



Amanda Cachia

Pandora's Box

Dunlop Art Gallery



Laylah Ali
Ghada Amer
Shary Boyle
Amy Cutler
Chitra Ganesh
Annie Pootoogook
Wangechi Mutu
Leesa Streifler
Kara Walker
Su-en Wong

Pandora's Box

Curated by Amanda Cachia

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May 16 – July 20, 2008
Central Gallery
Curated by Amanda Cachia

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TEL (306) 777-6040
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dunlop@reginalibrary.ca
www.dunlopartgallery.org



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Foreword

by Dr. Elizabeth McLuhan

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Pandora's Box is an ambitious project developed by the Dunlop Art Gallery's Curator, Amanda Cachia, who has selected current work from among two generations of internationally influential women artists: Laylah Ali, Ghada Amer, Shary Boyle, Amy Cutler, Chitra Ganesh, Wangechi Mutu, Annie Pootoogook, Leesa Streifler, Kara Walker and Su-en Wong. Artists in *Pandora's Box* draw on diverse cultural traditions to both re-invent and re-invest traditional myths and fairytales with new meanings in dynamic and often disturbing images/configurations.

These artists all reference their diverse languages, ritual, myths, cultural production, domestic and social customs, story-telling and values (such as African-American, Egyptian, Inuit, Indian, Euro-North-American, and Singaporean).

Many of the works in *Pandora's Box* reveal an inescapable sense of immediacy and a fierce sexuality. Anne Carson's observations on classical notions of female wildness are pertinent here in the archaic poetry of Archilochas "[who] summarizes the female threat in two iambic verses: 'She came carrying

water in one hand/the tricky minded female, and fire in the other'.... sexuality in women [is] a fearsome thing... united by a vital liquidity with the elemental world, woman is able to tap the inexhaustible reservoirs of nature's procreative power."¹

Pandora's Box documents and celebrates the contribution of women artists living and working in Canada and the United States to contemporary art making, and is a proclamation of the diversity of their accomplishments today. Women have too often been the object or "vehicle of attributed meaning."² In light of this struggle over gendered implications, the current blossoming of art produced by women about women is exciting. The progress and evolution of the current generation acknowledges the legacy of feminist art practice in North America and beyond: a legacy which has informed new fields of feminist art practice.

This is the first examination of contemporary women's art and feminist issues at the Dunlop Art Gallery, although a number of artists

presented in solo exhibitions have touched on related issues (Leesa Streifler and Rebecca Belmore for instance). Overall, however, there has been a dearth of feminist content in galleries in Regina in recent years. An exhibition of thirteen Saskatchewan women, *Remembering and Telling*, curated by the noted art historian Lynne Bell from the University of Saskatchewan was presented at the Mackenzie Art Gallery in 1991. Although a watershed exhibition for its time, there was no follow up in subsequent exhibitions to the themes and issues it raised. Seventeen years later, *Pandora's Box* seizes the torch and highlights the contribution of women's art in North America through its selection of artists with perspectives that resonate globally.

I would like to thank the participating artists and to commend the curatorial vision and tenacity of purpose of Amanda Cachia, the Curator. The Dunlop expresses its gratitude to Joan Borsa for her introduction to this catalogue, and her support for the project from

the beginning. I would also like to acknowledge Joyce Clark, Curatorial Assistant for her work on this project.

Dr. Elizabeth McLuhan is the
Director of the Dunlop Art Gallery

1 Anne Carson, "Dirt and Desire: Essay on the Phenomenology of Female Pollution in Antiquity," in *Men in the Off Hours*, (Canada: Vintage, 2001), 225.

2 Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form*, (Picador, 1987), 225.

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Introduction

by Joan Borsa

We all return to memories and dreams like this, again and again; the story we tell of our own life is reshaped around them. But the point doesn't lie there, back in the past, back in the lost time when they happened; the only point lies in interpretation.

— CAROLYN STEEDMAN, *Landscapes for a Good Woman*, 1986

Pandora's Box is a timely exploration of the passions, innovations and diversity that characterize feminist art today. It projects forward, it scans the past, the present and our differences, and it points to new layers of creative and critical acumen. Since the 1970s women artists, curators, critics and art historians have actively engaged with and contributed to debates on representation, authorship, desire, power relations and identity politics. A great deal of this work has focused on strategies of representing the body and the heterogeneity of women's cultural and social experience – an exploration that has moved from producing “images” of the body to creating more diversified representations of embodied subjectivity. Other components of this work have emphasized the need to analyze, deconstruct and intervene in the histories of art, and have affected change in the institutions, public spaces, and political processes that make up public culture.¹ Much has been accomplished since second-wave feminism and

formative (Western) feminist art projects such as Chicago's *Dinner Party*, Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum Document*, the Guerrilla Girls' public actions and since Griselda Pollock and Rozika Parker's book *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* insisted on claiming a space in a hierarchical and male-dominated art world – but struggles for the right to be recognized as agents and subjects of history have often been met with resistance and growing pains. One of the significant lessons of this period of almost 40 years of feminist theorizing, art making and activism is that there is a great deal of structural difference among us. How to represent our differences as well as our shared experiences as gendered and socially constructed subjects has remained a central preoccupation (and a strength) of contemporary feminist practice and scholarship.

Indeed, in the recent flourishing of notable feminist art exhibitions, substantial exhibition catalogues and comprehensive feminist art anthologies (particularly in the United States, but also in parts of Britain and Europe)² a recurring theme is the concept of difference – differences among women, particularly across generational, national and cultural divides; but, just as relevant, differences in the social conditions under which women produce art, in the approaches, mediums and materials which are utilized, and in the political, cultural and critical perspectives which inform feminist work. For example, in curator Cornelia Butler's introductory essay for the 2007 exhibition *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, Butler proposes that

unlike the ideological and stylistic cohesiveness of other influential art movements of the postwar period (Abstract Expressionism, Minimalism or Fluxus) Feminist Art's impact is rooted in “an ideology of shifting criteria,” which has not only “sustained an unprecedented degree of internal critique” but “contained wildly divergent political ideologies and practices.”³ Similarly in a recent article art critic Lucy Lippard discusses the difficulty of pin-pointing the characteristics and achievements of such a diversified and constantly evolving movement as feminist art, a project, which she suggests “like Conceptual art was not based on style but on content.”⁴

In my conversations with Amanda Cachia, curator of *Pandora's Box*, and as I asked her about her relationship to feminism and the impetus behind this project it became apparent that many of the artists selected for this exhibition (and perhaps the curator herself) do not readily identify their practice as feminist. In some of the reviews and articles surrounding the recent resurgence of interest in feminist art production a similar reluctance is portrayed. How are we to interpret this skepticism within the context of what appears to be feminist art's grand entrance on a coveted art world stage? Is this a re-examination of a movement, confirmation of a new wave, or the internalization of “post-feminist” press? Guerrilla Girl Kollwitz addressed the latter possibility commenting on why the term ‘feminist’ might cause adverse reactions: “The media love to talk about how nobody wants to be identified with being a feminist.” “We have been working all these years

to rehabilitate the word, because women and men who believe in the tenets of feminism don't want to be associated with a term that has been demonized.”⁴

Perhaps some of the anxiety associated with the term is symptomatic of an image problem tied to the backlash against feminism; but it might also be indicative of a generational divide (third wave feminists often take the achievements of previous feminisms for granted). That is, on a superficial level, one could get the (too complacent) impression that institutional and societal change has occurred, irrevocably. It could also be a reflection of the heterogeneity which continues to characterize feminism (a resistance to dominant definitions and a plurality of feminist agendas). Clearly, discomfort with the term “feminist” is also indicative of a desire to set the terms of one's own practice. Definitions and new directions in both feminism and the visual arts have always been intensely debated, and struggles over meaning are signs of a healthy, inclusive and evolving feminist culture. Nonetheless, having come through a ten year period where I also experienced conflicting responses to my relationship to feminism and feminist art, I believe there is a need to be vigilant about the reasons we may or may not identify with the F-word. As Coco Fusco, performance artist and associate professor at Columbia University's School of Visual Arts suggests, as part of their formal educational experience many art students discover that openly identifying with feminism is perhaps not in their best interests:

*They will be visited by critics who will yawn and stare at the floor if they talk about feminism or identity. They will be counseled by ‘sensitive’ men to be ‘post-identitarian’ and ‘antiessentialist.’ They will sit through painful group crits in which everyone will avoid discussing feminism – over and over, until they are disciplined through peer pressure into rejecting any feminist identification.*⁵

Despite the many achievements of forty years of feminist art activity and the remarkable exhibitions, panels and publications of recent years, there are many indications that women artists, curators, critics and academics remain cautious about how they name and frame their practices and feminist affiliations. As many have suggested, when conditions of marginalization and repression have surrounded one's relationship to dominant representational systems, it is not uncommon for speaking subjects (artists, curators, scholars) to be able to comprehend both the structure that contains them and the inappropriateness of this codification, while remaining “enclosed” in various enactments of this designation.

Underneath the mediations and inscriptions which have been layered upon women's bodies, women's history and women's art, the work in *Pandora's Box* clears a space where the parodies and pleasures of women's manoeuvres, masquerades and disguises can be productively reassessed. While the artists in *Pandora's Box* account for the specific effects of discourses, inheritances and representations that have set “woman” in her place, they simultaneously

project other possibilities as they re-order, re-imagine, and re-symbolize their relationship to the feminine sphere. Rather than the fear of “the difference” that women's bodies have come to represent, the work in this exhibition yields empowering alternative images, projections and symbolic realms – shifting attention to the positive and pleasurable forces looming within Pandora's mythic, social and sexual “box.” As Cachia outlines in her essay, “In the context of this exhibition, Pandora is not a demonized figure, but like the artwork, comes to us bearing gifts.”⁷ In this interpretation of history, women start with an exploration of their own bodies, desires, lives and cultural identities. They proceed from an intimate knowledge of what it means to inhabit specific bodies and moments in history. Onto these existing representations of gendered identity they overlay their own stories, memories and dreams. In this gesture they not only cover over (or defuse) the inequities, mythologies and blindspots that have plagued them, but give new meaning to Helene Cixous' call, nearly four decades ago, for cultural inscriptions that flow from the body:

*By writing the self, woman will return to the body which has been confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display.... Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time. Write yourself. Your body must be heard. Only then will the immense resources of the unconscious be heard.*⁸

The works in this exhibition play with the gendered images and codifications that are presented for public

consumption, but more importantly they are marked by a public display of intensely intimate and visceral knowledge. I am reminded of Nancy Miller's comment that the writing (speaking) subject persists in its need “to find a subject to love.”⁹ Interestingly, in this instance the love object appears to be one's own repressed femininity – a space which more than a century ago at the threshold of high modernism Rimbaud described as “the unknown.” “She will come upon strange, unfathomable, repellent, delightful things. We will take them. We shall comprehend them.”¹⁰ Indeed, part of what we have come to appreciate are the unique ways visual art practices “write” and “speak” in their own visual lexicons – how they function as a site of theorizing and form of knowledge.

If, in fact, the gallery is one of the safe public places where different points of view and diverse artistic practices, cultures and audiences can productively come into contact, then this exhibition promises to generate an atmosphere where Regina and Saskatchewan audiences will be the recipients of a lively, rare and important exchange. Clearly this timely exhibition builds on the energy, vision and critical frameworks of the current revival of interest in feminist art activity. While many of the recent wave of exhibitions are large scale survey format and revisit the activities since second-wave feminism and contemporary art practice became intimate, *Pandora's Box* carves out a unique territory which recasts feminist art and the notion of difference in several important ways. Firstly, it de-emphasizes the notion of woman's

difference as rooted in “lack” and returns to investigate the implications of Cixous’ term *joissance*; an insistence that women discover the source of their own pleasure. Secondly, in conceptualizing the positive implications of difference, and assembling a diverse group of artists who were born into exceedingly different geographical, political and cultural climates, the politics of location and cultural diversity resonate throughout the work included in this exhibition. Thirdly, the works in this exhibition are in dialogue with each other – not because they subscribe to a particular stylistic or ideological template, but because they mirror to each other the shedding of inhibitions needed to touch upon the depths of female knowledge. Fourthly, this is one of the few feminist art group exhibitions to surface in Canada in recent years. While I am certain that something major cannot be far behind, it is important that we recognize the leadership that smaller Canadian public art galleries continue to display. Over the past two decades the Dunlop Art Gallery has played a particularly vital role in initiating ground-breaking exhibitions of national and international significance. It is gratifying to see that this tradition continues. One can not help but notice that many of the artists included in *Pandora’s Box* are justifiably attracting tremendous international critical attention.

And finally although I am writing this introduction prior to seeing the exhibition, I am aware that I have already benefited from its influence – the work is not only indicative of a younger generation of feminist

practitioners, but also of new approaches by more senior artists. I see the ways these ten artists build on the work that has preceded them but, more importantly, I see how they are interrogating, re-interpreting and taking the dialogue between art and feminism in new directions. Within an aesthetic language that approaches collage or visual intertextuality, the works carry signs of the mind’s propensity to layer, sort, juxtapose, consider and process the details and fragments we call memory, desire and reality. In these new arrangements or “life” studies, a type of peeling apart and rebuilding seems to be at work – something is being made out of the struggles and stories they have accumulated. As I follow the specificity of each artist’s cultural, racial and generational context, and absorb the meticulous gestures, wit and provocation that constitute their work, I find myself encouraged that a feminist future will be as rigorous and innovative as anything that has already transpired.

