

an ego of her own

kaufmann repetto is pleased to present an *ego of her own*, a group exhibition curated by Amanda Schmitt, taking place in both our Milan and New York galleries, featuring the work of **Emma Amos, Mamma Andersson, Maximiliane Baumgartner, Ann Craven, Aria Dean, Elisa Filomena, Anthea Hamilton, Brook Hsu, Hayv Kahraman, Jordan Kasey, Marie Laurencin, Alissa McKendrick, Birgit Megerle, Jeanette Mundt, Aliza Nisenbaum, Paulina Olowska, Silke Otto-Knapp, Marcia Schwartz, Katja Seib, and Issy Wood**. The exhibition continues a series of group shows at kaufmann repetto that draw attention to themes of femininity and gender-related issues, topics that have been fundamental in the gallery's navigation since its establishment in 2000.

"La femme est le contraire du Dandy. Donc elle doit faire horreur. La femme a faim, et elle veut manger; soif, et elle veut boire. Elle est en rut, et elle veut être foutue... Le beau merite! La femme est naturelle, c'est-a- dire abominable".¹

This exhibition reclaims the position of the dandy for women. The title derives from a recently translated version of Viennese theoretician Oswald Wiener's 1982 text, *Eine Art Einzige*², which was elected for re-publication in the Fall 2019 issue of the October³ journal. Though literally meaning (in translation) "A sort of unique one" or "A sort of singular being", the translation here has surmised the meaning to be "An Ego of Her Own," attributing a female clause to a genderless preposition. While the task here isn't necessarily to analyze the translator's decision to insert the "ego" into the title, nor Wiener's absence in discussing gender in relation to the dandy, the re-publishing of this essay in English catalyzed an opportunity to postulate the existence of a female dandy, a sort of antithesis to the traditional [male] dandy. The timing of this translation happened to coincide with a developing aesthetic trend, a particularly romantic, sincere, and feminine approach to painting and other media whose stylistic ubiquity has become increasingly palpable in the last decade, representing a distinct re-routing from the cool, mechanical, and dandy-ist approach which rose to popularity in Europe and the US at the turn of the millenium.

The dandy-ist philosophy is originally a Eurocentric one: Charles Baudelaire is perhaps the most recognized to have written frequently and prolifically on the concept of the dandy, a (mostly) male figure who occupied certain social and cultural milieus at turn of the 18th and 19th centuries, notably

1 Baudelaire, Charles (1821-1867): *Mon coeur mis à nu: journal intime*, 1887.

2 Oswald Wiener: *Eine Art Einzige* (1982). In: Verena von der Heyden-Rynsch (Hg.): *Riten der Selbstauflösung*. München: Matthes & Seitz 1982: pp. 35-78.

3 October, Fall 2019, issue 170, Oswald Wiener, *An Ego of Her Own*: pp. 69-94.

in cosmopolitan cities like London or Paris. Among many characteristics, be it in terms of class, behavior, aesthetics, and lifestyle –or a melange of these– Baudelaire claims that a dandy must “live and sleep in front of a mirror”. This here highlights the cybernetic tools necessary for a dandy to thrive: a dandy must receive constant feedback, for a dandy’s subjectivity is defined by what they observe and what is reflected back to them. It is here that Wiener elaborates upon the dandy as a cybernetic organism; if the dandy doesn’t like what they see around them, or it doesn’t befit their perceived reflection, they escape a situation by manipulating one’s own perception of it. The dandy is highly in touch with their ego, which is responsible for reality-testing. In the translator Jakob Schillinger’s introduction to the Wiener text⁴, he remarks that in “observing how the other observes, the dandy renders observation reflexive”. In other words, the act of gaining information about the other is what in fact defines the observer. This cybernetic cycle is the core behavioristic tool of the dandy.

The point here however is not to commend the dandy as a male phenom of the 18th and 19th centuries, but to attempt to shape a new definition of *la dandie* and the space she occupies in the 21st century (and in this exhibition, the emerging depictions of this female figure as depicted by women artists). The female dandy co-opts the strategy of the male dandy who in turn co-opts the female strategy of being observed, being seen. This is a double reversal, and essentially, a parasitic strategy OF liberation. It is a double-mirror situation. A dandy defines themselves based on the reflection of those around them, whereas the female dandy defines themselves not solely via the gaze of others, but from within. Baudelaire was then right in saying “woman is the opposite of the dandy” (if only that), but for the wrong reasons.

The women portrayed in the paintings of this exhibition together depict the image of the female dandy: a 21st century woman who –unlike a “traditional” male dandy (who is made in the image of those whom he observes)– is made in their own sovereign image, resistant to the cybernetic feedback of the others’ gaze be it male, media, or societal.

⁴ October, Fall 2019, issue 170, Jakob Schillinger: *Oswald Wiener on Dandyism*: pp. 31-50.