

The image is a composite of two anatomical illustrations. The left side shows a female torso from the waist up, with a white cloth draped over the shoulders. The right side is a detailed, close-up view of the vaginal opening, showing the internal folds and structure. The word 'LEGITIMATE' is written in large, bold, red, serif capital letters across the top of the image, and the word 'VAGINA' is written in the same style at the bottom right.

**LEGITIMATE**

**VAGINA**



# LEGITIMATE VAGINA

women artists explore vagina imagery

October 13 - 20, 2012

*Artist Reception*

Saturday October 13, 6-8pm

*Pussy Talks: A Panel Discussion*

Saturday October 20, 5-7pm

Artists: Alexandra Rutsch Brock, Mia Brownell, Carissa Burkett  
Marcy B. Freedman, Cristina de Gennaro, Natalie Giugni  
Jenna Kelly, Sasha Kopelowitz, Fay Ku, Patricia Miranda  
fierce pussy, Katrina Rhein, Mira Schor, Kiki Smith  
Amy Swartele, Rachael Vaters-Carr, Faith Wilding, Tricia Wright

*Curated by Alexandra Rutsch Brock, Mia Brownell and Patricia Miranda*

miranda arts project space  
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Legitimate Vagina features seventeen women artists and one collective who explore the image of the vagina in both symbolic and personal ways, through painting, drawing, mixed-media, sculpture, installation and performance. The title of the show was inspired by a comment by Todd Akin, United States congressman and House Committee on Science and Technology member in August 2012, "If it's a legitimate rape ... the female body has ways to try to shut that whole thing down." Questions of who gets to speak about women's bodies and their experience are fundamental to this exhibition and the Pussy Talks. The exhibition LEGITIMATE VAGINA presents works exploring vagina-inspired imagery with intelligence and humor, investigating through visual means issues of women's rights, current politics, and personal experience.

### ***Pussy Talks***

Pussy Talks were inspired by events in 2012, including statements about women's bodies made by male American politicians and the arrest of Pussy Riot Group in Russia. The Pussy Talks Series aims to spark new dialogue among women and those who love them about the current public use of women's bodies as a tool of politics and violence, and create platforms for women's voices to be heard. Cognizant of all the women who fought before us for legal and civil rights, and those in the world who struggle to gain them, Legitimate Vagina is yet another rallying cry for women in 2012 to not to be silenced by ignorance, shame, and fear, and to be empowered through dialogue for a better world for all women.

### ***Pussy Talks Panel***

Rebecca Chalker, Ph.D. in Sexology and adjunct faculty at Pace University in New York City and at Florida State University in Tallahassee teaching "The Cultural History of Sexuality." She is a certified sexuality counselor and author of the book, *The Clitoral Truth*.

Jennifer A. Hudson, M.A. English and Advanced Graduate Certificate in Women's Studies from Southern Connecticut State University, B.A. in English magna cum laude from Sacred Heart University, finalist for the 2009 Rita Dove Poetry Award. Hudson read her poem "Unstill Volcano." (*see back page for poem*)

Tricia Wright, BA (Fine Art (Hons)) at Camberwell School of Art, London, PG Dip. (History & Theory of Modern Art) at Chelsea School of Art, London. Wright is an artist and author of *American Art & Artists* (Harper Collins, 2007) published in association with the Smithsonian Institute.

*Moderated by Patricia Miranda, director, miranda arts project space.*



**Curators:**

Alexandra Rutsch Brock has been teaching at New Rochelle High School since 1991. She has her BFA from School of Visual Arts and her MS from the College of New Rochelle. While primarily a painter, she also works in printmaking and ceramics. Alexi began curating while at SVA in 1989 with the “Young Professionals” exhibit at the Pelham Art Center, which grew into “Outlook” a bi-annual juried exhibition for young artists from 1990-1998 and transitioned in 2000 into the Alexander Rutsch Memorial Award, given biannually to national emerging artists. She has also curated other small venues such as Studio 12N in NYC, and the Media Arts Centre and the Museum of Arts & Culture in New Rochelle. She is currently on the Gallery Board at the Pelham Art Center.