Joan Borsa is an Independent Curator and Associate Professor Women’s and Gender Studies

1 I refer to the influential ideas represented by Griselda Pollock in *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and the Histories of Art* (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2003) and Suzanne Lacy in *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995).

2 In addition to the projects mentioned in my text I have found the following recent exhibition catalogues and feminist art anthologies particularly inspiring: *Inside the Visible, An Elliptical Traverse of 20th Century Art: In, Of and From the Feminine* ed. M.Catherine De Zegher (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 1994), *Global Feminisms: New Directions in Contemporary Art* ed. Maura Reilly and Linda Nochlin (London and New York: Merrell and the Brooklyn Museum, 2007), *Art and Feminism* ed. Helena Reckitt

(London: Phaidon Press, 2001), *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader* ed. Amelia Jones (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), *Feminism–Art–Theory: An Anthology 1968–2000* ed. Hilary Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), *Radical Gestures: Feminism and Performance Art in North America* ed. Jayne Wark (Montreal and Kingston: McGill Queen’s University Press, 2006) and of course the ongoing contributions of the international feminist art journal *n.paradoxa*, ed. Katy Deepwell.

3 Cornelia Butler, “Art and Feminism: An Ideology of Shifting Criteria,” in *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* ed. Lisa Gabrielle Mark (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 2007) 15.

4 Lucy Lippard, “No Regrets,” *Art in America* (June/July, 2007): 76.

5 As quoted in Phoebe Hoban, “We’re Finally Infiltrating,” *ARTnews* 106, no.2 (February, 2007): 110.

6 See Jori Finkel, “Saying the F-word,” in *ARTnews* 106 no. 2 (February, 2007): 119.

7 Amanda Cachia, “Bearing Gifts: The Myth of Pandora,” *Pandora’s Box* (Regina: Dunlop Art Gallery, 2008) 13.

8 Helene Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa,” in *Feminism–Art–Theory: An Anthology 1968–2000* ed. Hilary Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001) 630. First published in English in *Signs* 1, no.4 (1976).

9 Nancy Miller, “Changing the Subject: Authorship, Writing and the Reader,” in *Feminist Studies, Critical Studies* ed. Teresa de Lauretis (Bloomington: Indiana Univ Press, 1986) 109.

10 Written by Rimbaud in May 1871 and quoted in Simone de Beauvoir’s *Second Sex* (London: Pan Books, 1988), first published 1949, 723.

Bearing Gifts: The Myth of Pandora

by Amanda Cachia

“...the erotic offers a well of replenishing and provocative source to the woman who does not fear its revelation, nor succumb to the belief that sensation is enough.”¹

“I urge each one of us to reach down into that deep place of knowledge inside herself and touch that terror and loathing of any difference that lives there.”

– AUDRE LORDE²

Pandora's Box offers a new twist on the myth of Pandora, the first woman in Greek mythology. Women have simultaneously been beneficiaries and victims of mythological traditions. “In myth, woman's bodies are pliant, porous, mutable. Deformation attends her. She swells, she shrinks, she leaks, she is penetrated, she suffers metamorphoses. The women in mythology regularly lose their form in monstrosity.”³ It comes as no surprise then, that Pandora has been described as either a great goddess, beautiful and innocent, responsible for bearing gifts from the universe to humankind, or a mortal woman, blamed for unleashing all of the world's evil by opening up her magical box.⁴ Pandora is consequently a subtle, complex and revealing symbol of the feminine⁵ and has much in common with the Christian figure of Eve. In a similarly demonising account, it is Eve who first succumbed to temptation by eating the apple in the Garden of Eden, allowing sin to enter the world.

In the context of this exhibition, Pandora is not a demonised figure, but like the artwork, comes to us bearing gifts, as indicated by the meaning of her name.⁶ Here, the myth of Pandora and the opening of her miraculous box is a hopeful return of the repressed feminine. Today, a radical transformation is taking place regarding previously entrenched assumptions about gender, the body, sexuality and spirituality.⁷ This exhibition is “no longer about what is hidden inside of the box, never to be revealed, but what is metaphorically reflected in it of the outside.”⁸ Like the splash of genital fluid at the conclusion of *Testimony* by Kara Walker, there is among these works, a release of pent-up desires, anxieties and frustrations; a fountain of knowledge and wit springs forth.

The phrase ‘Pandora's box’ has acquired highly erotic connotations. Its opening is equated with the symbolic charge of surrendered virginity, as well as devaluation of the sacred feminine. “Like Pandora's famous ‘box’ ... woman's sexuality was once again blamed for all men's ills.”⁹ Amelia Jones notes that male philosophers from Nietzsche to Baudrillard have argued that seduction, sexuality and corporeality are connected to the threateningly sexualised feminine body.¹⁰ A woman's body, her sex, is treated in these androcentric constructions as a dual site for both the pleasure and downfall of man, conveying an obvious unease with female sexuality. Wangechi Mutu observes: “Females carry the marks, language and nuances of their culture more than the male. Anything that is desired or despised is always placed on the female body.”¹¹ The idea that women's sexuality might be about and

for women seems to elude those who subscribe to this phallogocentric notion. “The unfailing moisture and sexual drive of woman, then, is part of a larger conceptual schema, whereby the female is assimilated to the world of raw nature and femininity insistently identified with the wild.”¹² If putting the lid on female purity was the chief concern of mythological rituals, then the artists in *Pandora's Box* shift the focus from the male perspective in order to explore their own bodies as repositories of sensuality and lift the oppressive lid on the erotic. The “box” has become a slang word for womb and/or vagina. A woman's box or cunt is located at her physical core, a gravitational centre that is deeply engorged in the artists' work in this exhibition. While it has been used in derogatory ways, Ophira Edut suggests that “Cunt is a metaphor for unconditional self-love, a gentle call for women to embrace all things sacred and essentially female.”¹³ ‘Cunt’ is a word that *all women* potentially share, in resistance to its denigrations and in celebration of its juicy possibilities. Women have too often been divided from this anatomical jewel¹⁴, by cultural practices which, as Luce Irigaray has argued, deny the ways that a woman's geography of pleasure is diversified, “...more multiple in its differences, more complex, more subtle, than is imagined.”¹⁵ The imagery of *Pandora's Box* first and foremost seduces us. It may also offend, terrorise, delight and shock, engaging the full human experience. Viewers are invited to act not only as voyeurs into the self-pleasuring of these artists, but to permit the touch of the feminine imaginary to reshape their relationships with themselves,



Laylah Ali
Untitled, 2006-2007
 Courtesy of 303 Gallery

leading to curiosity, ecstasy, and transformation.

Ten international female artists are represented in *Pandora's Box*, including Laylah Ali from Massachusetts, Ghada Amer, born and raised in Egypt and the south of France, currently living and working in New York, Shary Boyle from Toronto, Amy Cutler and Chitra Ganesh, both from Brooklyn, Kenyan-born, Brooklyn artist Wangechi Mutu, Annie Pootoogook from Cape Dorset, Nunavut, Winnipeg born Leesa Streifler, now based in Regina, Kara Walker from New York, born in California, and Su-en Wong, originally from Singapore, and now living and working in New York. Inside *Pandora's Box*, viewers will encounter a phantasmagoria of myths, folktales, stereotypes and ambiguities. The artists challenge, appropriate and critique patriarchal myths, archetypes that claim universality, and various fairytales, to make them a more accurate mirror of female experience across a range of socio-historical contexts.¹⁶ The artists unpack symbolic constructions of female as vice and as burgeon, affirming the particularities of the experiences against which they test representational projects. Finding the 'goddess within' is a source of empowerment. Indian writer and theorist Geeta Kapur coined the term 'remythologizing,'¹⁷ while Audre Lorde has defined 'automythography,' both affirming processes of creating new and often idiosyncratic symbolologies that convey female erotic and psychic lexicons. Helene Shulman Lorenz says, "In fragments of oral history, in received spiritual traditions, in symbols surviving from other eras, a practice of autoethnography begins to sift through sediments, recreating in discourse

the kind of lived ecological diversity that surrounds us in our communities."¹⁸ The artists' works illuminate these conceptual practices in *Pandora's Box*.

Taken together, the artists in this exhibition support the social, economic, and political processes for social justice, access and opportunity that ground the feminist movement. They share reflections on their lives, liminal desires, personal fictions and autobiographies, multiple cultural identities, racialisation and psychological manifestations of longings and vexations, through various journeys. Their artwork seamlessly blends aesthetics, emotions and feminist concerns. Nevertheless, this work is collectively cautious about claiming any political stripe, label or tag. Some artists express anxiety, resistance and soul-searching about defining themselves as feminists, while others reclaim the title proudly; depending on their age, several ignore or remain apparently unaware of the stigma of the male gaze, creative forces unto themselves, and woman-centered, by any name. Viewers are invited to reflect on larger human issues within an imaginary that is deeply female, exploring birth, death, parenthood, relationships, rites of passage, (particularly childhood to womanhood), and multiple identities, through an engagement with otherworldly creatures and everyday environments. They offer a rich platform for the visitor to this exhibition, a scrumptious witches' brew that casts a spell of warning and wonder. The artists add diverse, poignant, independent and intersubjective voices to an evolving polylogue of what it means to be female.¹⁹

Pandora's Box was inspired, in part, by *Global*

Feminisms, an influential exhibition that opened with the pioneering Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art in the Brooklyn Museum, the only exhibition space in the United States dedicated to work by women that bears the name: feminist. Curated by Maura Reilly, *Global Feminisms* formed a key component of a blossoming recognition of feminist-based art in 2007. The thesis of this extraordinary exhibition used, as its backbone, “common differences” between women from various cultures, nations, religions, ethnicities, and sexualities.²⁰ In her essay for the *Global Feminisms* catalogue, Reilly acknowledged that the exhibition was focused on the work of younger women, completed since 1990, as an attempt to address present and future, moving forward from the past. Further, this exhibition was crucial to the thesis of *Pandora’s Box* in that it acknowledged feminisms in the plural: there is no single definition of feminism; multiple constructions of womanhood, replete with their own predicaments and situations, make up the tenants of feminist projects. *Global Feminisms* highlighted the differences among women and did not assume privileged cultures as a necessary referent. Audre Lorde pronounced that differences reflecting cultures, races, ethnicities and classes are all worthy of attention and validity, in woman-centered work. The themes of *Global Feminisms* are reflected and recontextualised in *Pandora’s Box*, and are as relevant to Regina as they are to other communities. Because contemporary art engages hybridised forms, with geopolitical referents that are prominent across environments, whether the artist comes from Toronto, Cape Dorset,

Regina, Egypt, New York, Kenya or Singapore, women’s struggles for expression and to flourish in meaningful lives resonate across continents and close to home. Female artists in the “centre” are just as strong, intelligent and capable as they are in the so-called “periphery”. There is a bi-fold apparatus in place in *Pandora’s Box*; these artists search for solidarity as women, while validating localised conditions of personal and political emergence. *Pandora’s Box* celebrates the current generation for its multifarious interpretations of ‘feminisms’ and woman-centered potentials and imaginaries. As Maura Reilly infers, perhaps the audience engaging in this generation of work has the capability of producing change and transformation in the world, even more so than before, because it has become more possible for women to communicate across what Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan have termed “scattered hegemonies.”²¹

Challenging Good versus Evil

Dualities: good and evil, heaven and hell, sin and atonement, right and wrong, and the tension of opposites, love-hate, death-life, are believed to be part of human nature. However, Helene Cixous suggests that these binaries are hierarchical and through the inherent assumption of superior/inferior that attaches to them, have been used to sustain male privilege. “Traditionally, the question



Shary Boyle
Untitled #2, 2007
 Photography: Shary Boyle

Annie Pootoogook
*Composition (Mourning
 Napachie's Death)*,
 Cape Dorset, 2003/04.
 Photography: Don Hall



of sexual difference is treated by coupling it with the opposition: activity/passivity.”²² The woman is usually seen as the passive figure in these dualities.

Cixous believes the stories from history are there to retell differently, and in light of such alternative re-tellings “...the future would be incalculable; the historic forces would and will change hands and change body – another thought which is yet unthinkable – will transform the functioning of all society.”²³

The artists in *Pandora's Box* seek to engage with and challenge hierarchical dualities, and break out of binary oppositions altogether. Ghada Amer employs sexual imagery, fairy tale and pornography to confound polarised constructions, such as male versus female, East versus West and the difference between fine art and craft. Shary Boyle uses androgyny to blur the lines of expectation and boundaries between human/non-human, animal and plant.²⁴ She states: “...it seems like there is no one thing, that everything has its counter. We're all drawn to the concepts of “pair” or “team” and then we're also repelled by it, so there's this constant pushing and pulling...tensions, dualities and polarities occur within each individual's psyche.”²⁵ Wangechi Mutu's work is a portrait of contrasts: beautiful and alluring female figures are also grotesque, mutilated, wild and sublime. Laylah Ali explodes binary categorisations of identity: human/alien, male/female, good/evil, black/white, while Annie Pootoogook uncovers the structural complexities emerging between the Inuit Arctic and

white Western Canadian life of the South: pop culture/community, family/individual, natural world/machines.²⁶ Amy Cutler's figures are at once ubiquitous and specific, obscure yet full of hope, ordinary and impossible.

