WOMEN AND MOTORCYCLES:  
FEMINISM, PROPAGANDA AND PORNOGRAPHY

A Thesis
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in the
Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By
Carrie Tokarczyk Scoville, B.F.A

* * * * *

The Ohio State University
1999

Master's Examination Committee:

Robert Schwartz, Adviser

Pheoris West

Charles Massey, Jr.

Approved by

Adviser

Department of Art
ABSTRACT

This paper explores propaganda and pornography in the context of advocacy for women motorcyclists. It is the class association with motorcycles, pornography and propaganda, and the people who appreciate them, which has effectively excluded each of them from the realm of fine art. My artwork brings this subject matter into a gallery setting, resulting in a critical combination of issues and venues.

Another important aspect is the idea of appropriation. In this body of work, I have taken imagery and given it a subjectivity that was lacking in the source material.

I have created three series of paintings expressing these ideas. The "State" series gives background to the ideas of identity, time and place; the "Banners" are based directly on a style of propaganda; and the "Covered" series represents a synthesis of ideas, resulting in a blend of the visual and conceptual forms.
This thesis is dedicated to my family: the Scovilles, Tokars, Tokarczyks, Hobsons, Johnstons, Vedros, Castillo and Ross'.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank my committee, Robert Schwartz, Pheoris West, and Charles Massey, Jr. for their support and encouragement through this process.

Thank you Jenita Landrum-Bittles for your insight and positive outlook and thank you Cathy Ellis, Marthe Berlepsch and Donna Boggs for helping me every step of the way.

For their assistance in hanging my shows my thanks goes out to my friends Kim Barker, Erica Manville and Eric Sowell.
VITA

January 1, 1960............................... Born - Los Angeles, California

1981 ........................................... A.A., Los Angeles Valley College
               Los Angeles, California

1984 ........................................... B.F.A., San Francisco Art Institute
               San Francisco, California

1996 - 1998................................. Graduate Teaching Associate
               The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio

1997 ........................................... Skowhegan Fellow, Skowhegan, Maine

1998 ........................................... Artist in Residence, Lancaster Art Festival
               Lancaster, Ohio

PUBLICATIONS

Market Street Vendors, Market Street Art In Transit Program, San Francisco Art

Street Sheet, Coalition on Homelessness, San Francisco, California, 1996.

Broad Topics, The Women's Resource Center, University of California at Berkeley,
Berkeley, California, 1990.


Catalog of the Frederick R. Weismann Collection of Art, Frederick R. Weismann Foundation, Los Angeles, California, 1985.

San Francisco Art Institute Summer Catalog, San Francisco Art Institute, San Francisco, California, 1984.

San Francisco Art Institute Viewbook, San Francisco Art Institute, San Francisco, California, 1983.

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Art
   Studies in Painting/Drawing
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .................................................................................................................. ii

Dedication ................................................................................................................. iii

Acknowledgments ................................................................................................... iv

Vita .......................................................................................................................... v

List of Plates ........................................................................................................... viii

Introduction ............................................................................................................. 1

Background ........................................................................................................... 3

State Series ............................................................................................................ 6

Banners ............................................................................................................... 18

Covered Pieces ................................................................................................. 21

Conclusion ............................................................................................................ 25

Bibliography ........................................................................................................ 31

Appendix: Plates .............................................................................................. 32
# LIST OF PLATES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plate</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Exhibition overview</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Exhibition overview</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Untitled, charcoal on paper, 1997</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. <em>California and Ohio</em>, oil and acrylic on canvas, 1998</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. <em>North Dakota</em>, oil and acrylic on canvas and bed sheet, 1998</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. <em>South Dakota</em>, oil and acrylic on canvas and bed sheet, 1998</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII. <em>Oregon</em>, oil, acrylic and grommets on canvas, 1998</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII. Untitled, oil, acrylic and grommets on canvas and fabric, 1998</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IX. Untitled, oil, acrylic and grommets on bed sheet, 1998</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X. Untitled, oil, acrylic and grommets on canvas and fabric, 1998</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XI. Untitled, oil and shower curtain on canvas, 1998</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XII. Untitled, oil and pantyhose on canvas, 1998</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XIII. Untitled, acrylic and fabric on canvas, 1998</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XIV. Untitled, shower curtain and fabric on material, 1998</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

Propaganda and pornography. These banes of high culture hold a potential for critical dialogue rarely acknowledged. I argue that abiding by this bias holds us back from accepting who we are and what we can enjoy and desire or have the power to change. This paper explores propaganda and pornography in the context of advocacy for women motorcyclists. It is the class association of motorcycles, pornography and propaganda, and the people who appreciate them, which has effectively excluded each of them from the realm of fine art. My artwork brings this subject matter into a gallery setting which results in a critical combination of issues and venues (Plates I, II.)

