Angels of Anarchy
Angels of Anarchy

Women Artists and Surrealism

Edited by Patricia Allmer

With contributions by
Patricia Allmer
Roger Cardinal
Mary Ann Caws
Georgiana M.M. Colvile
Katharine Conley
Alyce Mahon
Donna Roberts
Published in conjunction with the exhibition

Angels of Anarchy
Women Artists and Surrealism

Manchester Art Gallery
26 September 2009–10 January 2010

Copyright © for the texts by
The Manchester Art Gallery 2009
Copyright © for design and layout by Prestel Verlag,
Munich Berlin London New York 2009
For Picture Credits see p. 255–56

The rights of the authors to be identified as authors
of this work have been asserted in accordance with the Copyright,

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reprinted or
reproduced or utilized in any form or by any electronic, mechanical
or other means, including photocopying and recording, or any
information or retrieval system, without permission in writing from
the publishers.

Prestel Verlag
Königstrasse 9, 80539 Munich
T +49 (89) 242 908 300
F +49 (89) 242 908 335
www.prestel.de

Prestel Publishing Ltd.
4, Bloomsbury Place, London WC1A 2QA
Tel. +44 (020) 7323-5004
Fax +44 (020) 7636-8004

Prestel Publishing
900 Broadway, Suite 603
New York, N.Y. 10003
Tel. +1 (212) 995-2720
Fax +1 (212) 995-2733
www.prestel.com

Library of Congress Control Number: 2009927645

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data:
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.
The Deutsche Bibliothek holds a record of this publication in the
Deutsche Nationalbibliographie; detailed bibliographical data can be
found under: http://dnb.dde.de

Prestel books are available worldwide. Please contact
your nearest bookseller or one of the above addresses for information
concerning your local distributor.

Editorial direction: Philippa Hurd
Design concept: engelhardt, atelier für gestaltung, Mühldorf am Inn,
Germany
Layout and typesetting: Vornehm Mediengestaltung GmbH, Munich
Origination: Reproline Cenceller, Munich
Printing: 
Binding:

Printed in xxx on acid-free paper

ISBN 978-3-7913-4365-5 (hardback)
Contents

6 Foreword and Acknowledgements
8 Curator’s Acknowledgements
12 Of Fallen Angels and Angels of Anarchy
   Patricia Allmer
28 These Photographing Women: the Scandal of Genius
   Mary Ann Caws
36 The Imaging of Magic
   Roger Cardinal
46 Safe as Houses: Anamorphic Bodies in Ordinary Spaces:
   Miller, Varo, Tanning, Woodman
   Katharine Conley
54 Women Surrealists and the Still Life
   Alyce Mahon
64 Women Artists, Surrealism and Animal Representation
   Georgiana M. M. Colvile
74 ’Neither Wings nor Stones’:
   the Psychological Realism of Czech Women Surrealists
   Donna Roberts
84 Angels of Anarchy
226 List of Works
237 Bibliography
241 Artists’ Biographies
251 Contributors’ Biographies
253 Index
Foreword and Acknowledgements

This exhibition is the first major international group exhibition in the UK and Europe of twentieth-century women surrealist artists. Women played a huge, but at the time not fully recognised, part in the surrealist movement, working in a variety of media including painting, print-making, sculpture and photography. The movement’s intimate connection with the rise and dissemination of psychoanalytic theory makes it important far beyond its origins in the world of contemporary modernism, and only recently has an appreciation grown of how crucial women’s contributions were in this process. The exhibition is the result of another successful collaboration between Manchester Art Gallery and Manchester Metropolitan University and began when my colleague, Tim Wilcox, put the embryo of an idea for an exhibition of women surrealists to Dr Patricia Allmer, Research Fellow in Art History at the Manchester Institute for Research and Innovation in Art and Design (MIRIAD) at Manchester Metropolitan University. Dr Allmer has researched and published widely in the field and she has enthusiastically moulded this initial idea into a thought-provoking exhibition that extends and enhances the understanding of these artists’ radical and still sometimes shockingly revealing work. Dr Allmer has worked closely with my colleague, Fiona Corridan, who has more than capably steered this complicated project to completion.

With the rise in prominence of women artists within the field of contemporary art today we have reached a point where gender redress is no longer given as a reason for showing women’s art. Sheer quality and strength alone demand women’s place in the world’s galleries and exhibitions. There is considerable interest in the pioneers who made this happen. Artists included in the exhibition such as Meret Oppenheim, Frida Kahlo, Lee Miller and, more recently, Francesca Woodman are heroines and role models to a whole generation of women — not just artists.