In order for women to achieve recognition separate from men – outside of binary constructs – Luce Irigaray developed a body of theory and writing proposing mimesis, masquerade, hysteria, the mirror, speculum and gestural acts as methods for negotiating new terrains of meaning. Mimesis involves imitation, appropriation and reproduction, in processes deployed by the artists here to reinterpret binary constructions. Hysteria unearths repressed forms such as suffering or paralysis of desire. The masquerade is a concept of femininity as drag: behind the mask is a projected lack. “The masquerade is woman's playing [and acting out] of the script of femininity provided by man.”²⁷ Irigaray encourages women to break down the two-dimensionality of the mirror and break through received representations of the feminine, in order to find a more appropriate mirror to reflect ourselves. She proposes the speculum as a metaphor for finding ways to recognise the female soul, by demanding an imaginary based on the multiple, unfolding vulva, not bound to the phallus of psychoanalytic theory. She celebrates gestural processes that find expression in movement, crucial to the physical ‘making and doing’ relationship a woman has with her art-making in the studio. The artists in *Pandora's Box* make clever use of the devices proposed by Irigaray, visually articulated in the themes that inform

this exhibition: Libidinal Use of Media; Sexuality, Pleasure and Erotica; Undoing Race and Gender Constructs; The Carnavalesque and the Grotesque; Surrealist Influences, Dreams, Autobiography and Self-portraiture.

Libidinal Use of Media

Dancing, cavorting, flying, floating, leaping, jumping, running, falling. Quickening heart-beat. Shortening breath. Exhilaration. The artists free their own and represented bodies through their use of media in *Pandora's Box*. With wind-swept tendrils and out-flung limbs, Shary Boyle's frozen-in-falling-flight female silhouette on the cover of this catalogue gives us a stained-glass lens of colour and metaphor, through which to enter the gallery space. Liberated from convention, effervescent and sinister, this gestural female body illuminates the language of physical and psychic experience; because the glass is stained and variegated, our perspectives are multiplied.²⁸

The artworks represented in *Pandora's Box* are an expression by a new species of artists who are having a splendid love affair with the sensuous, revitalising quality of the media they are attempting to master: a delectable mix of ink on paper, collage, comics, stitched embroidery and acrylic on canvas, coloured pencil and watercolour, a collaborative musical and projection performance, a shadow puppet animation and much more. These works are violent, shocking, beautiful, decadent, decorative

and seductive. Some of the works are bold, using silhouettes or graphics, while others offer intricate portraits and diminutive windows, where the viewer is invited to come up close. Once near enough to examine the detail, viewers may experience the effects of the velvet glove or a Venus Flytrap, a sting, punch or element of surprise.

Annie Pootoogook uses ink, pen and pencil crayon, media that is reminiscent of a child's first contact with the world of art-making. Her series of eight drawings from 2001-2007 "compose" the various elements of her life together into a series that exemplifies core personal experiences as an Inuit woman. Chitra Ganesh has pushed her work outside the frame, literally; her goddess has Rapunzel braids of artificial hair that flow around the corner of the wall. She breathes from a vaginal hookah. Ghada's use of lively and energetic embroidered veiling/unveiling display women with their heads tossed back in states of ecstasy, undress or kissing that, combined with painting, treats the 'traditional female' craft of sewing as a woman's political medium. Laylah Ali works obsessively with detailed use of pencil and ink on paper, in labour-intensive and time-consuming work, yielding hieroglyphs that present meticulous minimalist intricacies for maximum impact. Kara Walker and Shary Boyle play with the rich, metaphorical associations of shadow and light, in ways that recall Irigaray's conceptual tools for detecting non-dominating ways of looking. Boyle's interdisciplinary practice of working with performance accompanied by music (*Shadow Songs* with Christine



Chitra Ganesh

Inside Pandora #2, 2008,
site-specific mural installation,
Dunlop Art Gallery

Photography: Trevor Hopkin

Wangechi Mutu
Histology of the
Different Classes of
Uterine Tumors, 2006,
 Series of 12 works

Courtesy of Sikkema
 Jenkins & Co.



Fellows), is ambitious, heartfelt, honest, a sensuous play across sight and sound. Wangechi Mutu creates cancerous, organic tissue, collage constructions exposing the distortions of Western fashion journals, *Playboy* and motorcycle magazines. Leesa Streifler deconstructs formal photographic portraits, by layering an “innocent” girl tableau with a web of written internal psychological thought processes using ink and markers, expressing the hurt, awkwardness and betrayal that characterise the messages with which baby boomers were raised. The text mirrors back to us: “Don’t criticize her”, “How much control?”, “Stop it Now” and “Dad don’t leave me”. A crown rests on top of the “sweet” child and the “hopeful” adolescent, invoking a desired if unrealised status among those she loves, or reflecting ego-based little-girl princess dreams. Streifler’s *Self-Conscious Romantic*, 2008, a portrait of a woman with dark brown-rimmed glasses and an awkward smile, uses expressionistic strokes of pink paint to suggest the amorous. This romance however, leaps out of the background, and intrudes on a face that is bruised or stained by indecipherable brown marks.

Through the ebullient grasp of these media, – we gain a sense of this generation of artists, their visions and liberatory politics. They show us that there is enjoyment and pleasure, pain and power, in the creative capacities of women who, by virtue of the specificities of their visions, reveal as more mysterious than we know, the feminine dance of public and private imagination and cunning.

Sexuality, Pleasure and Erotica

Pornography has become a terrain that female artists have begun to occupy in empowered ways. With Annie Sprinkle leading the crusade,²⁹ women are claiming the right to express pleasure in their own terms. Thus, they rewrite the scripts of porn, removing it from its functions, purely for the male gaze or male titillation. Ghada Amer has talked about a ‘double submission’³⁰ and famously said “I don’t see it [porn] in a harsh light, in terms of exploitation or critique...rather I see it as something beautiful and warm, a source of pleasure. Feminism can be empowered by seduction.”³¹

Sexual imagery is salient throughout this exhibition. Viewers greet a large nude goddess figure, the protagonist of the exhibition perhaps, upon entry into the centre of the exhibition space. Chitra Ganesh has created this goddess with three eyes, long braids, pert breasts, and an umbilical hookah connecting vagina, hand, and breath, in an intoxicating creative sweep. In two of Laylah Ali’s untitled drawings, a woman tongue-probes another woman, Judith Butler’s female phallus³² reaching across head-dressed and costumed armours of power and fear. In *The Delicate Perversity of Obscene Excess*, 2005 by Shary Boyle, a Sleeping Beauty figure astride a horse bears a large birthday cake on her belly lit up by licking flames that suggest the project of a head-first horny man

mounting from behind in a surreal and twisted enchanted forest. Wangechi Mutu produces a series of cartographical medical illustrations of female anatomy, juxtaposed and collaged with women's body parts, clipped from Western fashion magazines, crudely forming genitalia portraits that are violent and grotesque. An African slavegirl subverts power by killing her master and completes the necrophilist act of fellatio while he is noosed up by rope and hanging from a tree in *Testimony: Narrative of a Negress Burdened by Good Intentions*, 2004 by Kara Walker. *She is consistent; She nurtures; She's maternal; He thrives*, 2007, by Leesa Streifler, displays 'silhouette negatives' of a boy baby sucking and slurping the squirting milk from a woman's large nipple. This 'menu' of sexuality is evocative of Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party*, 1974-79, on permanent view at the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art. In a collaborative project with multiple women contributors, the artist fashioned dinner plates in the style of fleshy female labia, clitoris and vulvae, on a triangular-shaped dinner table, in homage to ground-breaking women the world over. This installation challenged the repression of nearly all feminine achievements, which obscured their histories from public memory.³³

Ghada Amer's paintings raise questions about the position of women in the West in relation to Islamic fundamentalism. Radical feminism's attempts to police desire remind her, in their restrictiveness, of the Islamic prohibitions of her Egyptian childhood, so the pornography she freely uses becomes a rebellion. She

explores the themes of feminine cliché and erotica, yet her paintings have often been described as entering a women's boudoir of pleasure, with submerged undertones of captivity and repression and the desire to lift the veil or hijab. Sometimes Amer incorporates text and calligraphy from numerous languages into her works, drawing from the Quran. The artist also creates sculpture and installation, and recently has begun to make antiwar statements in her work.

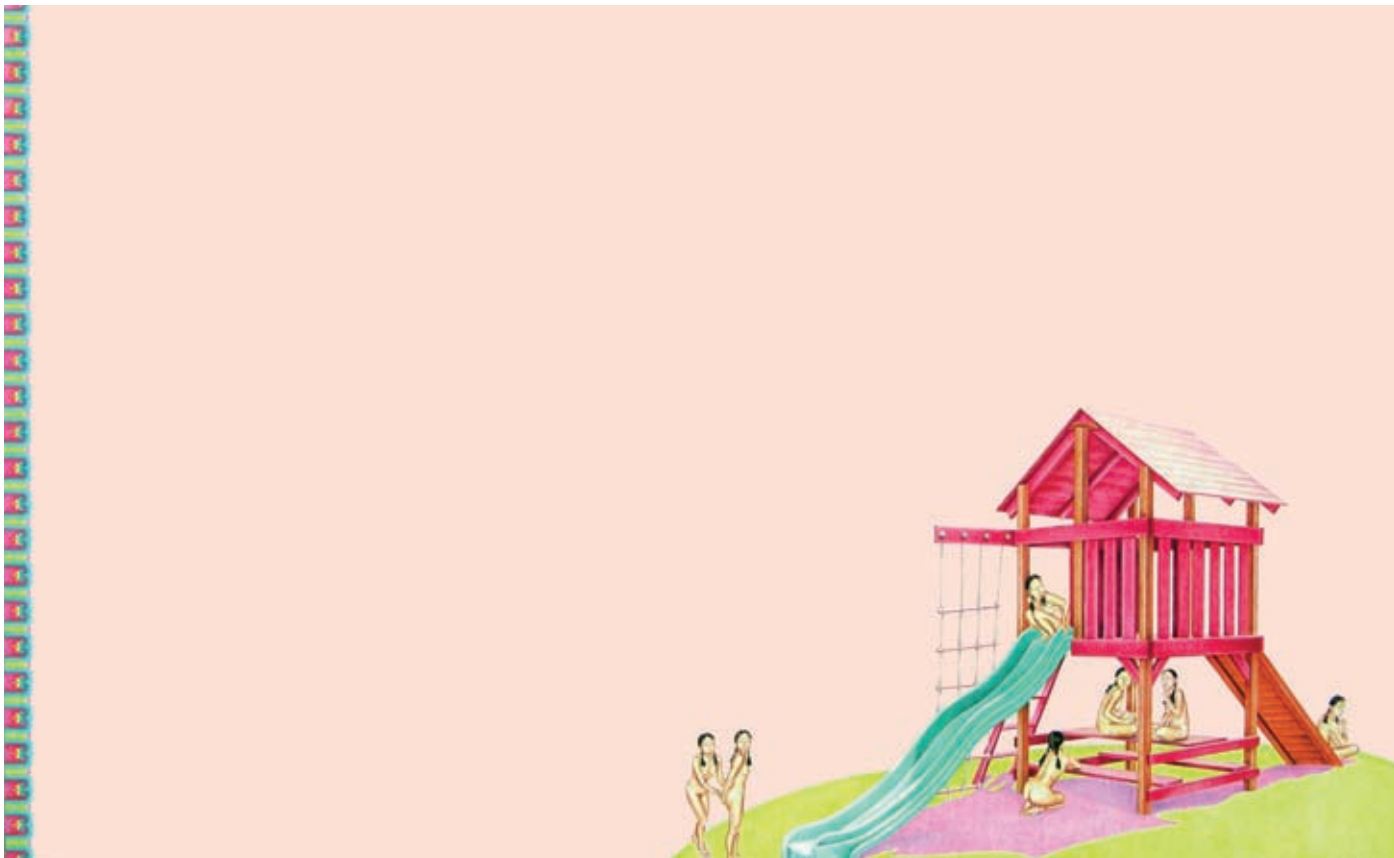
Like the feminist activist art group the Guerrilla Girls, who formulate revised versions of the history of western art, Amer remaps art history in new erotic and provocative terms in order to capture painting as a space of desire for the female. She does this by appropriating devices from movements that have characterised the male artistic canon, using her embroidered and acrylic strokes in an abstract expressionistic style and alluding to a minimalist grid through her pattern of repeating embroidered motifs. In *French Kiss*, 2003, the emblematic profile of an embrace is rendered in rhythmical linear and spatial repetition across an embroidered canvas, veiled in a shower of threads and acrylic blocks. The faces are difficult to see at first. What appear to be paint drips are actually thread ends that would normally be concealed in a traditional needlework,³⁴ a rendering of the inside, outside.

