

object LESSONS

Judith Stein

Watching my first Ms. Olympia contest in 1997 alongside Laurie Fierstein, Al Thomas, and Michael Cunningham, I began sorting through art history to find a framework to understand bodybuilding on its own, aesthetic terms. I watched the women's tanned and oiled bodies in awe, marveling at their dramatically volumetric arms which resembled braided challah breads. Like some of the Body Artists I knew in the art world who merged the creator with the created, these performing contestants had labored diligently to construct their bodies as objects of aesthetic contemplation. But were bodybuilders works of art? Were they artists?

It was this gala evening that spurred my interest in identifying the overlaps between art and physical culture, especially in the political- and performance-oriented art environments of the 1970s and 1980s.¹ I found that feminism had inflected both bodybuilding and the visual arts in similar ways. I discovered little known precedents to Picturing the Modern Amazon, in which museums had made room for physique displays. The following essay presents these fascinating findings and traces a lineage for the recent artworks included in the Amazon exhibition.

During the 1960s and 1970s, many avant-garde art works prominently featured performing bodies. Performance Artists, who were not necessarily trained as actors or dancers, used their own bodies as their medium, gleefully scrambling distinctions between art

and life, subject and object, and artist and model.² One of the earliest examples was the British artistic team of Gilbert and George, who in 1969 began exhibiting themselves as Living Sculpture. This new body-conscious genre attracted many feminists, who used it to focus attention on the ways society demeaned females as sex objects. For example, Hannah Wilke posed nude to mimic a controversial Duchamp sculpture in her cleverly titled photographic diptych *I Object . . .*, (1977–78). Martha Rosler displayed herself being stripped and measured in a 1973 performance that she documented on video and released in 1977 as *Vital Statistics of a Citizen, Simply Obtained*.

In Rosler's piece, taking a woman's measure depersonalizes and humiliates her; in Wilke's, voyeurism is derided. Yet there are those for whom scrutiny is not a negative experience. Physique contestants, for example, accept visual evaluation as part of the competitive process. But be they art world Performance Artists or bodybuilders, women and men who place themselves on exhibit are liable to be seen as exhibitionists. Body artists circumvented this with a transformative, art world ploy—voilà, they were objects. Perhaps for similar reasons, bodybuilders also position themselves as the embodiment of art. When contextualized as art objects, both bodybuilders and artists are able to shape and influence the viewer's gaze. However, there is one major difference: one pumps iron, the other, irony.

Photographer Dan Talley wittily skewed the overlapping vocabularies of art and bodybuilding in *A Biceptual Artist*, a postcard created in 1978. It showed sculptor Gail Whately flexing her sizable biceps, while flaunting such "bisexual" attributes as hairy armpits and no bra. Chicagoan Gladys Nilsson spoofed woman's performative body display in *Pumping Iron*, a 1980 watercolor showing a gal in an evening gown theatrically raising a small clothes iron. Nilsson's 1976 watercolor *A Artyst is*

WALTER K. GUTMAN, *ANOTHER RETURN OF THE GODDESS*, 1983. DYE-TRANSFER COLOR PHOTOGRAPH (MOUNTED ON BOARD), 60¹⁵/₁₆ × 26¹/₈". PICTURING CLAUDIA WILBOURN.



a *Woik of Aart* pictured a woman proudly brandishing a paintbrush while sashaying down the street behind a picture frame. Its content and spirit resemble the contemporary sentiments expressed by Performance Artist Pat Oleszko, who turned Descartes on his head by declaring "I am therefore I art."

Extending this notion one step further, the artist and environmental activist Phyllis Yampolsky posited that anyone could be art. On May 22, 1978, she commandeered SoHo's OK Harris and Susan Caldwell galleries to stage the benefit performance *In the Event of Living Sculpture . . . Who Is Not a Work of Art?* Fifty artists and art-world luminaries participated, exhibiting themselves or another person as an art object. They ranged from a sultry Hannah Wilke, who panhandled in support of impoverished artists, to Duane Hanson, who confounded visitors by posing a real woman to imitate his celebrated, lifelike fabrications.³

Eleanor Antin's droll *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture* (1972) is the classic feminist exploration of the conceit that women possess special status as art objects. While shedding poundage during a strict diet regime, Antin photographed herself daily from four vantage points. Her tongue-in-cheek accompanying statement declared: "The work was done in the traditional Greek mode: 'The Greek sculptor worked at his block from all four sides and carved away one thin layer after another. . . .' When the image was finally refined to the point of aesthetic satisfaction the work was completed." She concluded her text by paraphrasing "our great predecessor" Michelangelo, who wrote: "not even the greatest sculptor can make anything that isn't already inside the marble."⁴