Manchester is a city famous for its history of radical women and, as the home of the suffragette movement, it is entirely appropriate that the gallery has brought this rarely seen group of pioneering women artists together from around the world. The city’s tradition of nurturing powerful women’s
voices in politics and the arts from Elizabeth Gaskell, Emily Pankhurst and the suffrage movement, to Carol Ann Duffy, is the logical place to mount such an exhibition. Manchester Art Gallery too has a tradition of mounting revisionist exhibitions of women’s art and previously brought the women artists of the Pre-Raphaelite movement to attention for the first time. This exhibition develops this lineage on a grander scale and international stage and forms part of a season of exhibitions on the theme of Radical Manchester which have been made possible through the strategic support of the North West Regional Development Agency.

Manchester Art Gallery has succeeded in securing major loans for this exhibition from around the world. Many of the artists included will be shown in this country for the first time and the support of the surviving families and friends of these important artists has enabled Dr Allmer to make exciting new discoveries in the course of her research. I should like to thank the many private collectors and institutions without whose generous support this exhibition would not have been possible. We have been most privileged to have the support of three of the most significant private collectors of surrealism in this country, Andrew Murray, Antony Penrose and Dr Jeffrey Sherwin each of whom opened their respective collections to us and whose generosity has ensured a very significant showing of works by women surrealists which we would have had difficulty obtaining from elsewhere. Armando Colina has offered invaluable help in providing advice, contacts and helping us to secure works by Frida Kahlo, Leonora Carrington and Lola Alvarez Bravo. Lisa Wenger has generously offered her time in providing advice and assistance in securing works by Meret Oppenheim. We are also indebted to other galleries, collectors and artists’ relatives and descendants who have allowed us to represent exhibiting artists’ works with major loans, including: George and Betty Woodman, Katerina Jerinich and Marian Goodman Gallery in New York; Ariette Souhami and Galerie Minsky, Josette Exandier, Alain Kahn-Sriber and Roger and Brann Renaud in Paris; Xavier C annon, Claude Chenot, Michel Hallers, Rosine Ortmans, and Wolfgang Schulte in Belgium; Eva Kosáková and Adela Procházková, Jan Švankmajer and Bruno Solarik in the Czech Republic; Elizabeth Delerue, Dominique and Christoph Bürgi in Switzerland; Walter Gruen and Malu Block in Mexico; Liana Zanfisco and Roberto Lupo in Italy; James Birch, Paul Conran, James Mayor and Richard Shillitoe in the UK.

Many institutions including Tate, Centre Georges Pompidou, Museo De Arte Moderno Mexico, the Museum of Modern Art and Fine Arts Museum, San Francisco, the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, the Jersey Heritage Trust, the Albany Institute in Buffalo, the Bluff Collection in New York, Galeria Juan Martín in Mexico, Hauser & Wirth Zurich, Museum of Modern Art and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Kunstmuseum Lichtenstein, the Edward James Foundation, Leeds City Art Gallery and the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art in the UK have also been extremely generous in lending important works to this exhibition.

The exhibition has been generously supported by our benefactors, The Zochonis Charitable Trust and Manchester Art Gallery Trust, and we are extremely grateful to both of them.

Moira Stevenson
HEAD OF MANCHESTER CITY GALLERIES
Curator’s Acknowledgements

A complex exhibition such as Angels of Anarchy involves lots of collaborations and co-operations. I would like to thank Tim Wilcox, Fiona Corridan and their colleagues at Manchester Art Gallery for their hard work. Thanks are also due to Jim Aulich and to my department, the Manchester Institute for Research and Innovation in Art and Design at Manchester Metropolitan University.

My gratitude extends to a number of individuals for their expertise, advice and guidance, and for their generous support throughout this project. I am particularly grateful to Jean Benoît, Therese Bhattacharya-Stettler, James Birch, Ami Bouhassane, Lenka Bydzovska, Georgiana Colvile, Xavier Cannone, Armando Colina, Paul Conran, Bruno Decharme, France Elysées, Krzysztof Fijalkowski, Marcel Fleiss, Cristina Földesdy, Nicoletta Forlano, Michel Hallers, Ruth Henry, Leen de Jong, Sharon-Michi Kusunoki, Jacques Lacomblez, Thomas Levy, Martine Lusardy, Andrew Major, Alena Nadvornikova, Maria Naula, Rosine Ortmans, Antony Penrose, Katka Pinosova, Adela Prochazkova, Michel Remy, Roger Renaud, Donna Roberts, Barbara Safarova, John Sears, Richard Shillitoe, Bruno Solarik, Jan Švankmajer, Lies Van de Cappelle and Lisa Wenger.

