

Appropriation, Information, and Cyborgs: An Interview with Michele Fiedler

By **Mack Carlisle**, www.orartswatch.org

January 19th, 2017

This past Sunday, January 15, amid Portland's latest snowpocalypse, I had the pleasure walking through the current exhibition, "Oh Time Your Gilded Pages," with Michele Fiedler, Disjecta's sixth Curator-in-Residence. Fiedler is a curator and writer based in Mexico City, where she is the Curator at Sala de Arte Publico Siqueiros. Born in Puerto Rico, she received an MA in Curatorial Practice from California College of the Arts.

Guided by the artwork of Adriana Minoliti and Bobbi Woods in the exhibition, we discussed media representations, marketing, appropriation, posters, and porn. We also talked about the thread connecting Fiedler's four Disjecta exhibitions, information, and what to expect from the remainder of her year in residence. Midway through our conversation, artist Adriana Minoliti walked in and topics turned toward installation, cyborgs, sex, and science fiction.

Exhibition: Oh Time Your Gilded Pages

(magazines, posters, adds, porn, interior design, perfume, jewels, movies, and cyborgs)

Disjecta: 8371 N Interstate Avenue

Artists: Adriana Minoliti and Bobbi Woods

Curator: Michele Fiedler

Showing: through February 26, 2017

Gallery Hours: Friday-Sunday, 12-5pm

The golden glow of the gilded works and the warmth of the rose-colored wall suffused our time together with a little special magic, perhaps felt most in contrast to the cold outside.

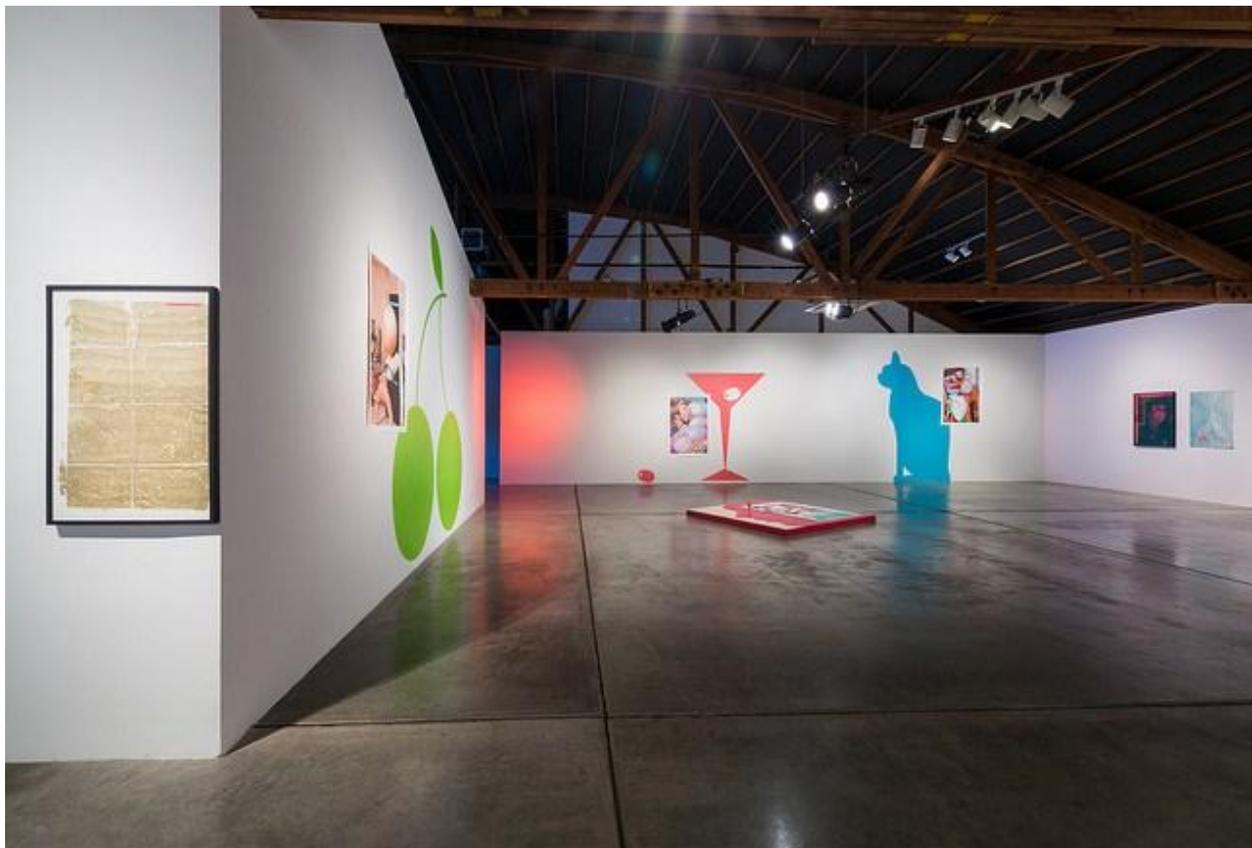
Maybe it makes sense for you to just tell me a little about the current show to start with.