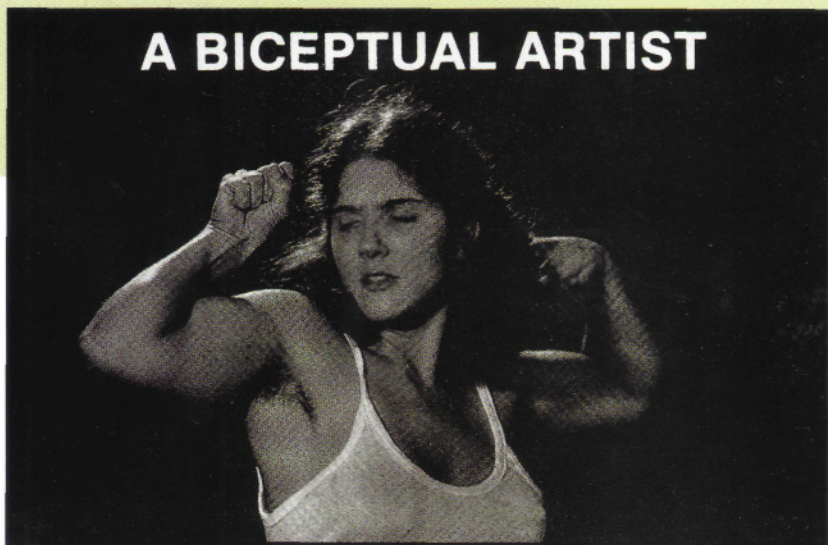
The Renaissance sculptor's words resonate in the

context of bodybuilding. For example, it is commonplace wisdom in weight training that hard work and discipline can develop only what genetics have provided; not every bodybuilder can look like Kim Chizevsky, for example. As it happens, Michelangelo's sculptural concepts were invoked in relation to bodybuilding just four years after Antin created her subtractive "sculpture" *Carving*. Art historian Colin Eisler observed that Michelangelo's idea "of bringing form out of the 'blob,'" was "somewhat analogous to the process of self-realization through bodybuilding . . . , in which exercise brings out the fresh manifestations of the divine original within."⁵

Eisler made his comments in February 1976 at New York's Whitney Museum of American Art in an unprecedented public program entitled *Articulate Muscle: The Male Body in Art*. Occasioned by the publication of author Charles Gaines's and photographer George Butler's book *Pumping Iron*, the program included a symposium, film screening, and demonstration by bodybuilding champions Arnold Schwarzenegger, Frank Zane, and Ed Corey. A capacity crowd crammed into the Whitney's fourth floor to watch them pose on a spotlight turntable. But first, critic Vicki Goldberg moderated a series of scholarly presentations by Eisler, Matthew Baigell, Richard Brilliant, and Mason Cooley.⁶ Brilliant, who spoke on "The Body as Gesture," recalls that the audience "could hardly wait until we were done to put on exhibitions of their own, in the flesh."⁷

Just for that occasion, the gallery walls were installed with Butler's photos of bodybuilders.⁸ By all accounts, the thrill of the evening came with the live demonstration. Corey, Zane, and Schwarzenegger held the audience spellbound as the turntable made a full

A BICEPTUAL ARTIST



DAN TALLEY, *BICEPTUAL ARTIST*,
1978. POSTCARD, 3½ × 5½".
PICTURING GAIL WHATLEY.



♀ GLADYS NILSSON, *A ARTYST IS A WOIK OF AART*, 1976. WATERCOLOR, 15 × 97/8".



revolution for each of their poses. Serving as a guide for the art world denizens who never had seen a bodybuilder up close, narrator Charles Gaines commented that: "physique posing is a kinetic form of art. . . . Posing is the presentation; the physique is the object being presented."

In the question and answer period that followed, the three performers were asked about the connections between art and bodybuilding. Zane reflected that: "[My body] is like a piece of sculpture because like a sculptor works at a statue with different tools. . . . I do the same thing. . . . but my apparatus is different. I use barbells, dumbbells, and pulleys. . . . I feel like an artist [and] my body is a work of art." To which Professor Eisler responded: ". . . if you are a work of art, you had the disadvantage of having a bad art teacher because, to me, your poses are the personification of nineteenth-century camp." Boos and catcalls ensued. Goldberg hastily concluded the program and the academics breathed a sigh of relief.⁹

The Whitney event had showcased only the male body. Public awareness of female bodybuilding was nascent in 1976. But one year later, the United States Women's Physique Association sponsored its first contest. It was only a matter of time before a museum or gallery would organize an educational program like the Whitney's that would include women. On October 4, 1982, the art gallery of California State University at Northridge hosted a dual-gendered posing session in conjunction with an exhibition of photographs of bodybuilders.¹⁰ Unlike the New York audiences, this California crowd dismayed the participants with their reserved behavior.¹¹ Undaunted, four years later gallery director Louise Lewis sponsored a second bodybuilding event that was more oriented to Performance Art. It was no surprise that the event was spearheaded by Lisa Lyon.

Immortalized by photographer Robert Mapplethorpe, Lisa Lyon is the one name that the general public still proffers when asked to cite a woman bodybuilder. Although the first women's competition occurred two

years earlier, it is the "World Women's Bodybuilding Championship," organized by Lyon in 1979, that the public regards as ground zero. Lyon, who had unerring marketing instincts, named it a "world" event even though all of the participants came from California. She garnered for the event the sponsorship of a Los Angeles TV station and of Gold's Gym where she trained, as had Schwarzenegger before her. Calling upon her considerable choreographic skills, Lyon had crafted a dazzling routine for the competition. According to some reports, most of the other contestants ran through standard gym routines and some hadn't realized until the last minute that they were expected to pose to music.¹² Lyon won first place.

