

ARTFORUM

“Elaine, Let’s Get the Hell Out of Here”

NICELLE BEAUCHENE GALLERY

327 Broome Street

June 29–August 18

The snappy title of this summer group exhibition—“Elaine, Let’s Get the Hell Out of Here”—comes from an anecdote relayed by Elaine de Kooning in response to Linda Nochlin’s feminist essay “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” (both Nochlin’s essay and de Kooning’s tale were published in the January 1971 issue of *Artnews*). The painter recalled an incident when a boorish man at a party began to ask her and Joan Mitchell, “What do you women artists think . . . ?” Not waiting around for him to finish his query, Mitchell—as famous for her uncompromising attitude as for her take on Abstract Expressionism—grabbed de Kooning’s arm and split.

With works spanning fifty years, this show poses a provocative question: How can artwork serve the politics of liberation (of race, gender, or sexuality) without explicit representation? In the older works, identity politics often remained subtle. Consider de Kooning’s portrait of the queer dance critic, Edwin Denby, 1960, or Joan Snyder’s *Dear Irene*, 1970—a sly love note scrawled in graphite and colored pencil, surrounding expressionist daubs of rainbow-colored paint. Rosemary Mayer’s resplendent sculpture *Balancing*, 1972, with swags of peach and pink fabric hung from acrylic tubes and cords, evokes flesh. Yet despite her feminist inclinations—she was a cofounder of the all-women A.I.R. Gallery—she insisted her work wasn’t solely focused on depicting the female body.

Other artists embrace abstraction as a site of resistance, such as the African American artist Al Loving, represented here with a multicolored paper collage (*Untitled*, 1976). Feminist abstraction features prominently, with a canvas from Deborah Anzinger adorned with mirrors (*I told you*, 2017), Molly Zuckerman-Hartung’s painting bedecked with T-shirts (*Lurch*, 2009–14), and a rope construction by Sheila Pepe (*On to the Hot Mess*, 2017). Among the youngest artists, no single formal approach dominates. But Sable Elyse Smith’s poetic video *Untitled*, 2012, stands out as a defiant collaboration in the face of linguistic and cultural barriers. Made with a student from Baghdad, the work features washy images of war and prayer. A voice-over ponders failed jokes, crying as cleansing, and the body as a “totem to loss.”

— Wendy Vogel



Joan Snyder, *Dear Irene*, 1970, oil, acrylic, pencil, and spray paint on canvas, 15 x 15"