Su-en Wong's paintings are dominated by multiple nude pre-pubescent self-portraits half child-like and innocent, yet knowing and adult-like in their seductive Lolita poses, a disturbing engagement with the Asian



Ghada Amer
French Kiss, (detail)
2003

Courtesy of Deitch Projects



Su-en Wong *Lovers Knot*, 2006 Courtesy of Danese Gallery

schoolgirl stereotype and the Western voyeur.³⁵ In *Lovers Knot*, 2006, nude Asian schoolgirls are juxtaposed with a red jungle-gym, set up against a pink, colour-field playground. The figures and this game knot together like lovers' tongues, an allusion to the phallic, blue, slippery slide, a common childhood [sex] toy. Like Ghada Amer, Wong's work signals a shift in perspective that undermines objectification by empowering the nude female body, particularly through performance of sexual desire.³⁶

Chitra Ganesh has created an erotic retelling – in the comic-book tradition – of Hindu myths. In her digital c-print series, *Tales of Amnesia*, she explores a new kind of sexuality that exceeds the confines of the traditional Indian virgin and/or bride, drawing from *Amar Chitra Katha* comics.³⁷ "The imagery [of the comics] was so interesting because it's so much about the women being pure or noble or maternal or supportive of their husbands, or quiet or passive – all of these conventional models of femininity but then, at the same time, they dress like I Dream of Jeannie [sic], very Barbie with tits and ass. I wanted to use some of the existing imagery to insert a different perspective into how these myths are told. I wanted to go beyond the suggestive 'don't ask, don't tell' quality of Indian culture."³⁸

Undoing Race and Gender Constructs

Laylah Ali, Wangechi Mutu and Kara Walker use recontextualised stereotypes to blast new meaning into race and gender constructs. Predecessors and peers on this path include Faith Ringgold, Adrian Piper, Carrie Mae Weems, and Renee Cox from the United States, Tracey Moffatt from Australia, and Tracey Rose from South Africa. Important critical thinkers including bell hooks and Audre Lorde inform the politics behind these engagements with prejudice and damaging social constructions. By placing sexual taboos, racialised stereotypes and the inherent violence of oppressive sexualisations into the public space of the art museum, they invite us to look, to categorize, to turn the tables of objectification and disturb the pathways of prejudice that condition the contemporary moment's emergence out of the past.

Walker is an African American artist of high profile and prolific output, whose controversial and confrontational use of black sexual stereotypes illuminates the traumatic abuse of the American slave trade, particularly within the Antebellum South.³⁹ Walker's work is a complex blend of fiction, the romance novel, history, autobiography and popular culture. Her large installations, countless drawings, prints and puppet animations are made up of black paper Rorschach-style typologies appropriated from the eighteenth century silhouette portraiture tradition.

Her nightmarish narratives are replete with obscene violence, lewd sexual acts, fornication, objects in orifices, defecation and a reversal of power relationships between master and slave. Walker explores the duplicitous constructs of Madonna/Whore and black subject as noble savage/violent avenger. Her work simultaneously seduces and implicates the viewer.

Pandora's Box exhibits Kara Walker's first film, *Testimony: Narrative of a Negress Burdened by Good Intentions*, from 2004. It is a black-and-white silent puppet animation housed inside the dominant video box structure in the centre of the Dunlop Art Gallery exhibition space, the quintessential physical symbol of the exhibition's adopted myth. Like Pandora's, this video box unleashes secrets within a dimmed space designed for viewing and reflection. *Testimony* tells, in eight-minutes, the tragicomic fable of a 'revised' relationship between slave and master, lynched by his slave lover, a Cinderella who revolts against this despotic "prince." For this piece, Walker created small-scale renditions of her most famous characters: the Auntie, the master, the master's son, and the Negress mistress. We can see the shadows of the artist's hands and arms in the background as she operates her puppets with string. The story takes place on a cotton plantation and is narrated through a series of intertitles that tell how the white men, in their "longing for fulfillment," temporarily relinquish their bodies to the slave women.⁴⁰

Trained as both a sculptor and an anthropologist, Wangechi Mutu began her work with an exploration of the way in which people, especially black women, are identified,

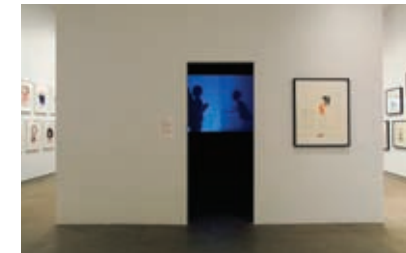
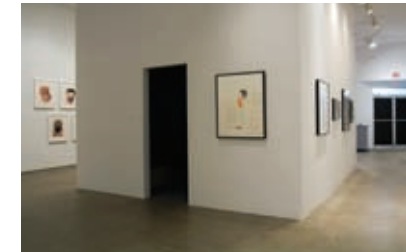
classified, judged and exploited based on their physical attributes.⁴¹ Her collages delve into the split nature of cultural identity, referencing colonial history, fashion and contemporary African politics. She describes her practice in the catalogue for the 2007 group exhibition *Collage: The Unmonumental Picture*, at the New Museum in New York: "When images in my work merge, they participate in a raucous mating dance producing a stinky, sinister, gorgeous, little transgender fruit."⁴² In *Histology of the Different Classes of Uterine Tumors*, a series of twelve collages created in 2006, Mutu uses nineteenth century medical diagrams as a basis for invented portraiture. Symbolic of colonial power, the original illustrations suggest a wide range of cultural pre-conceptions: from the 'superiority' of European 'knowledge' to the classification of nature and race into genealogical hierarchies. Drawing from the aesthetics of traditional African crafts and goddess-like figures, Mutu engages in her own form of story telling, as influenced by the Kenyan stories passed on by her grandmother; her works document the contemporary myth-making of an embattled cultural heritage.⁴³ Mutu's perverse, incongruous amalgamations of physical and cultural hyper-elaborated 'ideals' consist of painted surfaces, found materials and mismatched body parts and prosthetics clipped from misogynistic porn and fashion magazines, each an isolated feature of epitomized beauty: chiseled cheekbones, kiss-me lips, petite ears, and smouldering eyes. Together, they become a grotesque mask of racial parody, like Ellen Gallagher's minstreels. Centred over these medical



Kara Walker

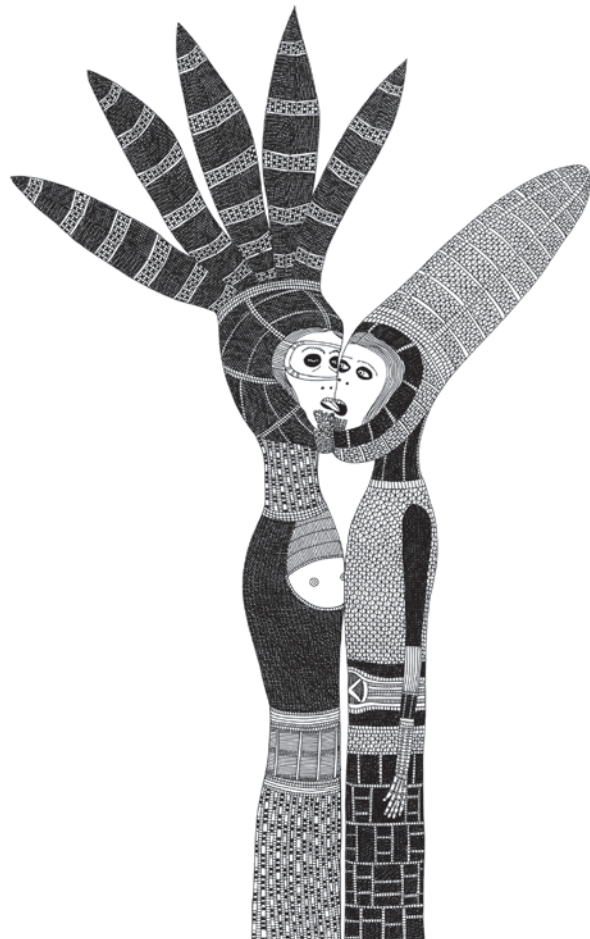
Testimony: Narrative of a Negress Burdened by Good Intentions, 2004, still from B&W video, 8:49

Courtesy of Sikkema Jenkins & Co.



Installation view of video box, 2008, Dunlop Art Gallery

Photography: Trevor Hopkin



Laylah Ali
Untitled, 2006-2007
 Courtesy of 303 Gallery

diagrams, her composites of physical ‘perfection’ become models of contamination and cancerous disease.

Laylah Ali has said: “...we all understand the immediately revealed, usually derogatory, narrative contained within a stereotype...In my...drawings I aim to fuse recognizable types with question marks, fuse known narratives with things that are not as easily articulated.”⁴⁴ In *Pandora’s Box*, six of Ali’s drawings from her uncanny *Typology* series, 2005-2007, include portraits, couples entwined, or a twosome with child. The figures are endowed with loaded cultural signs and symbols: hoods, robes, masks and uniforms from the military. Her other works also incorporate everyday items: band-aids, a dodge ball, sneakers. Power struggles, racial subjugation, oppression and political abuse are major issues explored in her work. The comics are at once childish and playful, ominous and inauspicious.

Exploring a terrain reminiscent of Mutu’s “transgender fruit” collages, Laylah Ali and Shary Boyle work with androgynous figures. In their re-interpretations of historical ethnography and identity classifications, both Mutu and Ali are “making room for [delicious new gender communities] in a crowded world.” The gender-ambiguous individual today has a “flexibility [that] has become a powerful commodity...the transgender body has emerged as futurity itself, a kind of heroic fulfillment of postmodern promises of gender flexibility.”⁴⁵ Mutu and Ali tease viewers with this ‘jumbled’ gender mis-recognition to imagine discontinuous selves that question identities based on gender stereotypes and bodily signifiers.

The Carnavalesque and the Grotesque

According to Mikhail Bakhtin⁴⁶ the carnivalesque, drawn from a popular folk tradition in which people disguised, crossed-dressed and performed in the streets, provided an opportunity to blaspheme and mock dominant structures of authority, including family roles. The tragicomic carnival offers an alternative expressive space that symbolises potentials for freedom, release and renewal. On this ad hoc stage (such as Kara Walker’s puppet stage), the body could be re-invented through processes of inversion, subversion and appropriation while at the same time assimilating into and exploding existing social and cultural structures.⁴⁷ Many of the artists in *Pandora’s Box* convey this process of embodied and interiorised reinvention and subversion in their own work.

Laylah Ali and Wangechi Mutu’s art project an ambiguous “anthropology run amok.”⁴⁸ Both artists use costume and the grotesque to convey traditions of identification and classification based on observable physical traits. Power, oppression, violence, gender and racial identity all become important themes. The figures in their drawings become hybridised, with characteristics derived from multiple cultural sources. Wangechi Mutu remarks, “Camouflage and mutation are big themes in my work, but the idea I’m most enamoured with is the notion that transformation can help us to transcend our predicament.

We all wear costumes when we set out for battle. The language of body alteration is a powerful inspiration.”⁴⁹ Ali also forces viewers to re-examine identity constructs. Of her characters, she remarks: “The head-dresses have been inspired by an amalgamation of hair, feather head-dresses and the headgear of the Catholic hierarchy... The details of the clothing hint at affiliations, status, aspirations.”⁵⁰ The incongruous acts of these figureheads suggest interiorities that do not match the status drag.

Leesa Streifler’s work has long been associated with the carnival and the grotesque. Streifler has used her own body as the source of her critical reevaluation of the woman’s perfect body ideal, and how the role of women in different capacities can affect their overall identity in stereotypical ways. “My drawing and textual interventions reflect on the role of women in domestic life, giving voice to repressed and unspoken desires and emotions too confrontational, risqué and taboo to have ever been mentioned.”⁵¹ The artist has been interested in exploring the female body in all its stages and glory: the pregnant body, the aging body, the domesticated body, the irregular body, using dressing up (and cross-dressing) in various guises and costumes. In this exhibition, Streifler returns to the Dunlop Art Gallery, a decade after her solo exhibition of self-portraits, *Normal*, was curated here by Vera Lemecha.⁵²

Leesa Streifler represents a local force within the international company of artists represented in *Pandora’s Box*. It is a rare and special opportunity that

the Dunlop Art Gallery audience in Regina can explore some of the most witty, candid, intimate, bewitching, powerful, and complex work created by women in recent years, and view “one of their own” amongst such esteemed international guests.⁵³ It is time for Streifler’s work to engage with her transnational peers on home turf. As Shary Boyle eloquently stated in an email discussion group with some of the participating artists, “This exhibition is interesting and unusual for a regional public gallery in Canada – to include such high profile artists from outside the country, and focus on the excellent work of women,”⁵⁴ many of whom are at the forefront of critical attention around the world.

Surrealist Influences, Dreams, Self-Portraiture & Autobiography

Mexican artist Frida Kahlo, used self-portraiture and Mexican folkloric traditions to explore aspects of her persona – the outward appearance of self and the projected image presented and performed for public consumption. Her autobiographical work, replete with complex and evolved idiosyncratic symbolisms and signs leads to provocative reinterpretations of semiotics, psychoanalysis and the female masquerade.



Leesa Streifler

Parenting Revisited:
portrait at 5 and 15
years, 2008

Photography: Lee Henderson



Shary Boyle
Scotch Bonnet, 2007
 Photography: Shary Boyle

Her method is a key antecedent to the practices of self-portraiture and signification that inform the work of young artists Shary Boyle, Amy Cutler and Annie Pootoogook.⁵⁵ They also draw on symbolism and hybridity, a morph of animal and human – and bizarre, complex, dreamlike scenarios, qualities or characteristics in conversation with the formal Surrealist movement.

