



SECOND SKINS

THE UNBOUND GENDERS OF NANCY
GROSSMAN'S SCULPTURE

“Who are these people? Are they men, women, or generic human beings?” This was the question posed to Nancy Grossman by a group of art students when confronted with the works for which she has become most known – her leather-bound head sculptures. Grossman’s long-term partner, the critic Arlene Raven, recounted the artist’s response: “She said they were self-portraits. I thought that was an interesting response, because the heads are generally interpreted as male. It got me to thinking about your wanting to delve into masculinity and what happens when women express masculinity, when men do, and what the difference is.”¹ This knowing response from Raven – said in a public forum but drawing on their years together – is illustrative of the challenges Grossman’s art poses. Bound up with questions of gender, these works evoke but do not image the sexed body. Rather, they vex assumptions about its inhabitations.

Gender is both crucial to and contentious in Grossman’s work. While much of the writing on her has dealt exclusively with her iconic head sculptures, I shall instead discuss her engagement with abstraction, assemblage, and practices of re-making in the mid-1960s and then discuss the ways in which this informed her practice and reception in the 1970s. It is through an investigation into her abstract work that one can recognize how Grossman’s practice has always offered a complex account of gender’s mobility and variability. In her assemblages made from old leather garments, she proposed open accounts of gender’s relation to the body and its mutability. In what follows, I shall focus on a handful of these 1960s abstract



78 Studio view, Eldridge Street, New York, 1968.

works in order to show how she developed an attitude toward the body in which sexual difference was not determining and in which bodily remaking was enabling. In this way, these early works are aligned with the other studies in this book. Grossman's practice used abstraction to propose new ways of understanding the sexed body and to parody our expectations of what we think we know about gender from looking at a body. In the 1960s, Grossman alluded to genital imagery in her abstract assemblages to question playfully its role as sign for gender. She mobilized bodily reconstitution for these works, as well, to remind viewers that what we are looking at now is the result of transformation and remaking. These practices and priorities informed Grossman's work after she turned from abstract renderings of the body to "figurative" sculptures in which the body was absent.² Throughout, a recurring question has been how to transcend the limitations of dimorphic sexual difference. For her, the body was nothing but raw material. After all, her sculptures are made from old skins.

Such complexity, however, has not customarily been seen in Grossman's work, which has been chronically misunderstood, parodied, and caricatured. Despite the fact that Grossman was one of the most iconic and recognizable

artists of the late years of the 1960s, she has proven to be a problem for later art-historical and art-critical taxonomies. This is both because of the misconception that this work was sexually explicit and because she was one of the first artists to make a "figurative turn" away from abstraction at the end of the decade.³ She started receiving critical attention in 1964, when Brian O'Doherty wrote in the *New York Times* that "A fabulously talented 23-year-old sprays the results of hard application all over the place in a show that could be the first of a distinguished career...Miss Grossman is a real artist from her fingertips to her subconscious."⁴ In 1965, at the age of 25, she was the only painter that year to receive a Guggenheim fellowship, making her one of few women (and one of the youngest) to receive such recognition at the time. Soon after she showed her first head sculpture at the 1968 Whitney Annual, she began having multiple successful one-person shows each year. At the beginning of the 1970s, she was being collected and published widely, in part because her work stood out sharply from that of her contemporaries. During this time, Grossman was also constituted as a feminist forebear, most notably in Cindy Nemser's groundbreaking book of interviews *Art Talk* but also in such varied publications as *Harper's Bazaar* and *Off Our Backs*.⁵ As feminism developed in the art world later in the 1970s, however, Grossman's seemingly male-identified representations increasingly sat uneasily with essentialist varieties of feminism that played an important role in the history of the decade. In addition, her commitment to sculptural making and recognizable figurative content kept her at a distance from the mainstream art world as it developed at that time.⁶ By the 1980s, Grossman's work was frequently mischaracterized, and her reputation became that of an "artist's artist" known to a devoted few.⁷

These shifts in reputation were, as I discuss shortly, fueled by the misrecognitions of Grossman's head sculptures as sexual, as masculine, and as kink. Indeed, it was because of these presumptions that, for many, Grossman's reputation became difficult to assimilate into versions of feminism from later in the 1970s that understood sexual and gender difference in starkly binary terms. It was during these years that debates began raging about the presence of transwomen in feminism and women-only spaces (a prejudice that continued well after and is still evident today).⁸ Grossman's work, in other words, became increasingly unrecognizable to art histories of the 1970s because the account of gender it offered differed from mainstream feminism during the later years of the 1970s – despite the clarity and conviction of both Grossman and her supporters about the feminist priorities of her work.

The perspective of the abstract assemblages from the mid-1960s allows for a re-reading of the subsequent sculptures that attends to the complex-

ity and mobility of gender that Grossman has claimed for them. Her work – both abstract and representational – prompts projective identifications of gender and sexuality only to complicate and confound them. Remarkably, she does this without representing the body at all.⁹ Her head sculptures abstract and suggest the body, and viewers rush to fill in what they think that body should be. For instance, the art students who questioned Grossman themselves struggled to articulate a non-binary answer to the sex of this depicted human head, and the term “generic” was offered as a (literally) neutered version of who this human could be. For Raven’s part, she expanded on these students’ confusion as a means to address how the works detach gender from sex, pondering “what happens when women express masculinity, when men do, and what the difference is.”¹⁰ Keeping this in mind and coupled with Grossman’s assertion that these heads are self-portraits, it becomes clear that these sculptures do not rely on an equation of gender with the sexed body.¹¹ Rather, Grossman’s sculptural practice offers an account of the body that is skeptical of its supposed determinism, seeing it instead as open to remaking. From this perspective, Grossman developed a stance in her sculpture in which gender was located variably in ways that are not immediately visible from the exterior.