Mia Brownell was born in Chicago, Illinois to a sculptor and biophysicist. She has had solo exhibitions in major American cities including New York, Boston and Washington, DC., and group exhibitions worldwide. Mia’s paintings are in private, corporate, and public art collections including Wellington Management, Fidelity Investments and the National Academy of Sciences. Her work has been reviewed and published in numerous publications including The Boston Globe, The Village Voice, New York Times, HiFructose and Artnet Magazine. She recently participated in the Aldrich Museum’s Radius program for emerging artists and a Visiting Artist residency at The American Academy in Rome. She teaches painting and drawing in New Haven at Southern Connecticut State University.

Patricia Miranda is an artist, curator and educator. She is founder and director of miranda arts project space, formerly Miranda Fine Arts, and Visiting Assistant Professor at Lyme Academy College of Fine Art. From 2008-2012 she served as Director of the gallery at Concordia College-NY. Miranda has developed art and education programs at The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, The American Museum of Natural History, The Metropolitan Museum, and the Smithsonian Institute; and has exhibited at Wave Hill, Bronx NY; Metaphor Contemporary Art, Brooklyn, NY; and Kenise Barnes Fine Art, Larchmont, NY, to name a few.



# Alexandra Rutsch Brock

A colony is community of one kind living close together or forming a physically connected structure. My work is always inspired by events in my life, and I began creating vaginas in ceramic after my son was born in 1999. During the 2012 political climate, the anti-woman rhetoric drove me to organize this exhibition to promote strong women artists and their convictions. When researching the image of vagina for this exhibit, I was not surprised at how prevalent it has been in art history, yet was saddened by how censored it still is. The wall installation mimics an altar, as well as a vagina, and radiates energy. My "*Colony*" represents the many individuals, whose strength in numbers can create change.



# Mia Brownell

The *Meat and G(l)aze Series* has evolved over the past few years as a tangent project from my main body of work about food. These two series use the conventions of still life painting and anthropomorphism to explore sexual objectification and co-opt the male gaze as well as attitudes of desire.

*from left: Still Life with Break (Up) from Adam, 2010, Oil on canvas, 42x30"; Still Life with Meat V, 2012, Oil on panel, 6"x6"  
Still Life with Meat II, 2012, Oil on panel, 5x5"; Still Life with Meat, 2012, Oil on panel, 10"x8"*



# Carissa Burkett

I am tired of 'faith' being an excuse for inaction.  
I am tired of prayer being promised instead of help.  
If you are going to pray, your prayer must be followed with action.  
Don't just pray for me while I stand in front of you bleeding,  
I need you to help me too.  
Women's bodies should not be left to 'faith.'  
We need tangible help and care.  
If you must pray, pray and do.

## **Give Me Jesus** *(song lyrics for Performance)*

I heard my mother say  
give me Jesus

give me Jesus  
you can have all this world  
but give me Jesus

In the morning when I rise  
give me Jesus

give me Jesus  
you can have all this world  
but give me Jesus

Dark midnight was my cry  
give me Jesus

give me Jesus  
you can have all this world  
but give me Jesus

And when I've come to die  
Oh, and when I've come to die  
when I've come to die  
give me Jesus