"[Women] are not trained to think about our potential . . . , we are trained to think about our limitations. . . . Our energies transcend anything most people can imagine," Lyon quoted herself as saying on her resume of the mid-80s. At UCLA in the first half of the 70s, an energetic Lyon had majored in Ethnic Arts and Anthropology, and minored in Art and French. She studied kendo, a Japanese martial art, ballet, flamenco, and jazz dance, as well as piano, guitar, voice, and percussion. In addition, she took classes in acting and in 1977 did graduate work at UCLA in Critical Studies, Political Sociology, and Cinema. She supported herself as a film studio story analyst. As described by novelist Bruce Chatwin, in his introductory text to Robert Mapplethorpe's 1983 book of photographs *Lady: Lisa Lyon*, the stunningly attractive Lyon considered "bodybuilding as ritual, and her concept of this ritual as Art."¹³

Lyon conceived of herself primarily as a "Performance Artist" and secondarily as the "First World Women's Bodybuilding Champion."¹⁴ Chatwin recounted that she had enraged the new crop of women bodybuilders by declining to defend her title at the Second World Championship, considering herself not so much an athlete as a 'performance artist'—a sculptor whose raw material was her own body. Since this material was, in the long run, ephemeral, she was on the lookout for the right photographer to document it. 'A mirror,' she says, 'is not an objective witness.'¹⁵ By 1986, Lyon had collaborated with well known photographers such as Mapplethorpe, Helmut Newton, and Joel-Peter Witkin, as well as the British sculptor Barry Flannigan. When their artworks depicting Lisa were shown at notable venues, so too was the art of Lisa Lyon.

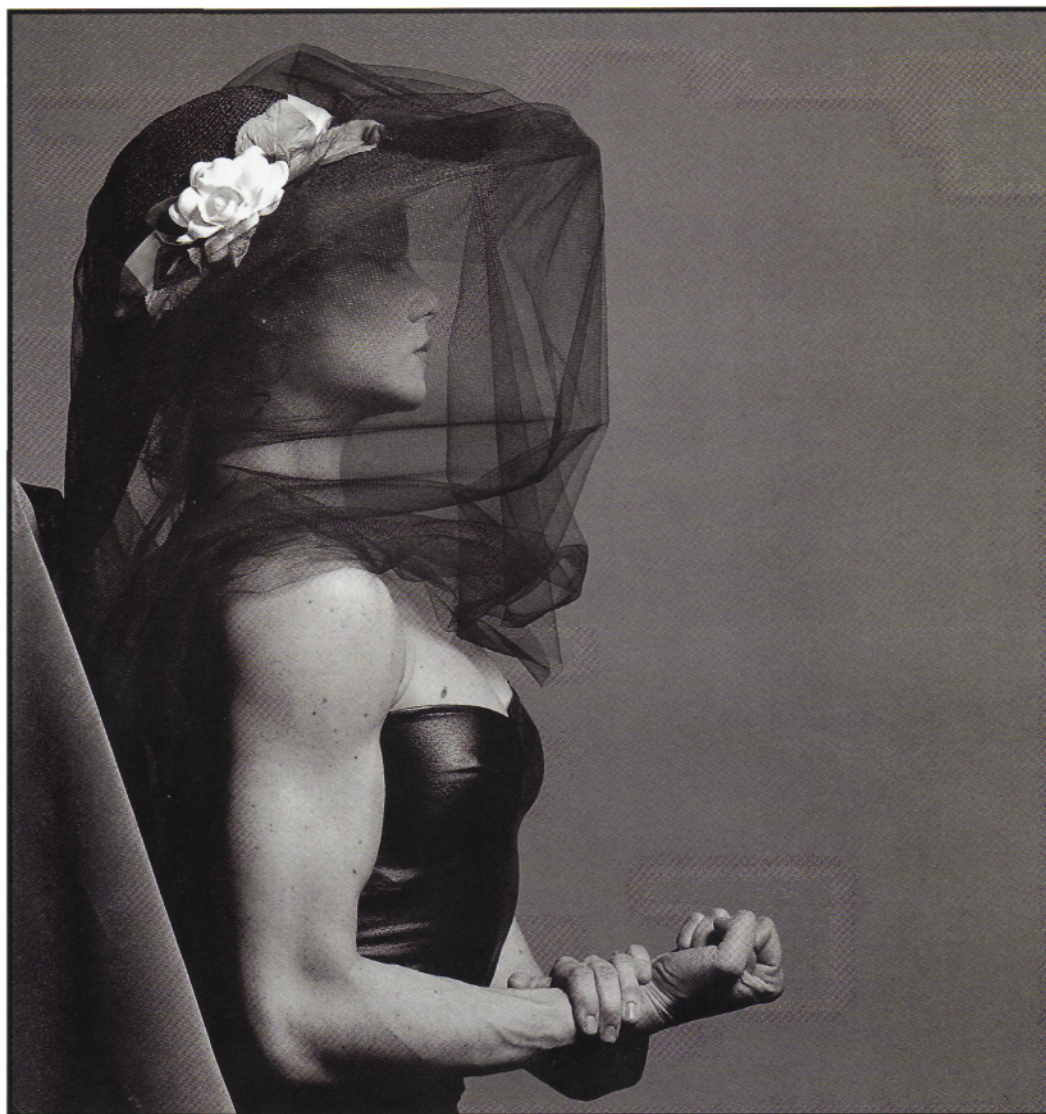
At California State University at Northridge on the evening of November 7, 1986, the crowds started lining up hours before the scheduled opening at the Art Gallery. They couldn't wait to see *Icons of the Divine: The Human Form as Art*, a performance art event created and directed by Lyon.¹⁶ When finally admitted to

the gallery, the patient audience pooled around raised platforms to gaze up at three male and three female bodybuilders posing as works of sculpture. Lit dramatically, fancifully costumed and made-up, the otherwise motionless models changed position every five minutes. Live electronic music underscored the impression of transformative magic afoot.

