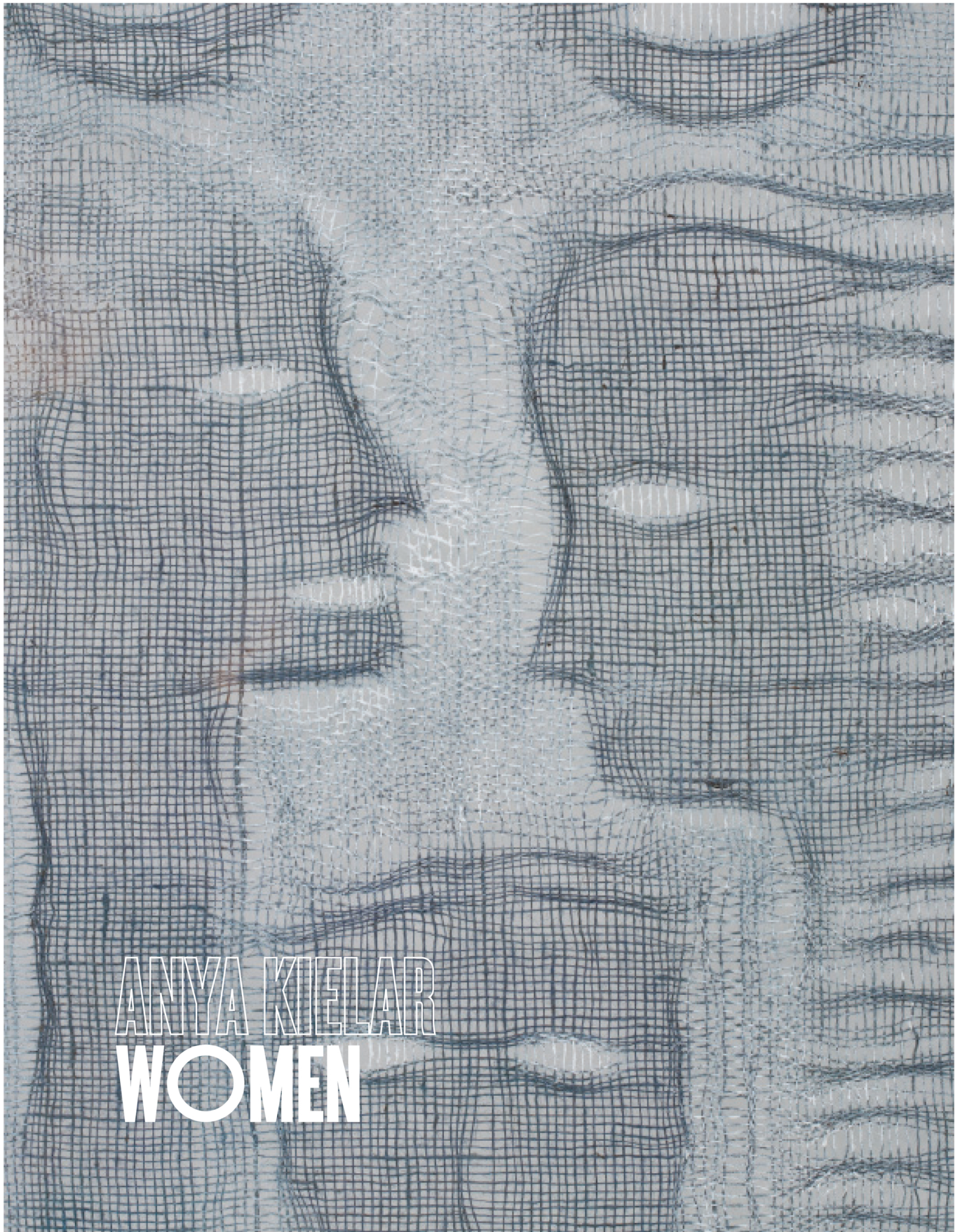


rachel uffner



ANYA KIELAR
WOMEN

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Exhibition Catalog



Rachel Uffner Gallery

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2012



ANYA KIELAR
W MEN

A series of observations while being observed by the work of Anya Kielar

“I wish to blur the firm boundaries which we self-certain people tend to delineate around all we can achieve.”
—Hannah Höch