In the 2004 *Whitney Biennial* catalogue, co-curator Shamim Momin argues that the strong appeal of transmogrification and the fantastic for young artists today rests in the response to a “pervasive internal anxiety and uncertainty about the world, existing in concert with a renewed desire for passionate engagement and re-enchantment.”⁵⁶ The surreal chaos of our everyday lives is incorporated into the zones of alterity they create. Josée Drouin-Brisebois, Curator of Contemporary Art at the National Gallery of Canada believes that “Fantasy becomes a strategic escape, a refuge from all that is wrong in the world.”⁵⁷ Fables, myths and fantasies are plastic enough to be reworked.⁵⁸

In her selection of ten watercolour and ink drawings on paper for *Pandora's Box*, developed between 2003-2007, self-confessed “outsider” artist Shary Boyle paints fantastical scenes, featuring one to two central characters. The titles are often a clue to their predicaments. Boyle’s international experiences influence the content of her work created in that location, whether she is in London, Finland, Scotland or Germany. Some of these drawings are a response to poems written by Boyle’s friend and fellow artist Emily Vey Duke. Boyle presents worlds in

which life is ambiguous and uncertain. She is interested in exploring issues that may be anxiety-causing, such as sickness, death and failed relationships.⁵⁹ The vulnerability and dysfunction evident in her characters is palpable – we wince with uncomfortable familiarity. Images range from the demonised witch reminiscent from stories like Hansel and Gretel or Snow White, to a bloodthirsty vampire girl in a scotch-patterned dress devouring a green marine snail with wings, to lost souls marching across a galaxy atmosphere towards a large conch shell, lit up by lava-like hell fire or coagulating purgatory. “My work explores personal alienation, longing and the female imagination. The characters and situations I create compel an examination of nature, childhood wonder, mortality, sexuality, gender and the supernatural....I honour the body in all its isolation, suffering and joy.”⁶⁰ Her archetypal characters can be lonely, mischievous or angry. She offers unsettling views that are repressed by society’s standards of what is deemed “acceptable” and hits nerves as her work offers scenarios of the inexplicable, frightening and puzzling.

Since 2005, Shary Boyle has joined artistic forces with Winnipeg-based musician and song-writer Christine Fellows. Their intimate collaboration uses the simplest of tools: overhead projector, piano and voice. They were drawn to each other by virtue of their shared “folk art” aesthetics and styles. Boyle illustrates the lyrics of songs composed by Fellows, which tell spell-binding, luminous tales of small towns, emergency wards and endless road trips. Boyle’s invented child-like silhouettes are projected overhead onto walls, enlivened by light, colour, movement

and sound. Described as something of a Victorian light show, Boyle also uses colour theatre gels, sands, string and mirrors. The emotionally-charged performances become magical, poetic outpourings of both artists' psychological investigations into issues of power, alienation, longing and liberatory imagination. This practice links Boyle's work to Kara Walker's projection installations and puppet animations, also featured in *Pandora's Box*. Staged at the Dunlop Art Gallery to mark the occasion of the *Pandora's Box* opening, *Shadow Songs* was composed of *Migrations*, a haunting tune about change, told in three little stories, nestled among several other melodies, all within a captivating twenty minute performance. Fellows sings about the girl on the catalogue cover, from *Migrations*: "Would you pick me up? I'm light as a feather, Though I'm not afraid, I am not brave enough to offer."

Like Shary Boyle, Amy Cutler's work creates unique hybrids. This artist uses narratives that incorporate elements of fairy tales, phobias, cryptic personal symbolism and the tradition of Surrealism. Often her dream-like tableaux evoke both child-like wonder and a sinister psychological underside. Like the women in mythology, metamorphoses in Cutler's world are common; her main protagonists are usually women in recognisable settings or relationships, wearing intricately patterned, textured dresses and folk costumes, ranging from old-maid housecoats, tent frocks and hoop skirts to hip, bohemian garb indicative of notable periods in fashion history. Her female characters may grow broom-stick

arms, teapot heads or horse hunch-backs. Enchanting and enigmatic, her skillfully executed and meticulous topsy-turvy drawings are reminiscent of children's book illustrations by Victorian and Edwardian artists. Dutch genre paintings, paper folk dolls, Japanese *ukiyo-e*⁶¹ woodblock prints and nineteenth century fashion plates also spring to mind.⁶² "Quirky and fanciful though they are, Cutler's vignettes resonate with age-old struggles [old wives tales] that remain burning issues in our time."⁶³

In *Accommodation*, 2001, a large flock of robins with red chests swoop and spiral above a young lady who floats in a large expanse of white space. A purple blue bird martin house (with room for nine) replaces the woman's head, tilted back flat, as if bending over backwards to accommodate the birds who will enter and rest in her compartmentalised and vacant "bird brain", which projects an attitude that is considerate, cooperative, helpful, hospitable, kind, neighborly, obliging, polite, and unselfish, all signifiers of femininity. In her hands she holds a saucepan of water. Household chores are a recurring theme in Cutler's works on paper. The style of the woman's dress (c. 1940's) and the pointy-roofed bird-house invoke periods when a woman's role was very clearly defined and delineated towards the tyranny of drudgery. Birdhouses are a recurring motif in Cutler's works, her birds often metaphors for thoughts.

The theme of birds and 'flying' or 'floating' gather momentum in this exhibition, bursting forth from Pandora's box in delightful and scandalous array. A flying girl and

Amy Cutler

Accommodation, 2001

Courtesy of The JPMorgan Chase
Art Collection



Wangechi Mutu
*Histology of the
 Different Classes of
 Uterine Tumors*, 2006,
 Series of 12 works

Courtesy of Sikkema
 Jenkins & Co.



boy appear in the Fellows/Boyle *Shadow Songs* performance, streaming across the gallery walls. Everywhere is falling and flight. Helene Cixous theorises that “Flying is a woman’s gesture – flying in language and making it fly. We have all learned the art of flying and its numerous techniques; for centuries we’ve been able to possess anything only by flying; we’ve lived in flight, stealing away, finding, when desired, narrow passageways, hidden crossovers.... What woman hasn’t flown/stolen? Who hasn’t felt, dreamt, performed the gesture that jams sociality? Who hasn’t crumbled, held up to ridicule, the bar of separation? Who hasn’t inscribed with her body the differential, punctured the system of couples and opposition? Who, by some act of transgression, hasn’t overthrown successiveness, connection, the wall of circumfusion?”⁶⁴ Who could resist?

Wangechi Mutu uses animals in her collages, too, in order to create female hybrid humanoid and metaphoric creatures. Lauri Firstenberg cites *Strange Beauty*, 1929, in Hannah Höch’s series “From an Ethnographic Museum” as a point of departure for Mutu’s work, and for her fascination with the absurd and the abject.⁶⁵ Höch was one of the only females in the German Dada group of artists from the 1920s and 1930s. Like Höch, Mutu has remarked that she is trying to slowly and thoughtfully “vandalize and eradicate that profane notion that beauty is singular or objective.”⁶⁶

Strongly relying on personal, symbolic and autobiographical components, Annie Pootoogook is an Inuit artist who often inserts icons from contemporary Inuit life into her drawings, including clocks, polar bears,

ski-dooos, sexual fantasies, television, family meals and houses. Her peers include Kavavaow Mannomee, Nick Sikkuark and Annie’s cousin Shuvina Ashoona, who has a strong interest in terror, fantasy and surrealism.⁶⁷ All of these artists deal with the precarious nature of life in the North, gleaning inspiration from romantic and Inuit mythologies. Annie’s drawings have also highlighted the community’s ongoing struggles with mental health, alcoholism, suicide, domestic violence and drug addiction as enduring scars of colonialism. Here are more healing scenes of her parents undergoing everyday activities and a mother, taking care of her young child. The relationship between parent and child is clearly paramount in Inuit life. Like some of Pootoogook’s maternalist drawings, one of Laylah Ali’s masked figures with bulbous headpiece has a baby strapped to her body. Leesa Streifler also takes up themes of motherhood and autobiography in her new work, *She is consistent; She nurtures; She’s maternal; He thrives*, 2007, influenced by the relationship with her son.

In Streifler’s series of new portraits, entitled *Parenting Revisited*, 2008, we see the artists’ critique of posed images taken by her uncle, a Winnipeg portrait photographer, when the artist was one and five years old respectively. The fifteen year old shot was Streifler’s high school year-book portrait. Streifler comments: “I analyse feminine socialisation of the 60’s critically from both a feminist and humanitarian perspective. I am expressing feelings of anger, regret and sadness over unintentional, yet identity transforming messages I experienced as a child.”⁶⁸ The photographs represent a history of the

artist's evolving consciousness over a ten year period. Streifler has found that the naïve quality of those early years of her life has provided her with fertile ground for mature reflection on her childhood, particularly from her adult perspective as a mother.⁶⁹ In *Life Force in Two Realms (the social and the spiritual)*, 2008, the artist depicts a hovering, floating, partially human figure, almost spiritual in its offering. Her large hands are not powerful – they are numb – taken from the artist's suffering with carpal tunnel. The figure is at once social and spiritual – a conflation that the artist observes repeatedly in her life.⁷⁰

Su-en Wong delicately renders with coloured pencils a multiplicity of small photo-realistic self-portraits in her acrylic diptych and singular paintings, each alluding to different strands of the artist's ego. Wong provides the theatrical archetype, in both leading and supporting roles.⁷¹ These young women are based on Wong's memories of growing up in an all-girls Chinese Catholic school in Singapore, and her struggles to assimilate into American culture. The objects that the girls encounter and interact with are often metaphors for states of mind. These pubescent, erotically-charged girls are typically placed within a large colour-field, flat-plane painting.⁷² The titles of Wong's paintings usually recall the commercial paint chips that she uses for her monochrome backgrounds; thus she alludes to narratives that these titles evoke and demonstrates how colour can capture in/tangible cultural assumptions that elicit emotional response. In *Lovers Knot*, 2006, multiple copies of the artist surround and perch on top of a schoolground play-house or labyrinth, with

blue slide. The girls are engaged in “good” and “bad” adolescent behaviour, ranging from benign games, tantalising charm and sexual curiosity, to outright rebellious, aggressive, jealous, bullying and competitive acts. We also witness the influence of peer pressure and the dynamics between individual and group.

Chitra Ganesh provides a surreal stage in her comic series, depicting idyllic landscapes, classic motifs, Homeric-like panoramas, nudes, three-headed women and winged scalpels.⁷³ The artist is interested in providing new views of the sacred in everyday life, drawing particularly on sacred Hindu myths and morality, as well as very personal expressions of her sexual identity, desire and fantasy. Like Shazia Sikander, Ganesh questions the role of Eastern tradition and history in relation to her diasporic identity as a South Asian American woman. “I interweave and fuse personalized iconography and contemporary expressions of femininity with traditional popular mythologies of the South Asian subcontinent, including Hindu, Buddhist, and Bollywood content and popular tales to create mythological hybrid tableaux. Much of my work engages the term ‘jungle’ (meaning savage or literally ‘of the jungle’), an old colonial Indian idiom used to describe women who were perceived as defiant or transgressing social norms.”⁷⁴

In *Dazzle*, 2006, the artist has developed a digital c-print narrative full of dismembered characters immersed in an ambiguous love triangle, rich with symbols and metaphors. The title of the work alludes to the dazzling yellow light surrounding a raised clenched



Leesa Streifler

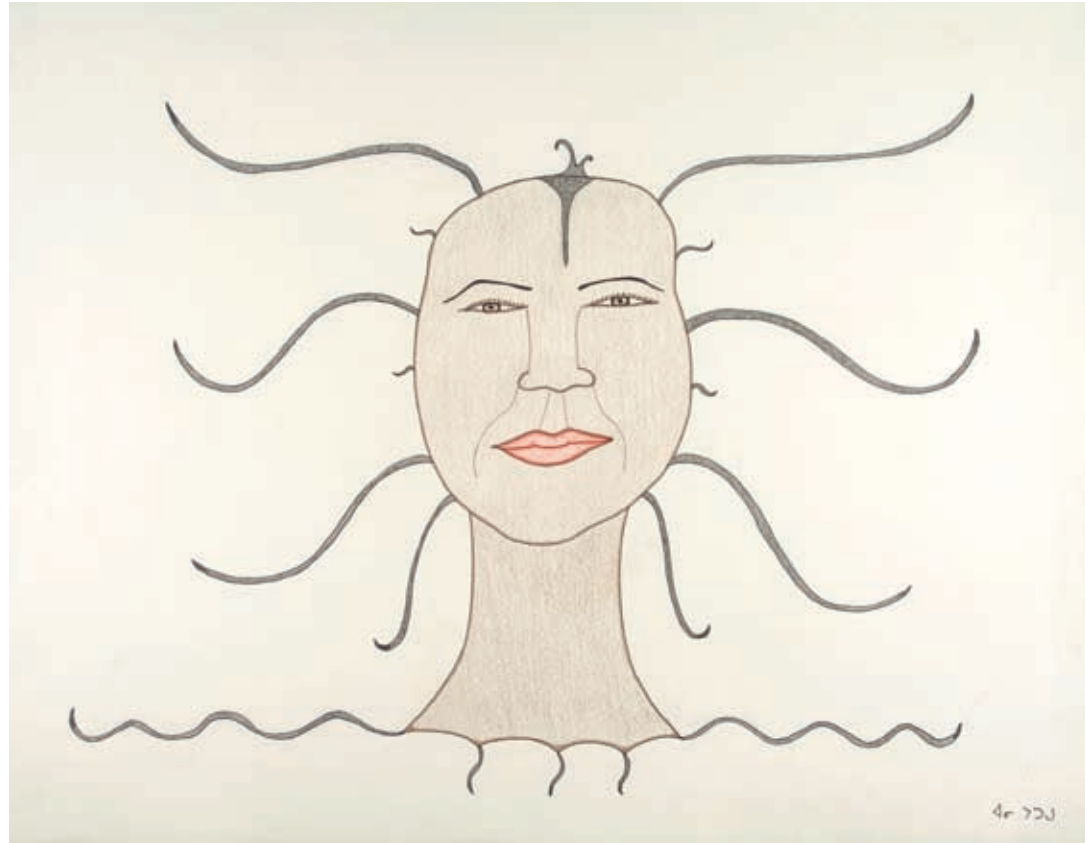
Life Force in Two Realms (the social and the spiritual), 2008 Photography: Lee Henderson



Ganesh creates large-scale 3D collage and drawing murals, which often depict floating ethereal female forms, comfortably juggling objects and identities within

The passage of time that is encapsulated by *Pandora's Box* invokes a generation of women artists whose time has come. Their inward focus breaches surfaces that deny, disguise, eroticise and reveal. Ultimately the way that we interpret the work in *Pandora's Box* has much to do with our own obsessions, existential dilemmas, anxieties, and inner conflicts.⁷⁷ This is the one of the many gifts that *Pandora's Box* offers us.