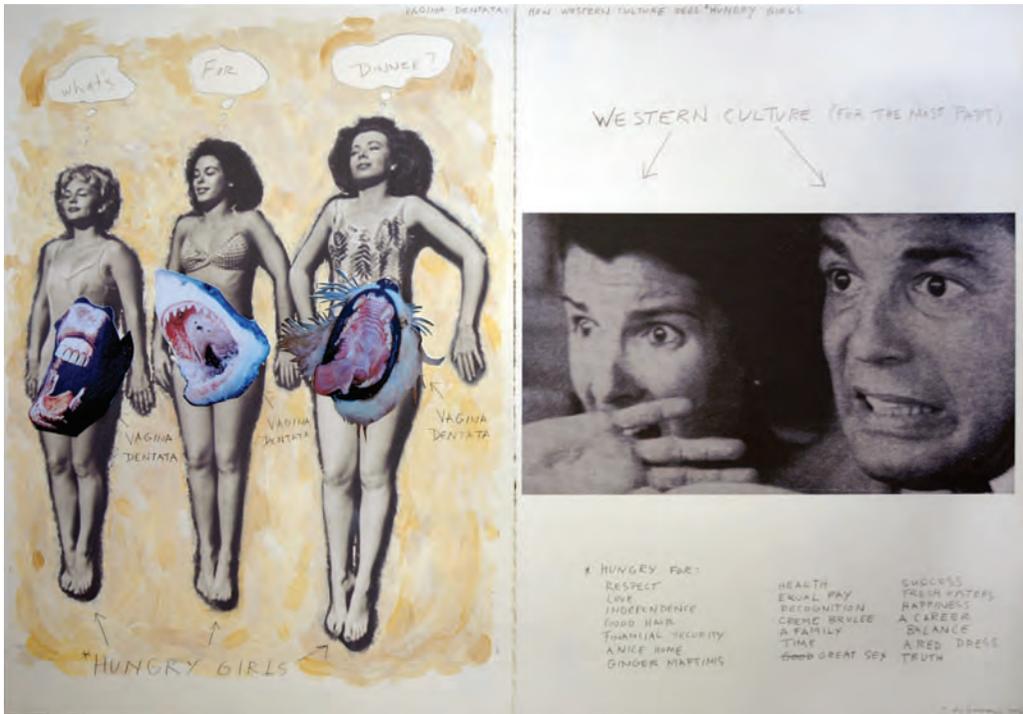


Can you find the  
Pussy by Picasso  
in this drawing by Marcy?

MBF

# Marcy B. Freedman

Marcy B. Freedman is an artist and an art historian. For *Legitimate Vagina*, she designed an interactive performance that challenged gallery visitors to look, think and talk about one man's relationship to female genitalia. Hopefully, her project will inspire participants to ponder the wider implications of the scenario under examination. For the performance, Marcy stood near an installation of 30 drawings that she created as follows: after studying a famous series of etchings by Picasso called *Suite 347*, she isolated the "female genital details" and used them as the basis of her own artistic creations. The Picasso works were displayed in a binder. The participant was challenged to identify the work of art from which the detail had been taken. Marcy invited viewers to find the *Pussy* by Picasso in any one of her drawings. Marcy engaged the participant in a conversation about Picasso's complex relationship to women, including that the works on view reflect Picasso's great appetite for sex -- his fondness for the pleasures afforded by a woman's body, and the disturbing fact: this great artist who loved to love women -- in the physical sense -- was frequently cruel to the women in his life. Finally, she posed the crucial question: assuming that there are other men who share Picasso's ambivalence towards women, what are the social, political and economic consequences of such attitudes and behaviors?



# Cristina de Gennaro

Even in this “post-feminist” age, women who try to take control over their lives are viewed as dangerous, their appetites for independence seen as a threat to the status quo of the nuclear family, while the real dangers, affecting both men and women alike, are those pervasive engendered stereotypes that limit as they define us as social beings.



#### Fortune Cookie Quotes

*Courage is the most important of all the virtues, because without courage you can't practice any other virtue consistently. You can practice any virtue erratically, but nothing consistently without courage.*  
Maya Angelou

*A leader takes people where they want to go. A great leader takes people where they don't necessarily want to go, but ought to be.*  
Rosalyn Carter.

*Don't be humble...you're not that great.*  
Golda Meir

*My grandfather once told me that there are two kinds of people: those who work and those who take the credit. He told me to try to be in the first group: there was less competition there.*  
Indira Gandhi

# Natalie Giugni

This sculpture, entitled *Welcome to Take*, is my response to oppression of women that is brought on by fear of female sexuality and power. Though plush and seemingly tongue-in-cheek, the work deliberately coaxes the viewer into potentially uncomfortable territory. This interactive piece rejects “do not touch the artwork” constraints by requiring participants to physically insert their entire arm deep into the dark, velvety interior of the sculpture to reap the reward of a sweet confection nestled within its core. Inside, blush-tinted fortune cookies that house citations made by outspoken female trailblazers offer the bravest participants taste, enjoyment and, quite possibly, inspiration.

