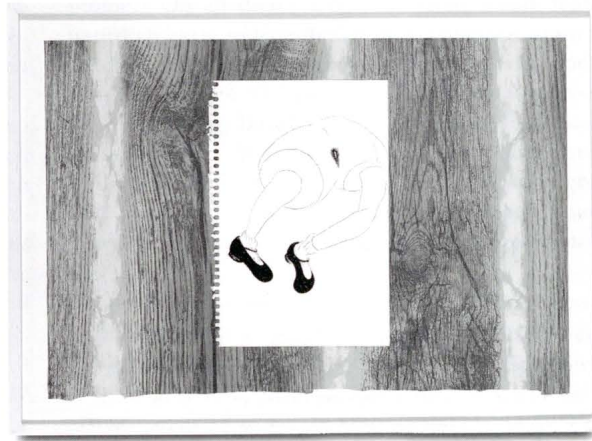


REGEN PROJECTS

Camhi, Leslie. "Domestic Horrors." Parkett No. 50/51 (1997) pp. 200 – 203

PARKETT



LESLIE CAMHI

Domestic Horrors

Avec ma main brûlée, j'écris sur la nature du feu.¹⁾

Rounding the corner some years ago in a major museum, I nearly stumbled over a cast of the figure of a woman. She was lying on the floor in fetal position. Her eye was blackened, and her hand was held protectively against her face; footprints and bruises, accusations and statistics were stamped across her naked limbs like so many blows. "Look what you made me do." "I think you like it (Mom)." "Love is

LESLIE CAMHI is a writer and cultural critic living in New York. She has written extensively on feminism, psychoanalysis, and nineteenth- and twentieth-century visual culture. She is currently at work on an anti-memoir.

forgiving." I didn't want to like the sculpture. It was painful; it was bad. It was simple; it was sad. But it brought back memories.

When Sue Williams first exhibited *IRRESISTIBLE* (1992) in a New York gallery, a man came in and kicked it. But the sculpture's resilient density—it is cast in solid rubber—made it extraordinarily resistant to attack. Had the assailant been planted there by feminists against pornography, who claim that representing violence against women only begets more of the same?²⁾ For whom was this work "irresistible"? Women also felt its pull. Some bemoaned it as promoting a "victim mentality," while others' stories of

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Sue Williams

how to play with them; adults tend to forget just how much fun they can be. Filled with the frenetic, automatic energy of sex, Williams' elaborate webs seem like vast abstract tissues of unconscious material being woven in someone's head. To make private traumas public can sometimes seem to be a strangely

depriving experience for what remains of a sense of self. Williams says that when she's alone with herself she sometimes gives herself "the willies," but by transforming these neuroses into high-spirited aesthetic practice she has found a way of giving them to us instead.

- 1) "With my burnt hand I write about the nature of fire." Cited in: Ingeborg Bachmann, *Malina*, trans. Philip Boehm (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1990), p. 58 (source unknown).
- 2) I'd feel more comfortable rehearsing the lines of this long-standing feminist debate if Sue Williams herself had not painted an explicit parody of these positions, in *ARE YOU PRO-PORN OR ANTI-PORN?* (1992), which shows a smiling woman artist being drawn and quartered, while beneath her, pro- and anti-porn positions are represented by rutting and lame horses, respectively.
- 3) Dr. Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), p. 28; as quoted in: Elaine Showalter, *Hystories* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 144.

- 4) The False Memory Syndrome Foundation's first annual meeting took place at Valley Forge (a symbolic choice of location?) in April 1993. See Ian Hacking, *Rewriting the Soul: Multiple Personality and the Sciences of Memory* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 121.
- 5) See Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "Why I Wrote 'The Yellow Wallpaper,'" in: *The Charlotte Perkins Gilman Reader*, ed. Ann J. Lane (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), pp. 19-20.
- 6) Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1973), p. 13.
- 7) *ibid.*, p. 20.

SUE WILLIAMS,
A FUNNY THING HAPPENED, 1992,
 acrylic on canvas, 48 x 42" /
ETWAS MERKWÜRDIGES GESCHAH,
 Acryl auf Leinwand, 122 x 106,7 cm.