Another important aspect is the idea of appropriation. In this body of work, I have taken imagery and given it a subjectivity that was lacking in the source material. Typically, pornographic images and those of motorcycles have been exclusively made by men for the male viewer. My paintings reverse that intent by taking those same images and altering them for the female viewer as well. In short, I am making objects to make the subject less objectified. This alteration is important for two reasons: I do not want the viewer to feel threatened or insulted by my paintings; second, it demonstrates just how easy it is to question and change our perceptions of these institutions.
I have created three series of paintings expressing these ideas. The “State” series gives background to the ideas of identity, time and place; the “Banners” are based directly on a style of propaganda; and the “Covered” series represents a synthesis of ideas resulting in a blend of the visual and conceptual forms.

These works are an exploration of subject matter and themes I either am personally involved with or have learned to respect through working on this project. They represent a link between my past, my present interests and my vision for the future. They form a body of work derived from human experience which is what gives them vitality, passion and urgency.

Throughout this process, I have realized many things about myself and how I interact with my subject matter and the world around me. These thoughts are expressed in this paper directly and described through the development of the artworks. Among them are ideas of structure, creation and self critique.

Although I take the subject matter seriously, I feel I have not succeeded if the viewer does not break out in laughter. I have found that humor, beauty and irony are the most effective ways of communicating critical thought in an accessible manner.
BACKGROUND

A lot of changes have taken place in my work since entering the Graduate program at The Ohio State University. I think the most significant is one of attitude toward my work and how I represent my thoughts. Previously my work took a critical tone although its application was done in a sumptuous, beautiful, or a humorous manner. The problem with this outlook is that so much time is spent being critical that the ideals and alternatives are not addressed. Now my work represents a vision of a world I want to live in, a world of my creation rather than dwelling on the frustrations of this one. This came about through understanding that as long as the criticism was the focus, my work would be defensive. This posture relies on the perceived problems and allows them to continue to dominate the work.

New challenges arose, such as how to present ideas in a way that they would be taken seriously without being dry or dogmatic. I found that humor and irony are an ideal solution as they engage the viewer without necessarily giving the answers. In other words, the jokes or twists can pose questions which allow the viewer to reach their own conclusions without feeling they are being judged or preached at.

Personal changes are also reflected formally in my choice of mediums and applications. When I started at OSU, I had established my own “rules” for the process of
art making. I felt that I could only truly call a work my own if the imagery came from my imagination, and it had to be drawn or painted freehand as opposed to having a model or relying on a photograph. Paint was the only substance allowed on the canvas, and I thought I should be able to paint an object as convincing as if it were affixed there. This painstaking process meant that my paintings and drawings took months to create. The lack of a visual reference resulted in a primitive or naive painting style.

Even the palette has changed. Warm hues such as cadmiums were out as I preferred the cooler tones of phthalos, hansas and napthols. Very little white was mixed with the colors and never black, resulting in little or no contrast in the pigments. For skin tones, I always mixed reds and greens, never using an umber or sienna. I felt this gave the skin vitality rather than the flat mannequin quality of the standard brown pigments.

All these rules eventually boxed me into a corner. It was impossible to make a painting in less than two months. Creating imagery exclusively from memory resulted in distorted, highly stylized paintings in strange color schemes. The whole process was extremely self-conscious, and it showed in the works. Returning to school forced me to reexamine this situation and see just how restrictive and pointless it was. Instead of helping me achieve a unique style, these self imposed rules were only slowing me down and stifling my work.

Now, I use mixed media and direct appropriation of imagery. Photographs are projected and painted, fabrics and household items are sewn to the canvas, a simple linear outline often represents an idea or image, and tedious background settings are eliminated. These works take much less effort since I do not feel I have to paint everything; the
pattern or nature of the material does that for me. Reliance on other materials also resolves the problems of the stylized figuration and self-consciousness in my previous works.

After this change in direction, I had to decide what my subject matter would be. If I were to create my own world, I wanted it to be using themes and subject matter I enjoyed. Of all the possibilities this direction provided, I narrowed them to three: riding motorcycles, flowers and painting women. I chose motorcycles because I have been riding them for about ten years, and it is an experience I wanted to share. Flowers appeal to me because of their vivid colors, their symbolic potential and the creative metaphors of growth and life. Lastly, while I enjoyed painting women, I wanted my works to go beyond just a depiction of the female figure. I wanted to include a broader scope of women's lives so they will have more relevance than yet another model study.