The title *Icons of the Divine* revealed Lyon's earnest interest in the spiritual dimension of bodybuilding. In an excerpt of her poetry quoted on the postcard invitation, she expressed a concept of inner beauty that harkened back to Michelangelo: "The most perfect grace consists not in external ornamentation but in allowing the original material to stand forth." All of the participants shared Lyon's intention to present "the human form as art." For example, Darla Miller suggested: "I try to sculpt my body like a statue, creating the perfect curves and contours . . . a beautiful body that beams . . . to reflect a perfect physical being . . . in the image of God."¹⁷ Lyon dominated the second half of the program with a videotape of her 1984 Tokyo performance *Contemporary Alchemy, Evolution Ritual*.¹⁸ She had worn only body paint and a G-string to perform a dramatically choreographed series of poses. "Respect this female power," she intoned on the tape, in a sexy voice-over of her own poetry.

Although Lisa Lyon was the most renowned proponent of artful bodybuilding in the early '80s, Claudia Wilbourn also merits recognition. In the 1979 "World Championship" she had come in second behind Lyon. An articulate, first-generation feminist with a BFA in studio art, Wilbourn liked the feeling of physical power that bodybuilding gave her: "When you are a little person, ninety pounds and female, people always treat you like a doll. A childlike figure, not to be taken seriously."¹⁹ She was attracted by the challenge of penetrating what she termed the "male bastion" of bodybuilding: "They saw that I drove myself as hard as they did. Harder. . . . They could not deny me. I forced them to change their minds." For Wilbourn, bodybuilding "was not just a sport. It was a personal expression. By creating an ideal from my body, molding and remolding each detail, until it satisfied my inner vision, I was defining an aesthetic. It was a form of artistic statement."

Sometime in 1980, she met Walter K. Gutman, a seventy-seven-year-old filmmaker and patron of the arts. Eccentric and charming, Gutman had a longstanding attraction to powerfully muscular women. "I became an artist in order to try to meet strong women," he guilelessly revealed in 1983, in reference to taking up painting in the 1950s.²⁰ A securities analyst dubbed "a Proust in Wall Street," Gutman had been actively involved with the New York avant-garde for decades.²¹



ROBERT MAPPLETHORPE, *LISA LYON*, 1982.
BLACK-AND-WHITE PHOTOGRAPH, 20 × 16".

Citing his friend's "Dionysian passion for feminine bodies," sculptor George Segal has described how Gutman would bring muscular circus performers to his studio, who would pose for his sculpture while Gutman photographed the process.²² Gutman's 1981 photographic portfolio *Inspirations of Strong Women* included documentation of a 1960s session with Suzanne Perry, a celebrated acrobat with Ringling Brothers Barnum & Bailey Circus, and a co-founder of Big Apple Circus.²³

"Bodybuilding broadens the spectrum of the feminine by adding strength," Gutman said on the soundtrack of his unconventional 1981 film *Clothed in Muscle: A Dance of the Body*. A collaborative venture between Gutman and Wilbourn, *Clothed in Muscle* granted viewers permission to scrutinize her unclothed body.²⁴ As the camera reverentially detailed her musculature, the voice-over expressed the former art school model's interest in doing bodybuilding competitions without

bathing suits. The filmmaker muses in the voice-over: "I thought to myself: She's not nude. She's clothed in muscle." In a statement he made subsequent to the filming, Gutman said, "Claudia is a sculptor and . . . felt, as I did, that the effect of body building, when filmed nude . . . makes it look in frequent sections like antique Greek sculpture . . . a dance of the body."

The idea that "in bodybuilding, muscles function in much the same way as clothing" was also articulated by feminist film critic Annette Kuhn in her insightful analysis of Charles Gaines's 1984 film *Pumping Iron II: The Women*.²⁵ This influential movie covered the 1984 Ms. Olympia championship, held at Caesar's Palace, Las Vegas. Gaines closely followed three of the competitors: Rachel McLish, Carla Dunlap, and the Australian Bev Francis, a former champion powerlifter. Viewers of the film could eavesdrop on the jurors, the women, and their trainers as they disputed the contentious issue of "appropriate" muscularity for women—discussions prompted by Francis's singular build. No woman with

such developed muscles had ever before entered the competition. Deemed "too masculine" by the judges, she placed last, the top prize going to Dunlap. Yet the lithe and sinewy look epitomized by Lisa Lyon and Claudia Wilbourn was soon to be out of style. Muscle, like clothing, has cycles of fashion, and taste was changing.²⁶

While Gutman's *Clothed in Muscle* played at art movie houses, documentaries such as *Pumping Iron II* and the contemporary *Women of Iron* brought the image of the hypermuscular woman to a wider audience.²⁷ Before the '80s, hypermuscular women rarely appear in the movies. For example, six years after the admirable and unabashedly muscular Rosie the Riveter exhorted women to do their part for the War effort, George Cukor's 1949 film *Adam's Rib* presented a physically powerful model whom few were expected to emulate.²⁸ In this delightful Hepburn and Tracy vehicle, the heavily corseted Hope Emerson played Olympia La Pere, a carnival understander who could support the weight of five men. To demonstrate her skills, the Samsonian

LEFT: WILLIAM WEGMAN, *UPPER BODY*, 1984. POLACOLOR II POLAROID PRINT, 24 × 20". PICTURING EVE DARCY.