By generating the vaginal, soft form of this sculpture through sewing techniques, a traditionally feminine practice, and combining it with a highly provocative title, I consciously mirror the acerbic method of protest seen in such modern women’s movements as the “Slut Walk;” the right to control one’s body and choices concerning rape and childbirth is demanded with sardonic flair. Additionally, the selection of quotes from powerful women leaders is an effort to restore a “voice” to the topic of abortion, which was censored in June of this year when a female democratic state representative was gavelled for merely stating the word “vagina” and from proclaiming her stance in a session legislating womens’ right to choose. Those who interact with this provocative work experience a spectrum of emotions starting with trepidation and uncertainty, building into curiosity and climaxing in pure delight.



# Jenna Kelly

*BabyFace, BabyTalk* and *BabyBath* are manifestations of anxieties caused by deciding to or not to become the Maternal Being. The mother acts as host to biological conversations that occur within her own body, allowing the “other” to mutate within the self and even overtake one’s original identity and physical body and resulting in the never-ending pressure to be the Eternal Maternal Being. Cultural pressures placed on women to wed and produce offspring in spite of current overpopulation, and a woman’s right to choose are at the root of my explorations. No matter how supple we appear, how maternal we act, our body is controlled by our choices as intelligent, strong and LEGITIMATE women.



# Sasha Kopelowitz

*Revisionist History* is from a series of intricate abstractions that attempt to give form to libidinal chaos and the drive towards transcendence in the body, soul or unconscious.

This painting provides the viewer with an immediate intimacy. Close attention will yield the richly detailed places and creatures that inhabit the soft biology of my imagination. This piece is a temple or structure built from multiple layers of brightly colored skins or cloths that surround and protect portals or chambers. The fleshy forms and folds can be excited, erotic or terrifying.

Form and color imbue this architecture's skin and flesh with a vibrant corporeal knowledge that pulses with life.

My morphology, represented by this structure, is in a constant state of tension forever striking a balance between the delicate and grotesque, chaos and order, body and spirit.



# Fay Ku

This is one from a series of a few works with this type of imagery; this one is the most playful of all of them. This series draws from ideas of feminine stoicism (pain endured in order to ascend, be beautiful, etc.) as well as religious and social mutilations and tortures, yet the images never explicitly point to a single conclusion, but are meant to be a messy, even contradictory--as in ourselves in life. Here, the characters' behavior belie their painful predicament. The title comes from the childhood game: Give me five, up high, down low... too slow.



# Patricia Miranda

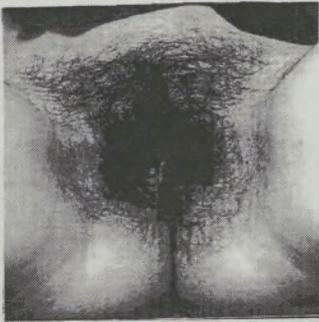
I've long been fascinated with the iconic female body of the Virgin Mary, both visually and conceptually. She is the ultimate feminine symbol of passivity and sacrifice, yet one that "chose" to actively take on her fate- she both emphasizes and contradicts ideas of feminine passivity and agency in the world. Centuries of men's ideas have been written, indeed staked onto her body, yet she is also taken hold of by the grass roots as their own, a symbol of both power and submission. Consensual surrender as a form of power is a different kind of power, one that activates while simultaneously represses desire. The iconic modern Mary statue is vagina shaped, complete with fluttering robe/lips. She is sexuality without sex, agency through inaction, surrender without compromise. Her ambiguous fixedness is ceaseless.

from left: *Black Madonna Vagina*, 2012, Plaster, graphite, rabbit skin glue, 22k gold leaf, 12"x6"x2.5"  
*Song of Song Series, I, & II*, 2009, Graphite, rabbit skin glue, 22k gold leaf, 9"x9"

You  
can't  
legislate it.

You  
can't  
lick it.

