

# BROOKLYN RAIL

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE

## MARY BETH EDELSON

My Favorite and Most Disturbing  
by Ann McCoy

GREATER NEW YORK

MoMA PS1 | OCTOBER 11, 2015 – MARCH 7, 2016



Installation view: Greater New York, MoMA PS1, October 11, 2015 - March 7, 2016. Image courtesy of the artists and MoMA PS1. Photo Pablo Enriquez.

What a celebration! Have we forgotten that before Nancy Spero was shown at MoMA, in 1976 she was picketing the place, demanding that an exhibition include fifty percent women? Now she is a floating goddess among a heavenly host of winged women artists—as owls, bees, and humming birds—in Mary Beth Edelson's wonderful *Untitled* (2015). This wall collage, around an arch, celebrates her sisters in art, many deceased. Two photographs celebrating female spirituality are also shown: *Woman Rising / Sky* (1973) and *Woman Rising / Spirit* (1973). Edelson, breasts bared, portrayed the goddess: heavenly, dematerializing, and even demonic. Part of a history eclipsed by minimalism and a market that supported the guys, Edelson has produced a complex and highly intelligent body of work in photography, painting, performance, and writing. My Christmas wish would be for Edelson to have a long overdue retrospective, and for *Heresies* to be reprinted.

Strangely, the work I found the most disturbing was also by Mary Beth Edelson: *Kali Bobbit* (1994). Reminiscent of Edelson's silkscreen series of pistol-packing mamas avenging violence against women, this work references Lorena Bobbitt, an abused woman who cut off her sleeping husband's penis. My period revenge fantasy would be directed at art-world darling Allen Jones for his women as furniture, equally tacky mannequins in S & M gear. Kali is dual-natured: destructive but also bringing forth new life. This work flattens the archetype, and fuels male castration fears. We have enough chopped body parts with ISIS; we need Aphrodite's Eros and women artists to serve her cause.