Patricia Allmer
Essays
Of Fallen Angels
and Angels of Anarchy

Patricia Allmer

‘The angel is that which unceasingly passes through the envelope(s) or container(s), goes from one side to the other, reworking every deadline, changing every decision, thwarting all repetition.’ Luce Irigaray

The word ‘angel’ derives from the Latin ‘angelus’ meaning ‘messenger’; the angel is a signifier that we are ‘about to enter another world’. The angelic function is one of prophecy, guidance and communication, a function of to-and-fro — ‘gestures of passage between opposite states’. The angelic position is a position of in-betweenness and motion. These functions and positions are the strengths of angels: they overcome and deconstruct the paths of Western patriarchal binary thought, its hierarchical structure, replacing stability with flux, singularity with multiplicity, separation with transgression, and being with becoming and transformation.

Flux, multiplicity, transgression, becoming and transformation are major foci of the surrealist women artists’ works represented in Angels of Anarchy. Although these artists span three generations, their diverse artistic productions are mostly independent from each other, ranging across a multitude of twentieth-century media. However, they share a close interest in and draw on surrealism and its desires to overcome dualities, boundaries and binaries, as André Breton states in the Second Manifesto of Surrealism: ‘Everything tends to make us believe that there exists a certain point of the mind at which life and death, the real and the imagined, past and future, the communicable and the incommunicable, high and low, cease to be perceived as contradictions’. This surrealist desire to overcome (hierarchical) oppositions and boundaries is present in a variety of surrealist concepts such as ‘communicating vessels’, a metaphor for the dream which fuses inside and outside, reality and imagination. The term is taken from a scientific experiment which bears the same name: ‘in vessels joined by a tube, a gas or liquid passing from one to the other rises to the same level in each, whatever the form of the vessel’. As Mary Ann Caws notes, ‘this passing back and forth between two modes is shown to be the basis of Surrealist thought, of Surreality itself’.

Communication, exchange, the passing-back-and-forth, are the foundation of a variety of surrealist activities, such as the surrealist game of exquisite corpse — a game involving a number of participants, each writing or drawing on a piece of paper which is folded and passed on to the next.
By unfolding the paper, a communal sentence/drawing emerges, a corpse, exquisite because created by a multiplicity, by a collective utterance, by an assemblage. "Designed to provide the most paradoxical confrontation possible between the elements of speech [. . .]" and opening the possibility for 'tacit communication between the participants', this game allowed the exploration of language anew. The game of the exquisite corpse is also the site of collaborations between female and male surrealists. It celebrates becoming and transformation, the fluidity of identity rather than its fixedness, and aesthetic production as a collective rather than individual activity. The (ideological) status quo is also challenged in surrealism, by seeking and teasing out the marvellous in the everyday — without departing from it, surrealist strategies reveal the everyday and familiar as marvellously unknown, differing from itself, differing from what ideologies dictate it to be.

However, whilst surrealist thought radically challenged hierarchies, it often remained blind to its own gender politics, locked in a heterosexual, sometimes homophobic, patriarchal stance positioning and constructing women (and never men) as artists' muses, femme-enfants, virgins, dolls and erotic objects. As Gwen Raaberg points out 'no women [. . .] had been listed as official members of the original surrealist movement, nor had they signed the manifestoes'. There is also a significant absence of women in the first series of the 'Recherches sur la sexualité' — recordings of surrealist discussion on 'Investigating Sex' in the early months of 1928, as Dawn Ades notes: 'There were no women participants in the first series, apart from the mysterious Y in the seventh session [...]; their absence was noted and regretted by, it seems, only Naville and Aragon'. The second series included more women; whilst 'Y' from the first series remains mysterious, Malcolm Imrie states in his 'Notes on Participants' that a number of women participants also cannot be identified, their histories lost: '[. . .] we know nothing either of Jeannette Tanguy or Madame Unik, save for their marital status'.