Michele Fiedler: Okay. So, I took the four exhibitions as a series. In that way I could work with less artists in each show, and deconstruct the whole concept throughout the year. I've been dealing with deconstruction of information formats: popular culture, such as music, videos, and movies, and more cultural forms such as books. The first show had an installation of 40 pages of the *Communist Manifesto* (a piece by Anna Gray + Ryan Wilson Paulsen), for example, so it was all the objects mentioned throughout those 40 pages. I think that's the clearest example of the visualization of the concept of the whole show.

So in this one, I wanted to work with these two artists who both use appropriation. I'm more interested here in that artistic format: the appropriation of images. What they do with them, well, it's a whole other thing, it's their practice. But Bobbi [Woods], for example, is appropriating images from posters from mostly movies, mostly comedic soft porn like *Porky's*, and then real porn movies like *Pussy Talk* and *Liquid Assets*. And all of the text that she has, I'm sure she wrote some of it, but that's mostly appropriated from different advertisements, academic articles, different posts on Facebook—you know it's a little bit of everything. It's really nice to read through them. They're appropriated words. You get to see the language that is used to sell something, and that was very much something that we were trying to get through in this show.

I love the idea that you're not just curating individual shows, but that you're viewing the whole year as almost like one continuous curated show.

Yes, exactly. It's good because it gives you time to really really develop a concept. Instead of having smaller works on the wall that follow your theme, you're really able to commission artists to do new things and to develop bigger work. And you still are not missing everyone you wanted to work with regarding that concept.



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And so then, Adriana, she appropriates from porn magazines from the ‘70s and ‘80s, gay porn magazines. This is the first time she’s done this installation, so I’m very excited, to see the murals behind them.

Right, these big flat graphic shapes.

Yes, and all of her work also deals with appropriating media such as painting and the classics of painting, and cartoons like the *Jetsons*, and interior design magazines. Or she rethinks the image, mostly of the female in them, and what they have been doing throughout history in painting. In cartoons, you know the Jetsons are all like super sexy girls. And in interior design the woman becomes part of the prized possessions inside of this architecture interior design magazine. So there’s the beautiful couch, the beautiful bar, and there’s your wife holding a martini.

One more possession.

Yeah, it’s one more trophy. Exactly. I mean of course for a perfect male lifestyle. But she works very much following ideas from Donna Haraway’s *Cyborg Manifesto*. She starts constructing, or making all these figures, or these sexy geometrical maybe-feminine figures in her work. And in here it’s been more men that she’s been turning into cyborgs. [Referring to a piece with a man whose mouth is firmly planted on a sphere.] He’s kissing another guy in the real image.



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It seems like a unique opportunity that at Disjecta you’re getting to view the whole year in this singular way. Broken up, but still as a continuous concept. Do you get to work like that when you’re in Mexico City? How do you feel like your experience here has been different or similar from your experiences back home?

It’s been super different from where I work in Mexico City. I work in a museum. And what is similar is that we mostly commission works by artists. But as far as the curation of a whole program, what I do for Mexico City is not following a concept like it’s been

here. So it gives a lot of creative freedom, you know, to be able to do that in the series.

Did you have the concept in mind when you first decided to come to Disjecta, or has it evolved since coming here?

It has evolved. It's very similar to what I applied with. Many of the artists are similar, but maybe the shows have been a bit smaller. I've included fewer artists so they can have more space. But I've always been, since I wrote my thesis, very interested in information, and in many many many ways. So it was something I really wanted to do for a long time, to see how that could develop into exhibitions, because it's much easier writing about it maybe, about theory of information, than to put it in a show. It was interesting to experiment with how that would come together in the space in a whole year of shows.

In the next show, for example, what I'm doing with information is thinking about the archive. I do love going to archives and digging through them. I try to do an archive show almost every year. So this time, I went to the Getty, to the Harry Smith Archives. It was super nice. It's crazy because it's more like I'm the one receiving the information. We can talk about the archive, but we won't have archival pieces here because we don't have the qualities for it—such as light and temperature control—that you need. But it's important that it is researched and that the show will come from the research and archive.