This combination has allowed me to create imagery I enjoy while encompassing a wide variety of issues that are of interest to me, such as: identity, gender, class, culture, and of course sex.
STATE SERIES

One of the first pieces in this series is a charcoal drawing depicting a map of the United States and a woman sitting adjacent to a chopper trike. The woman is dressed in a black evening gown and she and the bike are large enough to stretch from coast to coast (Plate III.) This simple drawing inspired me to continue with a state-by-state breakdown of the USA using flowers to represent each state.

This series appeals to me because it introduces a new dimension, that of a sense of “place.” The idea of place is not the neutral or sterile art world concept of site or space, but it is a location rich with cultural, historical, political and ideological implications. Lucy Lippard describes place as:

“... latitudinal and longitudinal within the map of a person's life. It is temporal and spatial, personal and political. A layered location replete with human histories and memories, place has width as well as depth. It is about connections, what surrounds it, what formed it, what happened there, and what will happen there.”

Time is also reflected in the choice of imagery and material. The photos and fabrics date from the 1970s and 1980s. This reference is important because that was an era when identity politics was at its height. Feminism, nationalism, and sexual preference

---

(all the popular fronts) were claiming to be the vanguard. In the art world, the idea of painting as the highest art form was being debunked by performance and installation. Images and materials dating from this activist culture are used to emphasize the politics of the propagandistic aspect of my work, that being the importance of getting women to ride motorcycles. It also heightens the class references to what can be seen as pornography and propaganda as they are being brought into a high art establishment.

The photographic source material is primarily from American biker porn magazines, again from the 1970s and 1980s. The style of the motorcycle and certainly the pornographic standards, including the model’s pose, attire, gaze and body type, are of that time period.

The impact of these ideas of time and place fixes the paintings firmly on American soil, creating humorous icons of cultural identity.

The background surfaces were applied while the canvas was unstretched, lying flat on the ground. This allowed for more abstract pours, spray painting, or collage. While creating the background, I sometimes referenced motorcycles through the use of designs or mediums actually found on bikes. This can be done with chrome or metalflake paint, pin striping, pours similar to motor oil stains, tire track prints, or tank designs. On other pieces, I used drawings derived from actual road maps from a particular state. The maps are of scenic routes so the drawings indicate a line and numbered points of interest. I then cut the large canvas in two, three, or four smaller pieces to create a group of states. The canvases are stretched and the flowers, women, and bikes are added.
Although there is only one woman per piece, rarely did one canvas stand alone because I wanted to convey the idea of women traveling together. This pairing or grouping was meant to reflect the feminist concept about the creation of a new space, as proposed by Donna Haraway.² She hypothesizes that technology gives us the means to create new realities independent of and therefore not dominated by the existing structures. Haraway sees the need for women to develop systems which combine divisions of oppression into a form where they no longer have any distinction. With the elimination of these boundaries, so goes the potential for domination and exclusion. For example, when I see a woman on the back of a bike, I will ride up along side and tell her she should get her own ride. I point out that although it is fun to ride on the back, she is still just a passenger.

I have also ridden many men on the back of my motorcycles. While this is an interesting role reversal, it is a short lived thrill since one person is still at the controls while the other person must follow. It does not form any alternatives to the power structure; it is simply restating the binaries. This diverts attention from real change.

I feel that my attitude toward my work has also reflected this structural transformation. While I was critical of my subject matter, I did not realize that I was allowing it to dominate my work. I was not able to “step outside the framework”, so to

speak. Creating my own alternatives means that criticism of others is unnecessary since they are no longer the focus.

I have found that the most satisfying motorcycle riding is with a group of women. Each rider controls her own machine so she may branch off at any point or continue the journey. There are no leaders or followers when everyone moves independently. If there is no given destination, competitiveness is not an issue; the objective is just to travel a path together. This type of meeting creates a collective space while sustaining the independent agency of its participants. It evokes profound feelings of power and community, the character of which is extremely rare for women in contemporary culture.

In my paintings the women are not in competition with one another. They are confident in their space and share it in a friendly manner. I have paired them in sets containing similar formal visual elements. The similarity may be in costume, pose, model bike, or direction of the gaze. Whatever it is, they seem to belong together; they support and reflect each other and are stronger as a unit than alone.