RIGHT: SHERMAN DREXLER, *GERTRUDE EDERLE*, 1963. OIL ON CANVAS, 60 × 50".



La Pere hoisted an irate Tracy into the air. By 1989, director Blake Edwards would cast the hypermuscular Raye Hollitt as a babe of an aerobics instructor who strips before bedding John Ritter, a dissolute writer, in *Skin Deep*.

Among the rare examples are Sherman Drexler, who in 1963 painted an Amazonian swimmer in *Gertrude Ederle*,³⁰ and his wife, the writer and painter Rosalyn Drexler, who showed a wrestler glorying in her success in the 1965 painting *The Winner*.³¹ In the 1970s, painter and photographer Rudy Burkhardt made a series of collages based on his photos of the model Takwa, flexing her biceps.

Many more artists became aware of hypermuscular women in the first half of the '80s, thanks in part to Lisa Lyon's visibility and to the documentaries that familiarized the larger American population with the world of women bodybuilders.³² Howard Kanovitz's *Red Figure Posedown* 1983; is one of a series based on images he discovered in magazines. Kanovitz found that physique contestants presented "a new kind of figure. These gals had a quality that reminded me of Greek sculpture, or even Michelangelo's works in the Medici Chapel."³³ Gustav Rehberger underscored the attributes of his muscular models in the drawings he made while teaching at the Art Students League. The photographer William Wegman, better known for his images of beguiling Weimeraners, did a series of Polaroids of his muscular friend Eve Darcy in 1984. In her colossal-scaled *Rainbow Caverns* (1987), Ida Applebroog featured a dark-skinned bodybuilder as a trope of female empowerment.

By the mid-80s, the idea that the human body is a malleable sculptural material had become common currency.³⁴ It had jumped the confines of both the art world and the bodybuilding community to land in the domain of popular culture. Today every gym and health club offers classes in body sculpting.³⁵ Anyone with willpower can become a body artist. If they diet, they do subtractive sculpture, if they weight train, it's additive. Does this represent the democratization of the art world, or perhaps the logical extension of Marcel Duchamp's belief that any found object can be art if placed in an artful setting? Like the roués and just plain folks who celebrate in the final scene of *Pecker*, filmmaker John Waters's 1998 send-up of contemporary art, we may be toasting the end of irony.

Notes:

¹ The connections linking the worlds of art and of physical culture predate the present era. Sports historian Jan Todd has shown that the reintroduction of Greek and Roman sculpture during the Neoclassical period stimulated an interest in exercise that helped Europeans attain the ideal of ancient beauty. Jan Todd, "The Classical Ideal and Its Impact on The Search for Suitable Exercise: 1774-1830," *Iron Game History* 2, no. 4 (November 1992): 6-16. See, for example, Sir John Sinclair's 1806 comment that Greek sculpture should be viewed as "living examples of the perfection which the human form is capable of attaining," quoted in Todd, "Classical Ideal," 7.

According to Greek legend, Pygmalion, a king of Cyprus, once fabricated an ideal female figure that was brought to life for him by Aphrodite. While early-nineteenth-century Europeans such as Sinclair regarded classical statuary as reverse Pygmalions that reflected the physiognomies of actual models, there were those at the close of the century who reversed the relationship of art and life back to a legendary realm. The founder of bodybuilding, Eugene Sandow, conceived of himself



HOWARD KANOVITZ, *RED FIGURE POSEDOWN*, 1983. RED PIGMENT AND CHARCOAL ON PAPER, 16 × 20½".





RUDY BURKHARDT, *MUSCLES*, 1975. COLLAGE, 7²/₅ × 7⁴/₅". PICTURING TAKWA.

as a living version of Greek sculpture. When he posed, he covered his body with white powder to better resemble carved marble. Modeling himself on ancient art, he in turn modeled for sculptors and photographers. In 1903, promoter and muscleman Bernarr Macfadden sponsored the world's first physique contest in New York's Madison Square Garden. Among those he picked as judges were prominent painters and sculptors, who were schooled in classical sculpture and therefore were expert in evaluating the ideals of symmetry, proportion and clarity of human musculature as defined by the ancients.

² See for example, Max Kozloff, "Pygmalion Reversed," *Artforum* 14, no. 3 (November 1975): 30–37; Peter Frank, "Auto-art: Self-indulgent? And how!," *Art News* 75, no. 7 (September 1976): 43–48.

