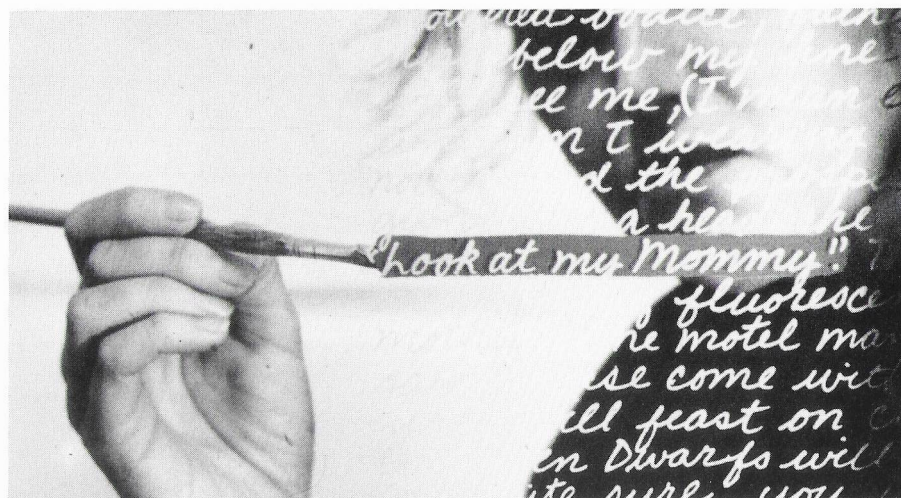


MARY KELLY

INTERIM

Part I: Corpus

L A C E
Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions
June 15 - July 24



Mary Kelly working on Interim

Interim Part I: Corpus 1984-85 (*edited version*)

24 Panels 4' x 3'

Laminated photo positive, screenprint
and acrylic on plexiglass

INTERIM'S THEMES ADDRESS A SUCCESSION OF ISSUES WHICH HAVE PREOCCUPIED feminists in the past decade, attempting to recover and rework them. In Part I, first, the politics of psychoanalysis; that is, following the Foucauldian imperative to place it, historically, among the discourses which define and regulate the realm of sexuality, it seems pertinent to ask if it has now become another orthodoxy within the women's movement. Second, hysteria - it is a focal point in feminist theory, but clinically does it exist? Third, what is the status, or fate perhaps, of the body and the image in theories or practices informed by Lacanian psychoanalysis in particular?

Corpus makes explicit reference to Charcot's now famous photographs of female hysterics by using the titles of "the five passionate attitudes" (*Menace, Appel, Supplication, Erotisme and Extase*) to announce the work's five sections.¹ In citing the work on hysteria, I intended to link popular discourses of the body with those of psychoanalysis and then to place psychoanalysis itself within a historical perspective by referring to the founding moment of Freud's theory. Charcot's study, which was the first to observe and distinguish the category of non-organic nervous disorders, placed emphasis, almost

exclusively, on the *visible* symptom. In the process, madness became a spectacle: the theatre of hysterics, a play dedicated to the production of unreason as a tangible event. Above all, what interests me is that it was a theatre in which *women* enacted the stages of the hysteric crisis and that it was the young woman in particular who posed in the passionate attitudes. No doubt, there were male hysterics, but it seems that they were not photographed. At least, it is uncertain, since the figures posed in what could be called "less passionate" attitudes, such as Irony, Repugnance or Terror, are older, "unattractive" or sexually ambiguous in appearance. The important point here is that Freud, who began the *Studies in Hysteria* while working with Charcot, shifted the analyst's attention from looking to *listening*. With this, he introduced the linguistic moment into the analysis of psychic disorder. In effect, the body was dispersed, made invisible, with the invention of the "talking cure."

