Kong in the work below). Same for Pauline Boty who decides to re-interpret the iconic statue of Marilyn Monroe as a full woman (and not only as a celebrity): a woman who is strong, inspiring, and who affirms her sexuality.
STEP 3: ICONOGRAPHY AND IMAGE SOCIETY

THE PIN UP

This image of the hyper sexualized women, an object dominated by the male gaze, is borrowed by female artists through diversion and provocation. The questions raised bring forward a reflection on this widely-used iconography, overexploited in the popular culture.

At the heart of Poland, a country divided between conservatism and individual liberties, Natalia LL captures two movements of the society. On one hand, the homogenization and anonymization of the individuals, on the other, the massive production of an ultra-sexualization of young women. True pioneer of avant-garde female art in Poland, Natalia LL is celebrated worldwide for her playful critique of consumerism as well as for her deep explorations of sexuality and gender. The artist looks to produce an effect on the audience: the meaning that it takes from these topics. She plays the role of the pin up in order to question this cliché of the women back in those days.

ITEMS ACCUMULATION AND THE HOUSEWIFE

The suffocating domesticity which rules the era is re-invested by the Pop artist as a topic of creation crucially needing sublimation. Artists inject a critical perspective within this domestic sphere allocated to the women in spite of them. Martha Rosler more particularly, revisits kitchen advertisement by adding to its parts of women bodies (for example, breasts within an oven) as a way to attack the invasive sexist clichés ruling the imagery. The strangeness resulting from her works puts into question the inappropriate analogies evoked by advertisement campaigns at the time.

The house environment is majorly represented in two ways within the exhibition: the art of assemblage, whose goal is to assemble heterogeneous items from the everyday life (the art of assemblage is a central part of the used plastic language); the accumulation and sublimation of that everyday life but also of the social and political reality of a particular era.
The role of the “good” wife and exemplary housewife suggests the image of a beaming consumer. The idea of acquiring items from the everyday as the condition to realize oneself is naturally contested by different female artists. The work of Lourdes Castro features items like aluminum packages and produces a sociological account of women’s reality, an archiving of their times. The colors and the visually pleasant final result act as reminders of the hypnosis and the vicious cycle women must yield to through the marketing of consumption items.

The artist Ulrike Ottinger conceives her work as a superposition of political, social, and aesthetical stratas which dissect the myth of mass consumption. It reminds the artworks of Christa Dichgans who made use of batteries to denounce over-consumption, or Isabel Oliver’s Cosmética in which an anxious and slimmed Lady Liberty drowns into a flow of beauty products, standing as if they were skyscrapers.

Similarly, Kay Kurt is an expert of accumulation and large formats because of their effect on the audience. The personal technique used consists of an accumulation of thin layers of pain, a process that can go on for one to four years. The enlargement of the painted items associates her work with Pop Art and produces a new shape for each subject, distant from its reality. Such re-appropriation may seem critical and ironic but also surrealist.

THE IDOL

Pauline Boty decides to re-invest the imaginary of Marilyn Monroe to make her a model of a strong and shameless woman. The idol is no more the men-fantasized creature but the independent and fighting woman who refuses sexist oppression.

Jann Haworth makes use of the famous figures of the time to assemble them in an installation recalling a family picture. The result is surprising, almost disturbing. The employment of textile, wood, or even artificial hair drastically changes the image of stars, usually surrounded by sparkles and spotlights.
A MODEL FOR TEENAGERS

The singers of the time are bearing witness to their era and mirror the pop music culture. They are models for teenagers. The exhibition features a serie of screens diffusing music clips from some of these singers (France Gall, Dany etc) as well as an ancestor of makeup tutorial, produced by Marie Laforet. The complicity established with young girls reveals the important place these women held in the heart and minds of their feminine audience.

STEP 4: WHAT NOW?