When you look at the work of Anya Kielar you realize how the delineation between being an observer and being observed, between living and not living objects, makes no sense anymore. In fact as soon as you start looking at the work you realize the work is already looking at you. When you encounter Kielar’s artworks you feel a bit like Alice meeting the flowers in Wonderland—they are simultaneously attractive and intimidating, and staring at you whether you like it or not. Whether a full size figure or just a single eye, her artworks are continuously making eye contact with the viewer, flirting the same way many people do every day on the streets of New York. I’ve been flirting with Kielar’s work for quite some time now, and as embarrassing as it may seem, I can’t help myself. Damsels in distress, femme fatales, or downtown girls, her female figures are gazing at you, reminding you that the encounter of Ulysses with the Sirens was not just a myth—it was a metaphor. I am trying to free myself from this pleasant hypnosis in order to begin a conversation with these beautiful figures. Needless to say, I want to impress the *Lady*.

Anya Kielar’s father, Paul Kielar, was raised in a small farming town in Pennsylvania. His parents were immigrants from Poland who never learned to speak English. Paul worked for the film and theater industry for thirty years; in his retirement he became a theater impresario and actor. Part of his job was organizing elaborate trade shows for companies and directing events that involved stage productions, lighting, and the orchestration of actors relevant to the theme of the event. Kielar grew up around these productions, so from a tender age she knew what it meant to *put on a show*. So it follows that her sculptures and installations are very theatrical, and her work seems to be made using theater props. Even the way she arranges the materials in her studio reminds you of the inventory from a theatrical costume department. Her mother, Elzbieta, was also an influence. She came to the United States from Poland when she was thirty-two, and retained a great appreciation for the customs of her native country. She was a gifted seamstress and would make amazing outfits for the young artist, filled with elaborate colors and patterns. Growing up, it was as if the household was constantly observing festivities and rituals.

Portrait of a Lady



In my approach to art making, I draw on how theatricality can be used to create a more grand emotional setting for a piece. At the same time I also like the intensity of the intimate touch of handmade processes and folk traditions, underlining the idea of making something for the pleasure of it.

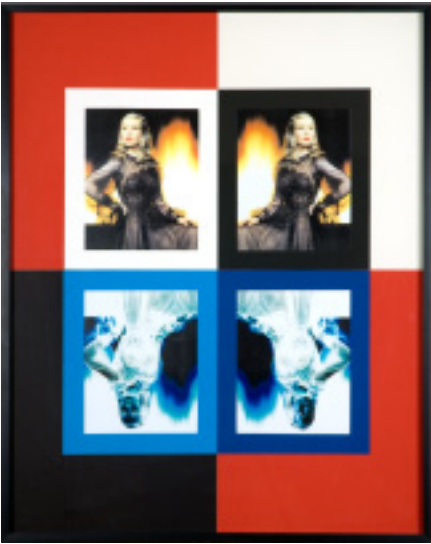
The female figure is a predominant element in Kielar’s work, and in fact one of her solo shows was simply titled “Lady.” One of her most iconic artworks is a self-portrait comprised of a photo collage in which a detail of her face is inserted into a picture of actress Veronica Lake. That work is part of a larger series (an example of which is at right) in which Kielar painted her face, found images of women from the past that she could slightly resemble through makeup, and then spliced a positive and negative version of the image together into a collage. In that body of work the artist was dealing with the notion of the alter ego, presenting herself as the *other* version of Veronica Lake, setting up a composition wherein the ego and alter ego, light and shadow, positive and negative, could interrogate each other. In subsequent pieces Kielar continued to redefine the genre of portraiture. For her show entitled “FACE,” she made relief paintings with colored sand of different facial features and arranged them on the wall so they made large faces. Her present solo exhibition, “Women,” includes a large-scale fabric painting depicting different female forms through various means of representation.