Corpus takes up some of the implications of that shift, very schematically, as follows. In the first case, what could be called the "modern" world-view, which Freud represents in contrast to Charcot, language becomes central in a way that makes the visual take on a kind of compensatory value (the unrepresentable, the monstrous, even the sublime). Freud, in fact, calls Charcot a "*visuel*," says he is not a reflective man, not a thinker, that he has the nature of an artist. Thus the visible disorder, expelled from the theatre, reappears in the non-psychiatric discourse of the artist who becomes the prototype for madness. The recovery of unreason is orchestrated through the socially acceptable form of art. More relevant still, at the present time, the body - that repressed object of the medical gaze - returns in the spectacle of contemporary advertising where women's bodies, posed in an infinite variety of passionate attitudes, are all-pervasive. The scale, for instance, of the panels of *Corpus* is based on the dimensions of a small hoarding. On that stage, in place of Charcot's figures, emblematic articles of clothing pose, not only as the objects of medical scrutiny, but also as items for commercial exchange or subjects of romantic fantasy. Clearly, there is not *one* body, there are *many*. Moreover, discourses of the body are not synonymous with images of women. But images of women *are* overdetermined by anatomical referents and by a certain repetitious form of hysterical posturing. So, once again, this spectacle requires a critical shift, within the space of the picture, from looking to listening.

The second point concerns the psychoanalytic concept of hysteria. In theory and to some extent in clinical practice, hysteria, defined in relation to the conversion symptom (the bodily symptom as the formation of a substitute for the repressed wish), has disappeared. Parveen Adams has pointed out that there are two concepts of symptom and two concepts of hysteria in Freud's writings: the first appeared in the 1890's and is evident in the *Interpretation of Dreams*, the second emerged after 1926 with the work on femininity and the pre-Oedipal phase.² By that time, both symptom and hysteria are being redefined by the implications of Freud's emphasis on identification and bisexuality. Dora's cough, for example, is not a substitute but a means of identification with her

father which, in turn, is linked to the repressed desire for Frau K. At the same time, this emphasis seems to be shifting the whole field of psychoanalysis away from its preoccupation with woman - *her* repressed sexuality, her hysterical symptom, towards the more encompassing, but also more illusive, question of the subject - *its* sexed identity. Here, what interests me is that hysteria continues to have a metaphorical significance. Lacan, for instance, speaks of psychoanalysis as the "hystericization of discourse" posing analysis against mastery and hysteria against knowledge. More importantly, for those expelled, not from Charcot's theatre, but from Lacan's *École Freudienne* - I am thinking in particular of Luce Irigaray - the hysteric exposes the institution's fundamental misogyny; she founds the theory of psychoanalysis and sustains it by facilitating the exchange of ideas between male theorists. Thus hysteria, marginalized in one realm, becomes central in another, that is, feminist theory. For Irigaray, the hysteric signifies women's exclusion from discourse; for Monique Plaza - woman's revolt against patriarchy; for Michèle Montrelay - the blind spot of psychoanalysis; for the film collective of Dora - the analyst's symptom and therefore the basis for feminism's critique of Freud; and for Jacqueline Rose - the problem of sexual difference.

My work is also deeply implicated in this trajectory, impelled to fill in, or perhaps I should say widen, the gaps in the Freudian thesis. I have often thought of dedicating *Interim* to Dora's mother - the woman who never made Freud's acquaintance. He assumed she had housewife's psychosis: too old for analysis? Too old to be noticed? In a sense, she underlines the dilemma for the older woman of representing her femininity, her sexuality, her desire when she is no longer seen to be desirable. She can neither look forward, as the young girl does, to being a woman, that is, having the fantasized body of maturity; nor can she return to the ideal moment of maternity - ideal in that it allows her to occupy the position of the actively desiring subject without transgressing the socially acceptable definition of the woman as mother. She is looking back at something lost, acknowledging perhaps that "being a woman" was only a brief moment in her life.

In *Post-Partum Document*, I asked myself what the woman feared losing beyond the pleasure of the child's body and concluded that it was the closeness to the mother's body she experienced in being "like her." Now, in *Interim*, I am asking how the woman can reconstitute her narcissistic aim and consequently her pleasure, her desire, outside that maternal relation. Significantly, the stories in Part I begin with the decision not to have a child and then continue to explore other forms of identification around which the feminine/masculine terms revolve. Effectively, *Corpus* reiterates the hysteric's question: am I a man or am I a woman? But with the loss of maternal identity, I feel that a different order of fear emerges, one which concerns the importance of the repressed pre-Oedipal identification with the father - the desire to be "like him," but the fear of being the *same*, that is, of being "like a man."