So if the work from the archive itself won't be here, what will be here?

So, another nice exercise, I asked the archivist, Rani Singh, who made the archive and knows everything about Harry Smith, to collaborate on the curation of the show. She worked with Smith for the last years of his life, and she knows everything. Harry Smith was born in Portland, and I thought that was very important since there hasn't been a bigger show of his here. His videos have been shown in apparently very good shows put on by Mississippi Records, but we wanted to do a little bit more.

I think we will have some sound pieces that are called "Movies for Blind People." They are field recordings from different folk concerts in Prospect Park, a barbershop in Harlem, riding on a train to a party, but they're really really beautiful. So we may have that. We may have some of his lost jazz paintings. There are only photos of them, so we

may print them out, which would be great. We can have some video too, I'm trying to see. But not only Harry Smith but the idea of research, such as who was influencing Harry Smith in the '40s, for example. There's a lot of beautiful videos that I think may be here.

And then his archivist told me that there's this professor of anthropology that knew Harry since they were super young. He went around with Harry doing the recordings of different people here, different indigenous people here, and they used to think of themselves as anthropologists together. So maybe he will come into the equation, which would be nice. And then there's going to be a few contemporary artists too.



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That sounds great. I'm excited about the rest of the year.

I'm excited too, but I'm sad that there's only one left.

[Adriana Minoliti enters and joins our conversation.]

I'm really enjoying the installation of the exhibition, that there are pieces that are framed, there are pieces that aren't framed, there're folded pieces, layered pieces, pieces overlapping, on the floor, leaning against the wall... And the way that creates a more dynamic experience for viewing the show.

Michele Fiedler (MF): Yeah, that's good. That was the idea. And your work [referring to Minoliti] is always super dynamic in the way it's installed.

Adriana Minoliti (AM): Yeah, there is always something that I try to put in, to break the white cube, the regular painting...

MF: Yeah, me to, I work a lot with installation and videos, and I'm not a very white cube person at all.

AM: Yeah, we were talking that the space has a lot of flow through it. If you connect the dots it's really a lot of up and down.



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There's a doubling of shapes and repetition of the different forms. Like the the glass gets repeated, the olive gets repeated, and these circular, bulbous forms kind of pull you through.

AM: Yes.

Why did you choose to use porn images?

AM: This is part of a series I started in 2014. I started working before with geometry and abstraction, but applying queer theory and feminist critique. Since then my work was always a mix of geometry and sex, and this series is the most literal. In that way I am using the image but replacing human parts for geometrical parts, but also making them look more galactic or kind of sci-fi. For example, yesterday we were talking about the black rectangle as the monument in Stanley Kubrick's *2001 Space Odyssey*. I had that idea when I did the figure, but I was trying to make it not so obvious, but there're some remaining sci fi references. That's why we talk about cyborgs: transforming these porn actors into very weird geometrical cyborgs is part of the idea of this series.

And then the cat? There's almost this playful side to it, too.

AM: Well, the wall paintings are new. I always try to do something on the walls, to make an accessory to the piece that I'm presenting. For example, the wall is all painted in one color, or there are some stickers, or there is something to try to break the regular order of when you contemplate a piece on a wall. And this time I wanted to try putting colors on the walls but using more layers of information by giving them shapes. This is my first time playing with the scale and also using this graphic synthesis.

It definitely disrupts the standard expectation of a gallery space.

AM: I took the trick from old magazines, but also decoration from the '70s, but more psychedelic. I took that profile from a hair salon from the '70s, which had those weird images on the walls. I thought about the cat and the martini glass and the cherries as sexy elements—I thought those shapes were good accessories to this particular series.

How do you feel that your work and Bobbi Woods' work interact together? I think one of the strengths of the show is, were there no descriptive wall text in the front, I might not have realized that it was two artists and where the demarcation is—the text pulls through, there're very punchy graphic works, appropriated works from magazines, and so forth.



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AM: Yeah yeah, we're both also using posters and pictures from movies from the '70s and sex. And there is some play with the scale of objects, painted objects, and fake objects. “My Pleasure My Business” I think is also a good change, an intermezzo.

I also really like “Man Eater” in the context of this piece with the man making out with the bulbous form.

AM: There are a lot of things that you can discover that we didn't plan. It's amazing. It's like a very special game.

I love that about art and simultaneous invention, when people are totally independently coming up with similar things at the same time.

AM: Synchronicity. Yeah, that's part of the magic.