The women and motorcycles are painted in a manner that may be seen as less than flattering, even degenerative. The process is to take a Xerox copy of a photograph, paint the back side a particular color, turn it right side up and place it to the canvas. Then with the blunt end of a brush the photocopied image is traced over. This form of transfer printing, or frottage, recreates the photograph in line with some burnishing added for value. It is not simply a straightforward painted portrait, nor is it strictly an appropriated image. It is a combination of painting, drawing, printmaking and photography in one mark. This kind of mark appeals to me because it creates a line quality unattainable by
any mechanical process. In addition, because of its photocopy like appearance, this type of line reflects an attitude of intense attention to the image. Although a step removed from painting or drawing, it is still obviously hand made in an inventive, low-tech fashion. The intention is the recreation of a likeness of the image, not just commentary on stereotypes or the recreation of a calendar girl. For this reason the raw mark is successful. It is rough but not violent; it is direct, urgent, and conveys a form of beauty without the saccharine sweetness or kitsch which it could become if painted in a more photorealistic manner.

Researching source material for images of women on motorcycles has been an arduous process since mainstream motorcycle magazines print hardly anything about women riders. There are plenty to be found in a soft core pornographic magazines however.

Among the nudes in these magazines, there is a surprising amount of photos that women submit of themselves, fully clothed, actually on their own bikes. This does not occur in mainstream trade magazines, just the pornographic ones. Why are women confined exclusively to the visual (object) aspect of riding? What are the connections between women readers, fashion magazines and biker porn?

It is interesting to note that automobile advertisers are now targeting women in their campaigns to sell SUVs, or sport utility vehicles. It seems that this decision has less to do with the practicality of hauling families, groceries, etc. than with the idea that after decades of advertising sports cars with women sprawled across the hoods, we would not be interested in buying one for the same reasons. That does not work in the world of
motorcycles and should not work for autos either. Practically the entire biker porn
industry revolves around the Harley Davidson, yet that remains one of the most popular
models for women riders. Could it be that the sexual appeal to men in advertising also
appeals to women? Is a suggestive photo of a woman and a vehicle necessarily
heterosexual?

After searching for months for images of women on bikes, I found the imagery to
almost exclusively consist of nude women on Harleys or women in the passenger seat
with men at the controls. At any rate, the women were never actually riding a bike. My
interests for this project were to find images of women which reflect my reality of
motorcycle riding, namely all kinds of women on all kinds of bikes. This search was so
frustrating that I furiously began cutting out photos of bikes with women in the passenger
seat and scribbling out or erasing the men in the photos. The intention was to change the
position of the woman from an accessory to a primary image by appropriating and
reversing the intent of the photographer and publisher.

I have since overcome my anger at the inadequacy of images of women for my
project and have moved on to directly appropriating the ones I once found offensive.
Something I appreciate about these images that is lacking in pornography in general is the
maturity of the models. The craze to see young girls does not occur because they are too
small to handle the motorcycles and to see them nude with one would be more absurd or
disturbing than arousing. The result is images of women who fit the bikes, strong women
who may be in passive poses but who are also clearly in control of their lives and their
bodies.
I manipulate these images to create a world of women and motorcycles, a world that includes the erotic, the feminine, the masculine, the power, the beauty and the joy of riding. This is my futuristic vision, one where technology is a welcome extension of our bodies not a surgical replacement for what we feel are bodily inadequacies.

This idea of technology as a replacement for our bodies brings up another reason why I have chosen to use imagery from the 1970s and 1980s. If one compares the body types in photos from that time with our current standards, one will see a stunning difference. I find this change difficult and uncomfortable. Now, in order to be a centerfold, models must have breast implants, collagen injections and shaved pubic hair. This idea of beauty is getting farther and farther removed from what a normal woman looks like, placing enormous pressure on women of today. The desire for this unattainable beauty standard manifests itself in a variety of self-destructive behaviors. I am equally disturbed when I see this self hatred of the body enacted in some performance art. Artists who go under plastic surgery as art or substitute robotic apparatus for body parts are doing just that. Instead of working with technology to enhance their bodies, and their art, they are using it to correct what they perceive to be bodily flaws.

In addition to being one of the things I love to paint, the flowers represent specific geographic locations. They also add beauty, nature, and symbolic feminine sexuality which balances the industrial form of the motorcycle. State flowers have been copied from a book of botanical drawings and were painted clearly in full color. After a few pieces, I stopped filling in the stems and leaves and only painted in the blossoms, allowing the remaining parts to be a white underpainting. I felt that the blossoms were
enough to convey what the flowers were and just the suggestion of the rest of the plant is sufficient. This contrast between the application of the figures and the flowers is important because I do not want the figures to dominate the canvas. The difference in painting creates a gestalt which sets the figure back in space and brings the flower, the clearer image, forward, to have them appear to be on the same plane. Since both images are equally loaded with social, sexual, and other symbolic references, I do not want visual conflict over which would be more important. A perception of depth would give the viewer an “out,” it would give visual clues as to whether the flower or the figures are more important. I wanted the viewer to make a comparison rather than read them as a narrative.