Transformations operating since the end of the Second World War in the everyday life, housing, traveling, landscapes, values, and leisures allow for very euphoric projections toward a bright future and well-being for all. Mass production gives birth to a wide range of new items, carrying the promise of eternity in their radiant colors and materials. A "better" future, progressive and pacific seems achievable... at least in Europe and in the United States because colonized or native people’s aspiration to self-determination weakens certain conceptions of democracy.

WORKS OF HOPE

Martine Canneel is an artist engaged in the environment fight. This engagement has a direct impact on the materials she uses and the places of exhibition of her work. Indeed, little by little in her career, she selects elements directly gathered in the immediate environment she lives in. Her feminist emancipation entrusts the choice of new materials (a trademark of feminine Pop Art). Using contemporary materials, the artwork Demain sera meilleur recalls a disenchanted vision of the world but also the utopia of a bright future. By taking hold of a concrete and material banality, the artist initiates an optimist thought, lighted up by the derived use of neon. Originally, this work was placed in a worker facility. The workers were invited to slip a coin in it to have "the right to hope."
THE SPACE CONQUEST AS A NEW TERRITORY FOR LIBERTY

The reference to science-fiction is a notable trademark of English Pop Art. The women artist saw a potential for emancipation and auto-transgression in the topic of the space journey. Moreover, Valentina Terechkova, the first woman to have gone to space, opened the floor to a space conquest and desires of escape accessible by women, thus leading many artists to honor her legacy.

Martha Rosler is an artist who calls for reflections around the history of feminism, photography, and political activism. Her artistic productions aim to deconstruct the privileged status of the modernist artwork in order to create a new relation with theory: as of today, there is no more separation between aesthetics and the everyday, human life.

Martha Rosler’s collages create projections that allow us to reflect on our vision of society. There are quasi-dystopian settings acting as a critical apparatus mixing absurdity, real documents, and science fiction. The exploration of space and the moon, the perception from the sky of our “bordered” world pave the way for a point of view reversal and support relationships with other cultures and forms of life, notably extraterrestrial ones. Machines and robots become vectors of harmony since they allow surpassing questions of gender, race, and social class.

As for Kiki Kogelnik, the future is envisioned as a new opportunity to appreciate the woman and her body. The latter is then sublimed with cyborg prostheses and numerous powers, illustrated by surprising colors and shapes. Kiki Kogelnik de-multiplies and takes possession of the space differently; she interacts with her environment in a new way and creates a new universe.

IDEOLOGIES AND REVENDICATIONS: « ALL WE NEED IS LOVE »

Women Pop artists emancipate and openly express their activism against colonial wars. Some American artists combine these revendications with the hippie ideology: “Make love not war.” Whether it is Vietnam or Algeria, there is a need to express themselves, as women, through their art, by refusing another oppression: colonialism.

Niki de Saint Phalle’s Autel OAS positions itself against the Algerian war, sacrificing on the altar the clandestine organization supporting the maintenance of French occupation in Algeria. It also criticizes religious dogmas through the use of symbolic representations.

Carolee Schneemann is the attentive witness of the important events of her time. Pioneer of performance and video (she’s at the origin of "expanded cinema", a term designating performances that expand the boundaries of cinema and rejects the traditional one-way relationship between the audience and the screen), she responded to the activism of
women artists notably with her work *Viet Flakes* which gathers pictures depicting atrocities committed in Vietnam, issued in various foreign magazines and newspapers. The visual breaks create an explosive animation over a soundtrack of Vietnamese religious and profane songs, some excerpts of Bach, as well as popular songs from the 1960's. More generally, the work underlines the question of mediatic diffusion of actuality pictures and the flow of images it entails.

