



Marjorie Strider, *Triptych II (Beach Girl)*, 1963, acrylic on epoxy-coated Styrofoam, mounted on Masonite and wood panel, 5' 9" × 13' 9" × 6".

Marjorie Strider

GALERIE GMURZYNSKA | NEW YORK

“It has never been pretty,” wrote Lucy Lippard in a 1974 catalogue essay on the art of Marjorie Strider (1931–2014). “In fact,” the esteemed critic noted, the work is “usually awkward, funny, grotesque, or heavy-handed.” Too true: Strider’s paintings, especially those of svelte, bikini-clad women with bulky, three-dimensional breasts (such as *Come Hither* and *Triptych II [Beach Girl]*, both 1963) or gaping mouths with bulging, cherry-red lips (such as *Welcome*, 1963, and *Tunnel of Love*, 2013) are gauche. Tacky, even. But Strider never wanted to create “tasteful” art: With her appropriations of advertising imagery executed in a garish, high-key palette, she penetrated Pop with a double-edged sword, as both an art-world insider and a feminist outsider. This is perhaps the main reason why it has taken so long for Strider’s oeuvre to be given the retrospective treatment—but the moment finally arrived with this outing at New York’s Galerie Gmurzynska, which featured twenty-odd paintings made between 1963 and 2014.

One of the most commanding pieces here, *Triptych II (Beach Girl)* was included in the “First International Girlie Exhibit,” a famed 1964 group show at New York’s Pace Gallery, which boasted works by many of the male giants of Pop—Roy Lichtenstein, Mel Ramos, Andy Warhol, and Tom Wesselmann. Writing about the presentation for the *New York Times*, critic

John Canaday lumped Strider in with Rosalyn Drexler (“Two women are among the newcomers”), observing that “the Misses Strider and Drexler are right in there with additional proof that, when you face it, girlies are really rather repulsive.” Indeed, time has done nothing to soften Strider’s early work—as a friend put it, her art is like “Roy Lichtenstein injected with strychnine.” For some, however, her particular brand of tragicomedy could be difficult to ascertain. Throughout her life, Strider was the recipient of many mixed reviews: Because of her art’s perceived ambiguity—or perhaps even its realpolitik (was she weaponizing sexism or was she complicit in it?)—the painter was often criticized in ways that her peers weren’t. Writing in these pages in 1965, Barbara Rose attacked Strider’s *Triptych II (Beach Girl)* as “even more egregiously mammalian” than a Wesselmann, “and even less art.” Rose missed Strider’s campy critique of sexism, which could be wittily acerbic, like Lee Lozano’s cartoony, contemporaneous drawings of phallic airplanes and noses.

In this show, one could detect an early whiff of Strider’s caustic sensibility in a collage of studies for *Girl with Radish*, 1963—perhaps her most famous painting, which was concurrently on view in “New York: 1962–1964” at the Jewish Museum. The work on paper revealed that, in 1962, Strider appropriated a photograph of a young Jean Shrimpton from a Wishbone salad-dressing advertisement. The artist seems to have considered transforming the iconic brown-eyed brunette into a nauseatingly clichéd blue-eyed bottle blonde, while flattening her facial features and turning the radish into a cherry—or maybe even a bloated sperm with a diminished tail. Yet in the final work this element was rendered, with vomitous flair, as a tumorous three-dimensional object.

After a decades-long hiatus from these *Girls* (Strider used to throw the word back at society like a bomb), she picked them up again in the 2000s. But, sadly, her subjects became a little tamer, more predictable. *Girl with Two Pearls*, 2009, an anodyne portrait of a tanned lady wearing pearl earrings, and *Descending*, 2010, which features a voluptuous beach bunny sauntering down some stairs, both reference male artists (Vermeer and Duchamp, respectively), while *Girl with Red Rose*, 2014, recalls the formal arrangement of *Girl with Radish*, sans the sickening punch. Other more recent works showing mademoiselles in vividly hued swimsuits could be read, possibly, through a postfeminist lens. Which brings me back to Lippard: She didn’t believe in postfeminism—once noting that no such thing could exist until “our goals have been met, and not before.” I have a feeling that Strider, who was involved with New York City feminist circles of the 1970s and ’80s, wouldn’t be at all surprised to see how much farther, tragically, we still need to go.

—Lauren O’Neill-Butler