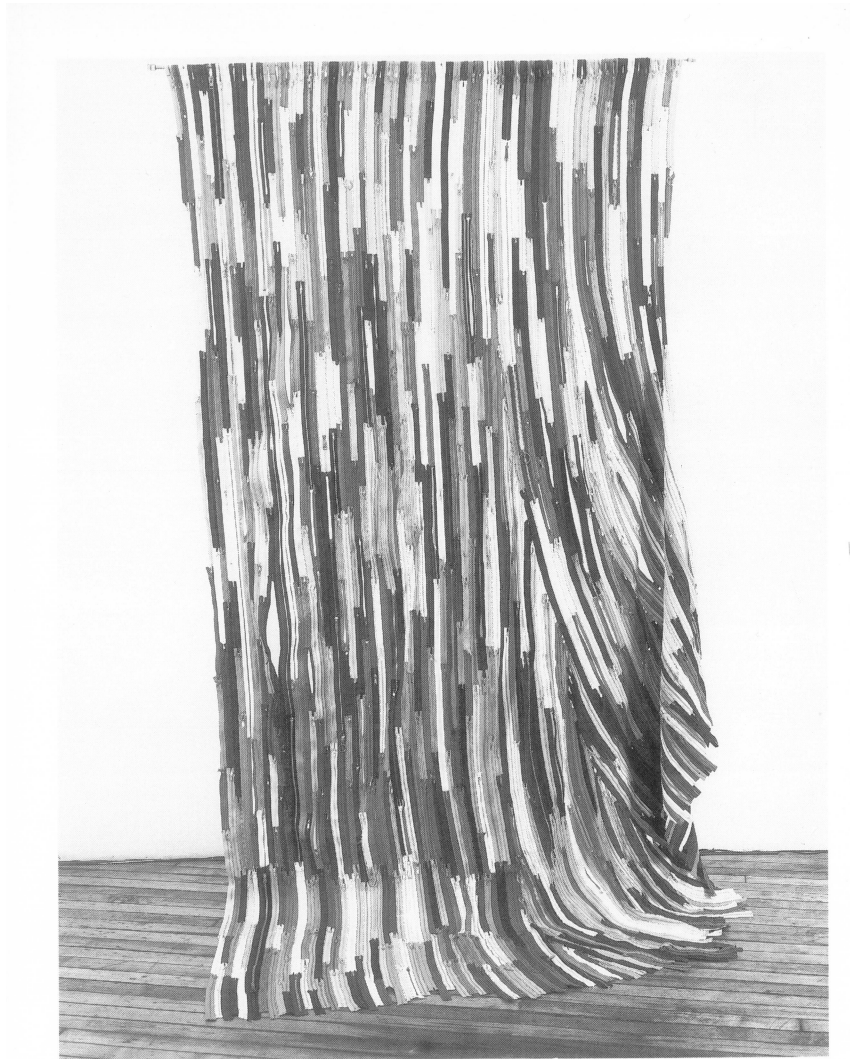


**BOY
MEETS
GIRL**

**LISA HOKE
MIKE HOWARD
CATHERINE HOWE**

When boy meets girl the stereotypical attributes of art made by either is up for grabs. The question of gender has been raised in a rage to locate the social and political constructs operating at the center and at the periphery of discourse. When boy meets girl they are challenged by the reflection of themselves in the other. This exhibition of works by Lisa Hoke, Mike Howard, and Catherine Howe, is an opportunity to examine a new double voiced object, a “hermaphroditic” hybrid containing coded aspects of male and female vocabularies. These qualities are to be found in the assumptions of maleness and femaleness in regard to materials, procedures, and histories. More important in this proposal are the ideas and conditions in artworks and how they operate, rather than the gender of their makers. These three artists offer examples of expanded categories of painting and sculpture, undoing previously acknowledged properties of each genre, while creating a challenging new idiom. Each of them has spoken of the ongoing consideration of making “serious” art, yet by shedding the affiliations with known production values, they have given their respective works a more vital, personal pedigree.