You  
can't  
beat it,



**FIERCE PUSSY.**

*Season's Greetings*

John Cardinal O'Connor  
St. Patricks Cathedral  
50TH & 5TH Avenue  
N.Y., N.Y. 10022

*Season's Greetings*

Rep. Todd Akin  
117 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

*Season's Greetings*

Romney for President  
PO Box 149756  
Boston, MA 02114-9756

*Season's Greetings*

Rep. Paul Ryan  
1233 Longworth HOB  
Washington, D.C. 20515

# fierce pussy

fierce pussy is a collective of queer women artists. Formed in New York City in 1991 through our immersion in AIDS activism during a decade of increasing political mobilization around gay rights, fierce pussy brought lesbian identity and visibility directly into the streets.

Low-tech and low budget, the collective responded to the urgency of those years, using readily available resources: old typewriters, found photographs, our own baby pictures, and the printing supplies and equipment accessible in our day jobs.

fierce pussy projects included wheat pasting posters on the street, renaming New York City streets after prominent lesbian heroines, re-designing the restroom at the LGBT community center, printing and distributing stickers and t-shirts, a greeting card campaign, a video PSA and more recently, various installations and exhibitions in galleries and museums.

Originally fierce pussy was composed of a fluid and often shifting cadre of Dykes including Pam Brandt, Jean Carlomusto, Donna Evans, Alison Froling, and Suzanne Wright. Many other women came to an occasional meeting, and joined in to wheat paste, stencil and sticker. Four of the original core members—Nancy Brooks Brody, Joy Episalla, Zoe Leonard, and Carrie Yamaoka—continue to work together.



# Katrina Rhein

I am interested in analyzing fantasy and consumerism, conveying distortions of certain biological processes due to cultural interference. The concept of each piece focuses on the alteration of these basic, fundamental needs, both physical and psychological, into cultural wants. With this my aim is to playfully expose fears of mortality. I attempt to make the toll of the impossible visibly evident by highlighting the absurdities of conflicting cultural messages.



# Mira Schor

In the introduction of my book *A Decade of Negative Thinking: Essays on Art, Politics and Daily Life* (Duke University Press, 2009) I wrote about the painting I used for the cover of my earlier book, *Wet: On Painting, Feminism, and Art Culture* (Duke University Press, 1997):

*"a semi-colon was imbricated in a vaginal slit created by thickly applied oil paint emerging from a smooth flesh colored field. It was the detail of a painting that imagined a gynecological examination during which it was discovered that, just where Western philosophy has located the darkness of unreason –woman/ painting-- there was language in there."*

The works in this exhibition are digital prints of two related paintings from the same time period, another semi-colon, from a painting that is reproduced on the inside cover of *Wet* and a painting of the word red, where the viewer may bring any subtextual interpretation including the meaning of the color red to the female body.

*Slit of Painting*, 1994, Inkjet print of oil on canvas, 12"x16"  
*Red*, 1994, Inkjet print of oil on canvas, 12"x16"



# Kiki Smith

For Kiki Smith the vagina is just one more body fragment, as worthy of attention as any other and part of her own, female experience. She experimented with the image in various formats—printed on single sheets installed randomly on the wall, printed on a paper mache sculpture, printed on numerous blanket-like works. Smith sees a formal resemblance between the vagina and the eye of a peacock feather. In the work titled *Peacock* of 1994, she installed a paper mache figure in front of a wall printed with individual rubber stamps of vaginas that together suggested a peacock's plume.

