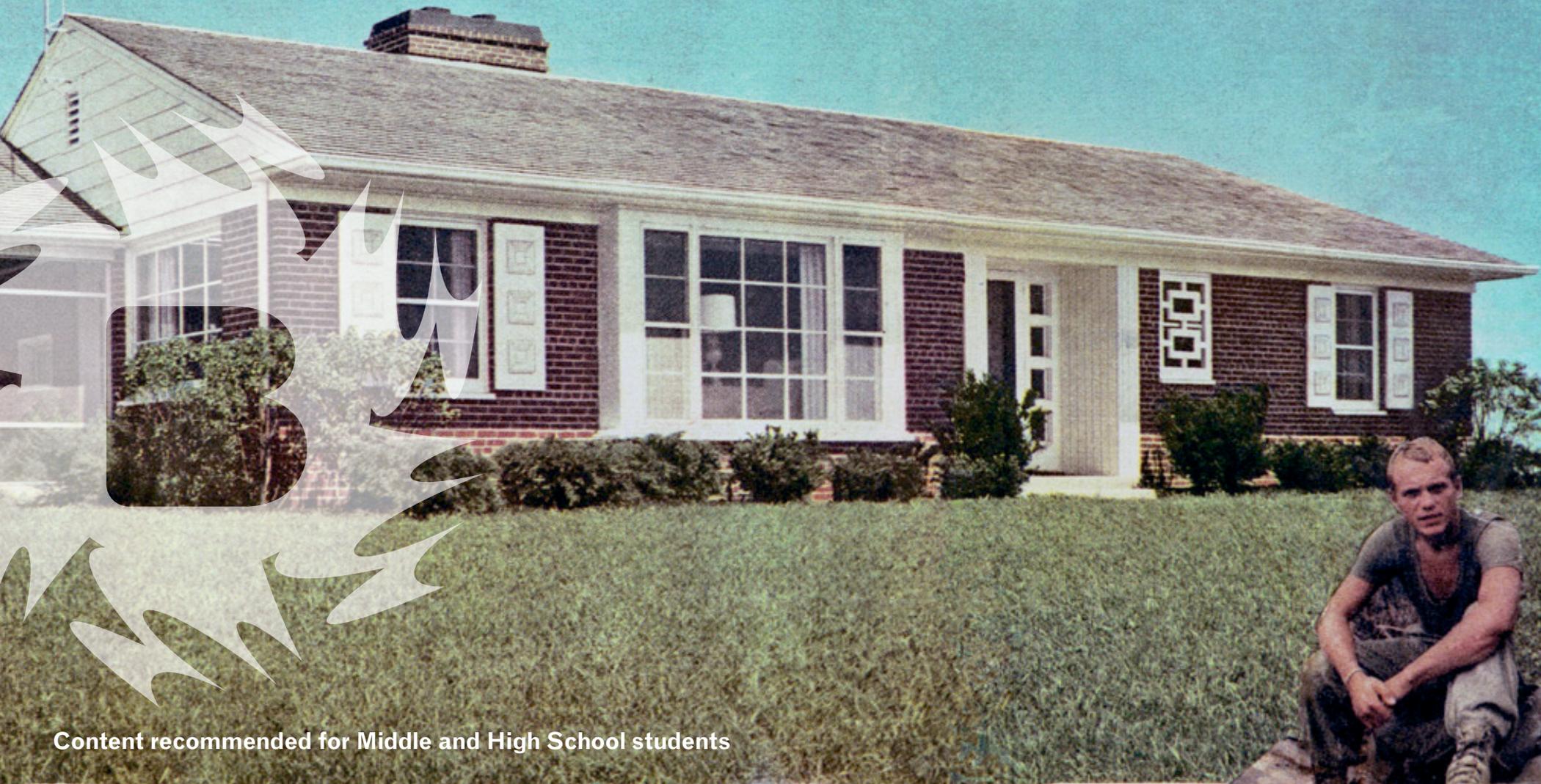


Brooklyn Museum

Teacher Resource Packet

Seductive Subversion: Women Pop Artists, 1958–1968

October 15, 2010–January 9, 2011



Content recommended for Middle and High School students

Seductive Subversion

Women Pop Artists, 1958–1968

About the Exhibition

Seductive Subversion: Women Pop Artists, 1958–1968 examines the impact of women artists on the male-dominated Pop art movement. It widens the narrow definition of Pop by bringing to the fore the important female artists who worked in the Pop idiom during this period. In addition to artworks by Martha Rosler, the exhibition features more than fifty artworks by Chrissy, Niki de Saint Phalle, Rosalyn Drexler, Marisol, Yayoi Kusama, Jann Haworth, Vija Celmins, Lee Lozano, Marjorie Strider, Idelle Weber, and Joyce Wieland, among others.

About Pop Art

“Pop” comes from the word *popular* and refers to popular culture. The Pop art movement emerged in the mid-1950s and had established a significant place in the art world by the mid-1960s. Pop artists blurred the lines between the fine arts, mass-communication media, and advertising by incorporating everyday objects and imagery into their work. While some artists represented the whimsical or mundane, other artists chose objects and pictures charged with social and political connotations. In the decade from 1958 through 1968, women working in the Pop art style included references to consumer culture—post-World War II domestic life, fashion trends, and entertainment—as well as to issues of sexuality, the growing women’s liberation movement, and, by the early and mid-sixties, the Vietnam War.

About the Artist

Martha Rosler (American, born 1943) creates photomontages (collages constructed from several photographs) by selecting components from different images, carefully cutting them out, and rearranging them. The final photo-collage is then photographed to create a novel image. Rosler’s

artworks raise questions about women’s and men’s roles in society and their relationship to family, mass culture, politics, and war. Her works challenge the status quo in ways both subtle and overt.