Amanda Cachia is Curator,
Dunlop Art Gallery



Annie Pootoogook
Face Transformation,
 Cape Dorset, 2001/02
 Photography: Don Hall



Chitra Ganesh
 installing a mural for
739 Feet Running Wall,
 Gwangju Contemporary
 Art Museum Gwangju,
 Korea, 2005

Courtesy of Thomas Erben Gallery

Leesa Streifler

*She is consistent; She
nurtures; She's maternal:
He thrives, 2007*

Photography: Lee Henderson



Annie Pootoogook

*Composition (Mother
& Child in Amautik),
Cape Dorset, 2006/07*

Photography: Don Hall



Shary Boyle and Christine Fellows,
Shadow Songs performance
at Dunlop Art Gallery,
Friday May 16, 2008

Photography: Jeff Nye



1 Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* by Audre Lorde (The Crossing Press, 1984), 54.

2 Dorothy Allison, Audre Lorde quoted in "Public Silence, Private Terror" in *Skin: Talking About Sex, Class & Literature* (New York: FireBrand Books, 1994), 101.

3 Anne Carson, "Dirt and Desire: Essay on the Phenomenology of Female Pollution in Antiquity" in *Men in the Off Hours* (Canada: Vintage, 2001), 133.

4 Several writers have talked about Pandora in a positive light, as originally bearing gifts, including Charlene Spretnak, *Lost Goddesses of Early Greece: A Collection of Pre-Hellenic Myths*, (Beacon Press, 1981) and Jane Ellen Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion* (1903) (1922), 280-85. Over time, the story evolved so that popular, androcentric Greek myth tells us that Zeus gave Pandora a jar containing all of the troubles and ills that mankind now knows including Old Age, Sickness, Insanity, Vice and Passion, and told her not to open it. Unfortunately her curiosity got the best of her and she opened it, unleashing the evil spirits into the world, as cited in Patricia Turner, Patricia & Charles Russell Coulter, *Dictionary of Ancient Deities* (Oxford University Press, 2001), 372.

5 Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form* (Picador Press, 1985), 214-215.

6 Means "all gifts", derived from a combination of Greek παν (pan) "all"

and δωρον (doron) "gift", as cited in Hesoid, translated by M.L. West (1966), *Theogony, Works and Days* (Oxford University Press, 1966), no page number available.

7 Riane Eisler, *Sacred Pleasure: Sex, Myth, and the Politics of the Body – New Paths to Power and Love* (HarperCollins Publishers, 1995), 267.

8 Carrie Vassallo, *Pandora's Box: A Collection of Collections* (Ontario: London Regional Art & Historical Museums, 1999) 12.

9 Riane Eisler, *Sacred Pleasure: Sex, Myth, and the Politics of the Body – New Paths to Power and Love* (HarperCollins Publishers, 1995), 73.

10 Amelia Jones, "Postfeminism, Feminist Pleasures, and Embodied Theories of Art" in *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology* ed. Donald Preziosi (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 383.

11 Merrily Kerr, "Wangechi Mutu's Extreme Makeovers", *Art On Paper*, Vol. 8, No. 6, (July/August 2004).

12 Anne Carson, "Dirt and Desire: Essay on the Phenomenology of Female Pollution in Antiquity" in *Men in the Off Hours* (Canada: Vintage, 2001), 140.

13 Ophira Edut, *BUST* magazine, issue & date not available.

14 Inga Muscio, *cunt* (California: Seal Press, 2002), xxxi.

15 Luce Irigaray, "The Sex Which is Not One" in *New French Feminisms*

eds. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (Schocken Books, 1981), 103.

16 Donald Haase, ed., *Fairy Tales and Feminism: New Approaches* (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 2004), 23.

17 captured from Geeta Kapur's essay "Gender Mobility: Through the Lens of Five Women Artists in India" in *Global Feminisms* eds. Linda Nochlin and Maura Reilly (New York: Brooklyn Museum of Art, 2007), 79.

18 Helene Shulman Lorenz, "Thawing Hearts, Opening a Path in the Woods, Founding a New Lineage" in *This Bridge We Call Home* eds. Gloria E. Anzaldua and Analouise Keating (Routledge, 2002), 497.

19 Kristin Chambers, *Threads of Vision: Toward a new Feminine Poetics*, Cleveland Center for Contemporary Art (New York: DAP Publishers, 2001), 19.

20 Maura Reilly, "Toward Transnational Feminism" in *Global Feminisms* eds. Linda Nochlin and Maura Reilly (New York: Brooklyn Museum of Art, 2007), 31.

21 Inderpal Grewal & Caren Kaplan (eds.), *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices* (University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

22 Susan Sellers, ed., passage quoted from "The Newly Born Woman", in *The Helene Cixous Reader* (Routledge, 1994), 38.

23 Ibid, 40.

24 Meeka Walsh, "Uneasy Painting: The Ambiguous Art of Shary Boyle", Shary Boyle in Interview with Robert Enright, *Border Crossings*, Volume 26 No. 3 (2007): 89.

25 Ibid, 93.

26 Nancy Campbell and Deborah Root, "Inuit Art and the Limits of Authenticity" in *Annie Pootoogook* (Calgary: Alberta College of Art & Design, Illingworth Kerr Gallery, 2007), 26.

27 Hilary Robinson, *Reading Art, Reading Irigaray* (London and New York: I.B.Tauris, 2006), 34.

28 One is reminded of the beautiful Sky Goddess-Egyptian Acrobat character(s) present in the mixed media work of seminal artist Nancy Spero, see Jon Bird, Jo Anna Isaak, Sylvere Lotringer, *Nancy Spero* (Phaidon, 1996).

29 Annie Sprinkle, *Post Porn Modernist: my 25 years as a multi-media whore* (Cleis Press, 1998).

30 "Ghada Amer defines 'double submission' as the act of taking images exclusively rendered for the male gaze and re-presenting them to empower the subject of the gaze, not the viewer." Valerie Cassel Oliver, *Perspectives 148: Su-en Wong: The Strange and Fascinating World of Su-en Wong* (Houston: Contemporary Arts Museum, 2005).

31 Neville Wakefield, "Ghada Amer: Embroidering a Delicate Deception", *Elle Décor* (February-March 2000): no page number available.

32 Judith Butler, "The Lesbian Phallus and the Morphological Imaginary" in *Bodies that Matter* (Routledge, 1993), 57–92.

33 *Dinner Party* has been described as "perhaps the first effort to embrace a transnational spread of feminist art today." Eleanor Heartney, "Worldwide Women", *Art in America* (June/July 2007), 164.

34 Laurie Ann Farrell, *Looking Both Ways: Art of the Contemporary African Diaspora*, Museum for African Art, New York (Ghent: Snoeck Publishers, 2003).

35 Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer, *Su-en Wong* (New York: Danese Gallery, 2007), 3.

36 Valerie Cassel Oliver, *Perspectives 148: Su-en Wong: The Strange and Fascinating World of Su-en Wong* (Houston: Contemporary Arts Museum, 2005).

37 This series is one of India's largest selling comic book series, with more than 90 million copies sold in 20 Indian languages. Founded in 1967 by Anant Pai, the series retells stories from the great Indian epics, mythology, history, folklore, and fables in a comic book format. They are read and distributed widely both on the South Asian subcontinent, as well as in the South Asian diaspora (Canada, England, US, Australia, and Caribbean). Intended to educate children about the cultural history of South Asia (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Burma), *Amar Chitra Katha* comics provide prescriptive

models of citizenship, nationalism, religious expression, public behavior, and sexuality. Artist statement in body of email (February 2008).

38 artist statement, *VelvetPark*, no date available.

39 Unlike Walker's characters, movies such as D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*, 1915 and *Gone with the Wind*, the 1936 novel by Margaret Mitchell and the 1939 film, both reference the relationship between master and slave through a romanticised lens.

40 "Of course, the problem is that power has no conscience, and as viewers are quickly told, the women refused "to subvert to the old order" and instead they "rounded 'em up" and murdered their masters/lovers....A tragicomedy, Walker's fable, presented in the spirit of slave testimonials, delves into the flaws of assigning any kind of moral superiority in the realm of human emotions." Yasmin Raymond, "Maladies of Power" in exhibition catalogue *Kara Walker: My Complement, My Enemy, My Oppressor, My Love*, Walker Art Center (New York: DAP Publishers, 2007), 365.

41 "Central to this consideration are the histories of imperialism, genocide, slavery and diaspora, who have inscribed their violent histories onto both the individual body and the body politic." Celina Jeffery, *Wangechi Mutu: The Cinderella Curse* (Georgia: Savannah College of Art and Design, 2007), 2.

42 *Collage: The Unmonumental Picture*, the New Museum, New York, curated by Richard Flood, Laura Hoptman, Massimiliano Gioni (New York: Merrell Press, 2007), 74.

43 Merrily Kerr, "Wangechi Mutu's Extreme Makeovers", *Art On Paper*, Vol. 8, No. 6, (July/August 2004).

44 Laylah Ali in conversation with Cylena Simonds, Curator, Exhibition Projects, inIVA, "Laylah Ali: the kiss and other warriors" (London: 2006/2007).

45 Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time & Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York University Press, 2005), 18.

46 M. M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, translated by Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).

47 Isolde Brielmaier, "Wangechi Mutu: Re-Imagining The World", *Parkett 74* (2005): 8.

48 Alex Baker, *Laylah Ali: Typology*, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia (New York: DAP Publishers, 2007), 3.

49 Wangechi Mutu, interview with Lauri Firstenberg, *Looking Both Ways: Art of the Contemporary African Diaspora*, Museum for African Art, New York, by Laurie Ann Farrell (Ghent: Snoeck Publishers, 2003).

50 Laylah Ali in conversation with Cylena Simonds, Curator, Exhibition Projects, inIVA, "Laylah Ali: the kiss and other warriors" (London: 2006/2007).

51 Leesa Streifler, artist statement, *Where she's at* (Toronto: Harbourfront Centre, York Quay Centre, 2006).

52 Vera Lemeche, *Leesa Streifler: Normal* (Regina: Dunlop Art Gallery, 1998), 5.

53 Kristin Chambers, *Threads of Vision: Toward a new Feminine Poetics*, Cleveland Center for Contemporary Art (New York: DAP Publishers, 2001), 9.

54 quote from email discussion Shary Boyle (January 14, 2008).

55 "The autobiographical has become an important means through which women have explored the social and psychic production of feminine identity...In the 1970s and 1980s feminist practices of writing, film-making and art emerged that used the investigation of the past in order to uncover clues to the present." Rosemary Betterton, *An Intimate Distance: Women, Artists and the Body* (Routledge: 1996), 173.

56 Carly Berwick, "Absolutely Fabulist: Artists mine fairy tales and fables for contemporary takes on familiar narratives" *ARTnews*, 104, no. 9 (October, 2005): 160.

57 Sheila Heti, "Ornamental Impulse", by Josee Drouin-Brisebois in *Otherworld Uprising* (Conundrum Press, Montreal, QC, 2008), 38.

58 Carly Berwick, "Absolutely Fabulist: Artists mine fairy tales and fables for contemporary takes on familiar narratives" *ARTnews*, 104, no. 9 (October, 2005): 161.

59 Meeka Walsh, "Uneasy Painting: The Ambiguous Art of Shary Boyle", Shary Boyle in Interview with Robert Enright, *Border Crossings*, Volume 26 No. 3 (2007): 90.

60 email conversation with the artist (February, 2008).

61 a genre style of painting and printmaking developed in Japan from the 17th to the 19th centuries and marked by the depiction of the leisure activities of ordinary people; interestingly, these paintings also included portraits of courtesans faces and vulvas.

62 Kristin M. Jones, "Amy Cutler", *Frieze* (September, 2004).

63 Laura Auricchio, "Amy Cutler", *Art Papers* (July/August 2007).

64 Helene Cixous, "Laugh of the Medusa" in *New French Feminisms* eds. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (Schocken Books, 1981), 258.