The idea of having a flat picture plane comes from the tradition of political posters. Posters usually do not have depth; their function is simply to communicate visually or verbally. Confronting the viewer is key to getting the point across, and to give depth creates a visual alternative which undermines this effort. In other words, if the viewer's eye is allowed to wander back into the distance, it is not reading the message.

The flowers in this series are meant to convey sexuality as well as location. They are painted sensuously, and of course their form has specific genital references. After all, they are the reproductive organs of the plants and use attraction to complete their function.

Pairing the flowers with the transferred image of the woman and motorcycle creates an uneasy juxtaposition. Since the women are mostly from pornographic magazines, one would expect them to be fully painted and sexually inviting. But they are
not. This comparison makes the figure appear almost skeletal or robotic like the motorcycle. It raises questions of whether the flowers are more lifelike and attractive than the models or of who is in control of the image.

Although my description here may make the images seem sinister, in reality they are not. The cheesecake quality of the models still comes across through their pose and facial expressions and creates a ludicrous farce of the source material. This contrast is similar to my previous work of altering photographs to make the female passenger of a motorcycle the primary image rather than the male rider. Once again it is about appropriating and reversing the intent of the original photographs.

The first painting in the “State” series has an image of myself and my motorcycle taken from a calendar. The state is California, where I was born and lived until attending OSU, and the flower is the California Poppy. The second painting is of Ohio, the only other state where I have lived, and the flower is, of course, the Scarlet Carnation. The photograph used is from a magazine depicting a barefoot woman standing on tiptoe beside a chopper, her hands raised high in the air with an expression of joy or ecstasy.

These two pieces were cut from the same canvas. While the canvas was on the floor it was painted with long strips of paper dipped in black paint which were then pressed to the primed canvas. The resulting black streaks reference tire tracks or skid marks on the canvas. A translucent orange paint was then poured across a portion of the canvas.

“California” (Plate IV) is a 22” x 24” canvas with an almost diagonal split of orange paint and the black and white. Over the orange segment in the lower left is a
transferred image of myself and my bike painted in blue. On the black and white segment in the upper right are painted the California Poppies. The poppies are painted clearly enough that they could almost be a sticker rather than paint. The black and white background is of a matte finish and the orange is a thick, glossy pour. In contrast, the figure and motorcycle are raw and matte on top of the glossy orange and the flowers are fine and glossy on top of the matte black and white. Both the figure with the bike and the flowers are approximately the same size. What holds this image together formally is the contrast between the raw linear image on the orange background and the colorful flowers on the black and white background.

“Ohio” (Plate IV) is a 14” x 24” canvas with a large round pour of the same glossy translucent orange paint which occupies most of the canvas. The figure and bike are transferred in black line on top of the orange. In this painting, the carnations are also painted on the orange surface near the front of the bike. A matte black and blue is painted around the perimeter of the orange. This creates an illusion of a geographic area or peninsula contained by a murky, oily fluid.

In several pieces, I have introduced gender metaphors in describing the crossing over of the concept of the domestic space and the garage or shop. I wanted to combine these ideas in a familiar and comfortable manner. These metaphors are reflected in the choice of mediums and materials. In some pieces there are printed fabrics from drapery, bedding or articles of clothing. In others there are actual motorcycle paints and primers.

“North Dakota” (Plate V) and “South Dakota” (Plate VI) incorporated a flowery bed sheet. The entire sheet was adhered to a piece of canvas and then partially painted
over with layers of green, black and white paint. The sheet was then cut into two
rectangular sections and stretched. The exposed sheet and the painted area formed a
diagonal across each canvas. The painted area of the background was done in large,
expressive marks which gave it remarkable momentum. This momentum was enhanced
by images of women and chopper bikes repeating the diagonal span across the length of
each canvas. I selected these photos because of their severe camera angles emphasizing
the stylization of the choppers, and the models standing at either end further extended
these stretched images.

"North Dakota" is a frontal/right side view of the model at the back of the bike
with one leg propped up on the rear tire. She is, in effect, straddling the bike, and we see
her as bikini clad with her legs apart. The bike is foreshortened with the front tire
touching the right edge of the canvas. The placement of the model at the opposite side of
the foreshortened front end anchors the bike onto the canvas and highlights the dynamic
angles of the chopper.

"South Dakota" is a rear/right top view with the model, shirt partially unbuttoned
and hands on hips, straddling the front forks and tire. Not only was this painting done on
a bed sheet, but since this is a top view, we are looking at a downward angle toward the
bike and model. Normally this type of view would imply passivity or powerlessness, but
the confidence of the model's stance and her smirky facial expression keeps that from
occurring.