Rosler was born in Brooklyn and studied painting at the Brooklyn Museum Art School. She graduated from Brooklyn College in 1965 with a bachelor’s degree and received her MFA from the University of California, San Diego, in 1974. In addition to her photomontage work, Rosler creates videos, performances, and art installations (which are site-specific, three-dimensional artworks intended to transform particular indoor or outdoor spaces).

Descriptions of the Artworks

Tract House Soldier depicts a seated figure in the right foreground. A house stretches horizontally across the length of the composition behind this figure. There is open space to the left of the house in the far distance. Lining the front of the house are small shrubs while branches at the top left allude to the presence of a large tree. *Tract house* is a term for a home that looks like all the others in the area (also called cookie-cutter homes). The entire artwork is comprised of color images.



Family Portrait with Car includes three black-and-white figures standing in the foreground to the left-hand side of the composition. This triad is arranged with two figures standing toward the front, while the third, taller figure stands behind and reaches out and touches the two figures on their shoulders. All three look out toward the viewer and are positioned in front of a color picture of a yellow vehicle with a black-and-white background.



Old Bride/Bride Party includes three figures standing in the center of the composition occupying most of the pictorial space. The background is solid yellow. The figure on the left-hand side is wearing a white outfit and looks out toward the viewer. This figure is wearing a drawn veil and is holding something in her hand. The other two figures gaze toward her. The one in the center holds an object in her hand similar to that being held by the figure to her right. This entire artwork is comprised of color images.



First Lady (Pat Nixon) depicts a female figure standing in the center of an elaborately decorated room. She looks out toward the viewer. The walls of the room are painted yellow. Surrounding the figure are objects of luxury, including artworks, candelabras, and a fireplace. She is wearing a yellow outfit similar in color to the room. This artwork includes both black-and-white and color images.



Questions for Viewing

These questions may be used as the basis for a group discussion or independent writing.

Look at each artwork, one at a time. What do you notice?

Look closely at each of the figures. Consider the following questions. (Use visual evidence from the artwork to support your answer.)

What are they wearing?

What might be their racial or cultural identity?

How old might they be?

What emotion(s) do their facial expressions suggest?

What relationship might they have with each other?

What object(s) has the artist placed next to each figure? Describe these objects. What connections can you make between the object(s) and the figure(s)?

Locate the title of each artwork. Does the title chosen by the artist change or reinforce your initial perceptions of the artwork? What more does the title say about the artwork?

If the artist had a political message, what might the message be?

Look at the artworks as a series (a collection of related works). Consider the following questions.

What similarities do you notice? How are they different?

Each work is a portrait and contains an image of a man, a woman, or both: Based on your observations, what might the artist think about the roles of women and men in the 1960s? How are the expectations and lifestyles they have similar today? How are they different?

Provide a title for this series of artworks. Support your answer.

Which artwork do you find most interesting? Explain why.

Activities

Women's Studies Activity

Consider the possibility that each artwork illustrates a story about a different role women play in society. Some examples of these roles may include: daughter, caregiver, friend, lover, mother, student, sibling, spouse, working professional.

Now, think about the woman, or women, either present or absent in the artwork. Identify her role. What is her relationship to her family? What might her life be like? What feelings and emotions might she have about the role she routinely performs?

Make a chart with four columns. In the first column, list the woman's role. In the second column, list the benefits of having that role. In the third column, list the challenges. In the fourth column, list interesting points to consider: These could include the permanence or transitory nature of that role; an observation comparing the past versus the present day; or something you find fair or unjust. You may choose to focus on one artwork or make a chart for each of them.

Art Activity

Create a photomontage examining an issue that concerns men and women in the twenty-first century. Consider international affairs, as well as the choices and social norms that affect daily routines in the United States. Older photomontages made by Rosler were cut and glued by hand before being photographed; today, she uses a computer. Try creating a photomontage by hand with magazine clippings or use images from the Internet and a computer design program. Be sure to bring out your main idea. How will you express it visually to the viewer? Consider:

Color — Will you select black-and-white images, color, or a combination of the two?

Scale — Will your images be the same or difference sizes?

Layering — Which images will you place in the front? In the background? Will you overlap them or place them side by side?

Resources

Catherine de Zegher, editor. *Martha Rosler: Positions in the Life World*.

Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1999.

This book, containing essays on Rosler's work, was written to accompany her first retrospective exhibition.

This resource was written by Cheri Ehrlich, with assistance from Alexa Fairchild, Education Division; and Catherine Morris, Curator of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art.

Seductive Subversion: Women Pop Artists, 1958–1968 was organized by Sid Sachs for the Rosenwald-Wolf Gallery of The University of the Arts, Philadelphia. The Brooklyn Museum presentation is organized by Catherine Morris, Curator of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, Brooklyn Museum.

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Illustrated:

Martha Rosler (American, born 1943). *Tract House Soldier*, 1967–72. Photomontage, 20 x 24 in. (50.8 x 61 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York

Martha Rosler (American, born 1943). *Family Portrait with Car*, 1967–72. Photomontage, 20 x 16 in. (50.8 x 40.6 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York

Martha Rosler (American 1943). *Old Bride/Bride Party*, 1966–72. Photomontage, 20 x 16 in. (50.8 x 40.6 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York

Martha Rosler (American, born 1943). *First Lady (Pat Nixon)*, 1967–72. Photomontage, 20 x 24 in. (50.8 x 61 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Mitchell-Innes & Nash, New York

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200 Eastern Parkway, Brooklyn, NY 11238-6052
www.brooklynmuseum.org

