

# FORT GANSEVOORT

## HYPERALLERGIC

**City of Women**  
Thomas Micchelli  
October 13, 2012



Installation view, "To Be a Lady," Vanessa German, "Toaster" (2011). Mixed media, 31 ½ x 14 x 12 inches.  
(photo by Hrag Vartanian for Hyperallergic)

There is something ineffably comforting about *To Be a Lady*, the exhibition curated by Jason Andrew and subtitled *Forty-Five Women in the Arts*. The second time I visited the show, on a misty, autumnal afternoon, the light-filled bays at 1285 Avenue of the Americas seemed to lead back to a once intimate, now forgotten place.

I specify my second visit because my first was preoccupied with the show's startling scale, ambition and quality: a museum-caliber exhibition unenclosed by museum walls.

In his review of *To Be a Lady* in Monday's *Hyperallergic*, Howard Hurst compares its significant presence of artists associated with the New York School to the Museum of Modern Art's blockbuster Abstract Expressionist New York (October 3, 2010-April 25, 2011) and its paltry smattering of women.

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The current exhibition, as Hurst suggests, may be viewed as a corrective to that show, and Andrew, in his catalogue essay, makes a similar allusion. But the differences go well beyond proportional representation.

One of the points of discussion about *Abstract Expressionist New York* as well as MoMA's recent *de Kooning: a Retrospective* (September 18, 2011-January 9, 2012) was how difficult it is to hang a Pollock or a DeKooning in the same room with other artists.

I would venture that the same could be said, to a greater or lesser extent, of just about any major male figure from that era — Still or Rothko or Motherwell or Kline, who never seem to tire of jostling each other. Their machismo is integral to their aesthetic power as well as to their postwar historical context.

The parade of objects in *To Be a Lady* (and there is a definite sense of movement to the exhibition, with each bay acting as a theatrical reveal) never evinces that kind of territoriality or self-protection.

While generational differences in style and content are readily apparent, the work — primarily painting and sculpture but also photography, collage, video and text — feels seamlessly integrated in a way that owes as much to the art's ethos as it does to Andrew's expert and imaginative curatorial eye.

This is art that invites you in rather than brushes you aside. Even something as bilious as Jay DeFeo's acrylic-on-Masonite "Lotus Eater No. 2" (1974) or as confrontational as Nancy Grossman's leather-and-chain bas-relief "Potawatami" (1967) feels open and inclusive of its neighbors — Grossman's yin-yang relationship with the yarn sculpture beside it, "Omega Female" by Ellie Murphy, being a case in point: the latter imparts a degree of levity to the former, while Grossman's weather-beaten straps and orifices lend visceral intensity to Murphy's soft trails of fabric.