The rawness and momentum of both the background and the transferred image, as
well as the stance and expressions of the models, makes these two paintings extremely
suggestive. Whereas in other images the models are strictly posing for the photographer, in these pieces, the models seem to be ready to mount the bikes in a sexual manner, photographer or not. This presence of attitude in the models compliments the gritty technique of the paintings and serves to intensify their subjectivity.
**BANNERS**

The individual pieces in the “State” series are generally less than three square feet in size. When making larger pieces, I have chosen to suspend them unstretched with the use of grommets. Large panels of printed fabric are treated and sewn to sections of painted canvas to become the background for the piece. These are pinned directly to the wall, and the imagery is painted by using a large roll of paper and an opaque projector instead of the Xerox copies taped together to be used in the smaller pieces.

Since I came from a family of political activists and had some artistic ability, I spent much of my time making signs, banners, backdrops and street art for one cause after another. The banner format is reminiscent of the multitude of political protest marches, elections and events I took part in during that time. I wanted these banners to be like political propaganda: large, inspirational, and commanding; I also wanted them to be paintings: aesthetically pleasing, intriguing and complex.

Once again, this low-tech proletarian format fits the subject matter and paint application process. It is inexpensive, portable and accessible. These qualities are what make banners ideal for street protests and celebrations.
The banners also have the potential to convey gender metaphors in that they can be made from industrial tarps or household items such as bedding or tablecloths. Even the grommets can serve as a form of decorative ornamentation, an additional metaphor.

This propaganda is my large scale visual display format for showing the world the importance of women and motorcycles. I want them to be positive, celebratory images that can hang indoors or outdoors, on walls or from balconies and overpasses (Plate VII).

At the time of writing this paper, these banners are still in progress. Some of them will reflect the theme of the state flower and the motorcycle as in “Oregon” (Plate VIII); some will include themes such as horseback riding (Plate IX) or other genres of pornography (Plate X.) All will include sections of printed fabric and the jewelry of the grommets.

To briefly clarify the differences in these banners: the connection I make between women, motorcycles and horses stems from the fascination young girls have for horses. If so many girls love horses, it is only natural that they should grow to love motorcycle riding as well. After all, motorcycles are commonly referred to as the “iron horse.” The banners pertaining to horseback riding would follow this theme of girls and women riding horseback.

One of the potential pornographic sources would be that of human ponies, or “ponygirls.” This is centered around role playing activities where, instead of riding horses, people want to be horses. This is not a form of bestiality, it is more like a mild version of bondage and domination. Elaborate harnesses, saddles and carts are designed
for human use, trainers ride the ponies, and there are even horse shows for the
participants. This is of interest to me because it crosses so many boundaries. Sexual
taboo are meaningless when something this silly and outrageous comes into play.
COVERED PIECES

These works are large scale oil paintings which depict a woman and a motorcycle in an outline form on a solid ground. The figures were projected and painted with one image filling the entire canvas. Instead of painting directly on top of a piece of fabric, a sheer woven material covers the canvas so the painted image is seen through the fabric. The fabrics are mostly shower curtains or window draperies and usually have botanical imagery woven into them. This gives the viewer a sense of voyeurism because of seeing an image through a curtain and the sense of intrigue when one discerns, or unveils, what the layered imagery is. Once again, this combines the theme of the domestic or the feminine with the realm of the motorcycle. These are surprisingly simple yet effective paintings which depict women, motorcycles and flowers.

While using the same imagery, this series is very different from the “State” or “Banner” paintings. One thing that sets them apart is that neither the model and bike nor the flowers are painted in full color. They are both suggestions of imagery without giving all of the information. This emphasizes the commentary aspect of the works and prevents them from being interpreted as simply recreating the exploitation aspect of the source material.
In addition, the canvases are all 63” in height and vary from 32” to 58” in width. The larger scale means the figures are also larger than life. Even nude, these women, seven or eight feet tall if standing, cannot be interpreted as diminutive or powerless.

Another difference is that the model and bike are hand painted while the flowers, until now the most delicately painted subject matter, are entirely machine made. In a humorous twist, this industrial interpretation of nature brings the issues of appropriation and reversal of intent to the flowers as well as the figure. This is of interest to me because it raises questions about authority in the reproduction of nature and the exclusivity of science and art in this area. If manufactured flowers are rendered just as well as the those copied from botanical drawings, would that not make them just as authentic?