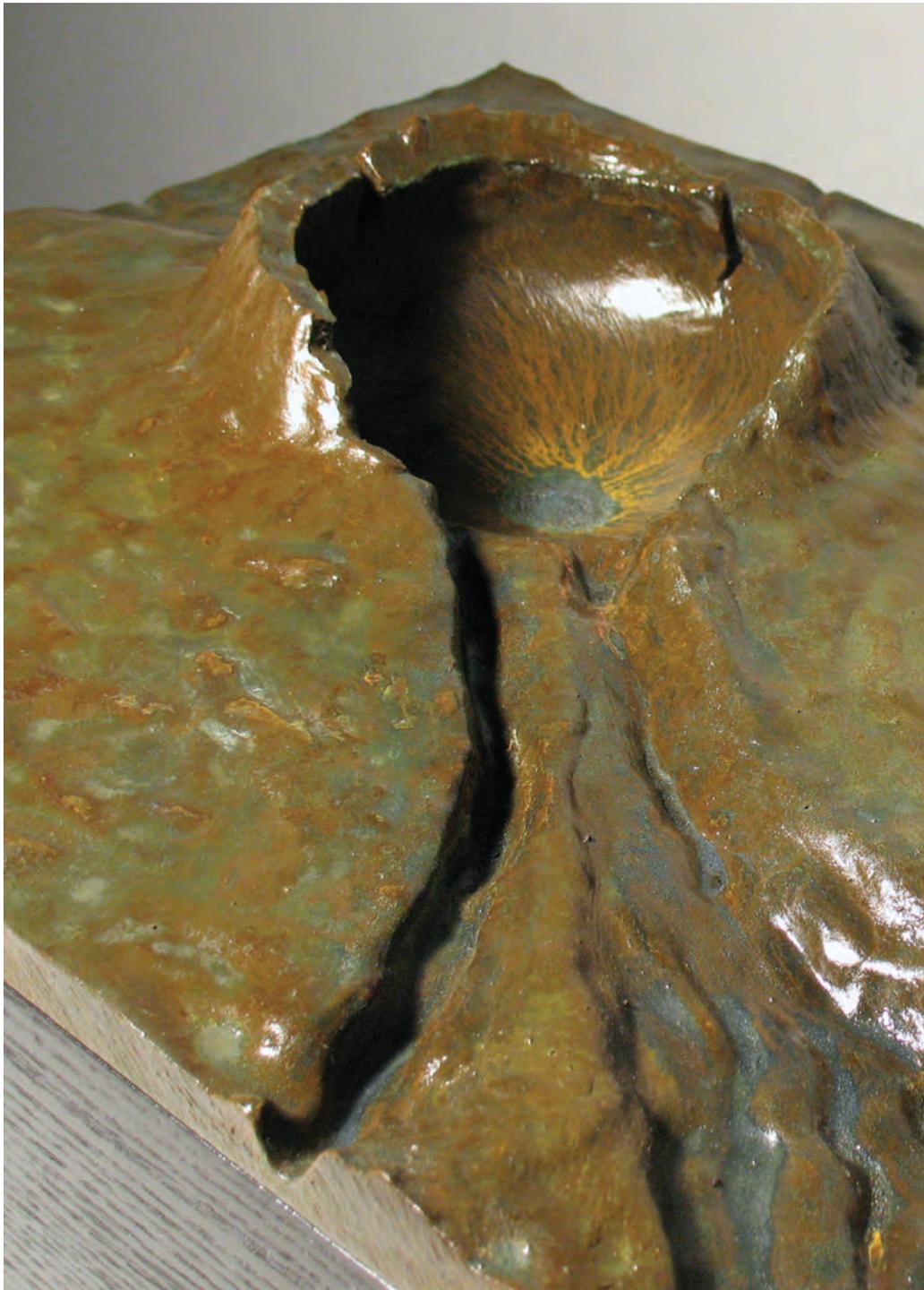
from *Kiki Smith: Prints, Books & Things*”, by Wendy Weitman and Kiki Smith



# Amy Swartele

*Gertrude, The Amazing Cooch Monster, On The High Wire* is part of my new body of work 'Oh Sideshow My Sideshow". The 'cooch show' was a standard part of many carnivals and circuses. Gertrude grew intuitively, starting with multiple vaginas. Why have just one when you could have more? In this case, more is definitely better. Pussys, eyes, teeth, hair, and fingers allow Gertrude to grope her way around herself and on the high wire. Gertrude is my friend. She is working on a burlesque act.