Only from the 1930s onwards did the surrealist movement start to include women as artists, an inclusion which, albeit not full, was arguably much more pronounced than in other artistic movements. A number of the international surrealist exhibitions featured (some) women artists; women artists contributed to publications; and Peggy Guggenheim organised the Exhibition by 31 Women at her Art of This Century gallery in New York in 1943, showing a range of women artists associated with surrealism, including Frida Kahlo, Dorothea Tanning, Kay Sage, Meret Oppenheim and Leonora Carrington. However, subsequent scholarly work often reinforced the exclusion of women artists from the history of surrealism, by treating their art as marginal to the movement. Popular historical summaries of surrealism, for example, only mention a few of the women artists and often only briefly in comparison to discussions lavished on male artists, whilst the landmark exhibition Dada, Surrealism and Their Heritage at the Museum of Modern Art in 1966 included only one artwork by a woman — Meret Oppenheim’s fur-lined teacup. Scholarly work on women surrealists really began in 1977 with a special encyclopaedic issue of Obliques. Since then, there have been significant developments in the field; a variety of key exhibitions have been devoted to individual artists; and
the major exhibition *Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism and Self-Representation* at San Francisco’s Museum of Modern Art in 1999 explored women artists and their self-representations in relation to surrealism. However, despite this focus on women artists and surrealism, there is still a pronounced absence of anglophone research on Czech, Belgian, British and many French artists; a number of these artists also remain little known in their home countries. *Angels of Anarchy* hopes to introduce some of these lesser known artists, offering the chance to see rarely and sometimes never-before-exhibited artworks.

*Angels of Anarchy* explores how women surrealists self-consciously work with surrealist strategies of denaturalising ideologies and conventions to interrogate art itself as the grounding for the shaping and reconfirmation of a number of patriarchal positions. These ideological positions and beliefs are rooted in the ‘myth of the “artist” as an “empowered white man”’; in the myth that ‘his’ artworks are unique and original; and in monolithic myths of linearity, present in a variety of immobile, universal categorisations ranging from chronologies and (male) canons to generic divisions. ‘Art history’ and tradition reaffirm and shape patriarchal myths of origination and originality, always anchored in man as the creator, ‘his’ objectivity (the notably flawed and exclusivist conventional tradition and history is represented as objectively determined and complete), and ‘his’ stability (canons, genres, periods are represented as stable and static and cannot be changed); the terms originality, objectivity, uniqueness and stability being regarded as hierarchically superior to multiplicity, flux and transformation.

Women surrealists’ works explore the ‘intimate experience of boundaries, their construction and deconstruction’. They explode and undo binary and hierarchical categorisation by ‘[. . .] rendering the tradition non-identical to itself’, perverting (in its sense of turning round) tradition, showing that tradition is not a fixed entity, but that it already inoculates its own transmutations and becomings, deconstructing itself from within, thereby producing new forms. In a non-chronological manner, and without pretending to present a complete canon of women surrealist artists, the exhibition traces the multiplicity of ways in which women surrealists

---

*Fig. 1 Unknown
Cast of Lee Miller’s Torso, c. 1942*
disrupt binaries, hierarchies, the linear, the fixed and the motionless. Its five sections — Portrait and Self-portrait, Landscape, Interior, Still Life, Fantasy — are not there to confirm the status quo of traditional generic categories. On the contrary, the artworks in these sections explode these categories from within, demonstrating how the subversion of generic and gender categories, and of the traditions of art, lies at the core of these artistic productions.

**Portrait and Self-portrait**

A number of women surrealists are also iconic muses of the twentieth century. Perhaps the two best known of these muses are Dora Maar, Picasso’s subject in many portraits, and Lee Miller, who was not only a fashion model for Vogue, but also the model for some of Man Ray’s most erotic photographs. Miller’s lips loom large in the sky in *Observatory Time, The Lovers* (1934); an image of her eye is fixed to the ticking arm of a metronome in *Indestructible Object* (1923); her neck is the focus of *Lee Miller (Neck)* (1930); and her torso particularly fascinated Man Ray, as is evident from photographs such as *Shadows on Lee Miller’s Torso* (1930) and *Electricity* (1931). This torso is united with its plaster cast (fig. 1 and pl. 118) in photographs by Roland Penrose taken around 1942 (fig. 2). In Jean Cocteau’s film *The Blood of a Poet* (1930), Miller appears as a marble statue, arms missing, brought to life through the touch of a poet enacting the Greek myth of Pygmalion. The myth represents the positions of men and women in the history of art: the artist (male, creative, active) brings his artwork, Galatea (female, created, passive), to life, a myth threading through the history of art and also dominant in surrealism — Salvador Dalí, André Masson and René Magritte have painted artworks based on this myth (Dali even referred to his wife as ‘Galatea’). These representations of Miller evoke Mary Ann Caws’ summary of women artists’ position in the surrealist movement as mostly consisting of being muses, models represented in a fragmentary manner by male artists: ‘Headless. And also footless. Often armless too; and always unarmed, except with poetry and passion. There they are, the surrealist women so shot and painted, so stressed

Fig. 2  Roland Penrose, Portrait of Lee Miller, ‘Which-be-Witch’, Lee Miller with body cast, known as ‘Bewitches Witch’, 1942. Roland Penrose Estate
and dismembered, punctured and severed: is it any wonder she has (we have) gone to pieces?16