³ Sponsored by Doris Freedman, the performance was a benefit for the Public Art Fund of New York. The fifty participants included the well known Louise Bourgeois, Tom Wesselmann, and Mark di Suvero, as well as non-artists such as former Museum of Modern Art director John Hightower, and former

Metropolitan Museum director Thomas Hoving, who came as each other's sculpture, equipped with megaphones and canvas director's chairs. The "living works of art" posed as the viewers thronged around them. Dealer Robert Graham contributed the seventy-eight-year-old painter Alice Neel, wearing a lamé dress, bonnet, and gilded orthopedic shoes. He called his work *Alice Neel in the Eighteenth Century*. Neel sat on a studded chair and chatted with viewers, proclaiming she was a "speaking statue." Sherman Drexler contributed two interrelated "works": a gridded painting, in which each segment depicted a female figure in motion poses; and actress Lucinda Ziesing in a body stocking, who stood near the canvas, assuming in turn each painted position. According to Yampolsky, Larry Rivers had intended to exhibit a Bowery bum as his work of art, but was dissuaded by the sponsors; Phyllis Yampolsky, conversation with author, 15 March 1999. I am indebted to Sherman Drexler, who brought this event to my attention. See Gerald Marzorati, "Everyone and Every Walk a Work of Art," *The SoHo Weekly News*, 25 May 1978; "Art Brought to Life with Living Sculpture," *New York Post*, 23 May 1978, 25; Malcolm N. Carter, "Arts Alive," *Associated Press*, 23 May 1978.

⁴ From the exhibition *Endurance*, curated by Jeanette Ingberman and Papo Colo, that was organized and presented by Exit Art, New York, from March 4–April 22, 1995; exhibition texts from forthcoming book *Endurance Art: The Information*, edited by Mary Anne Staniszewski with contributions from Papo Colo, RoseLee Goldberg, Jeanette Ingberman, and Kathy O'Dell, with research by Melissa Rachleff.

⁵ Colin Eisler, quoted in Al Antuck, "Bodybuilding in the Whitney Museum," *Muscle Magazine International* 2, no. 2 (August 1976): 66. Eisler's talk was titled "Metaphors of Art: Narcissus, Virtue, and Exercise." All other text quotations of comments made on this evening are found in Antuck's article. Sports historian Joe Roark kindly provided me with this source.

⁶ Vicki Goldberg was chosen because she had recently written what the Whitney Museum's press release identified as the first mass media article on the subject of bodybuilding; see Vicki Goldberg, "Body Building," *New York Times Magazine* (30 November 1975): 45–54.

⁷ Richard Brilliant, letter to author, 31 July 1998. Painter Sylvia Sleigh, noted for her depictions of male nudes, related that she had been slated to speak on the topic "Misapprehension on the Painting of Man (Beauty and Homosexuality)." She struggled through the throng to reach the side-lined podium with her husband, the critic Lawrence Alloway, with her favorite model Paul Rosano in tow. But when she learned that the spotlight on the central posing platform would not be extinguished during the slide presentations, she declined to participate. She decided that the clamorous assembly was not in the mood for intellectual engagement. Sleigh recalls that although artist Scott Burton had been cited in the Whitney's press release as a panel participant, he was not present that evening. Telephone conversation with author, 28 December 1998.

⁸ Butler and a crew filmed the evening's events for his forthcoming documentary, and excerpts of earlier footage were included in the Whitney program. His documentary film *Pumping Iron* was completed in 1977 but did not contain any footage of the event.

⁹ Matthew Baigell, for one, felt menaced by the crowd. In his estimation, the panel's presentations had not been well-received by the audience, who was more accustomed to watching bodybuilding displays than to listening to scholarly disputations about them; Baigell, conversation with author, 17 February 1999.

¹⁰ The photographs were by William Heimanson, and the live muscle display was performed by Eileen Carda, Dennis Fields, and Audrey and Shurray Perryman.

¹¹ Gallery director Louise Lewis recalls that the athletes wrongly assumed that the lack of spontaneous vocal appreciation and the withholding of applause until the conclusion of the presentation had signaled not politeness but disapproval; Lewis, interview by John Hunt, in *Icons of the Divine*, 1987, videocassette. *Icons of the Divine* documented a 1986 performance of the same name by Lisa Lyon at the California State University at Northridge Art Gallery.

¹² Nik Cohn, *Women of Iron: The World of Female Bodybuilders* (Wideview Books, 1981), 153.

IDA APPLEBROOG, *RAINBOW CAVERNS*, 1987. OIL ON CANVAS, 86 × 132".



¹³ Bruce Chatwin in Robert Mapplethorpe, *Lady: Lisa Lyon* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), 12.

¹⁴ These are the terms she used on her résumé in 1986. A narrative section read in part: "Collaborating with a conceptual artist she developed her initial posing routine into a museum piece. She could dead lift 265 pounds but marked her greatest achievement as the impact of this form of body sculpture. . . ."

¹⁵ Chatwin, *Lisa Lyon*, 11.

¹⁶ *Icons of the Divine* was one of three programs in a performance art series on the theme of the body entitled "Non-Static." It included Lyon's piece; Noreen Barnes's, Bryan Hornbeck's, and Karen Kearns's "The Salvia Milkshake"; and Ilene Segalove and Steve Proffitt's humorous radio broadcast "Bodyparts."

The names of twelve bodybuilders, called Performance Artists, were listed on the program for *Icons of the Divine*: Katie Anawalt Arnoldi, Michael Buonanno, Laura Creavalle, Suzanne de Cayette, Edmund Druilhet, Charles Glass, Cindy Lee, J. J. Marsh, Darla Miller, Shawn Ray, Suzanne Tigert, and Rick Valente.

¹⁷ Both quotations were contained in the unpaginated, photocopied program flyer that was given to *Icons of the Divine* attendees.