This reticence has implications for feminism too. What I am suggesting is that we have privileged the relation to the mother's body in a way that does more than explain a

different relation to castration; it asserts our difference from men. In the process, perhaps we made the mother too real, too close and consequently blamed her for too much. For instance, we say it is not that men do not experience anxiety over aging but that they transpose it into another mode, a metalanguage; while women articulate it in terms of corporeality - pain, the feeling of deformation or transformation of features, organs, limbs - or literally embody it 'beyond words' as one of the characters in *Extase* comments. Michèle Montrelay describes this symptomatically as the woman who never lets up trying to be her sex and, theoretically, as a form of 'precocious femininity'; that is, an archaic organization of the drives that bar the woman's access to sublimated pleasure. Although I have some reservations about her thesis as a whole, one of her observations is absolutely central to *Interim's* discursive schema. She says, "The adult woman is one who reconstructs her sexuality in a field that goes beyond sex." This is, of course, crucial for the older woman. It is also here, precisely in this statement, that I glimpse the social and political relevance of psychoanalysis for feminism, one which goes beyond the meanings of orthodoxy.

Returning to *Corpus*, my emphasis on the shift from looking to listening is not simply a theoretical point, it is also an artistic strategy. Its aim, first with regard to images of women, is to release the so-called "female spectator" from her hysterical identification with the male voyeur. What I mean is that by placing the enigma of femininity, so to speak, on the surface of the picture rather than behind it, I hoped to open a field of identification which could be distinguished from that of object choice and desire. Secondly, concerning the status of the body, the work refers not so much to the anatomical fact or even to the perceptual entity as it does to the body of fantasy, the dispersed body of desire. Recalling Lacan's description of erotogenic zones as the gaze, the phoneme, the nothing, I am tempted to describe the space of the installation as an instance of "gathering" rather than a condition of reading or viewing from a fixed vantage point. For me, the gesture of writing is a way of invoking the texture of speaking, listening, touching; a way of visualizing exactly that which is assumed to be outside of seeing - precocious, unrepresentable, unsaid. I would like to think that it is possible for a work of art to produce a different kind of pleasure for a woman in "seeing herself," one that is linked to the loss of her imagined closeness to the mother's body. In this sense, the textual emphasis is more than an effort to create significance out of the absence of her image as representational or iconic sign, it is an attempt to alter the conditions of her presence in the spectacle of postmodern practices and histories of art.

- Excerpts from "Invisible Bodies" *New Formation* no.2, 1987 - Mary Kelly

Notes

¹ J.M. Charcot, *Nouvelle Iconographie Photographique de la Salpêtrière*, volume II (Paris: 1878).

² P. Adams, "Symptoms and hysteria," *Oxford Literary Review*, 8, 1/2 (1986).

As an artists organization, LACE is not hampered by the constraints of the commercial art market, neither is it subject to a mandate as with museums to interpret and preserve a permanent collection. Rather, LACE is committed to artists and to the presentation of their work and ideas in a context free from any prejudice regarding form or content.

Thus, it is significant that LACE present the work of Connie Hatch and Mary Kelly (in concurrent exhibitions). Both artists, though approaching their work from rigorous and distinct theoretical viewpoints, have made an important contribution to feminist art production. Their most obvious commonality is their commitment to feminist discourse manifested in ongoing and in-depth series of work employing, among other devices, photographs and text.

Mary Kelly's previous work, *Post Partum Document*, drew on discourses of feminism and psychoanalysis specifically Lacanian to chart her relationship to her son. Mary Kelly's current project, *Interim*, while drawing on psychoanalytic theory, layers themes of feminism and postmodernism to address in her words "midlife-an intervening moment between two conditions referred to as young and old." The ongoing project *Interim*, is planned in four parts. Part I, *Corpus*, explores representation of the body - how it is shaped socially and psychically in the interim moment of aging. ¹ *Corpus*, was begun in 1984 and consists of 30 plexiglass panels, each measuring 4 feet by 3 feet, of paired images and text. *Corpus* is shown in an edited version at LACE.

