



L. Mary Beth Edelson, *Loving Justice* (Gena Rowlands), 1983–93; silk screen, transfer, oil paint gesso, acrylic paint, pencil, watercolor, gauche, ink, fringe and fabric; 12 x 10 inches; courtesy the artist and The McKinney Avenue Contemporary; photo by Fernando Rojas

R. (background) *Collage Wall: History 1971–2010, 1972–ongoing*; (foreground) *Double Marlene Dietrich, Here's to the Boys in the Navy*, 1992, 2010; chiffon and mixed collage images backed with muslin fabric; courtesy the artist and The McKinney Avenue Contemporary; photo by Fernando Rojas

DALLAS

Mary Beth Edelson The McKinney Avenue Contemporary

What's the relevance of Women's Lib today? This question arises when viewing The McKinney Avenue Contemporary's recent exhibition of the work of Mary Beth Edelson, a pioneer of '70s American feminist art. In 2010 *Newsweek* claimed that only one in four women consider themselves feminists, blaming divisiveness within the women's liberation movement and the '80s conservative backlash with ushering in the "postfeminist" era. By reviving the power of community and the history of women's achievements, Edelson challenges viewers to confront the F word.

Edelson's exhibition, *There is Never Only One Game in Town and Other Stories*, poses this challenge by reconfiguring nostalgic images of women in site-specific installations, a collaborative video projection and mixed-media photomontages. A doubled likeness of Marlene Dietrich in the sailor garb she donned for *Seven Sinners* (1940), imprinted on chiffon and suspended from the ceiling, accompanies two walls of small-scale collages featuring Hollywood beauties—femmes fatales from the 1940s–70s and Judy Garland as Dorothy. The installation *Collage Wall: History 1971–2010* populates much of the remaining wall space with intricate, black-and-white cutouts of the key players of the '70s feminist art movement intermingled with pasted floral and animal motifs, images of ancient goddesses and fertility symbols. Elsewhere, Edelson venerates seven feminists in her Hannah Höch-like *Cameo* collages (1986): *Louise* [Bourgeois], *Ana* [Mendieta] and *Nancy* [Spero] ascend toward the ceiling in apotheosis. Throughout, Edelson combines fetishized but deadly film goddesses with the "stars" of activist collectives, testifying to gender stereotypes yet also calling for young women to re-unite, following the lessons of their feminist foremothers.

In her writings Edelson dates her dedication to "dismantling the master's house with women's tools" to the '70s, when she combined

photographs of her own nude body with drawings of the Goddess, an incarnation of female spirituality. Traces of these images appear as cutouts on the *Collage Wall* and in other works in the form of eclectic female deities such as the pre-Greco Baubo and the ancient Irish Sheela-na-Gig, who flagrantly exposes her genitals while smiling wilyly at her viewer. Sheela's presence points to the persisting importance of the Goddess in Edelson's work but also to its strongest quality: humor. Sheela is a trickster, flaunting her sexuality yet laughing at herself for it. For Edelson, humor transgresses male-dominated language systems—laughter becomes women's best provocation.

Laughing helps viewers appreciate the ardent feminist message of *Pink Peggy: Thinking the Unthinkable* (1996), a collage featuring B-movie star Peggy Castle wielding dual handguns. One earnestly reads the psychoanalytic interpretation of the femme fatale penned directly onto the work; yet one also laughs at the absurdity of the double-packing, peignoir-wearing glamour girl. Likewise, in the *Judy Garland* series the wit of Dorothy's big serigraphed head atop teeny cartoon-like bodies tempers the solemnity of the handwritten text, which provides questions and multiple-choice responses referencing perennial female concerns, such as the shame of menstruation. Viewers tally their points (as in a *Cosmo* quiz) to determine if they are worthy of the feminist moniker. Does second-wave feminism seduce today's young viewers or will it remain the F word? Take the test to find out.

Catherine Caesar is an art historian specializing in American art of the 1960s and '70s, and Assistant Professor of Art at the University of Dallas.

DALLAS NOVEMBER 2010
PAPERCITYMAG.COM

ON THE EDEN OF JULY

ARTNOTES

GIRL POWER PLUS A GIANT INFLATABLE:

A ground-breaking exhibition at **McKinney Avenue Contemporary** pairs two generations of female artists with a decidedly feminist stance. **Mary Ann Edelson**, who burst onto the SoHo scene in the 1960s, brings works circa 1981 through 1997 — mostly small-scale, mixed-media offerings, plus an installation materialized as a vast spider web. Concurrently, Houston and New York-based **Molly Gochman** unfurls the series "Lullabies," which interweaves photography, sculpture, video and audio into a hypnotic installation (November 7 – December 12) ... At Victory Park, Artopia on Saturday, November 13, includes headlining Dallas artist **Billy Zinser**. His work is hard to miss: It's a 20-foot-tall, forced-air inflated sculpture, series three of his ongoing Macrodon toys. Zinser's day job is as an art dealer at **Marty Walker Gallery**. **MUSEUM MUST-SEES:** If you identify with the Middle Ages, the **Dallas Museum of Art's** contemplative exhibition "The Mourners" is required viewing (through January 2). The DMA is co-organizer of this gem-like show of tomb figures from the 14th- and 15th-century Court of the Burgundy, which once reigned over a territory encompassing France, Luxembourg, Belgium and the Netherlands. The DMA's **Heather McDonald** serves as co-curator for this seven-city national tour ... Make tracks to the **Amon Carter Museum** in Fort Worth for "American Modern: Abbott, Evans, Bourke-White." The exhibition showcases **Walker Evans** alongside the lesser-known **Berence Abbott** and **Margaret Bourke-White**, focusing on the trinity's classic documentary black-and-whites à la the 1930s (through January 2). **WHERE WOULD YOU GO?:** **Christopher Blay** is an installationist whose time-

Billy Zinser's *Macrodon (Series 3)*, 2010, at Artopia, Victory Park

machine vignette with the viewer as performer is creepy cool. Catch his final days at **Conduit Gallery** in the Project Room (through November 13). **REFRIGERATOR MAN:** **ARTnews** recently anointed former Texan **Peter Saul**, the acknowledged genius of the darkly comic figured canvas, as one of the best underrated artists, so Dallas Art Fair co-founder **Chris Byrne's** curatorial turn at the New York branch of international gallery **Haunch of Venison** — a survey of 50 years of Saul's prodigious output — seems perfectly timed (November 5 – January 8). On ice are Saul's famed paintings of refrigerators (an early precursor to Pop art, the "Icebox" series continues today). **BOOKIN' IT:** **Dallas Contemporary**, one of the beneficiaries of the volume **Texas Artists Today** — whose North Texas project leader is collector/patron **Karla McKinley** — hosts the first Dallas book signing on Friday night, November 19, followed by another signing at the **Nasher Sculpture Center** on Saturday, November 20, 1 to 3 pm. See you there! *Catherine D. Ansporn*



Molly Gochman's *Topography of a Town* from the "Lullabies" series, 2008, at The MAC

COURTESY THE ARTIST AND COLTON & FARR GALLERY, HOUSTON