

ART

BLACKBOOK PRESENTS A *WOMAN'S RIGHT TO PLEASURE* AT SOTHEBY'S

A Book And Exhibition Celebrate The Dimensions Of Female Desire

BY SHANA NYS DAMBROT



Mystical, delicate, ethereal; bold, brash, satisfied; abstract, symbolic, organic; seductive, whimsical, dangerous; empowering, funny, unsettling; intergenerational, inclusive, intimate; erotic, personal and political — featuring work by pioneering women artists from art history and today, *A Woman's Right To Pleasure* offers a radical perspective on what it's like to be female.

Currently the inspiration for a major show at Sotheby's in Beverly Hills, before it was a hybrid exhibition, *A Woman's Right*

to Pleasure was a best-selling art book featuring some 80 artists and contributions from a host of writers. Like the book, the related exhibition explores how the female experience is inherently political, pushing back against the ways in which the power and freedom represented by female desire is objectified, shamed, and feared by various aspects of patriarchal society. The idea is that when women assert themselves in the Pleasuredome hierarchy, kingdoms tend to topple.

It's not that men aren't welcome in this equation, in fact there are some men in

the show being very, um, attentive to their partners, courtesy of painter Alexandra Rubinstein — it's that many women artists have each in their individual styles, mediums, and contexts felt called to undermine what Art History terms “the male gaze.” This can be understood as how the complex web of social and economic forces which have determined patriarchal social structures have expressed in, among other ways, the prevalence of museums filled with pictures of naked women made by men. Partly because women artists were rarely valued or platformed and partly



Georgia O'Keeffe,
Canna Series,
1918/20. Courtesy
BlackBook Presents
and Sotheby's.



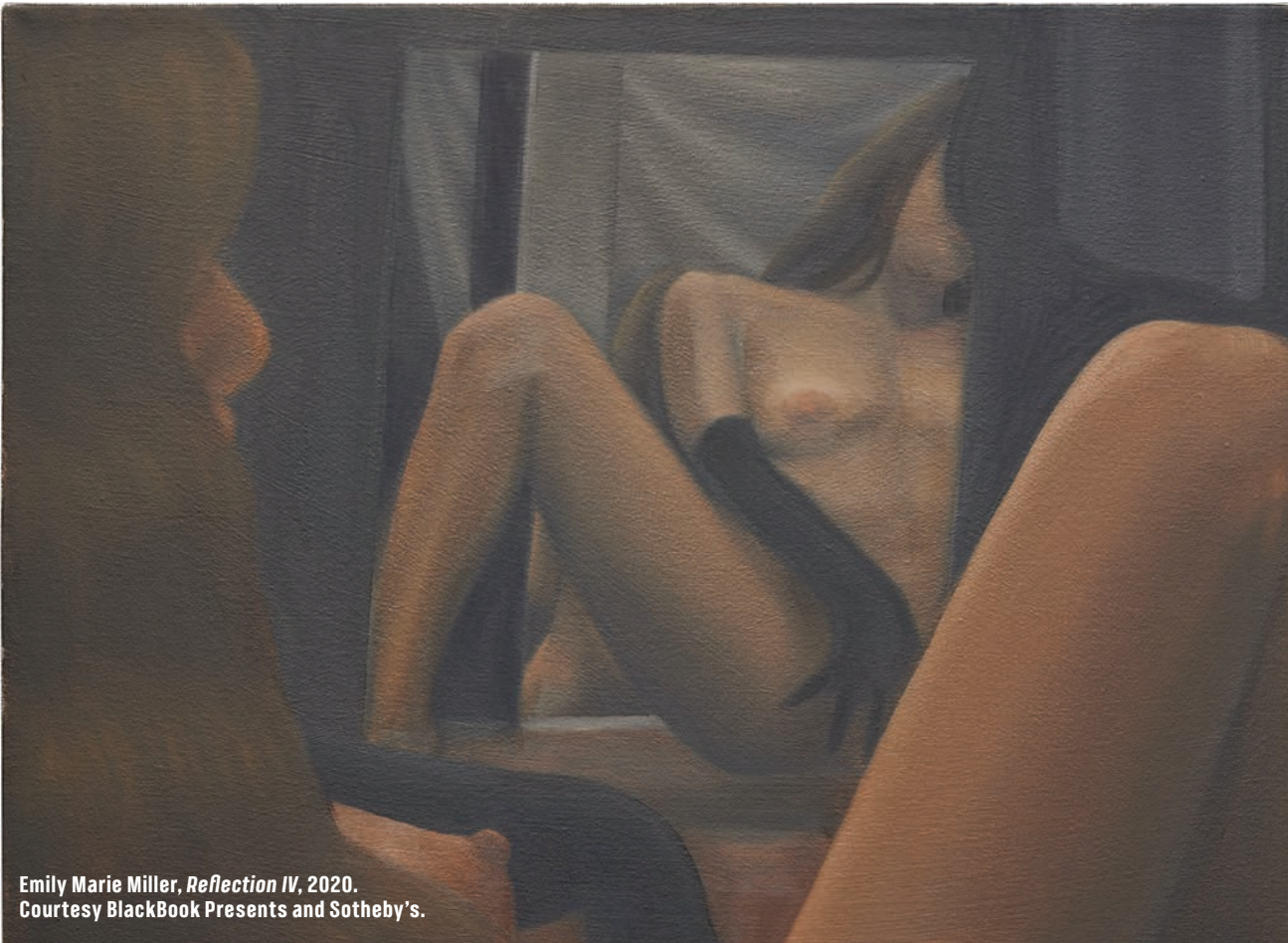
Betty Tompkins, *Little Girl*, 2019.
Courtesy the artist, PPOW Gallery,
New York, BlackBook Presents and
Sotheby's.