I think all my artwork comes from some psychological space that creates an evolving portrait. But the portrait is more the embodiment of what it is to be a woman rather than me as a specific person.

The history of modern art, especially the aesthetic style of the avant-garde, plays an important role in Kielar’s practice. Her work can be perceived as an example of anachronism: Her art making is a continuous attempt to escape time, trying to avoid what is current, the so-called “contemporary.” In the a-temporality that she constructs her work can look like a fresco from Pompeii as much as a painting by Marc Chagall—which reminds us of her Central European roots—or even one of Yves Klein’s anthropometries—partly due to the big presence of blue in Kielar’s palette. At the same time, the artist is not trying to consciously avoid the connotations of contemporary art. It might actually be the opposite: By exercising total freedom from the language of contemporary art, Kielar is able to incorporate all of her disparate interests into a practice that can shift and change form.

My taste definitely tends to drift toward more archaic objects because they capture the spirit of a person long-gone and there is a mystery to looking at an object that derives from a distant set of aesthetic priorities. A lot of my interests are based in very old and basic traditions. I’m more genuinely intrigued with what people can do with techniques and the inventiveness of making something out of nothing. I prefer keeping the evidence of the handmade apparent in my work as a means to capture my own spirit. I feel if you do that genuinely there is always a chance you will potentially capture the spirit of the times around you.

Craft is another key word to understanding Kielar’s modus operandi. The way she deals with the material, the “making” of her work, the way she tries to invent new techniques—like her trademark “sprayograms,” in which she creates paintings by putting objects on a sheet of paper and then spray painting them—is always driven by the desire to make something unique. If we consider the current state of contemporary art, where works of art are more and more similar to commodities and where the aura exists only within the



Veronica, 2006, museum board, photocopy, paste, 40 x 30 inches

artist’s persona – leaving the artworks empty and cold, like gadgets – Kielar’s practice is quite exceptional. In her artworks – which are like talismans – the aura burns like a flame, and there is little room for cynicism or distance, even when the ironic language of Dada is referenced, as we can see when comparing her sprayograms with Man Ray’s famous “rayographs.” One of the reasons Kielar is constantly looking for new techniques is because she sees technique as a way to be inventive and expand her understanding of herself as an artist. For Kielar, learning a new material is close in feeling to the spark of creation. This approach also makes the process less predictable, freeing the artist from predetermined constraints and opening her up to possible new ideas.