65 Wangechi Mutu, interview with Lauri Firstenberg, *Looking Both Ways: Art of the Contemporary African Diaspora*, Museum for African Art, New York, by Laurie Ann Farrell (Ghent: Snoeck Publishers, 2003), 137.

66 *Collage: The Unmonumental Picture*, the New Museum, New York, curated by Richard Flood, Laura Hoptman, Massimiliano Gioni (New York: Merrell Press, 2007), 74.

67 These three young Inuit artists are featured in an article by Amy Karlinsky, entitled "Land of the Midnight Sons and Daughters: Contemporary Inuit Drawings", *Border Crossings*, Issue No. 105 (2008): 66-83.

68 email conversation with the artist (February 2008).

69 Ibid.

70 Ibid.

71 Valerie Cassel Oliver, *Perspectives 148: Su-en Wong: The Strange and Fascinating World of Su-en Wong* (Houston: Contemporary Arts Museum, 2005).

72 Wong thus pays homage to her artistic influences, including artists Mark Rothko, Agnes Martin and Ellsworth Kelly. She expands on the ideals of Abstract Expressionist painters of the 1950s and the Colour Field painters of the 1960s and 1970s.

73 Chitra Ganesh, *Upon Her Precipice* press release, Thomas Erben Gallery, New York (2007).

74 Chitra Ganesh artist statement within body of email (February 2008).

75 In China and India, the lotus is symbolic of coupling, purity, innocence, beauty, birth and immortality. A new exhibition, *Exploding the Lotus*, at the Art and Culture Center of Hollywood, FL, presents a selection of South Asian artists from Feb 29 – May 25, 2008, whose work upends traditional cultural, spiritual, and political facets of their national

origin disrupting surfaces, images, social spaces, and hegemonic culture – exploding traditional notions of the lotus and more.

76 This was a work that was originally created in 2006 in a group exhibition entitled *Murals* for Newman Popiashvili Gallery in New York.

77 Lisa D. Freiman, *Amy Cutler Paintings and Drawings*, Indianapolis Museum of Art (Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2006), 26.

Artist Biographies

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Laylah Ali was born in Buffalo, New York in 1968, and lives and works in Williamstown, Massachusetts. She received a BA from Williams College and an MFA from Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri. She opened a one-person exhibition of paintings and drawings at the Contemporary Art Museum of St. Louis, MO in December 2004. She was included in the 2004 *Whitney Biennial of American Art*, New York, and in 2003, in the *Venice Biennale*, Italy. Ali has had recent one-person exhibitions at the Albright Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY, Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indianapolis, IN and the Atlanta College of Art Gallery, Atlanta, GA. The artist published a 40-page book of her work for Projects 75 at the Museum of Modern Art, NY in 2002, and received the Regione Piemonte Prize from the Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo per l'arte in 2001.

The exhibition *Laylah Ali: Drawings from the Typology Series* presented 23 selections of the artist's recent ink drawings. The show traveled to the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia and the University of Iowa Museum of Art in 2007 and the University of Arizona in 2008. She is represented by 303 Gallery, NY.

Ghada Amer was born in Cairo, Egypt in 1963; when she was eleven, her family moved to the south of France, where she went to school, university and art college. In 1996, she moved to New York, where she now lives and works. She graduated from the Institut des Hautes Etudes en Art Plastique in France in 1991 and has studied at the Beaux-Arts, Nice and the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Amer's work has been presented in numerous solo and group exhibitions at such venues as Deitch Projects, New York; the first Arab artist to have a one person exhibition at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art; the 2000 *Whitney Biennial*, New York; PS1, New York; the 2000 *Kwangju Biennial*, South Korea; *SITE Sante Fe*, NM; the 1999 *Venice Biennale*; the 1997 *Johannesburg Biennale*; and Gagosian Gallery, London. 2004 marked her first solo exhibition in Los Angeles when her show opened at Gagosian Gallery, Beverly Hills. Solo exhibitions were held in Italy and France in 2007. Her first major U.S. retrospective, *Ghada Amer: Love Has No End* is on display at the Brooklyn Museum from February 16-October 19, 2008. She is represented by Gagosian Gallery, NY.

Shary Boyle was born in 1972 in Toronto, Ontario and is currently based in Toronto. Shary is an artist whose practice includes drawing, painting, sculpture and live "projected light" performance. She received a Diploma of Fine Arts from the Ontario College of Art and Design in 1994. In 2005 she presented a celebrated art/ music collaboration with Feist at the Olympia Theatre in Paris, researched the origins of European porcelain in eastern Germany, performed "live drawing" for the Sonar Festival in Barcelona and maintained a painting studio in Tampere, Finland. Foreign residence and travel is central to her creative methodology, her images map an intensely personal location within international transience. Boyle's porcelain sculptures have been recently acquired by The National Gallery of Canada, and her work was featured in the Los Angeles drawing anthology *Kramer's Ergot #6*, published December 2005. Shary's 2007 solo exhibitions included *Aspects and Excess*, Canadian Clay and Glass Gallery, Waterloo, Ontario and *Wonderlust*, Jessica Bradley Art + Projects, Toronto, Ontario. In 2007 Shary was awarded a Canada Council International Studio grant, where she spent several months in a residency based in London, UK at Space Gallery, culminating in an exhibition, *The Clearances*. Shary was also shortlisted for the 2007 Sobey Award. Her first major Canadian solo exhibition, *Shary Boyle: The History of Light*, was presented at the Southern Alberta Art Gallery in Lethbridge in 2008. Shary Boyle is represented

by Jessica Bradley ART + PROJECTS, Toronto.

Amy Cutler was born in Poughkeepsie, New York in 1974. She studied at the Staatliche Hochschule fur Bildende Kunste, Stadelsschule, Frankfurt am Main, Germany, from 1994-1995; received her BFA from The Cooper Union School of Art, New York, in 1997; and continued her studies at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in 1999. Having rapidly gained an international audience, Cutler's work has been included in major exhibitions of contemporary art, including *The Whitney Biennial* in 2004 and *Greater New York* at PS1/ MOMA in 2005. She has had solo exhibitions at the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art in Kansas City, the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, and the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia. Her paintings, drawings, and prints are included in the collections of the Hammer Museum at UCLA; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Museum of Modern Art, and New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York City; the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis; the Indianapolis Museum of Art and numerous private collections. Cutler is represented by Leslie Tonkonow Artworks + Projects, NY.

Chitra Ganesh was born in 1975 in Brooklyn, New York City and currently lives in Brooklyn. She received a BA magna cum laude from Brown University, and an MFA from Columbia University in 2002. Awards and residencies include the Skowhegan

School of Painting and Sculpture and the Henry Street Settlement Abrons Arts Center, CAA Fellowship, and the Astraea Visual Arts Fund. From 1998-2003, Chitra was a Board Member of the South Asian Women's Creative Collective (SAWCC). In 2003, Chitra was a featured artist in *Velvet Park* magazine and chosen as one of *OUT* magazine's top 100 people of the year. Chitra was Gregory Millard Fellow as one of New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship awardees. Chitra's drawings and installations have been exhibited in Toronto, Brazil, Italy, India, Germany, London, Gwangju, and New York, including the Queens Museum of Art, Brooklyn Museum, Bronx Museum, Asia Society, Momena Art, Bose Pacia Modern, Apex Art, White Columns, Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo and ZKM. Chitra's work has been reviewed in *Time Out New York*, *Art Asia Pacific* Magazine, *India Today*, and the *New York Times*. In 2004, she received the Astraea Visual Arts Award, and awarded an LMCC Workspace. Recent projects include an emerging artist workspace grant from the Center for Book Arts, and residencies at the Artists' Alliance in the Lower East Side and Smack Mellon, Brooklyn. A solo exhibition in Mumbai, India is scheduled for 2009. She is represented by Thomas Erben Gallery, New York and Haas + Fischer, Zurich.

Wangechi Mutu was born in Nairobi, Kenya in 1972. She moved to New York in the 1990s to study anthropology and fine art at Cooper Union (BFA,

1996), and Yale University (MFA, 2000). Mutu's work has exhibited internationally at galleries and museums including the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Miami Art Museum, Tate Modern in London, the Studio Museum in Harlem in New York, Kunstpalast Dusseldorf in Germany, and the Centre Pompidou in Paris. She participated in the 2004 *Kwangju Biennale* in South Korea. Her work has been featured in several major exhibitions including *Greater New York* at the PS1 Contemporary Art Center and The Museum of Modern Art in New York, *Black President* at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York and the Barbican in London, and *USA Today* at The Royal Academy in London. She is represented by Sikkema Jenkins & Co. in New York, Susanne Vielmetter in Los Angeles, and Victoria Miro in London.

Annie Pootoogook was born in Cape Dorset, Nunavut in 1969 and is the daughter of artist Napachie and Eegyvudlu Pootoogook and granddaughter of the celebrated artist Pitseolak Ashoona. Annie is an emerging Inuit artist who began drawing in 1997 under the encouragement of the West Baffin Eskimo Cooperative in Cape Dorset. She quickly developed a preference for drawing scenes from her own life, and has become a prolific graphic artist in the intervening years. In 2003, Annie's first print was released: an etching and aquatint drawn by the artist on a copper plate. The image, titled *Interior and Exterior*, is a memory of

Annie's childhood, lovingly recording the particulars of settlement life in Cape Dorset in the 1970s. Among Annie's most recent achievements, was a solo exhibition of her work at The Power Plant in Toronto, in the summer of 2006. In addition to this honourable accomplishment, Annie was recognised as an up-and-coming, young Canadian artist by winning the prestigious Sobey Art Award in October 2006. Annie has most recently been honoured with an invitation to *Documenta 12* in Kassel, Germany, in June 2007. She is represented by Feheley Fine Arts, Toronto.

Leesa Streifler was born in Winnipeg in 1957, where she received a BFA Honours from the University of Manitoba in 1980. She lived in New York from 1980-86, earning an MFA from Hunter College of the City University of New York in 1983. She currently lives and works in Regina, where she has been a professor in the Visual Arts Department at the University of Regina since 1986. Streifler's work has received recognition in the form of grants and inclusion in public collections, notably The Canadian Museum of Contemporary Photography, the Canada Council Art Bank, the Saskatchewan Arts Board, the MacKenzie Art Gallery, the Kenderdine Gallery, University of Saskatchewan, the Winnipeg Art Gallery, City of Regina and the City of Winnipeg. She was an artist-in residence at Toronto's Open Studio in 2001 and *NORMAL*, originating at the Dunlop Art Gallery, Regina in 1997 toured

throughout Canada. Streifler became known for her work on body image and feminine identity and she has since given numerous workshops on these issues. Recent exhibit venues include: Open Studio, Toronto, 2001, Latitude 53 in Edmonton in 1999 and The Beaverbrook Art Gallery, Fredericton, 2002; Womens' Art Resource Center, Toronto, 2003, and *Contained*, Neutral Ground, Regina, 2004. Two new bodies of work, *Deflations* (2005) and *Her Domain* (a recipe card project) 2006 were exhibited in a group exhibition at the Harbourfront Centre in Toronto in 2006. *Her Domain* (a recipe card project) was also displayed in a solo exhibition at The University Club, University of Regina in 2007.

Kara Walker was born in Stockton, California in 1969. She received a BFA from the Atlanta College of Art in 1991 and an MFA from the Rhode Island School of Design in 1994. The artist is best known for exploring the raw intersection of race, gender, and sexuality through her iconic, silhouetted figures. Walker's work has been exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, and the Whitney Museum of American Art. A 1997 recipient of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Achievement Award, Walker was the United States representative to the 2002 *São Paulo Bienal* in Brazil. In 2007, The Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, MN, curated a large-scale survey of her work with accompanying

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publication entitled *Kara Walker: My Complement, My Enemy, My Oppressor, My Love*. The exhibition traveled to ARC/Musée d'Art moderne de la ville de Paris, Whitney Museum of American Art, NY, and Hammer Museum, LA. Walker currently lives in New York where she is on the faculty of the MFA program at Columbia University. She is represented by Sikkema Jenkins & Co, NY.

Su-en Wong was born in Singapore in 1973 and currently lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. She received her MFA in painting from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1997, and recently finished studio residencies at the Marie Walsh Sharpe Foundation, New York, and the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Maine. She has had solo exhibitions at Stefan Stux Gallery, New York (1999) and at the Chicago Cultural Center (1999), and exhibited in the North American section of the *Kwangju International Biennale*, Korea (2000). Solo exhibitions at Danese Gallery, New York were held in 2006 and 2007. She is represented by Danese Gallery, New York.

