

On Message in the Outer Boroughs

The modest “From the Inside Out: Feminist Art Then & Now,” at St. John’s University in the far reaches of Queens, answered the question “what is feminist art?” (which seems to bedevil many exhibition organizers). Curator Claudia Sbrissa demonstrated, in this thoughtful gathering of quietly effective works, that it is gender-based art

approx. 22 by 30 inches; at St. John’s University.



with a political edge. In Jessica Plattner’s realist painting *Kid Gloves* (2005), a woman, her hands protectively sheathed, holds a baby; her slightly alarmed expression conveys clearly mixed feelings about motherhood. In a 2003 work, Joyce Kozloff recast a Gerhard Richter timeline graphing major artists’ lifespans, replacing his all-male roster with women’s names. Indeed, so nuanced is each work in reference to the topic at hand, there is ammunition for a seminar. Mira Schor’s charmingly primitivist painting *Goodbye Cal Arts* (1972) poses a mix of female figures in a formal landscape of cypresses and a pond—with penguins. (Class, discuss the California Institute of the Arts’s early Feminist Art Program and the role it played in generating the work in the current exhibition.)

Subtexts about gender and power that would be subdued in other contexts were made obvious here—say, in Barbara Zucker’s 1977 brass-and-conduit *Table Ruffle*. Composed of hardware parts, it conveys the vulnerability of a daisylike form on a wilting 10-inch stem. Intended as an inter-generational musing, the show presented numbers of younger artists doing original projects using new approaches. Tiffany Ludwig and Renee Piechocki, who call themselves Two Girls Working, hoping to stimulate discussion of feminist ideas without using the “f” word, travel nationwide interviewing women about what clothes make them feel powerful. (A sampling of answers was accessible on an audiobook via cellphone.) Cheryl Yun’s articles of “girlie” lingerie on hangers look tie-dyed and frivolous. Upon scrutiny, they reveal themselves to be topical: gampi tissue decorated with tiny inkjet images from politically tinged newspaper articles such as “U.S. Troops Get a Thank You from President Bush.”