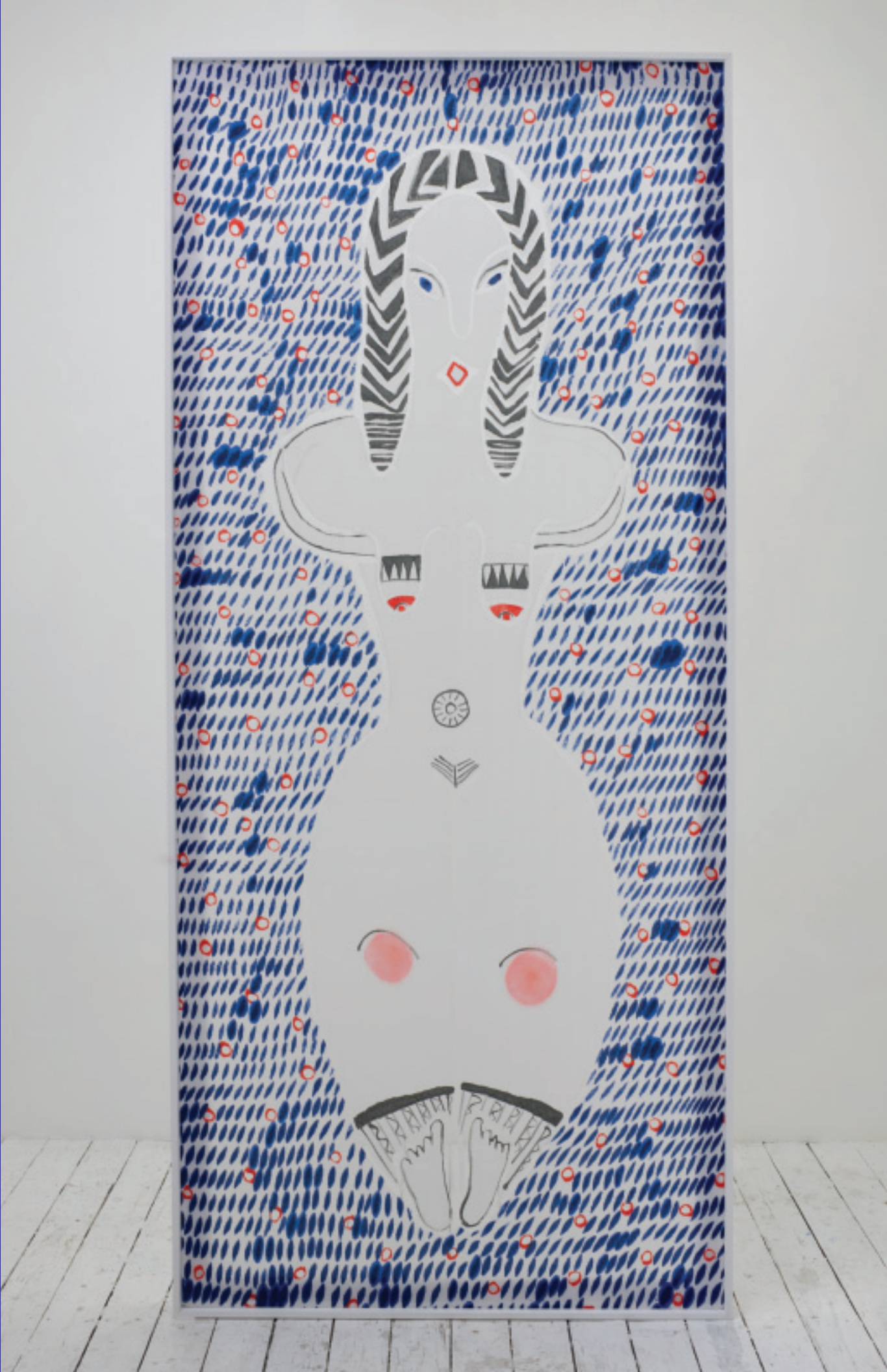
I usually have a rough sense of what quality a technique will lend to a work, but in general I try to stay in a loose and intuitive state of mind. I still think there is room for taking delight in what you do, and that art doesn’t have to be overly burdened with a conceptual perimeter. I aim for my work to look like I took joy in bringing together all the disparate elements.

Anya Kielar is the quintessential studio-based artist. She doesn’t make shows, she makes bodies of work, figures and objects, which are eventually presented in a space other than the studio. Once each work leaves that magical space they are alive, either together or by themselves. The artist’s studio is in her apartment, so there’s no separation between living space and workspace, a reflection of a life in which there is very little distinction between time making work and time away from it. For example, the way her most recent body of work began was the result of some specific problem-solving. While working with plaster, Kielar realized how toxic the material could be in a domestic environment. Leaving plaster behind, she sought out materials that wouldn’t have such residual effects, and settled on fabric and textiles. This idea emerged organically: Kielar has always integrated pieces of fabric, or used it as veil over a figure, although she rarely used it as surface to paint upon or manipulate. With her current fabric pieces, Kielar began exploring how dye works, filling her kitchen with huge pots of blue and green liquid. Eventually she started to use felt, researching the way felt has to be pressed into itself to become a solid sheet.