Sister Corita Kent, a religious and artist activist, also promotes a political message calling for peace while playing with a simple but evocative vocabulary. One can recognize the influence of Warhol's serigraphies. The question: "Where are all the flowers gone?" is an obvious reference to the hippie movement and the profusion of flowers which characterizes it ("the Flower power"). Moreover, her artworks display informative content aiming at communicating with the audience and raise interest for the actuality. The pronounced colors seemingly want to provoke indignation, anger, wonder, but more importantly, *surprise* from the audience.
ASSOCIATED KNOWLEDGE

KEY WORDS

POP ART Starting from the early 1950’s, premises of a new artistic wave appear simultaneously and essentially in the United Kingdom and in the United States. This new conception calls for a return to figuration through the use of techniques and industrial materials of the everyday life. Each Pop Art artist has a proper style but common baseline topics can be spotted. The audience now assists to an expression of popular culture with a vocabulary, a language, an identity expressed and recognized in 20th century art. The expression of "Pop Art" itself was invented by the English critique Lawrence Alloway. Animated and passionate discussions derive from a creative method materialized and characterized by objects borrowed from industry and trades. The items, used or recently purchased, intend to manifest materialist values of post-war consumer society and its objects bulimia nervosa; the prosperity of industries profiting from the perishable nature of their production is another notable stimulus.

NEW REALISM "On Thursday October 27th 1960, the Nouveaux Réalistes take conscience of their collective singularity. Nouveau Réalisme = new perceptive approaches of reality." The group declaration, written by the art critique Pierre Restany at Yves Klein's Parisian home, gathered the signatures of: Arman, François Dufrene, Raymond Hains, Yves Klein, Martial Raysse, Pierre Restany, Daniel Spoerri, Jean Tinguely, Jacques Mahé de la Villeglé; though invited, César and Mimmo Rotella were absent; Niki de Saint Phalle, Christo and Gérard Deschamps joined the group, respectively in 1961 and 1962. The collective gesture of artists, all from Europe, in which Arman, Klein and Raysse represented the Nice unit, did only but observe a situation already ten years old, the majority of those artists having already elaborated a determining part of their work. The common ground that linked the Nouveaux Réalistes, a group originally constituted of very diverse personalities, nevertheless united in a same refusal of the triumphant abstraction of the Ecole de Paris, was the realization of the existence of a "modern nature", that of the factory and the city, of advertisements and mass media, of science and technique at a given point of consumer society. Translating an appropriation of the real everyday life, proposing a re-reading of Duchamp's ready-made, the Nouveaux Réalistes led the object in a new adventure and gave it a new "artistic baptism" through the exploitation of the quantitative language, the aggressiveness of reality and the poetic dimension of the materials used. The group's collective action was short, from 1960 to 1963-64. In July 1961, the first Nouveau Réalisme Festival was organized in Nice, featuring work exhibition and actions-shows.

FEMINISME Social movement whose goal was the emancipation of the woman, the extension of her rights in order to equalize her status with that of the man, more particularly in the judicial, political, and economic field; doctrine, corresponding ideology
PERFORMANCE/HAPPENING The beginning of art-performance can be dated back in the late 1950’s. Allan Kaprow launches his first happening by revendicating his status not as an "action painter" anymore, but as an "action artist", destined to participate directly in the world. It is in the field of visual arts that art-performance first emerged, notably with Jackson Pollock's action-paintings in which the active presence of the artist's entire person is requested. The art of performance also features interdisciplinary crossings (for example with the composers John Cage, La Monte Young...). A renewal is produced through this call to go out of the studio, to renounce to medium, to material, technical, and symbolic frameworks in order to engage the artist with his own person and his body directly.

❖ WORK TRACKS

Consumer society
The artwork and the woman
Feminism in Pop Art
Re-appropriation of the item
Art and politics
Art as a messenger
Art as creative outlet or as therapy

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- **Power Up Female Pop Art**, KUNSTHALLE, Gerald Matt et Angela Stief, 2010

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160 pages
170 illustrations
Editor: Flammarion
Director: Hélène Guenin et Géraldine Gourbe
Authors: Hélène Guenin, MAMAC director; Géraldine Gourbe, philosopher, art critique and independent commissioner; Mathilde De Croix, art historian; Catherine Macchi, art historian; Sid Sachs, Rosenwald-Wolf Gallery exhibition director at the University of Arts of Philadelphia; Didier Semin, art historian.
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