Contributors

Joan Borsa is an independent curator, art critic and Associate Professor in the Department of Women's and Gender Studies at the University of Saskatchewan. She has contributed to numerous public forums on contemporary curatorial practice and has produced two international curatorial conferences, *In Public: Shifting Curatorial Practice* (Montreal, 2001) and *Rethinking Exhibitions* (Saskatoon, 2003-04). In her curatorial practice she has worked with artists such as Eleanor Bond, Marlene Creates, Aganetha Dyck, Hamish Fulton, Suzanne Lacy, Suzy Lake, Edward Poitras, Reinhard Reitzentein and Tomiyo Sasaki. She has published extensively in various magazines, journals, exhibition catalogues and anthologies including *Third Text*, n. *paradoxa*, *Vanguard*, *Canadian Woman Studies: An Introductory Reader*, eds. Andrea Medovarski and Brenda Cranney (Inanna Publications and Education Inc., York University, 2006), *Obsession, Compulsion, Collection: On Objects, Display Culture and Interpretation*, ed. Anthony Kiendl (Banff Centre Press, 2004), *Unframed: The Practices and Politics of Women's Painting*, ed. Rosemary Betterton (Tauris, 2004), *Feminism—ART—Theory 1968-2000*, ed. Hilary Robinson (Blackwell, 2001),

Creative Con/Fusions: Interdisciplinary Practices in Contemporary Art, eds. Lynn Hughes and Marie-Josée Lafortune (Optica, 2001) and *Naming a Practice: Curatorial Strategies for the Future*, ed. Peter White (Banff Centre Press, 1996). Her exhibition *Ann Harbuz: Inside Community, Outside Convention* (1995) was organized by the Dunlop Art Gallery and traveled to the Mendel Art Gallery (Saskatoon), the Glenbow Museum (Calgary), the Canadian Museum of Civilization (Hull), Oseredok – Ukrainian Cultural and Educational Centre (Winnipeg), and the Art Gallery of Windsor. She is known for her work on Frida Kahlo, contemporary feminist art practice and her interdisciplinary perspectives on public art, public interventions and contemporary curatorial practice. Her current research builds on her Ph.D. thesis *Site- and Context-Oriented Curating: Staging Encounters Between Art and Everyday Realities*.

Amanda Cachia was born in Wollongong, NSW, Australia. She received her BA/BCA from the University of Wollongong (1999), and an MA in Curatorial Studies from Goldsmiths College, University of London (2001). This was followed by internships at the Museum of Modern Art and the Dia Centre for the Arts in New York. Other internships include Tate Modern, London, National Gallery of Australia and Museum of Contemporary Art, Australia. In 2004 she immigrated to New York City from Australia and worked as Assistant Director at Cynthia Broan

Gallery in Manhattan and Program Manager at Aljira, a Center for Contemporary in Newark, New Jersey until 2006. Prior to that, previous positions included Curator of the New England Regional Art Museum in Armidale, NSW, Australia (2003-2004), Director of the Blake Prize for Religious Art one of Australia's oldest and most established art prizes and Regional Arts Youth Project Officer, coordinating a tour around regional NSW of art created by youth, both in 2002. Amanda co-curated *YOUR SKY* with Robyn Donohue for Gigantic Arts Space in New York in 2005, funded by Advance and the Australian High Commission, NY. Other curatorial projects have included *New England Picture: In what they paint I see* (2004) for the New England Regional Art Museum and *Puncturecapital* (2001), displayed at the Asian Australian Arts Centre (Gallery 4a) in Sydney. She was hired as Assistant Curator for the Dunlop Art Gallery in January 2007 and in June, was promoted to Curator. To date, other curatorial projects at the Dunlop include *Abnormal Growth*, 2007 and *Garden Folk*, to open in summer, 2008, both at Sherwood Village Gallery. Since 2007, Amanda has been Chair of the Dwarf Artists Coalition attached to the Little People of America. In April, 2008, Amanda completed two weeks of volunteer work in a school for children with special needs in Lima, Peru through Cross-Cultural Solutions. Her curatorial practice revolves around themes of social justice.



Kara Walker *Testimony: Narrative of a Negress Burdened by Good Intentions*, 2004, still from B&W video, 8:49
Courtesy of Sikkema Jenkins & Co.

LIST OF WORKS

Height precedes width.
All dimensions are in centimetres.

Laylah Ali

Untitled 2005
ink and pencil on paper
35.0 x 27.5
Courtesy of 303 Gallery, New York

Untitled 2005
ink and pencil on paper
18.75 x 13.75
Courtesy of 303 Gallery, New York

Untitled 2006-2007
ink and pencil on paper
58.75 x 47.5
Courtesy of 303 Gallery, New York

Untitled 2005
ink and pencil on paper
35.0 x 27.5
Courtesy of 303 Gallery, New York

Untitled 2006-2007
ink and pencil on paper
60.0 x 47.5
Courtesy of 303 Gallery, New York

Untitled 2006-2007
ink and pencil on paper
25.0 x 16.25
Courtesy of 303 Gallery, New York

Ghada Amer

French Kiss 2003
acrylic and embroidery on canvas
175.0 x 175.0
Courtesy of Glenn Rice/Carol Rice

Shary Boyle

Under the Water, Guarded by Women 2003
watercolour, ink on paper
61.0 x 46.0
Courtesy of Jessica Bradley ART + PROJECTS, Toronto

Thinnest Web of Followed Dreams 2004
watercolour, ink on paper
61.0 x 46.0
Courtesy of Jessica Bradley ART + PROJECTS, Toronto

The Delicate Perversity of Obscene Excess 2005
watercolour, ink on paper
50.0 x 43.0
Courtesy of Jessica Bradley ART + PROJECTS, Toronto

In the Winter, We Are Less Happy 2004
watercolour, ink on paper
61.0 x 46.0
Courtesy of Jessica Bradley ART + PROJECTS, Toronto

Scotch Bonnet 2007
watercolour, ink on paper
61.0 x 46.0
Courtesy of Jessica Bradley ART + PROJECTS, Toronto

The Bad Mother 2007
watercolour, ink on paper
70.0 x 50.0
Courtesy of Jessica Bradley ART + PROJECTS, Toronto

All Retreat to the Cave in Permanence 2007
watercolour, ink on paper
57.0 x 77.0
Courtesy of Jessica Bradley ART + PROJECTS, Toronto

Untitled #2 2007
watercolour, ink on paper
46.0 x 61.0
Courtesy of Jessica Bradley ART + PROJECTS, Toronto

The Obvious Answer 2005
watercolour, ink on paper
43.0 x 52.0
Courtesy of Jessica Bradley ART + PROJECTS, Toronto

The Effects of New Meds Monitored 2007
watercolour, ink on paper
57.0 x 67.0
Courtesy of Jessica Bradley ART + PROJECTS, Toronto

Amy Cutler

Accommodation 2001
gouache on paper
97.5 x 74.5
Courtesy of The JPMorgan Chase Art Collection, New York

Chitra Ganesh

Dazzle 2006
digital c-print
65.0 x 112.5
Courtesy of Thomas Erben Gallery, New York

Inside Pandora #2, 2008,
mixed media
site-specific mural installation,
Dunlop Art Gallery
Courtesy of Thomas Erben Gallery, New York

Wangechi Mutu

Histology of the Different Classes of Uterine Tumors 2006
digital prints and mixed media collage
12 works, 57.5 x 42.5 each
Courtesy of the Artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York

Annie Pootoogook

Face Transformation,
Cape Dorset 2001/02
ink, pencil crayon, pencil
40.0 x 65.0
Courtesy of Feheley Fine Arts, Toronto

Composition (Outpost Camp),
Cape Dorset 2003/04
pencil crayon, ink
40.0 x 65.0
Courtesy of Feheley Fine Arts, Toronto

Composition (Mourning Napachie's Death),
Cape Dorset 2003/04
pencil crayon, ink
40.0 x 50.0
Courtesy of Feheley Fine Arts, Toronto

Composition (Mother & Child in Amautik), Cape Dorset 2006/07
pen, pencil crayon
30.0 x 30.0
Courtesy of Feheley Fine Arts, Toronto

Composition (Hands in my Pockets), Cape Dorset 2006
ink, pencil crayon
65.0 x 50.0
Courtesy of Feheley Fine Arts, Toronto

Composition (Father Tying his Son's Coat), Cape Dorset 2003/04
ink, pencil crayon
50.0 x 65.0
Courtesy of Feheley Fine Arts, Toronto

Composition (Mother Feeding Her Child), Cape Dorset 2002/03
ink, pencil crayon
50.0 x 65.0
Courtesy of Feheley Fine Arts, Toronto

Outpost Camp: Packing Up,
Cape Dorset 2004
ink, pencil crayon
37.5 x 50.0
Courtesy of Feheley Fine Arts, Toronto

Parenting Revisited: portrait at one year 2008
c-print
38.1 x 30.5
Collection of the Artist

Parenting Revisited: portrait at 5 and 15 years 2008
c-print
38.1 x 53.3
Collection of the Artist

Parenting Revisited: portrait at 5 years 2008
c-print
38.1 x 30.5
Collection of the Artist

Kara Walker

Testimony: Narrative of a Negress Burdened by Good Intentions 2004
16mm film and video transferred to ovp, black and white, silent; 8:49 min.
Edition of 5
Courtesy of the Artist and Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York

Su-en Wong

Lovers Knot 2006
coloured pencil and acrylic on panel
135.0 x 220.0 cm
Courtesy of the Artist and Danese Gallery, New York

Self-Conscious Romantic 2008
acrylic on paper
81.3 x 111.8
Collection of the Artist

Life Force in Two Realms (the social and the spiritual) 2008
acrylic on paper
81.3 x 111.8
Collection of the Artist

She is consistent; She nurtures; She's maternal: He thrives 2007
acrylic on butcher paper,
76.2 x 106.7
Collection of the Artist

Acknowledgements

Pandora's Box has been an incredibly enriching, serendipitous journey of 'mythic' proportions, a labour of love that I have enjoyed to every last detail. For this reason, it is the most important and ambitious exhibition of my career to date, closely aligned to my personal conceptual and aesthetic interests. There have been many wonderful people that I have met during my research who have shared with me their insights, their opinions and their pearls of wisdom.

Joan Borsa and Lynne Bell from the University of Saskatchewan first provided me with their positive impressions of my assembled list of artists for *Pandora's Box*. I owe a special debt of thanks to Joan Borsa, not only for providing feedback on my essay and general collegial exchange, but also for composing a germane guest introduction, despite her very

busy schedule, with generous editorial feedback from Bruce Russell and Marie Lovrod. I am honoured that she has been engaged in the *Pandora's Box* project with me. Gail Chin, in the Department of Art History at the University of Regina has also been supportive and shared the role of editor/commentator on my essay, along with Elizabeth McLuhan and Leesa Streifler.

My praise and eternal gratefulness are extended to Marie Lovrod. I am very fortunate to have worked not only with an astute editorial advisor, but a knowledgeable and energetic collaborator of the best kind: she completely exceeded my expectations and gave me hope when times were tough and deadlines drew near. Thanks to Joan once again for recommending her to me.

In New York, I was delighted to meet Guyatri Chakravorty Spivak, who holds a special relationship with the Dunlop Art Gallery as essayist for Jamelie Hassan's solo exhibition *Inscription*, 1990. Maura Reilly, Curator of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum

was inspirational for her energy and frankness. Joyce Zemans from York University suggested I read Joseph Campbell's *The Power of Myth*. Helena Reckitt at The Power Plant suggested Marina Warner. Sigrid Dahle introduced me to Mentoring Artists for Women's Art (MAWA) in Winnipeg.

A majority of my essay was composed during my one-week Self-Directed Curatorial Residency at the Banff Centre in February. Thank you to those who facilitated my residency and shared interest in the project, particularly Suzanne Steele.

I have had the honour, delight and privilege of meeting the following artists face to face in the course of studio visits, singular or numerous — Ghada Amer, Shary Boyle, Chitra Ganesh and Leesa Streifler— my sincere thanks for sharing your personal takes on Pandora's Box with me. I am so lucky to have worked with you, and to be able to share my passion for your work with a wider public at the Dunlop Art Gallery.

To the artists that I did not meet, but through whose work (and some email discussions), I have had the

opportunity to experience a new education on art and life: Amy Cutler, Wangechi Mutu, Kara Walker, Su-en Wong, Laylah Ali and Annie Pootoogook, my warmest gratitude and appreciation.

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The hard-working staff of the Dunlop Art Gallery – for your professionalism, camaraderie, encouragement, support and enthusiasm for *Pandora's Box*: Dr. Elizabeth McLuhan, Jeff Nye, Corey Bryson, Angie Friedrich and especially Joyce Clark, thank you for providing a community to this work. Also to the Gallery Facilitators: Margaret Bessai, Laura Koroluk, Jessica Riess and Janell Ranae Rempel, thank you for competently facilitating between *Pandora's Box* and the public. Thanks to the install team: Chad Arie, Rob Bos and Karli Jessup who worked with Chitra Ganesh. I would also like to extend my thanks to the fabulous infrastructure that the Dunlop Art Gallery is housed in: the Regina Public Library. It has been a pleasure to operate as a Curator inside a public library system for the first time. Jeff Barber, Library Director and Julie McKenna, Deputy Director, and many

others, have been excellent supporters of the DAG during my brief tenure.

To the community of Regina, and the supporters of the Dunlop Art Gallery: what a wonderfully high-spirited community you are. I could not have brought this project to fruition if it were not for the knowledge that this community is a gallery-going one – that enjoys the stimulation, the challenge and the education one receives from an exhibition that hopefully poses many questions, sometimes provides answers and leaves the rest up to the individual imagination. My job as Curator has been made all the better because of this community – one that I have been very happy to serve.

I would also like to thank The Canada Council for the Arts and the Saskatchewan Arts Board for their generous support of this project.

Last, but not least, to my wonderful partner, Cory Malone: thank you for your patience, support and love. My move to Regina has been made all the more worthwhile because of you.

– AMANDA CACHIA



Leesa Streifler
Out of the Box, 2008
Courtesy of the artist