My studio is where I finalize all of these ideas, but the rest of my apartment is where these ideas are developed. I feel like this philosophy is rooted in my belief that art needs to come more directly from the way you live your life. In my case, I’ve always been really drawn to fabric, whether it’s in the shape of a tablecloth, a dress or a tapestry, so I finally forced myself to integrate this interest into my work.

It is hard to imagine Anya Kielar doing what she does in a city other than New York, specifically downtown New York, where the artist was born and raised. In her work the references to the city are never literal, but remain ever-present in everything from her street-gathered materials to her dominant female characters. When asked about her relationship to the city, the artist describes the city as a hard place to blend into but at the same time a hard place in which to be a total individual. It’s a place where everyone has multiple layers of ethnicities, styles, cultures, and attitudes. Kielar has always been inspired by the various characters, each inhabiting her own world, that pass across her urban stage.

I feel that New York plays heavily into my work even if there are no references to the actual city. I think it shows up more in the characters that I portray, most specifically, the strength and eccentricities of the female characters that I keep coming back to over and over again over the years. The women around the city that catch my eye always seems to be seeking their individuality and are partaking in this internal quest to stand out in a city that is cohesive in its diversity. ■



Seated Women, 2012, fabric, dye, textile paint, wood, 97 x 42 x 3 inches

Face, 2012, fabric, dye, textile paint, wood, 85.5 x 43 x 3 inches





Faces, 2012, burlap, fabric dye, textile paint, wood, 61 x 35.5 x 3 inches

Mother, Mother, Child, 2012, burlap, fabric dye, textile paint, wood, 97 x 35 x 3 inches





Spiraling, 2012, fabric, dye, paint, wood, 85.5 x 42 x 3 inches



Her Majesty, 2012, fabric, dye, wood, paint, 87 x 43 x 2.75 inches

Big Teller, 2012, fabric, dye, paint, wire, wood, glue, 40 x 30 x 8 inches





I and I, 2011, plaster, paint, canvas, rope, wood,
artwork: 84 x 36 x 12 inches, base: 6 x 40 x 14 inches





Les Doubles Dames, 2011, plaster, paint, glue, burlap, rope, wood, artwork: 84 x 36 x 12 inches, base: 6 x 40 x 14 inches