Questioning and subverting this genre is therefore an elemental function of women artists — not only in order to reclaim the passivating representation of women, but also to inscribe the female artist into the genre of surrealism. Self-portraiture has served the male artist to affirm his identity as subject, ‘masterful creator’ and ‘tortured soul’, whilst women have been mostly represented as objects; as Marsha Meskimmon states: ‘The self-portrait as a form is dependent upon the concept of the artist as a special individual, worthy of representation in his own right. And, indeed, it is in his own right; since, linked to the status of fine artists, self-portraiture has evolved features mainly exclusive to male artists’.17 Penny Slinger’s collage, Read my Lips (1973) (fig. 4 and pl. 111) satirises the fragmented, often metonymic representation of women in patriarchy as observed by Caws. Read my Lips seems to be a feminist response to and a re-appropriation of René Magritte’s The Rape (1934) (fig. 3), which metonymically transposes a woman’s body onto her face — the crotch forming her mouth. Here, surrealist collage is used, according to Slinger, to approach surrealism from ‘a woman’s point-of-view, attempting to bring to light the half that has long remained hidden. [. . .] present[ing] the muse as her own subject (as opposed to object) [. . .].’18

And the muses do return as outstanding artists. Miller’s destruction of her image as muse and model at the level of her photographs is the more powerful, as it heavily references the statuesque representations of herself mentioned above. Revenge on Culture (1940) (pl. 73) is an ironic commentary on her own position as objectified, photographic muse. Here a fallen statue of an angel is represented. Its face bears striking similarities to representations of Miller’s statuesque face familiar from Man Ray’s photographs and images from Vogue. Miller’s ‘fallen angel’ is discarded, echoing Emila Medková’s forgotten sculpture of an angel huddled against a wall (pl. 69); the tumbled sculpture’s head is severed by what looks like a thick cable, her torso weighed down by a brick. Here the statue, the idealised object of male desire,
no longer awakens but is destroyed, as a revenge on the culture which produced it, opening the space for a different kind of representation of femininity and self. Even the title* Revenge on Culture* is two-fold — whilst it refers to the destructive powers of patriarchy in World War II, it also alludes to patriarchy’s destruction of women. On a further level the title is ironic, suggesting Miller’s own *Revenge on (patriarchal) Culture*, as Miller commented: ‘I looked like an angel, but I was a fiend inside’. In *Revenge on Culture*, the common male depiction of Miller as object to be looked at is shattered, is no longer flawless.

For women surrealist artists the genre of self-portraiture is a ‘way of coming into representation [. . .], in which the artist is both subject and object and conceives of how she looks in the sense of how she sees rather than how she appears’.19 The artist as both subject and object lie at the core of Claude Cahun’s self-portraits which re-appropriate the genre of self-portraiture and the representation of women from a male domain (pls. 21–24). Claude Cahun’s masquerades unhinge and mock gender stereotypes whilst revealing gender to be a fluid category which can literally take on many faces: ‘Under this mask, another mask. I will never be finished carrying all these faces’,20 Cahun comments in her autobiography *Disavowals: or Cancelled Confessions*. ‘Never be finished’ emphasises the processual rather than the finite and reveals identity as endless becoming, which can be shaped, re-shaped and changed, rather than being. Following the surrealist functions of masquerade as ‘weapons in Surrealism’s assault on the foundations of the “real”’,21 Cahun extends this assault — as angel, body builder, skinhead, vampire, and vamp, she deconstructs any notionally stable identity.

The self as an unstable category is also represented in Emmy Bridgewater’s *Transplanted* (1947) (pl. 19) — the portrait of the artist emerges out of two twigs grafted together. Grafting, the joining together of two distinct pieces which meld into one, is here not only a metaphor for gender identities, but also for artistic identity and for the art work itself, destroying the myth of ‘originality’ and independent creativity. Here art and the artist are becoming through the grafting together of two disparate parts, similar to a surrealist collage, recalling J. Hillis Miller’s equation of the artistic text to the grafting of wood: ‘a new text in a different language that will be grafted on the original and draw...
its life from that original, while being as different from it as a grafted tree is from the rootstock on which it grows. [. . .] One life flows into the other and draws life from the other’.22 The artwork as well as identity are here no longer regarded as ‘original’, but emerge as hybrids from exchange and interchange.