because even if they were to be, it's not as simple as a switcheroo wherein women would get to paint naked men and call it even — assuming that's what women even wanted to do, which mostly it is not.

It's when women turn such a gaze on each other and on themselves that the resetting of the power dynamics of desire become truly progressive and culturally subversive. But also, when women assert their right to claim and source their own pleasure and bodily autonomy — not to mention equal pay and more space on gallery walls and in executive conference rooms, or being able to walk down the street alone or, you know, be on Twitter — it can attract a five-alarm misogyny backlash. Well, those folks are not going to like this glorious project at all, not one bit.

“The recent overturning of *Roe v. Wade* only further solidifies this reality. In this context, pleasure is not only radical,” writes project Director Alexandra Weiss, “it's imperative.”

The remarkably eclectic array of art in-




Emily Marie Miller, *Reflection IV*, 2020.
Courtesy BlackBook Presents and Sotheby's.



Katherina Olschbaur, *Vision (or how I became part of society)*, 2019. Courtesy BlackBook Presents and Sotheby's.

Saville, Carolee Schneemann, Tschabalala Self, Cindy Sherman, Penny Slinger, Mickalene Thomas, Betty Tompkins, Ellen Von Unwerth, Carrie Mae Weems, and many more. Essays, excerpts, epigraphs and commentary are by Erica Jong, Roxane Gay, Kathy Acker, Pussy Riot's Nadya Tolokonnikova, Natasha Stagg and Stoya, Simone de Beauvoir, Eve Ensler, Betty Friedan, Audre Lorde, Anaïs Nin, Naomi Wolf, and others.

The book's second edition is available now, and the exhibition is on view through August 12 in Beverly Hills and online; sothebys.com; blackbookpresents.com. 



Judy Chicago, *Birth Trinity*, 1985. Courtesy BlackBook Presents and Sotheby's.

cludes explicit work that deals with the reality of women's bodies (Marilyn Minter, Cecily Brown); abstract work that explores the fractal visual source code of everything (Louise Bourgeois, Loie Hollowell, Georgia O'Keeffe); witty and romantic work (Jessie Mackison, Emily Marie Miller); surrealist (Leonor Fini, Katherina Olschbaur) and diaristic (Nan Goldin) work; and work by several artists with no fucks left to give and a flair for the dramatic (Tracey Emin, Penny Slinger, Mary Beth Edelson). In painting, sculpture, photography, performance (documentation), and collage, and importantly across all the waves of feminism and even from the decades before the movement claimed that

moniker, *A Woman's Right to Pleasure* not only makes the case for equality in the libido as much as in everything else, it does so in leading by example.

A Woman's Right To Pleasure contributors include: Nina Chanel Abney, Marina Abramović, Ghada Amer, Judith Bernstein, Louise Bourgeois, Cecily Brown, Judy Chicago, Renee Cox, Vaginal Davis, Tamara De Lempicka, Marlene Dumas, Tracey Emin, Mary Beth Edelson, Leonor Fini, Nan Goldin, Loie Hollowell, Jenny Holzer, Hayv Karahman, Jessie Makinson, Marilyn Minter, Alice Neel, Georgia O'Keeffe, Katherina Olschbaur, Meret Oppenheim, Alexandra Rubinstein, Faith Ringgold, RIP Bambi, Jenny



Alexandra Rubinstein, *Top Cunt*, 2018.
Courtesy BlackBook Presents and Sotheby's.