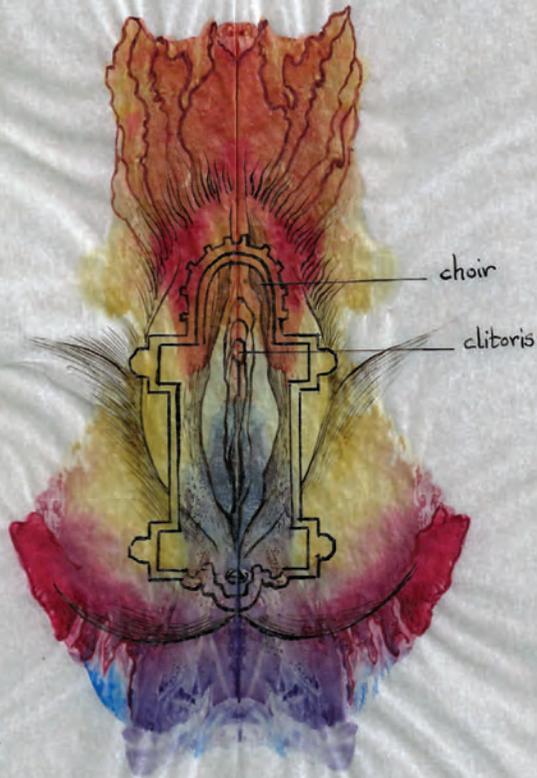
The beautiful in the grotesque, and the strange in the familiar have always seduced me. This series is focused around that which is generally considered lesser, freakish or 'other'. Unfortunately, the female, and female genitalia, still seems in the dominant culture to be classified as such.



# Rachael A. Vaters-Carr

Our emotional and physical worlds often collide and create upheavals that are not unlike the cataclysmic events that are an integral part of shaping the landmass. It is a rich terrain that is constantly shifting, and thus, adjusting to the catalyst of change. Informed by real locations, my sculptural landscapes are primarily invented. They serve as a fabricated window on the world, leaving the viewer to reflect the complexities of our internal and external worlds.

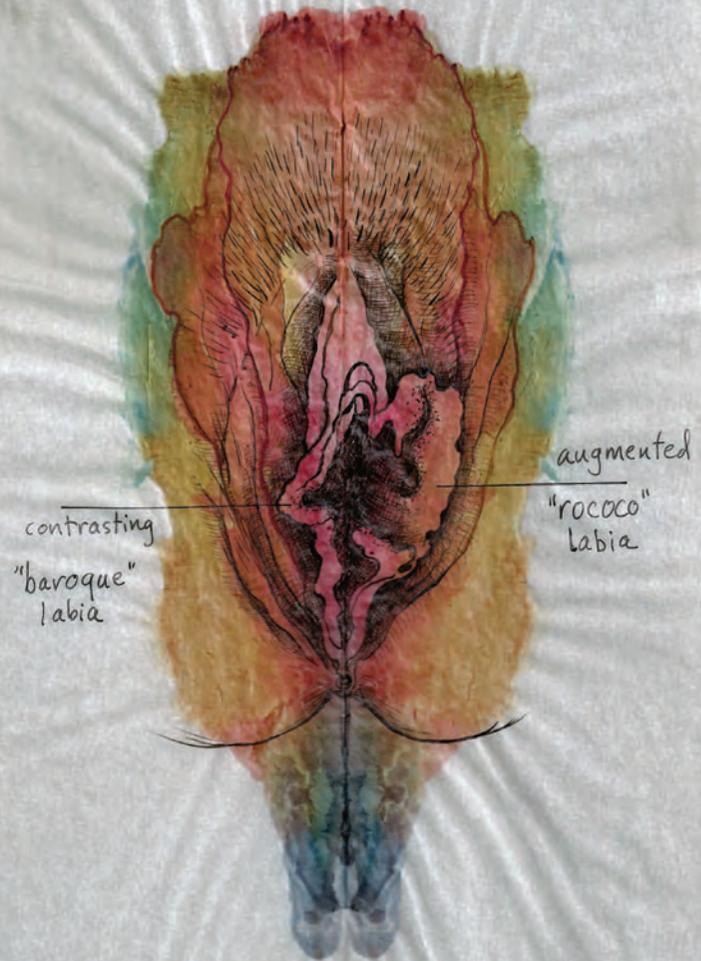
*Impact* is a landscape of aftermath, silently bearing witness to the event that has left its mark and altered its structure. Women's bodies have been the source of political debate throughout history. This ongoing debate continues to leave its mark on our rights, our futures, and our bodies. If we do not take control over this debate, history will serve as witness to the consequences that will have a profound impact on the individuals, generations, and cultures to come.