Similarly Frida Kahlo’s self-portrait Diego and Frida 1929 –1944 (1) (1944) (pl. 54) represents the artist as a botanical fusion (symbolic of change and flux rather than stability) between herself and another, a fusion doubled by the generic fusion of still life and portraiture in this painting. The other half of Kahlo’s face is the face of Diego Rivera, her husband, but also, significantly, that of another artist, suggesting that the artistic self is not independent and discrete, but emerges from fusions with others. This double portrait is at the centre of a heart-shaped bulb, in which tubers bifurcate. This rhizomatic representation of the (artistic) self, like the multiple and the graft, is ‘open to becomings’23 and undermines hierarchical, binary organisation.

‘The muse as her own subject’ is also at the core of little-explored photographs by women surrealists of women surrealists. Away from her traditional status as muse of the male artist, away from her conventional representation through the male gaze, here the muse is revealed as artist. These photographs offer alternative representations of these artists — often representing them with their artworks. Perhaps one of the most intimate of these portraits is one where the artist actually is no longer, namely Lola Alvarez Bravo’s Kahlo portrait Frida’s room (c. 1954) (pl. 10): a single, discarded shoe, a photograph of Diego, a Kahlo painting, the wheelchair on which a pot with brushes and a pallet are placed — this summary of Kahlo’s life is arranged in the form of a Kahloesque still life, inverting the conventional emphasis on Kahlo’s art being biographical to offer Kahlo’s biography as artistic. Confidence and strength mark the subjects in these images, artworks which are also crucial documentary evidence offering an alternative history of surrealism.

Landscape

Traditional Renaissance perspective understands the structure of a painting, as well as its content, as
analogous to an ‘open window’ looking out onto reality, as was famously argued by Leon Battista Alberti in his treatise Della pittura in 1435, implying that a painting can be an accurate reflection of reality. This perspective is radically challenged by Lee Miller’s Portrait of Space (1937) (the title already connotes generic transgressions between portraiture and landscape) (pl. 77). Alberti’s rectangular window has been here replaced by a tear in a net which opens up onto a landscape outside. The tear resembles the uneven shape of a vagina (which is also referred to colloquially as a ‘crack’, a type of tear), a broken hymen, but also the shape of an eye. In this photograph it is no longer the even, rectangular frame of the window or the painting which allows a direct view onto an outside, but the uneven, fragile shape of the tear/crack. This tear evokes other famous tears in the history of art, such as the tear in St Thomas’s cloak in Caravaggio’s The Incredulity of Saint Thomas (c. 1601–02). There the tear mirrors Christ’s wound which St Thomas is touching; the wound/tear/crack being the site of the ‘truth’ of Christ’s transformation and becoming. Like a crack, the tear ‘runs its course in a continuous, imperceptible, and silent way [. . .] that which it transmits does not allow itself to be determined, being necessarily vague and diffuse. [. . .] it always takes an oblique line, being ready to change directions [. . .]’.25 As Gilles Deleuze states, Renaissance perspective ‘has only a single centre, a unique and receding perspective, and in consequence a false depth. It mediates everything, but mobilises and moves nothing’.26 In contradistinction, the tear diverges and decentres, it causes movement which ‘implies a plurality of centres, a superposition of perspectives, a tangle of points of view, a coexistence of moments which essentially distort representation [. . .]’.27 The tear in the net in Miller’s photograph offers an alternative perspective on ‘reality’, proposing that reality can be perceived not from the ‘window’ of tradition but from a spreading, rhizomatic structure which is unstable and cannot be contained.

Other appropriations of the generic tradition of landscape into a specifically feminine and feminist discourse can be found in Jane Graverol’s The Holy Spirit (1965) (fig. 6 and pl. 49) and Ithell Colquhoun’s Scylla (1938) (fig. 5 and pl. 33). In The Holy Spirit the formation of two rocks resembles a woman’s silhouette. A bird in flight, an icon of flux and motion, marks her crotch. Here the body is no longer a discrete entity, detached from its environment, but is shaped by it, entangled in it, deconstructing the boundaries between landscape and portrait,
between inside and outside, creating cross-generic fertilisations (is such an artwork a landscape or is it a portrait?). Colquhoun’s Scylla manipulates generic and gender boundaries and categorisations, transforming the body into a landscape and a landscape into a body, or rather, promoting multiplicities of bodies. As in The Holy Spirit, the formation of two rocks, looming out of the surrounding sea, is central to these mutations. On one level the two rocks, ever so slightly touching each other, resemble two penises, thus playing on the patriarchal association between phallus (as a monolithic ideology) and rock, yet disempowering these stereotypes by the soft contact of the two phalli. The patriarchal association of phalli and rocks is also disturbed by the penises’ texture and consistency, represented as bare and vulnerable, as if the skin would have been peeled off, leaving the muscle tissue exposed, literally dismantling the phallus as a symbol of patriarchy.

