

Staff, "History of Freak Flags Flies at Susan Inglett Gallery", NEW YORK PRESS, 13 June 2012.



History of Freak Flags Flies at Susan Inglett Gallery

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By Jim Long

In early 1970, with the publication of Robin Morgan's poem "Goodbye to All That" as its battle cry, WITCH (Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell) took over the daily operations of RAT Subterranean News, founded in 1968, and transformed it into Women's LibeRATion.

By then, New York City had become the East Coast headquarters of activists, writers, musicians and artists from around the world, and tabloid publications like RAT were springing from rhizome networks as quickly as psychedelic mushrooms. Spoofing the lurid covers of easily available "adult" tabloids like National Police Gazette, Keyhole and National Tattler and inspired by progressive politics, the anti-war movement and the power of the pen to empower the people, the romance of cash-up-front, print-at-night independent publishing took hold, with lucrative personals sections paying the bills. Membership in the Underground Press Syndicate allowed free access to other members' material.

As tips of very cool icebergs go, even the ever-curious cops and feds were never sure how big the material under the surface might be. (Confronted with boxes of evidence, an editor at the East Village Other was informed by arresting officers that they knew R. Crumb was really him.)

Curated by Specific Object's David Platzker, SCREW YOU at Susan Inglett Gallery features back issues of EVO, RAT, SCREW, KISS, LUV, New York Review of Sex (and Politics) and ORGY, along with the work of some of their artists and writers—Brigid Berlin, John Chamberlain, Dan Graham, Peter Hujar, Yayoi Kusama, Mel Ramos, Carolee Schneeman, Robert Stanley, Betty Tompkins and Andy Warhol. Lennon/Ono make an appearance, along with Crumb, Picasso, films by Stan Brakhage, Kusama and Warhol and writing by Gregory Battcock, Charles Bukowski and Allen Ginsberg.

Media revolution, around since the days of Luther's Theses and the peasant revolts, was joined in the '60s by revolutions in home movie cameras, tape recorders, FM radio and amped guitars. The gatekeepers were caught with their pants down. Innovative reporters like Jane Alpert at RAT wrote from inside unfolding politics, while EVO artists blew up the repressive Comics Code and its mandatory Seal of Approval.

SCREW was an unlikely grail for artists and writers hungry for the publicity of instant notoriety; after all, the publication was busted 16 times in its first three years, so chances were good your work might acquire an aura. Publisher Al Goldstein didn't give a damn about art, but his first issue's centerfold featured Kusama's naked Central Park orgy at sculptor Jose de Creeft's "Alice in Wonderland." Shortly thereafter Kusama would launch her own publication, ORGY, and Picasso would release his epic 347 erotic engravings.

The tabloids were linked in many ways, not just in the discovery that a nude on the cover would triple circulation. SCREW's art director, 17-year-old Steven Heller, branched off with NYRS(andP), offering writing from Battcock and Bukowski, photography from Chamberlain and Schneeman and art by Stanley and Ramos. EVO published KISS to compete with SCREW. The exhibition is necessarily compact, but Platzker has arranged art and ephemera as carefully as Indra's pearls. Look closely at the works and their miraculous reflections.