A. "Optimum architectural integrity of the vulva" [early German Gothic, Hildesheim]

7

B. Irregular Labia minora (after)



Labia augmentation surgery

8.

# Faith Wilding

An age-old problem has resurfaced--with a difference--in the biotech century. The problem: What does woman (sic) want? This question, once so exasperatedly asked by Freud--as a corollary to his finding that woman "represents a lack" (of a penis)--is once again being vigorously addressed in the practices of (mostly) male scientists and doctors with new biotechnological and medical processes at their disposal. New microsurgical medical technologies (MedTech) are being used by doctors to pioneer new flesh technologies, to address the Freudian "lack" directly by re-engineering the body of the woman rather than by treating her psyche. Designer Laser Vaginoplasty, the aesthetic surgical enhancement of vulval structures such as the labia minora, labia majora and mons pubis, make clear that what is lacking or inadequate is the woman's body and the structure of her sexual organs--not medical knowledge and sexual practices.

Can feminists counteract these entrenched views and disseminate a new (anti) aesthetic of the vulva? How can we counter the medicalized or pornographic images of vulvas that are usually the only ones offered for public view? Feminist artists tried to reclaim the cunt as a powerful pleasure source in the early 70s; and the vulva as a sign of sexual contention and gender construction has made many appearances in the art of the 80s and 90s. Subversive tactics that critique the commercial impulses and point up the ridiculousness and potential physical danger of such operations are called for. Rather than going for reduction surgery, for example, why not demand augmentation surgery, or other manipulations that will enlarge the labia minora? Why not have parties where women can examine, compare, and explore the myriad different forms of vulvas? Why not set up spa days (paid for by medical insurance) in which women teach themselves and their sexual partners about female sexuality and desire? Let's educate children in the proper nomenclature and sexual and pleasure functions of the female genital organs. Above all, let's call for resistance to the unquestioned technological "solutions" to issues that have profound psychological, emotional, cultural, and even political origins and histories. Let us not obliterate the vulva as we now know it--before we do know it!



# Tricia Wright

*True Value* is a series of small, intimate works on paper. They are pinhole drawings, made by pricking the design through the reverse of the paper. The drawings themselves reference lace, doilies and other decorative materials closely associated with the domestic realm, and into these I embed prosaic, assertively functional household objects and component parts. The series examines the relationship between decoration and function, and the value judgments attached to each; and it looks at the dichotomy between perception and reality that permeates the lives of ordinary women. The title for this series —True Value—is a direct reference to the chain of hardware stores where I buy my materials, and underscores the questions driving the work.

*Collar*, 2012, Paper, glass, dressmakers pins, nylon, 14"x14"  
*Domestic Animal; Zipper*, 2012, Paper, feathers, metal vent, fabric and metal zipper, nylon, 16"x16"

## Unstill Volcano

*Jennifer A. Hudson*

Vesuvius, my home,  
glowing valley with luscious lips  
never lying still,  
and tremors making magma flow:

I'm coming.

I'm here

with pressure building behind my corals,  
pulling open my plates,  
gliding along my soft edges,  
sliding into my cavern,  
parting my hot spots,  
shutting out the world,  
oozing  
away,  
with pleasure let through,  
my self  
no longer concealed,  
but found.



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Curated by Alexandra Rutsch Brock, Mia Brownell, and Patricia Miranda.  
*This project came together in a mere eight weeks, through the power of women  
talking, and creating a meeting of the minds around politics, women and art.*

Special thanks to Alexandra and Mia for their unending generosity, enthusiasm,  
hard work, and their fierce commitment to women and to art.

*This catalog includes a selection of works in the exhibition.  
Design: Patricia Miranda*