The phallus as symbol of the singularity of patriarchal authority is further questioned here in its doubling. This doubling of phalli also occurs in Eileen Agar’s photographs of Rocks at Ploumanach, Brittany (1936) (pl. 7). The multiplication of the phallus undermines Western patriarchal notions of uniqueness, primacy and origin also perpetuated in art’s hierarchical preference for the ‘original’ over and above its representation. This doubling is multiplied still further by another phallic object, a boat sailing towards the cleft between the rocks, which is doubled by its shadow.

However, on closer examination the two phalli/rocks in Scylla reveal themselves to be part of a female body (perhaps sitting in a bath tub); they become thighs, and the algae between the two rocks, like the bird in flight in Graverol’s The Holy Spirit, represents the woman’s pubic area. Here male and female bodies conflate with each other, entering into dialogues and entangled relationships.

**Interior**

According to Griselda Pollock:

*Against women the fiction of an eternal, natural order of things is monolithically employed to ratify the continuing power of men over women.*

*The justification for making women exclusively responsible for domestic work and child care is assumed to be the nature of women.*

*Historically produced social roles are represented in bourgeois ideologies as timeless and biologically determined.*

---

Fig. 7 Nicolaes Maes, Young Woman Peeling Apples, c. 1655. Oil on wood, 54.6 x 45.7 cm. Bequest of Benjamin Altman, Metropolitan Museum of Art.
Women surrealists render unfamiliar the familiar domestic interiors associated, as Pollock notes, with the ideologically seen ‘natural’ environments of women. The generic tradition of interiors is used as ‘the master’s tools to destroy his house’. The everyday, domestic interior is emptied out and returns as a space full of haunting and nightmarish potentials — potentials for transformation and becoming. In Dorothea Tanning’s *Eine kleine Nachtmusik* (1943) (pl. 114) and Leonora Carrington’s *Self-portrait* (c. 1937–38) (pl. 30) such nightmarish potentials are clearly connected to childhood. In Rachel Baes’ interiors (pls. 15, 16), only traces of femininity remain in barren, emptied out rooms. In Remedios Varo’s *Insomnia* (1947) (pl. 123) the interior is marked by the inescapability of a dominating gaze and confinement stretching out endlessly into labyrinthine multiplications of rooms.

Francesca Woodman’s *House #3* (1976) (pl. 125) shows an interior in the process of disintegration. The processual (becoming) rather than the completion (being) of this disintegration is emphasised by a female figure on the verge of dissolution, evoking an angel in transcendence, a dissolving figure recalling Jane Graverol’s *The Celestial Prison* (1963) (pl. 48). In Graverol’s painting an angel is locked in a bird cage, recalling the conventional metaphor of women as ‘birds in a gilded cage’, as well as Dante’s description of the angel as a ‘divine bird’, drawing together a multiplicity of intertextual references. Graverol’s painting is also a reclaiming of surrealist representations of the feminine as caged, such as the surrealist *Mannequin* at the Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme in 1938 which featured in photographs by Man Ray (fig. 8) and Raoul Ubac. The *Mannequin* — a dummy whose head is enclosed by a wicker bird cage, its mouth gagged — was constructed by André Masson. Graverol has replaced the caged, gagged woman’s head by a smirking angel. The angel’s smirk seems, like Woodman’s female angelic figure dissolving out of the disintegrating (domestic) interior, to imply that it is impossible to cage angels since the angel joins ‘corporeal and incorporeal states’.

Woodman’s *Untitled* from 1977–78 (pl. 128) engages in a complex discourse on women and the interior as the assigned feminine space. A woman hangs on a doorframe seemingly crucified, redefining the image of the sacrifice of Christ for humanity as the sacrifice of woman for patriarchy. This angelic figure hovers above the barren, spotless, tiled floor, reminiscent of traditional Netherlandish interiors.
A white cloth lies discarded on a solitary chair, evoking traditional interior scenes where women are depicted sitting, cloth/apron draped over their laps, absorbed in domestic works such as peeling vegetables and apples or sewing, as in Nicolaes Maes Young Woman Peeling Apples (c. 1655) (fig. 7), William Kay Blacklock’s A Woman Peeling Vegetables (1872) and Van Gogh’s Interior with Peasant Woman Sewing (1885). The discarded cloth implies an abandonment of female domestic labour, as well as, implicitly, an unnecessary male loin-cloth.

