

# Art Review:

## Kiki Kogelnik: Early Works, 1964–1970

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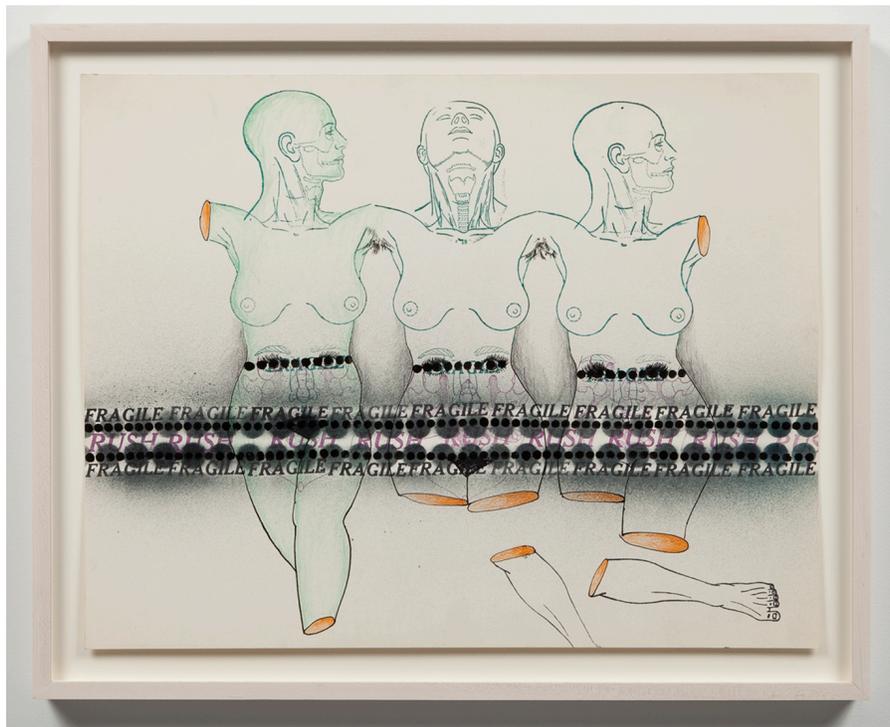
**Simone Subal Gallery, New York**

**9 September – 4 November**

**By Jonathan T.D. Neil**

1961: Lem's *Solaris*; 1962: Dick's *The Man in the High Castle*; 1963: Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle*; 1965: Herbert's *Dune*; 1966: Heinlein's *The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress*; 1967: Zelazny's *Lord of Light*; 1968: Clarke's *2001: A Space Odyssey* and Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*; 1969: Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*...

The 1960s were a golden age for science fiction, though as the list above would indicate, it was a bit more golden for men than for women. Le Guin was, and is, the rare pathbreaker, in the literature and in thought. *The Left Hand of Darkness* was not feminist SF. It did, and does, what we expect of all great literature, and that's to pry our minds free of convention. That Le Guin did this via the invention of an androgyne race won it the feminist label, but we can see now that it was an early stab at the kind of hybridity that Donna Haraway would flesh out 15 years later.



[Kiki Kogelnik](#) (who passed away in 1997) deserves a big place in this discussion. An émigré on the run from Vienna at the moment, in 1964, when Actionism set up its mud-and-blood-wrestling matches as vehicles of sociosexual liberation, Kogelnik took up in New York and quickly fell in with the Pop set – primarily Lichtenstein, and Oldenburg, whose early love for goopy objects echoed the Actionists's love of bodily fluids. But the image reigned in New York, and so Kogelnik's images, of bodies mostly, were rendered flat and graphic, yet always still with an inside, and always as something more or less than human.

Using medical stamps of heads (in profile, or head-on with chins raised to emphasise the throat), legs and women's torsos, and silhouettes of figures made from spraypainting over the edges of cutouts, Kogelnik, like Warhol, mechanised and automated the otherwise authorial, indexical trace. If Warhol wanted to be a machine, Kogelnik wanted to be a robot, a different kind of incorporation entirely. Her works on paper, such as *Robots* (1966) or *Untitled (Robots)* (c. 1967), show cut-and-quartered bodies getting wired together as if coming off an outer world assembly line. The paintings *Outer Space* (1964) and *Atmospheric Drag on Satellite* (1965) show what the dream life of such beings might be.

Kogelnik's greatest affinity might be with Paul Thek, whose *Technological Reliquaries* from the mid-1960s exhibit similar obsessions with impossible bodily hybridities and a kind of cyborg mindedness. But Kogelnik's work is less disaster-laden, less anxiety-ridden and allegorical with regard to sexuality. The figure in *The Human Touch* (c. 1965), whose head is disjointed from its body and perfectly circular, is ecstatic, a secular St Teresa for our robotic age – it's a label that could apply to Kogelnik as well.