TUESDAY, OCTOBER 11 – TUESDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2011

EMBODIED
LAURIE KAPLOWITZ | STACY LATT SAVAGE
This exhibition is made possible thanks to the generous support of the Gary David Goldberg ’66 and Diana Meehan Endowment for the Arts. Given Brandeis University’s commitment to the liberal arts and to excellence in teaching, the Women’s Studies Research Center (WSRC) is proud to showcase the work of two distinguished artist/teachers, Laurie Kaplowitz and Stacy Latt Savage. Both have been recognized as successful practitioners in their respective artistic disciplines and as celebrated educators. I am fortunate to have worked with both Kaplowitz and Savage as an MFA student at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, where they both teach. Their commitment to their artistic practice combined with their dedication to their students was an inspiration to a late-coming prospective artist with an inclination toward academia, such as I was. Both Kaplowitz and Savage demonstrated to me, through their impressive activity in the studio and their thoughtful approach to teaching, that life as a working artist was attainable, and even more so, desirable.

I am thrilled to exhibit the work of these two talented women whose examination of the figure offers fresh, compelling perspectives on female beauty and identity. Kaplowitz’s paintings of bedecked iconic heads are richly textured in both surface and content, raising questions about our relationship to nature, feminine standards of beauty, and the universal nature of adornment. Savage’s stripped-down, emotionally laden sculptural forms ask viewers to contemplate what is at the core of being human and what is essential to being female. All of these issues and questions are central to feminist inquiry and pedagogy, the WSRC’s fundamental mission.

FROM THE CURATOR

MICHELE L’HEUREUX

Founded in 2001, the Women’s Studies Research Center at Brandeis University and the Kniznick Gallery which is situated at its core have a long history of offering feminist art exhibits to the public. We have approached in depth women’s experiences in many different countries (including Mexico, Rwanda, India, and Nigeria) and we have addressed particular issues of concern to women (being stateless, affluence leading to ennui, sex trafficking, and many more.) This show explores feminist art from a different angle; it is not about a specific place or a specific problem. Rather, it builds on the strong tradition of women artists using their bodies to make art (such as Hanna Wilke) or making art that depicts bodies or body parts (such as Kiki Smith). The female body has been central to the resurgence of women’s movements from the 1960s to the present.

Whether the discussion is about taking control of our bodies in the reproductive rights debate, or understanding our bodies in everyday life (Our Bodies, Ourselves), feminists realize that in the case of women, the “body politic” has two meanings. At the WSRC, many of our 85 scholars do research related to the artistic themes explored in this exhibition. Psychologist Paula Doress-Worters is one of the originators of Our Bodies, Ourselves; photographer Karin Rosenthal depicts the intersection of women’s bodies and landscapes; and social critic Margaret Gullette examines the condition of being middle-aged and older in our society. Undoubtedly, having the “Embodied” exhibition and artists Laurie Kaplowitz and Stacy Latt Savage in our midst will enhance the scholarship and activism of the WSCR scholars and the entire Brandeis community.

INTRODUCTION

SHULAMIT REINHARZ, DIRECTOR, WOMEN’S STUDIES RESEARCH CENTER

This exhibition is made possible thanks to the generous support of the Gary David Goldberg ’66 and Diana Meehan Endowment for the Arts.
The beauty industry has long endorsed the idea that, unless it is physically "flawless," a woman's body is beautiful only if mediated by alluring cosmetics, jewelry, accessories, and stylish clothing. In a world dominated by this popular perception of beauty, painter Laurie Kaplowitz and sculptor Stacy Latt Savage exhibit a fresh approach to the female form and feminine beauty through a series of astonishing figurative oeuvres. Although beautifully crafted, their anomalous figures, on display at Brandeis University's Kniznick Gallery, do not fit within conventional ideals of the female form.

Stripping away basic markers of gender identity, hair, and clothing, Savage's sculptures encapsulate an expression of the female form that is neither flawless nor mediated by glamorous accents. Indeed, Savage shatters the ideal of the female body as a coherent entity. In her work, spine, intestines, bones, and veins—embodied in thickets of jagged metal strips, hydrocal, and wood—are exposed in the lower halves of sculptures that uphold perfectly intact and realistically crafted heads of clay and plaster. Transcending the confines of gender, Savage thus captures the essence of being human.

Taking a different stance toward the female form, Kaplowitz invites us to appreciate the natural means of beautification found in her favorite travel destinations: the remote areas of India's West Bengal, Orissa, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu regions. Surrounded by domesticated animals, the women in these rural settings go through daily rituals of applying paint, paste, and mud to their faces, while also adorning themselves with vegetation, animal bones, feathers, and plant fiber. This bodily ornament, Kaplowitz observes, extends as these women perform daily activities, carrying baskets of foodstuffs or silver jugs of water on their heads. Kaplowitz's female protagonists who conform to the classical ideal of symmetrical form (embodied in Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian Man) are garlanded with unconventional, lopsided embellishments. Kaplowitz thus turns her canvases into places where icons of the West peacefully intertwine with the flora and fauna of the East.