¹⁸ Presented in spring 1984 at the Laforet Museum Harajuku, the Japanese event was one component of a four-part performance series, *Next Wave of American Women*, featuring respectively, Lisa Lyon, Laurie Anderson, Cindy Sherman, and Molissa Fenley. Japanese colleagues have told me that Lyon's performance was "the" event of the season, and was much talked about.

¹⁹ This and subsequent quotes of Claudia Wilbourn are found in Cohn, *Women of Iron*, 149–53.

²⁰ Walter Gutman, "Interview with Walter Gutman," interview by Robert A. Haller, *Field of Vision* 12 (summer 1983): 8.

See also Haller's other interview with Gutman, "Walter Gutman on Photography," *Field of Vision* 13 (spring 1985): 17–18.

²¹ See John Brooks, "Profiles: A Proust in Wall Street [Walter Gutman]," *The New Yorker* (20 June 1959): 41–64. Gutman was a man of wide interests and talents—a former art critic for *The Nation* magazine, he had also published a book on painter Raphael Soyer (*Raphael Soyer, Paintings and Drawings* [New York: Shorewood Publishing Co., 1960]). His large circle of friends included Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, Alfred Leslie, Robert Frank, Alice Neel, Charlotte Moorman, George Segal, Lucinda Childs, and Bob Thompson. Neel painted him in 1965 wearing a suit and topcoat and holding his hat in his hand.

As a benefactor of the arts, he funded Carolee Schneemann's 1964 Judson Church performance, *Meat Joy* [Letters: Carolee Schneemann on Walter Gutman", *Field of Vision* 13 (spring 1985): 31], and Red Grooms's and Mimi Gross's 1962 film *Shoot the Moon* [Mimi Gross, conversation with author, 7 April 1999]. When his firm G-String Enterprises bankrolled Frank and Leslie's 1959 classic film of the beat generation, *Pull My Daisy*, his partners included Jack Dreyfus, then of the Dreyfus Fund; see Priscilla S. Meyer, "The Naked Truth,"

Forbes (16 January 1984): 113. For a time, Gutman served as an unconventional father figure for critic Jill Johnston; see her *Mother Bound: Autobiography in Search of a Father* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983), 117–120.

²² George Segal, "Introduction," in Walter Gutman, *Inspirations of Strong Women*, (New York: Anthology Film Archives, 1981), unpaginated. This photographic portfolio of thirteen color dye-transfer prints was published in 1981 to help raise funds for Anthology Film Archives. About half of the photographs in the portfolio were made between 1966–71 and the rest between 1979–81.

A selection of Gutman's dye-transfer prints entitled *The Beauty of Strong Women* were shown at Richard Bellamy's Oil and Steel Gallery in New York, in 1984, to benefit the Trisha Brown Dance Company. Gutman's photographs are today in the permanent collections of the Center for Creative Photography, Tucson, Arizona; the Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut; and the International Center of Photography, New York, New York.

²³ Gutman revered Suzanne Perry, whom he had met at a party when she had come up to him to say, "I hear you like



GUSTAV REHBERGER, *WOMAN*, 1987.
SANGUINE PASTEL, 35 × 23".





PHYLLIS BRAMSON, *BEING BOTH OBJECT AND SUBJECT*, 1998. OIL ON CANVAS AND MIXED MEDIA, 70 $\frac{1}{2}$ × 50".



muscles. I have muscles." It was Gutman's staunch enthusiasm for her that propelled him into filmmaking in 1968 when he was in his sixties. After Gutman introduced the acrobat to his friend, filmmaker George Kuchar, the younger artist promptly included Perry in a movie. But Gutman was greatly disappointed when he saw how Kuchar had presented her. As Gutman recounted to Robert Haller, "It was insulting to my goddess. So I decided that I would have to make a film glorifying a strong woman; no one else seemed to want to do it. So I bought a Super 8. And I made that film from slides I had taken at George Segal's; it was called *The Adoration of Suzie*." Gutman, "Interview," 11. Although Gutman would later claim, "I just didn't know what the hell I was doing," several critics have found his quirky and personal films worthy of serious attention. For example, Shirley Clarke has likened his ingenuity to that of the self-taught painter Henri Rousseau, and Lenny Lipton described him as an "American Don Quixote." These quotes and Gutman quotations in the text are found on the website of Arthouse Inc., the distributor for Gutman's *Clothed in Muscle*, at <http://arthouseinc.com/clothed.html>.

²⁴ Like the proverbial foot fetishist who became a shoe salesman, Gutman directed his private obsession with muscular women into socially accepted channels, creating some remark-

able films in the process. Not only did *Clothed in Muscle* depict Wilbourn posing nude, but it also contained a section of vintage photos of nineteenth century strong women, as well as sexually provocative images of mixed gender wrestling. The film also included images of other muscular women such as Karyn Bastiasen and Mary Lou Harmel. In an earlier film, *The Erotic Signal*, shot in Mildred Burke's studio in 1978, Gutman included segments on a woman weightlifter and a nude aerialist. For Gutman's process as a filmmaker, see Walter Gutman, "The Accident as a Creative Force," *Visions* (May/June 1983): 6–7.

