

CRITICISM ► EXHIBITIONS

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Girlies, Flowers, and Vegetable Delights: Marjorie Strider Rediscovered

by Robert C. Morgan

Marjorie Strider at Hollis Taggart Galleries

March 8th – April 2nd, 2011

958 Madison Avenue, between 75th and 76th streets,

New York City, 212 570 5786



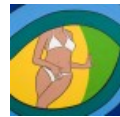
Marjorie Strider, *Green Triptych*, 1963. Acrylic paint, laminated pine on Masonite panels, 77-1/2 x 94-3/4 x 8 inches. Courtesy of Hollis Taggart Galleries

One advantage to having a downturn in the art market is that critics, gallerists, curators, and collectors have an opportunity to reflect and, perhaps, rediscover what they have missed during the infestation of mediocrity we have endured over the past few years. It takes a hefty dose of mediocrity to jump start an art market barnacled in the doldrums of selling bear rugs and blowjobs as the recent SCOPE Art Fair has made abundantly clear. Yet once we get a tingling – ever so slight – that quality is somewhere on another horizon, this will appear a hopeful omen (for some) that things are beginning to change. In such a period, the tendency to resurrect works of art that would have scarcely, if ever, made it through the portholes of acceptance in more lucrative times is reassuring.

Ironically, Marjorie Strider's hybrid paintings, fraught with protruding buds, butts, breasts, and luscious red lips, are being seen collectively at a gallery for the first time since their exhibition at Pace in 1965. These are being shown along with a more recent group of bathers and facial close-ups of women that bridge the old with the new. For those counting, it's been 45 years since most of the early formative works have been shown or seen. Of the recent work, the alluring large-scale close-ups seem closer to the present than the full-figured bathers. In the sixties, Strider was a formal artist – akin to Roy Lichtenstein – who employed Pop imagery in her paintings. She considered the gargantuan carved petals in *Red Roses* (1962), the alluring bikini breasts in *Come Hither* (1963), and the fertile asparagus stalks bound with pink rubbers in *Green Vertical* (1964), as all basically coming from the same family. In that the paintings employ carved reliefs, they are heavy. Painted with bright colors on laminated Masonite, the “built-out” elements are either in pine, resin-covered foam or, later, polyurethane. They are wonderfully conceived and executed. Another major work from this period, *Green Triptych* (1963), reveals a standing bathing beauty adorned in a green standing bikini. Strider has never concealed the fact that these came from *Playboy* or other girlie magazines. What makes these images ironic, even subversively Pop, is that the artist's formal and art historical knowledge did not ignore, for example, the influence of Venetian altarpieces. In such works, including *Girl with a Rose* (1963), the passage between Renaissance-style figuration and portraiture is transformed into a full-fledged secular Decameron, reminiscent of the tales of Boccaccio.



Marjorie Strider, *Girl with Rose*, 1963. Acrylic on Masonite panel, 45 x 20 x 2 inches. Courtesy of Hollis Taggart Galleries



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A great deal has been made of Strider being a woman in a male-dominated art movement of the 1960s. Issues of gender and feminism surround the question of why has this artist and her work been so intensively ignored. While attitudes in marketing contemporary art have historically favored men to the exclusion of women, this has most directly manifested itself in former connections between art media and the market. There are obvious ploys in making contemporary art easy to grasp, and therefore saleable. One such ploy is the association of select artists to one another, in the way, for example, that putting together Warhol, Lichtenstein, Wesselmann, Oldenberg and Rosenquist into one powerful gallery in the 1960s relegated Rosalyn Drexler, Robert Indiana, Mel Ramos, and Marjorie Strider, among others (such, for instance, as those seen in the important exhibition, "Seductive Subversion: Women Pop Artists 1958-1968" at the Brooklyn Museum last Fall) to the sidelines of attention. The problem here is also a critical and curatorial one, where critics fail to bring these artists into the dialogue and where curators fail to make aesthetic connections that are not entirely within the scope of the famous five.

However, the marketing issue is not only a gender issue, and the gender issue is not necessarily an isolated content issue. Thus, it becomes problematic in trying to argue the case internally that Strider was a feminist whose work throughout her career was severely focused on this one idea (or ideology). Having known the artist, and admired her work since the mid-1970s, I have always found her attention focused on her work, which I believe to be original in its subject matter and experimental in its application of materials. Intriguing in its demeanor, her energetic and insightful work is never without a certain paradoxical force and humility, intellectually gratifying in opening new thresholds of understanding about the post-human condition and about the role of women in a highly mediated era. She has always believed in herself as an artist, which is one reason I am gratified that finally a glimmer of recognition has found its way in her direction. Marjorie Strider is an example to any artist, younger or older, regardless of gender or race, that to believe in your work is ultimately what counts, and never to give up doing or believing in what you feel your art requires.