A third aspect is that both images cover the entire canvas so there is no side-by-side comparison; they are blended so the viewer takes in everything at once. To paraphrase an earlier section of this paper, this combines the divisions “into a form where they no longer have any distinction.” This synthesis eliminates the either/or binary approach to viewing the work and becomes a metaphor for the forming of alternative structures such as coalitions as opposed to individual fronts. No one group is the vanguard anymore; the different factions have come together for a common broader goal.

One of these pieces is a 63” x 32,” ultramarine blue canvas with the model and bike painted in a white outline (Plate XI.) Over it is stretched a white woven shower curtain depicting a round window form and large bearded irises. The model is seated on the bike, leaning over the front as if she is crouching to peer through the window. The
window normally would give an idea depth but since the background is a warm blue with white line it is still flat and confronts the viewer.

My initial intent in painting the canvas blue was to bring in the color the irises would have had, but the result is something very different. Instead it is eerie in that the blue background and white outline act as a negative or x-ray image, possibly from a nuclear flashpoint. Yet the model is smiling out at the viewer with a “Cheshire” grin. The irises are fully open to offer their large, vaginal corollas, but since they are woven in a shower curtain, they instead have an industrial feel. The sexual symbolism of the irises is ironically humorous since none of the flower parts are, again, fully painted and the model as an x-ray looks more like death.

Two other paintings are covered with material which gives an illusion of skin. Both are images of a nude or practically nude women in provocative poses. One canvas is covered with a layer of various shades of pantyhose which have been sewn together and stretched tight enough so that the image is visible through it (Plate XII.)

I would like to point out that this piece is the only one in the exhibit which implies non-caucasian women. Although the bodies of women of color have been historically sexualized, they are excluded from this genre of pomography. Racism and nationalism are strong among bikers, and to feature a woman of color on a bike would evoke an outrage among the readership, not unlike their violent reactions to Japanese motorcycles.

The second skin piece is painted with a pale yellow background, and the image is drawn in both green and raw sienna lines. A sheer hot pink window curtain is stretched over the canvas, creating a vibrant peach tone. Like painting with a glaze technique, this
layering gives a quality of life to the color like the skin is alive; there is blood running through it. This is not the color of a corpse or a plastic doll; it is a woman with electrified sexuality (Plate XIII.)
CONCLUSION

In her essay “Above the Pulp-Line, the Cultural Significance of Erotic Art,” Lynda Nead writes:

“For art to be art it has to engage the mind rather than the body; it has to involve the faculty of imagination and bring about a still, contemplative state in the viewer. Propaganda and pornography shatter the unified subjectivity of the view and incite, or more accurately excite, the body to action. What is clear from this kind of formulation is that the artistic and the pornographic are not simply properties of any given representation, but are also, and perhaps more significantly, classifications of those who view the images; they are social, cultural and moral designations of people as well as objects.”

This brings up the distinctions made between high and low culture, sacred and profane, erotic and pornographic, historical narrative and propaganda. The class issues of propaganda and pornography in the context of rider advocacy and cultural iconography construct the core of this thesis paper. The same fears that constructed the Cold War also propagate censorship. This creates the fallacy that we need to be saved from ourselves in order to survive as a society.

---

The purpose of bringing propaganda and pornography into a gallery setting is to expose these barriers and to encourage women to think for themselves. Motorcycles are ideal for this purpose for three reasons; first is the middle and lower class association with bikes and their riders; second is the abundance of pornographic material utilizing motorcycles; and lastly is the potential alternatives motorcycle riding can provide for women.

Aside from the obvious advantages of mobility and independence, bikes can enhance self-esteem and social relations. Women bikers are less likely to be taken for granted or to put up with poor relationships. They can come and go as they please, not having to rely on anyone else for transportation. If an argument ensues, they will not be the ones left to walk home, and when picking up a date, they do not slide over to let him or her drive.

So why is it that more women do not ride? Could it be the dismays women receive from dealers and shop workers? Could it be a fear of perceived unfeminine behavior? Homophobia? If motorcycles are icons of popular culture where does the average woman fit in, and how does she navigate the stereotypes of biker women?

"Propaganda and pornography shatter the unified subjectivity of the view and incite, or more accurately excite, the body to action." That is a sentence worth repeating. It is precisely that excitement, especially in women, that is threatening and therefore deemed inappropriate behavior.
“When we live outside ourselves . . . then our lives are limited by external and alien forms, and we conform to the needs of a structure that is not based on human need, let alone an individual’s. But when we begin to live from within outward, in touch with the power of the erotic within ourselves, and allowing that power to inform and illuminate our actions upon the world around us, then we begin to be responsible to ourselves in the deepest sense . . .”