In other artworks the bedroom as boudoir-esque setting, draped with nudes for satisfying the male gaze, is re-examined. In Graverol’s Last Pleasures (1962) (pl. 50) the boudoir-esque bed, decorated with little cherubs, conflates generic categories — the bed is displaced in a landscape. This conflation of genres is pushed further by placing a skeletal pelvis on the bed, a symbol of nature morte. This pelvis seems to unite and represent the ‘naturally’ regarded functions of women in patriarchy, ranging from the erotic function of pleasing the male gaze as nudes, to the biological function of giving birth, to the domestic function of making the bed. Nature morte; dead nature refers here to the destruction of the ideology that these functions of women are ‘natural’. Similarly, Eva Švankmajerová’s Bed (1976) (pl. 113) explores and disturbs boundaries of inside and outside, of presence and absence. It depicts an interior scene set in an outside landscape; the intimacy of the fold of the vaginal labia is here transposed onto the intimacy of the fold in the duvet, inviting the occupant to enter, a fold created by women’s labour. The fold itself is a signifier of in-betweenness. Folding is a practice of spacing, it creates an inside and an outside with additional spaces where new things can happen. It creates a ‘one and other’ whilst its own space fluctuates, remaining always in limbo — is the fold on the inside or is it outside? The fold behaves like a hinge, creating, out of a simple surface, two — it complicates matters, loses “the smooth simplicity of its surface”32 and produces a strange conflation of multiplicity and singularity — that which was singular becomes multiple and yet remains singular — “the fold renders (itself) manifold but (is) not (one)”.33 The fold unites through distinction and difference: as Deleuze states, it ‘relates one to the other by distinguishing them: a severing by which each term casts the other forward, a tension by which each fold is pulled into the other’.34 It decomposes and recomposes itself, fans out and pulls together again to produce new networks of differences, erasing any possibility of a master discourse, instead creating a dialogic structure which is marked by “a dynamic process of multiple meanings and hovering significations constantly reactivated”.35 The fold doubles the conflation of generic categories presented here, insisting on the transgression of categorisations and the reign of the multiple and the manifold.
Still Life

Still life as a genre is significant on a number of levels in relation to gender politics. On one level, according to Lillian S. Robinson, the genre of still life, as a record of men’s worldly goods during the embourgeoisement of European society in the seventeenth century, emerges at the same time as the beginning of the commodification of women in artworks. As she notes, women were ‘more and more transformed into unsentimentalized private property [. . .], commodities’.36 Women were increasingly placed in domestic settings in which, ‘strangely immobilized, they participated in the paintings [. . .] as passive objects, part of the inventory’.37 The commodification of women in artworks increasingly resembled the commodities represented in still lifes — goods which can be consumed and owned. On another level, traditional still lifes often record, but repress, the female labour present in the needle work of table cloths, the preparation of the represented foods and drinks, the setting of the table and arrangements of flowers. On a further level, due to the domestic setting of still life, this was the only genre in which women were strongly represented and were also able to attain fame, as in the cases of artists Annie Feray Mutrie and Martha Darley Mutrie for example.

Women surrealists’ exploration of still life takes on this multiplicity of layers. On one level it is a continuation of a generic tradition in which women artists did play a significant role, but it is also the rendering visible of women’s labour and, furthermore, the genre is appropriated to dish up the objectification of women to patriarchy. The collapsing of still life as a genre to record objects and the commodification of women is explored in Oppenheim’s objects, such as Souvenir of Breakfast in Fur (1970) (pl. 91) — an ironic memento (mori) of Object (Breakfast in Fur) (1936) (fig. 9), her famous teacup dressed in fur which overshadowed her career as it became increasingly the only artwork used to signify her artistic production. Object (Breakfast in Fur) ‘alludes to the feminine. The fur suggests an expensively decked-out woman; the cup, hollow yet round, can evoke female genitalia; the spoon with its phallic shape further erotizes the hairy object’.38 Object (Breakfast in Fur) ironises the objectification and fetishization of women, whilst the souvenir multiplies this original, destroying notions of ‘uniqueness’.

Lee Miller’s photographs of an amputated breast (c. 1929) (pl. 74), a consequence of a mastectomy, represent it disturbingly in a traditional still-life manner. The breast is placed on a plate which is neatly arranged on a set table, including a patterned place-mat and cutlery that evokes the stereotypical neatness of tables set by women. The photographs were taken in the halls of Vogue magazine before security guards were able to remove Lee Miller and her photographic subject/object — a memento mori indeed. These powerful images are an absolute rejection, a radical refusal, of the male gaze; they undermine and deny traditional representations by male artists of breasts as desirable objects. Instead the breast is, literally, served and fed back to the male gaze as diseased/dead meat. ‘Refuse’ becomes ‘refusal’; the genres coalesce in disturbing, challenging ways.

This thematic concern is continued in Francesca Woodman’s photograph From the three kinds