

HYPERALLERGIC

GALLERIES

Finding Dark Humor in the Plight of the Feminist Artist

by Will Heinrich on April 7, 2016



Mira Schor, left to right: "Flesh" (2015), oil on linen, 12 x 16 inches; "Flesh" (2015), oil on linen, 24 x 45 inches; "Interview: Are You A Feminist Artist?" (2015), ink, acrylic, oil on gesso on canvas, 24 x 45 inches (all images courtesy Lyles & King) (click to enlarge)

In her latest exhibition, *Death Is a Conceptual Artist*, feminist icon Mira Schor delivers a slow-motion knockout blow. She's filled the Mithraically subterranean back room of [Lyles & King](#) with two dozen incandescently grim feminist icons of her own, "power" drawings inspired by the recent Kongo show at the Met that depict a single fertility-crone archetype in kaleidoscopic reiteration. Each one insists, from within its corona of cheerful gallows humor and material-centered humility, on the simple but absolutely unwavering fact of its own being.



Installation view, 'Mira Schor: Death Is a Conceptual Artist' at Lyles & King (click to enlarge)

We're introduced to this project with an oil-on-linen syllogism of substance, action, and result. First, on a foot-high canvas thickly spackled with a creamy, pink-stained gray, the artist has written the painting's title, its conceptual and metaphorical material, its prison, and her subject in a single word: "flesh."

In the formless void of the second statement, also titled "Flesh," a skull-faced stick figure in a dress contemplates a scorched brown rectangle. The pink density of this void is hard to read as being located anywhere but inside the body, and the rectangle, though it could be a painting, looks more like the violently imposed emptiness that precedes one. Hanging behind the figure's back is an image, in reverse, of the first "Flesh."

In "Interview: Are You A Feminist Artist?," the syllogism's dispiriting finale, Schor's skeletal stand-in emerges into the brutally fluorescent world of gallery white. She's marked now with two seemingly detachable round breasts and tethered, with lines of blood leading from breasts, eye sockets, and vulva, to her painting, to a book, and to the relentless titular question, which she's corrected in pencil to the more open-ended but also more condescending way she probably encounters it most often: "Do you consider yourself a feminist artist?" (The answer implied, by the way, sounds to me like a thundering chord of "What else?" and "Fuck off!")



Mira Schor, left: "'Power' Figure #7: Still Too Young, Not Dead Enough" (2015), pastel, ink, and gesso on tracing paper, 45 x 24 inches; right: "'Power' Figure #14: Mira at 19 and Now" (2015), ink and gesso on tracing paper, 45 x 24 inches (click to enlarge)

"'Power' Figure #7," the first drawing in the temple chamber, shows a kind of stele with breasts and vulva in a haze of classical white. Over the stele floats an almond-shaped dessicated head being buffeted by five speech placards, including a reiteration of the same interminable question and the reflexive, paradoxically inescapable verdicts (this show notwithstanding), "Still Too Young" and "Not Dead Enough."

After that, the apparitions, which were executed on bone-colored tracing paper in ink, charcoal, acrylic, and pastel over six frantic months, proceed in roughly the order in which they were made. The goddess appears with a naked skull and usually has two breasts, as round as her black eye sockets, hanging from her shoulders like emblems of office. Sometimes she presents them to the viewer in her hands. She holds books, drips blood, or clutches her temples, in colors ranging from sooty to dirty and arterial to menstrual. One younger, smaller Schor emerges like Athena from the goddess's skull; another floats, like Lakshmi, on an amniotic stem. In "'Power' Figure #18: Are You A Feminist Artist?," the dirty-white face on its glossy black skull looks like Jackie O. in sunglasses and a babushka or the continent of Africa floating in the sea.



Installation view, 'Mira Schor: Death Is a Conceptual Artist' at Lyles & King (click to enlarge)

By stripping the husk from self-image this way, what Schor reveals is its mysteriously contradictory truth: the anger, frustration, and insecurity that underlie an extravagantly self-deprecating joke like a skeleton with breasts, but also the absurdity that underlies them; the bitter pinch of decay underlying creation, and vice versa; and, especially, the unresolvable tussle between roles that are socially imposed and those that emerge from within.

[Mira Schor: Death Is A Conceptual Artist](#) continues at [Lyles & King](#) (106 Forsyth Street, Lower East Side, Manhattan) through April 24.