Those are the words of Audre Lorde in her essay “Uses of the Erotic.” This combination of political, feminist and personal issues clearly articulates the need for women to go beyond preconceived notions of femininity. As long as women’s sexuality is limited to being a commodity, it will be divided from the rest of life. And if women continue to define themselves based on outmoded structures and morals, they may suffer serious problems from trying to live on an equal basis as men without understanding why it does not work; no one can be an equal in a society where they did not participate in making the rules in the first place.

Women need the space to develop their own realities in a form which fearlessly includes all their passions. Art can provide that context. It has the potential of an unmarked space where women can meet, not in the escapist sense but in the sense of creative exploration.

I would like to conclude by describing one last banner made late in this series. This banner is 60” x 80” with grommets around the perimeter. It consists of a brown piece of fabric covered with a white shower curtain which is then sewn to a panel of

highly stylized floral print material (Plate XIV.) The image woven in the shower curtain is a bucolic landscape complete with rolling hills, trees and birds that is repeated three times across the length of the brown background.

In contrast to my previous works, there is little evidence of human touch in this piece. This piece has no paint at all; the imagery is entirely machine made with synthetic fabrics and dyes. This indirect presence used to make me uncomfortable, but I now feel that just the acknowledgment that a person has chosen these fabrics, sewn them together (by machine) and set the grommets (by punch) is enough. It is a recognition of the selection process as much as of the artist’s hand. Now, not only do I not have to physically paint all the imagery myself, I do not have to paint any imagery at all.

Since this piece is in a banner format, one wants it to make some kind of political statement, but the imagery is so preposterous that no such specific conclusions can be made. The artificiality of the sentimental landscape is offset by the banner format and juxtaposed with a floral pattern. Although decorative, the flowers, 12” in diameter and on a flat picture plane, are large enough to command attention. They have an active role to the point of nearly visually overpowering the landscape. The flowers are as urgent as a written message would be on a banner and can be read as text next to a motivational image. It is this activity which keeps the painting from being kitsch and compels the viewer to want to assign some other meaning to this piece.

The landscape does not seem to have any other meaning, however. The tone is introspective; the biting irony is gone; beauty and tranquillity seem to be the message. This calling of attention to its own beauty makes the banner seem almost narcissistic.
What this piece becomes then is a parody of the other works, an absurd abstraction on art about causes. It declares with nothing we expect it to declare.

In summary, the progression of my works overall incorporate a complex exploration of themes. As many directions in which these can be taken however, the main points are those of recognition of where we are, what we could become and what keeps us back. We need to not be afraid of the challenge to take steps forward and support others who are doing the same.

In our culture, propaganda is equated with brainwashing while in the Spanish language, its literal translation is advertising. We all know that pornography has been blamed for violent behavior and the decline of Western civilization. The truth is that pornography is just sexual fantasy, and there is no politically correct sexual fantasy. It can just as easily be an expression of positive energy, of hope, a reason to go on living.

It is important to recognize whose interests are served by the perpetuation of these biases. Are they the same who recently held an exhibition of motorcycles at the Guggenheim, only to have it during the slow summer season? This displayed popular culture more on the level of a trade or technical exhibit than as fine art. It was a show to satisfy the tourists, the general public, not to be truly taken seriously by the art elite.

Through appropriation of imagery, my works reflect this questioning and reevaluation of these kinds of ideas. Their formats also describe alternatives such as blends rather than contrasts, cooperation rather than contests. In my final banner, this has been pushed and abstracted into a state that is no longer recognizable. This is a piece which commands our attention but whose meaning is in an unexpected vocabulary.
These works succeed in bringing together new concepts of human experience in a positive manner. Their presence demonstrates the qualities of an alternative space clearly and without pretension. The use of a variety of formats and mediums conveys the complexity of ideas without being redundant or predictable. To be critical though, that variety sometimes can become overwhelming. Even though the imagery is similar, it is not always easy to make the change in formats and keep the continuity of thought.

I have found that occasionally my works need further explanation for viewers who are concerned about the use of pornography. This is a fine point to get across, the use of pornography in a celebratory, not a degrading fashion. I discuss this with viewers who have concerns about exploitation as well as with those on the other side, the viewers who are overjoyed just to see anything sexual.

Overall though, this body of work shows that a combination of familiar materials and provocative imagery can convey serious concepts without being frivolous, judgmental or condescending. I expect to continue to use this humor and irony as a method of communication, and I expect viewers to continue to enjoy, and laugh at, my work.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


PLATE III - UNTITLED
PLATE V - NORTH DAKOTA
PLATE VI - SOUTH DAKOTA
PLATE VII - OREGON
PLATE IX - UNTITLED
PLATE X - UNTITLED