²⁵ Annette Kuhn, "The Body and Cinema: Some Problems for Feminism," *Grafts: Feminist Cultural Criticism*, ed. Susan Sheridan (London and New York: Verso, 1988), 17. See especially her proposal that muscles are like drag for female bodybuilders: "like clothing, women's assumption of muscles implies a transgression of the proper boundaries of sexual difference." For a recent discussion of bodybuilding as "glamorous camouflage" in the realm of gay male theater, see John Rechy, "Muscles and Mascara: On Bodybuilding as an Art," *Art Issues*, no. 53 (summer 1998): 15–19.

²⁶ According to Laurie Fierstein, which whom the author exchanged e-mail in January 1999, no woman with Bev Francis's 1984 body type has ever won the Ms. Olympia contest.

Francis chose to scale down her physique in order to win a World Championship bodybuilding competition a few years later. (See the interview with Francis in this book.) Although Cory Everson, who reigned as Ms. Olympia from 1985 to 1990, was more heavily muscled than her predecessors, Fierstein believes that a breakthrough regarding the issue of muscularity came when the very muscular Lenda Murray won the contest in 1990. However, Fierstein observes, in subsequent shows Murray's physique seemed somewhat less muscular and "hard." In 1991 a smaller Murray won the Ms. Olympia victory over Francis, when the latter was the most muscular she had ever been.

While taste variations in judging muscle have persisted throughout the last two decades of women's bodybuilding, it seems to Fierstein that between 1988 and 1990 there was a general trend toward the more muscular women winning both professional and amateur bodybuilding competitions. By 1991, seasoned observers noted a shifting away from such dense muscularity.

This trend came out in bold relief at the Ms. International contest in Columbus, Ohio in March 1992 where the most lightly muscled competitor, Anja Schriener, triumphed over the most muscular Paula Bircumshaw. In response, the audience vocalized its protest and even pelted the judging panel with objects. Since then, while the judging in the contests has been erratic, the public face of bodybuilding has moved away from muscular females altogether in favor of the fitness competitors. For coverage of this development see Marion Roach, "Female Bodybuilders Discover Curves," *New York Times*, 10 November 1998, p. F9.

27 In addition to Kuhn, "Body and Cinema," see Chris Holmlund, ". . . Visible Difference and Flex Appeal: The Body, Sex, Sexuality and Race in the 'Pumping Iron' Films," *Cinema Journal* 28, no. 4 (summer 1989): 38-51. A cinema scholar from the Department of Romance and Asian Literature at the University of Tennessee, Holmlund also wrote about *Pumping Iron II* in the 1980s.

28 Ruth Gordon and Garson Kanin wrote the screenplay.

29 European artists such as Lachaise, Léger, Maillol, and Picasso, and Americans Chaim Gross and Reginald Marsh, had depicted monumental, muscled, and statuesque women, but their work falls outside of the scope of this essay.

30 This expressionist rendering of the first woman to swim across the English Channel, who also set a new time record, is based on a 1926 photograph of the American emerging from her historic Channel swim. See Van Deren Coke, *The Painter and the Photograph: From Delacroix to Warhol* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1972), 124-25. Dubbed "the master of the hefty nude" by critic Tom Hess in *New York* magazine in 1977, Drexler had long focused on images of substantial women; see for example his gouache on paper *Eve* (1960) in the collection of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden.

31 Rosalyn Drexler, who is married to the painter Sherman Drexler, once wrestled professionally as Rosa Carlo, "The Mexican Spitfire"; see Rosalyn Drexler, "A Woman's Place Is on the Mat," *Esquire* (February 1966): 79-81, 120-24, 126-27. Set in sports arena, *The Winner* combines images of a referee and a wrestler.

32 For example, *Pumping Iron II* introduced the bodybuilders Carla Dunlap and Bev Francis to the artist and movie critic Carrie Rickey, whose 1985 catalogue essay, "Mapping Autogeography," accompanied the exhibition *Nude, Naked, Stripped* at the Hayden Gallery of MIT's List Visual Arts Center. She observed that their "deliberately built bodies" suggest both the power of physical strength and the mental will power to achieve it. Carrie Rickey, "Mapping Autogeography: Six

Rules for Navigating the Body Politic," *Nude, Naked, Stripped* (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1985), 5.

33 Howard Kanovitz, letter to author, 12 November 1998. Painter Howard Kanovitz, a former studio assistant of Franz Kline's who came to the fore in the '70s as a photo-realist, was awakened to women's potential for hypermuscularity by a woman friend. He liked the rhythmic abstract pattern of their rippling muscles. Some of these paintings and charcoal and conté crayon drawings resemble illustrations on a Greek vase. See a review of his work, Amei Wallach, "Stylish Musclewomen," *Newsday*, 24 June 1983.

34 See for example, Rickey, "Mapping Autogeography," 5, who noted this evolution in body consciousness in 1985.

35 The term "bodysculpture" first gained popularity in the 1970s. (See for example, Valerie and Ralph Carnes, *Bodysculpture: Weight Training for Women* [New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978]). But the ideas were current long before this. David Chapman has kindly called to my attention the periodical *Body-Molding*, published irregularly starting in April 1925, which was devoted to promoting the Checkley system of posture and body control. Bodysculpting also connotes cosmetic surgery.

ALISON SAAR, *SLEDGE HAMMER MAMA*, 1996. WOOD, NAILS, RUSTED TIN, AND HAMMER HEAD, 32 × 6 × 8".