Single Woman, 2011, plaster, paint, glue, burlap, rope, wood, 40 x 30 x 8 inches



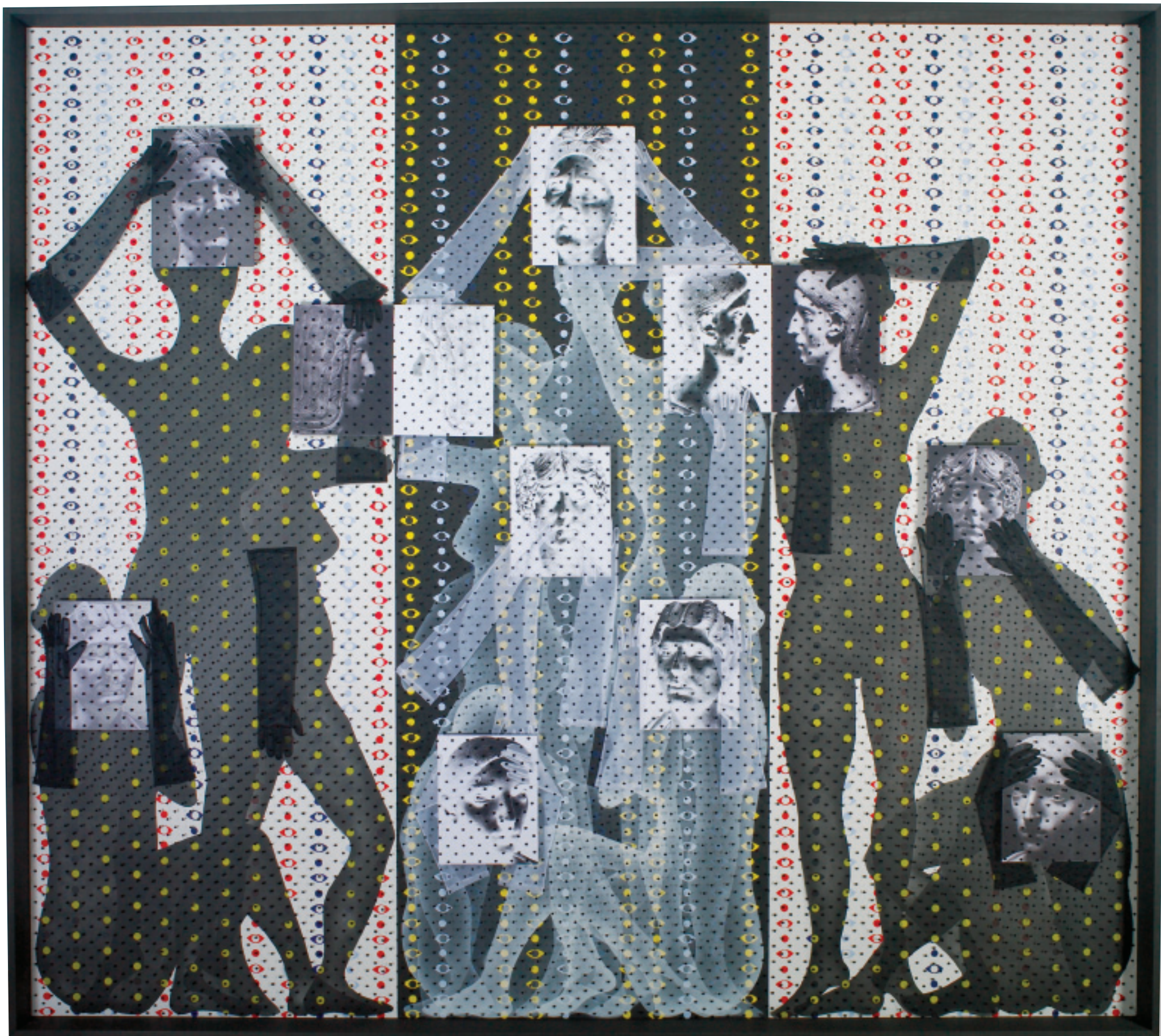
Installation view, *FACE*, Rachel Uffner Gallery,
New York, NY, February 25 - April 4, 2010

Purple Nose, 2010, masonite board, mixed media, paint, sand, 34 x 21 x 5 inches





Grey Mouth, 2010, masonite board, mixed media, paint, sand, 38 x 21 x 5 inches



The Geeks, 2008, wood panel, paint, fabric, inkjet prints, 96 x 108 x 6 inches



Black Lines, 2008, wood, paint, metal, fabric, glue, paper, 49.5 x 33.5 x 6 inches



White Lines, 2008, wood, paint, metal, fabric, glue, paper, 49.5 x 33.5 x 8 inches

Blue Lady, 2008, wood, paint, metal, fabric, glue, paper, 85.5 x 37.5 x 7 inches





Yellow Lines, 2008, sprayogram, acrylic on paper, 50 x 96 inches



Window, 2008, sprayogram, acrylic on paper, 50 x 96 inches

On the cover — **Faces** (detail), 2012, burlap, fabirc dye, textile paint, wood, 61 x 35.5 x 3 inches
On the back cover — **Red Eye**, 2012, paint, canvas, fabric, metal rod, 72 x 52 inches

Women
Anya Kielar

Essay by Nicola Trezzi
Graphic Design by Forest



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- Previous solo exhibitions:
- Lines*, Locust Projects, Miami, FL, 2012
 - FACE*, Rachel Uffner Gallery, New York, NY, 2010
 - Anya Kielar*, Casey Kaplan, New York, NY, 2009
 - Lady*, Daniel Reich Gallery, New York, NY, 2007
 - Anya Kielar*, Daniel Reich Gallery, New York, NY, 2005

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