

JUDITH BERNSTEIN: HARD

For over forty years, New York-based artist Judith Bernstein (b. 1942, Newark, NJ) has created expressive drawings and paintings that boldly address the underlying psychological connection between warfare and sexual aggression. Her provocative pieces have direct impact yet also carry nuanced meanings and allusions. As a student at Yale in the '60s, Bernstein developed a fascination with the graffiti she found in men's restrooms, images that would later inform the basis of her work. Within these crude sexual scrawlings, Bernstein discovered a window into the male subconscious as well as her own. Her works from this period, predating the wave of feminist artworks in the early '70s, assert female rights and critique militarism and machismo in a manner that is at once humorous and threatening. Her mordant antiwar and antisexist statements bristle with the political activism and fury that characterized the Vietnam War era, and continue to resonate viscerally today.

Bernstein's most well-known artworks are her subsequent series of biomorphic screw drawings, which she began in 1969. These monumental pieces appropriate the image of the screw as a phallic symbol of oppression—as in the expression “being screwed”—and evoke ominous power. One of these works on view here, *HORIZONTAL* (1973), was censored from the exhibition “FOCUS: Women's Work—American Art in 1974” at the Museum of the Philadelphia Civic Center for “lacking redeeming social value,” phraseology commonly applied to pornography. At the time, a petition letter was issued in protest, signed by many significant artists, critics, and curators, including Clement Greenberg, Linda Nochlin, Lucy Lippard, Louise Bourgeois, and the New Museum's founder, Marcia Tucker.

“HARD,” Bernstein's first solo museum exhibition, includes a focused selection of works ranging from the '60s through the present, including a new site-specific rendition of her *SIGNATURE PIECE* (1986/2012), painted directly onto the Lobby Gallery windows. This piece, presented in counterpoint to Bernstein's large-scale images of hardware within the gallery, proclaims her presence and confronts egotistical posturing of artists in the art world and society. Her latest painting, *BIRTH OF THE UNIVERSE #4 / SPACE, TIME, AND INFINITY* (2012), contains Bernstein's ongoing examination of sexual symbols in addition to a recent interest with outer space, the cosmos, and scientific anomalies. The exhibition's title, like Bernstein's work, carries an explicit meaning as a sexual reference. Yet it is also semantically elastic, conjuring up multiple associations within layers of political, personal, and artistic struggle.

“Judith Bernstein: HARD” is curated by Margot Norton, Curatorial Associate.

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