I want to thank the many people who helped to bring this exhibition to fruition: Kraig Cavanaugh, Robert Levine, Pat Nickell, Jane Rubin, Irene Ghepherd, Martha La Mair, Ron Griffin, Martin Kersels, who assisted in the building and mounting of the installation; Lorraine Wild and her assistant Patricia Osborn who created the design for this catalog; the staff and exhibition committee of LACE (listed in this catalog) who have committed countless hours to our programs, in particular Rita McBride for organizing every aspect of this exhibition. I especially want to thank Mary Kelly for giving us the opportunity to premiere her work in Los Angeles.

Joy Silverman
Executive Director

¹ M. Kelly, "Interim "(Part I), Catalog (Edinburgh: Fruitmarket Gallery/London Riverside Studios/Cambridge: Kettle's Yard Gallery, 1986).

MARY KELLY

Born in 1941 in Minnesota, Studied in Florence, Italy, and at St. Martins School of Art in London. Taught at University of London, Goldsmiths College, 1978-87. Artists-in-Residence, Cambridge University 1985-86. Visiting Artist, Whitney Museum Independent Study Program since 1985. Currently teaching at California Institute of the Arts in Valencia.

Awards

Arts Council Award, 1977
Lina Garnade Memorial Foundation Award, 1978
Greater London Arts Association Visual Arts Award, 1980
NEA Fellowship, 1987

Publications by the Artist

"Sexual Politics", *Framing Feminism*, ed. Griselda Pollock, Routledge & Kegan, Paul, London/Boston 1987
Post-Partum Document', Routledge & Kegan, Paul, London/Boston, 1983
"Desiring Images/Imaging Desire", *Wedge*, 6, 1984
"Reviewing Modernist Criticism," (reprint), *Art after Modernism*, New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York; D.R. Godine, Boston, 1984
"Mary Kelly in Conversation with Laura Mulvey," *Afterimage*, 8, 1986
Interim, catalog with essay by Laura Mulvey, Fruitmarket Gallery, 1985
"Invisible Bodies," *New Formations*, no.2, 1987

One-Woman Exhibitions

1976 Institute of Contemporary Arts New Gallery, London
1977 Museum of Modern Art, Oxford
1979 University Gallery, Leeds
New 57 Gallery, Edinburgh,
1981 Anna Leonowens Gallery, Nova Scotia
College of Art and Design, Halifax (Nova Scotia)
1982 George Paton Gallery, Melbourne (Australia)
University Art Museum, Brisbane (Australia)
1985 The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh
1986 A Space, Toronto (Ontario)

Kettles Yard Gallery, University of Cambridge
Riverside Studios, London,
Mary Kelly :Interim
1988 McNeil Gallery, Philadelphia

Group Exhibitions

1978 Whitechapel Art, London, Art for Society traveled to Ulster Museum, Belfast
Hayward Gallery, London, *Hayward Annual '78*
1979 ARC, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris, *Un Certain Art Anglais*
Hetzler, Muller & Schurr, Struttgart
Europa '79
Haags Gemeentemuseum, The Hague,
Feministische Kunst International
1980 Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, *Issue: Social Strategies by Woman Artists*
1981 Bonner Kunstverein and Gallery Magers, Bonn, *Typisch Frau*
Biuro Wystaw Catalogue
Artystycznuch, Cracow, 9th Cracow Meetings
1982 Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, *Vision in Disbelief: 4th Biennale of Sydney*
1983 Protetch McNeil, New York, *The Revolutionary Power of Women's Laughter*; traveled to Art Culture Resource Center, Toronto and Washington and the College Art Gallery, Maryland
1984 Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, *The Critical Eye/I*
City of Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery and Ikon Gallery, *The British Art Show*
1986 Collins Gallery University of Strathclyde, *Identity/Desire : Representing the Body*
Artists Space, New York, *The Fairy Tale: Politics, Desire and Everyday Life*
Institute of Contemporary Art, London, *State of the Art*
1987 Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, *The British Edge*
Whitney Museum of American Art at Philip Morris, *The Viewer as Voyeur*
Art Gallery of Ontario, *Propositions: Work from the Permanent Collections*
Postmasters Gallery, New York, group exhibition

LACE**Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions**

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Sunday 12:00-5:00

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