While driven by their own uniquely personal views and private sensations, Kaplowitz and Savage inevitably—if not, perhaps, inadvertently—bring to mind pioneers who have long challenged widespread notions of (female) beauty. Moving away from the concept of ideal beauty as flawless and shying away from placing the beautiful in the flesh—situating it instead in the mind—Savage evokes Emmanuel Kant’s arguments about the nature of beauty in his Critique of Judgment and recalls James Joyce's semi-autobiographical accounts of creating an independent aesthetics in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.

Turning to Kaplowitz’s eyeless women, one is reminded of Toni Morrison’s The Bluest Eye, in which racialized standards of female physical beauty are examined and probed. Similarly, Kaplowitz persuades us to question the psychological strategies that are employed to sell commercial products as a means to achieve outermost feminine beauty. In this sense, Kaplowitz concurs with the long-held feminist standpoint that regards beautification as perverted if it is for the male gaze alone. Above all, through her poignant hybrid organisms—composed of female corporeality, foliage, and animal flesh—Kaplowitz invites us to reconsider the polarized fixities of human and animal, profane and sacred, pure and impure. In fact, one wonders whether she intended to allude to Mary Douglas’s focal argument in Purity and Danger: that is, those things that are stigmatized as “polluted” and “ugly” are not necessarily detrimental to human well-being and sanity, but rather to the conventional social orders (in this case, the very structure of capitalism’s beauty industry).

Ultimately, the fabricated women of Kaplowitz and Savage take us to a paradoxical world, wherein ‘feminine beauty’ is simultaneously investigated and problematized.

EMBODIED: IDEAS AND IDEALS OF THE FEMALE FORM

PAMELA KARIMI, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF ART HISTORY
COLLEGE OF VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS, UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS DARTMOUTH

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PAMELA KARIMI
LAURIE KAPLOWITZ

GAZELLE CARAPACE
acrylic on board, 2011, 40”h x 30”w

KINGFISHER VEIL
acrylic on board, 2011, 40”h x 30”w

FLORIBUNDA
acrylic on board, 2011, 36”h x 36”w

BUTTERFLY SHADE
acrylic on board, 2011, 24”h x 18”w
“Stripping away basic markers of gender identity, hair, and clothing, Savage’s sculptures encapsulate an expression of the female form that is neither flawless nor mediated by glamorous accents.”

PAMELA KARIMI
NESTLE
hydrocal and wood, 2010-11, 21"h x 13"w x 48"d

KINDLING
hydrocal and steel, 2010, 67"h x 15"w x 10"d

PUSH
bronze and steel, 2010, 62"h x 20"w x 56"d

ENVELOPED
bronze and wood, 2010, 93"h x 11"w x 7"d
LAURIE KAPLOWITZ

Laurie Kaplowitz earned her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Boston University and her Master of Fine Arts degree from American University. She is a Chancellor Professor in Painting in the College of Visual and Performing Arts at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth.

Kaplowitz is represented by the CaldwellSnyder Gallery in New York and San Francisco, the Colhée Patrick Gallery in Dallas, TX, and Fresh Paint in Los Angeles. Her work has been exhibited at the Fogg Museum at Harvard University, deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum, Fitchburg Art Museum, Fuller Craft Museum, and the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, among numerous other museums and galleries.

Professor Kaplowitz’s work has been reviewed in Art News, the Boston Globe, the Boston Herald, Art New England, and the Dallas Morning Times. Her work is collected nationally and internationally.

STACY LATT SAVAGE

Stacy Latt Savage received her Bachelor of Arts degree from Wells College and her Master of Fine Arts degree from Cornell University. She is currently an Associate Professor of Fine Arts at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth.

Latt has exhibited her work at the deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum, Skokie Sculpture Park, Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Fuller Craft Museum, and Guilford Handcraft Center, among many other museums and galleries. She was awarded a commission for the Holocaust Memorial in Buttonwood Park, New Bedford, MA.

Latt has also been a visiting artist in several residency programs, including the Yew Tree Farm Iron Residency, Suffolk, England; John Michael Kohler Arts-Industry Program; Watershed Center for Ceramic Arts; and Franconia Sculpture Park. Latt’s sculpture has been reviewed in the Boston Globe, the Boston Herald, and Art New England, and she was included in an episode of CBS Sunday Morning.