

David Lewis is pleased to present its debut solo exhibition with Mary Beth Edelson, and the first to focus on her seminal 1973 series of hand-painted silver gelatin prints *Woman Rising*.

Searching in the early 1970's for images of powerful female images to combat patriarchal repression, and inspired by her own activism<sup>1</sup> and Erich Neumann's important *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype*, Mary Beth Edelson began work on a series of performative self-portraits, shot in the Outer Banks, North Carolina. Each silver gelatin print is hand-painted and drawn over to transform the artist into an archetype or goddess.

- She is the Hindu goddess Kali, defiant, many-armed, blood-soaked, claiming the skulls of defeated patriarchs as trophies.
- She is her friend Louise Bourgeois, wearing a suit of her own sculpture, generating rippling expanding lines of energy.
- She is her friend Lucy Lippard—who is at the same a many-breasted Great Mother figure, like the Venus of Willendorf, an image of maternal plentitude and abundance.
- She is William's Blake legendary Tyger, a figure of pure energy, beyond morality.
- She plays games with Picasso, and with photographs of Picasso-as-Minotaur, Picasso the bull-headed patriarch, adding fallopian tubes to his famous rhyme of a bicycle seat with a bull's head her own.
- She is Wonder Woman.
- She is the Irish trickster goddess Sheela-na-gig, tongue out, wearing a long necklace of skulls, or disappearing by way of a magical zipper the length of her body.
- And so on.

Using her own body as a visual trope for exploring self-constructed identities, this performative series anticipates not only the *Siluetta* series of Ana Mendieta (1973-80) and Francesca Woodman's self-portraits of the late 70's, but also the referential female-gaze iconoclasts of the Pictures Generation (Cindy Sherman, Dara Birnbaum, Laurie Simmons). Moreover, the struggle enacted by Edelson was not merely personal but, as the artist indicated, always a matter of *collective* of becoming and self-definition:

These photographic images were defining images - *not who I am* but *who we are*. The images were presented aggressively as sexuality, mind and spirit comfortable in one body...*Woman Rising* symbolizes the joy and exuberance of our new freedom as well as making a political statement for women that says *I am*, and *I am large*, and *I am my body*, and *I am not going away*.<sup>2</sup>

Lucy Lippard articulated the same collective position:

Mary Beth Edelson's work arises from Feminism's double strength. Like the great Goddess to whom she has dedicated her art, she has (at least) two aspects—political rage and life-giving affirmation. The two merge in an individual identification with the collective ego [...]<sup>3</sup>

In addition to the *Woman Rising* photographs, the exhibition will present *Kali Bobbit* (1994). This iconic sculpture was created in response to a wave of sexual violence in American culture in the early 90s.<sup>4</sup> It appropriates the cultural significance of Lorena Bobbitt, who infamously cut off her husband's penis as a

defense against the abuse she endured in her marriage. Edelson resurrects Bobitt as a complex goddess: part Medusa, part warrior, part idol. *Kali Bobbit* was recently exhibited to acclaim in *Greater New York* at MoMA PS1. Additionally, the artist will install a site-specific arrangement of her wall collages—serpents, birds, bats, archetypes from mass media and popular culture, and images of the head of Botticelli's Venus in response to, and celebration of, *Kali Bobbit's* presence, on a ziggurat, at the center of the gallery.

<sup>1</sup> Beginning in the late 1950's, Edelson was involved in civil rights and feminist movements. She established the country's first Conference for Women in the Visual Arts in Washington D.C. (1968), exhibited with the Heresies Collective (which was founded in part due to her efforts), and A.I.R. Gallery. She worked with the Committee on Diversity and Inclusion, the Women's Action Coalition, and the Title IX Task Force, among other actions throughout her lifetime.

<sup>2</sup> Mary Beth Edelson, "Woman Rising 1973-1974," in *Seven Cycles: Public Rituals*, 1980.

<sup>3</sup> Lucy Lippard, "Fire and Stone: Politics and Ritual," in *Seven Cycles: Public Rituals*, 1980.

<sup>4</sup> "Combat Zone: Campaign HQ Against Domestic Violence was a multifaceted project that offered a dynamic and immediate response to the 'war zone,' in which battered women live. Occupying the ground floor of a building in SoHo from October through December of 1994, Combat Zone was designed as a political campaign headquarters ready to fight all forms of domestic abuse. The HQ was complete with counseling, self-defense, workshops, lectures, a hotline, online services, photographs, videos, posters, and an art installation by Mary Beth Edelson. Enlisting the collaborative talents of artists, social workers, activists, performers, and students, Combat Zone provided a new model for community activism and brought attention to a long silenced issue."

"Creative Time Presents Mary Beth Edelson Combat Zone: Campaign HQ Against Domestic Violence Manhattan, 1994,"

*CreativeTime.org*, last modified October 25, 2016, <http://creativetime.org/projects/combata-zone-campaign-hq-against-domestic-violence/>.

Mary Beth Edelson (b. 1933, East Chicago, Indiana) has been exhibiting internationally since 1968. She was the subject of a celebrated retrospective in 2006, mounted by the Malmö Kunstmuseum, Sweden, which traveled to Migros Museum, Zurich; as well as the traveling retrospective *Shape Shifter: the Art of Mary Beth Edelson (1988-1990)*. Edelson has had numerous solo shows internationally and was included in important survey exhibitions including *Greater New York 2015*, MoMA PS1, New York; *Painting 2.0: Expression in the Information Age*, Museum Brandhorst, Munich; *WACK! Art of the Feminist Revolution*, MOCA, Los Angeles; *NYC 1993: Experimental Jet Set, Trash and No Star*, New Museum, NY; *Pictures by Women: A History of Modern Photography*, MoMA; *Mothers of Invention*, Mumok Museum of Contemporary Art, Vienna; *Coming to Power: 25 Years of Sexually Explicit Art by Women*, David Zwirner Gallery, New York; and most recently *Feminist Avant-Garde of the 1970s: Works from the Verbund Collection*, the Photographers' Gallery, London. Her work is included in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art, NY; The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, NY; Walker Art Center, MN; the Corcoran Gallery, Washington, D.C.; National Museum of American Art, Washington, D.C.; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL; Detroit Institute of Art, Detroit, MI; Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indianapolis, IN; Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, WA; Malmö Kunstmuseum, Sweden; and Sammlung Verbund, Vienna, Austria, among others.