Lisa Hoke’s early works were decidedly macho; rough and tumble wire configurations that orbited small cast iron planets, derived from melons, squash, and assorted fruits and vegetables. This brought an organic subtext to works whose dominant concern were properties of weight and balance, and the transformation of edible, fleshy produce into forged, lumpen matter is where Hoke removed possible associations with sculptors like Serra or Di-Suvero. The recent expansion of her materials, including vi-



Lisa Hoke *Interlocking Parallels*, 1992, Zippers, chain 11' x 6' x $\frac{1}{2}$ "

brant shower curtains, food containers, buttons, clothing, and various domestic detritus, allows for rich narratives that speak to conditions of fear, loss, play, and ritual. The new pieces are built by a labor intensive process of sewing, weaving, and glueing, and locate the origins of the work in the chaos of home and family, particularly the presence of a baby in Hoke's life. These procedures are an affirmation of intuition, and the possibility of finding a woman's voice in the ashes of girlish skills and expectations taught in Home Ec and art school classrooms. *Interlocking Parallels*, 1992, is a curtain made of thousands of zippers sewn together, forming a downward cascade of colorful stop-pages. The zippers, which provide access to gender in clothing, may be vertically closed (male) or unashamedly open (female), depending on the conditions of site installation or the desire of the installer. "The piece is my answer to the 12 year old's dread of learning how to sew a zipper properly. The rule was that the zipper had to be straight, and if it wasn't, you got points off, demerits. *Interlocking Parallels* is my way of making a mixed up, out of order response to those rules. It's me thumbing my nose at a zipper!"¹

Mike Howard's work has been an exploration of the advertised constructions of masculinity through American pop culture; his paintings based on images from calendar art, beer signs, and low brow male haunts. The qualities of these pictures combined a Homeresque realism with painterly licks from Field and Stream illustrations. Howard is basically unrecognized as the originator of several bodies of conceptual painting; the *Artforum Covers* of 1974, which predate many recent explorations of art about art commerce, and the *Trip to Paris Sweepstakes* of 1985, which fea-



Mike Howard *Good Luck*, 1992, Acrylic on canvas, fabric, tassle, rabbit feet 84" x 51" x 3"



Catherine Howe *Frozen Sounds*, 1992, Oil, wax on linen 52" x 40"

tured 100 identical paintings, sold as raffle tickets to win a roundtrip flight, T.V., or toaster. In 1991, he solicited the Baby Doll Lounge to exhibit his hunting and fishing works. The idea of an almost 50 year old man showing his paintings in a notorious N.Y. topless bar, was a self effacing comment on marginality and acceptance, and gave the juxtaposition of male sport scenes and male voyeurism a particularly odd bond.

That exhibition featured the beginnings of the free hanging banners that Howard is producing now. His recent involvement with decorators, designing window displays and showrooms for Macy's and The Limited, has moved the raw straightforwardness of *Free Buffet* and *Tips Are Appreciated* canvases shown at the bar, into new lush salon style tableaux. "Working with the designers reminds me of those great studio shots of Braque and Picasso, with striped fabrics and big pillows. Decorating was always thought of as a feminine activity. I usually make work about things I'm not familiar with. I don't hunt, or fish, and never really hung out in topless bars. I've been more excited about the timeless quality of such images, as if an atomic blast when off, and someone found one of my cow paintings. It could be from 1760 or 1990. Now I'm involved with decorating, and these velvets and tassles and silks are terrific. I get to make things prettier!"² These new materials have allowed Howard to build a lush context for his classic images. Reinterpreting his greatest hits, pinning decals, lures, and fringe to their heraldic supports, he is finding his particular female side.

Catherine Howe is an artist involved with a visual sampling of male painting traditions. Her works are a hybrid of Abstract Expressionist heroic space, and the assured painterly realism of

Robert Henri, John Singer Sargent, etc. She uses these distinctly loaded gestures to weave a mingling of old and new voices. Rather than appropriating specific works and reducing the viewing experience to a “find that source” game, Howe positions assured images of the young and disenfranchised, staring out at the viewer. “The work is about ways of painting and ways of looking at painting. I’m not on the outside criticising, I’m inside, implicating myself, and yet making paintings, square and firm”.³ A nose from here, a dress from there, allows Howe to create figures that merge with their backgrounds, built stroke by stroke, dominating the viewer in the exchange of eyes. She is constructing a realist language, moving in and out of male and female, and picturing what DeKooning felt was the “slipping glimpse”.

1. Conversation with Lisa Hoke, August 1992.

2. Conversation with Mike Howard, August 1992.

3. Conversation with Catherine Howe, August 1992.

Text: Stuart Horodner Design: Susan Bowman

Interlocking Parallels photographed by Joshua Nefsky

Good Luck photographed by David Britton

Frozen Sounds photographed by Patty Wallace

Cover image: Publicity still for Arabian Nights (Universal 1942)

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