

Kitnick, Alex. "Kiki Kogelnik; Simone Subal Gallery" Artforum, January 2015, p. 213, Print.

## Kiki Kogelnik

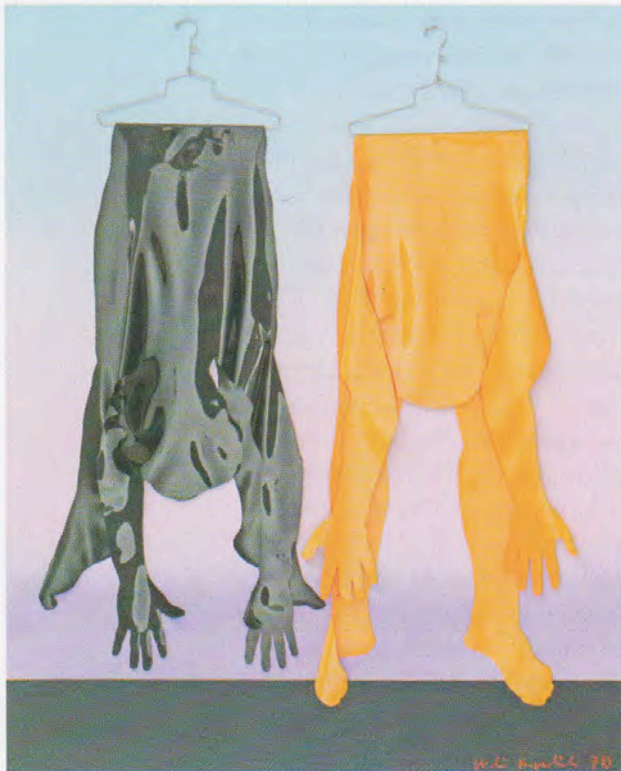
SIMONE SUBAL GALLERY

Kiki Kogelnik's art has rarely been seen in New York aside from a superb 2012 show of work from the 1960s at Simone Subal, despite the fact that the artist, who died in 1997, lived in the city for the entirety of her adult life and maintained close friendships with other significant artists such as Roy Lichtenstein and Claes Oldenburg. With "Cuts, Fissures and Identity: Works from the 1960s and 70s," a second exhibition at Simone Subal that opened this past November, Kogelnik's art feels hard to ignore; it puts pressure on a Pop moment we thought we knew, and, in doing so, forces us to reconsider things we may have guessed about Pop but were afraid to ask.

Though Pop was deeply committed to the image, it would have been nothing without the body, and so it is with Kogelnik's work. The body here, however, is not simply flattened or "imaged," but incessantly cut, poked, and prodded. It is a medicalized body, subjected to surgery and ripe for examination; Kogelnik made good use of her husband's access to equipment at the now-defunct St. Vincent's Hospital in New York, where he worked as a radiation oncologist. One of the strangest and most striking works in the exhibition featured a photograph of an X-ray of a woman's torso: The points where arms would emerge, however, have been cut out so as to suggest mouths and chins; next to these sharp, quasi-abstract silhouettes, there are two spray-painted starbursts (most likely shower drains) that conjure the image of phone receivers—someone or something is trying to get through. The work put me in mind of the late photomontages of John Heartfield, but Kogelnik's use of the form—certainly no longer "radical" by the mid-1960s—raises an issue pertinent to her moment, and to ours: a new, permeable self that communicates in previously unheard-of ways.

Certainly, this is the theme that haunts all of Kogelnik's work, and, happily, she offered no easy answer. In a later work on paper, *Untitled*





Kiki Kogelnik,  
*Hanging*, 1970,  
acrylic, sheet vinyl,  
and hangers on  
canvas, 66 ¼ x 54".

(*Wet, Dark and Beautiful*), 1970, a generic stamp of the female body used by doctors to chart symptoms is deployed to surprising effect; Kogelnik has embellished the bust with spread legs and bushy-haired genitals, which, at first glance, seem to illustrate the work's subtitle. Just below one figure's feet, however, stand two decapitated torsos: Perhaps their gaping, severed necks are "wet, dark and beautiful" as well. Certainly, in other drawings, the body—often taking the form of unidentifiable orifices—is ruthlessly poked and prodded. *Sexy Afternoon*, 1969, looks like a nice scene, but in *Tongue Operation*, 1970, a mouth is held open by a phalanx of menacing scissors. In the 1971 print *Womans Lib*, however, the scissor is enlisted as a sign of power. Here, Kogelnik stands in her best rock-star pose,

sporting a black trench coat and goggles, holding a massive pair of shears between her legs. She's literally got the thing by the balls, and, held open, the metaphorical phallus is split in two (and pointed down toward the ground). Certainly the work poses a threat, but the flattened-out silhouettes on the ground, ostensibly cut out by Kogelnik herself, suggest that she's less interested in mutilating men than she is in reshaping humanity as a whole.

These flat figures appear once again in what is perhaps the show's most realized work: *Hanging*, 1970. Here, two silhouettes cut from vinyl sheets are flopped over wire hangers that have been affixed to a canvas painted with a pink sunset-gradient ground. In this work, subjectivity is thin, and radically so. Though the title of the work suggests that this might be the scene of an execution, one also gets the sense that these fashionable, fetishistic phantoms are waiting to come back to life. Indeed, the work put me in mind of one of Václav Havel's favorite rock bands, the Plastic People of the Universe, which formed in Prague in 1968 and played a pivotal role in the Velvet Revolution. Plastic at that moment was not simply impoverished; it was full of possibility. I think this complex understanding of new media, which Kogelnik's work shares, gets to the reason why so much of her output looks so contemporary today, while scores of much more recent artworks "dealing with technology and the body" feel so out of touch. Kogelnik understood that pain, power, and pleasure tend to hang side by side.

—Alex Kitnick