SUSPENSIONS OF THE BODY

In 1965, the poet and critic Bill Berkson wrote in an early review of Grossman’s work that it conveyed “a nostalgia for parts.”¹² This enigmatic phrase comes from a dense but short review of Grossman’s Spring 1965 exhibition at New York’s Krasner Gallery, her first of two that year. Because of the brevity of his one-paragraph commentary on the works, Berkson left this phrase unexplored. Nevertheless, it encapsulates a key issue for the ambitious and intense body of work she created over the next two years – the abstract relief assemblages that immediately preceded the signature mode of her leather-bound head sculptures. Taken as a whole, the relief assemblages from 1965 to 1967 exhibit a mounting tension between their ostensible abstraction and their increasingly recalcitrant figuration. While the early assemblages to which Berkson referred had seemed to him nostalgically to long for their lost parts, the subsequent works located those parts ever more brashly.

Of this group of abstract assemblages, I shall discuss in detail three relief sculptures as exemplary of this body of work that has heretofore received little attention in the literature on Grossman.¹³ *For David Smith* (1965; see

figs. 81–83), *Bride* (1965–6; see figs. 85 and 86), and *Ali Stoker* (1966–7; see figs. 90–93) each mark different points along Grossman’s traversing of abstraction and the accounts of the body that it solicited. In and among the dense and abstract twisted leather strata, discernible body parts start to pop out. Unmistakable, these absurd genitalia signal Grossman’s frank and often preposterous confrontation with the sexed body, treating it as raw material to be remade. Increasingly, her relief assemblages detached “parts” from wholes and extended that detachment into areas of black humor and subversion. These works – and their supposed answering of the “nostalgia for parts” through their exposure of sexual organs – were the arena in which Grossman digested the body before leaving it behind to focus on the head.

These relief assemblages moved into three dimensions some of the concerns of her earlier drawings and collages from the early 1960s, becoming the most assertively sculptural and abstract of her works to date. Leather, which became Grossman’s signature material, came to be central in these works. The early assemblages such as *Eden* had used leather along with scrap metal, car parts, and rubber, but soon it became her dominant material. In works such as *The Edge of Always* (1964; fig. 79) and *Black Landscape* (1964; fig. 80), brown leather began to be featured. Despite being clearly reused and sutured together, the original objects from which this leather was taken are difficult to ascertain. By contrast, in the works between 1965 and her transition to making head sculptures encased in leather in 1968, Grossman increasingly used repurposed leather that did not wholly disguise the original objects from which it came. Jackets, harnesses, boots, and shoes, though partially broken down, remained visible in the concentrated surfaces. As Raven once wrote of these works, “There were ‘ghosts’ in the leather jackets, wood, and metal she used that she felt were activated in her work.”¹⁴

Consequently, the source materials for all of these works are important to an understanding of the meanings they put into play. Nowhere is this more evident than in the first major leather relief assemblage Grossman made, *For David Smith* (fig. 81). The year 1965 was a pivotal one for her: with her Guggenheim fellowship, she had recently moved to a larger loft on Eldridge Street on New York’s Lower East Side. The financial resources of the fellowship, plus the greater amount of space in her new loft, immediately resulted in these larger, more ambitious works. Grossman experienced a concerted burst of activity and created a heroic number of relief assemblages over the course of the year. She had two one-person shows in 1965, both at Krasner Gallery, that showcased these works. All of this was inaugurated with *For David Smith*, which she created for the sculptor from



79 Nancy Grossman, *The Edge of Always*, 1964. Leather and metal assemblage mounted on plywood, 78.7 × 55.9 × 5.5 cm (31 × 22¼ × 2½ in.).

80 Nancy Grossman, *Black Landscape*, 1964. Leather, fabric, metal, wood, fur, bristle, paper, nylon, and paint assemblage mounted on plywood, 126.7 × 98.7 × 8.9 cm (49⅞ × 38⅞ × 3½ in.).

materials he had given her, and which established the terms of the relief assemblages she developed over the next two years.

Grossman had met Smith in 1960 while she was still a student at the Pratt Institute, and the two had a sporadic relationship over the next five years. She recalled, “I had such an incredibly pure and simple and lusty relationship with David Smith...What happened between us was totally real and sturdy enough to last a lifetime. It wasn’t cynical.”¹⁵ Grossman was a regular visitor to Bolton Landing in upstate New York, and she created many of her figure drawings in Smith’s drawing studio there. On one of her last trips to Bolton Landing before his death in 1965, Smith gave Grossman a number of leather horse harnesses, purchased in an auction along



81 Nancy Grossman, *For David Smith*, 1965. Leather, metal, rubber, fabric, and paint assemblage on canvas mounted on plywood, 215.9 × 215.9 × 17.15 cm (85 × 85 × 6¾ in.).

with the rest of the contents of a bankrupt farm. Smith had been interested in the cast-iron tractor wheels and other metal implements, but Grossman admired the horse tack instead. (She had ridden horses since she was a

child.) They were Smith's challenge to Grossman, and she took the bundle of leather objects back to New York City to create an ambitious work for him. She completed it before Smith's accident, but, unfortunately, he never saw the final sculpture.

At 7 foot 3 by 7 foot 3 (221 × 221 centimeters), *For David Smith* was the largest relief assemblage Grossman would make and her most extensive use of leather to date. She said of this moment, "I was looking for material I could break down and build up and change midway." The harnesses gave her materials that she could de-construct and remake.¹⁶ More than the found detritus that populated her earlier works, the harnesses needed to be meticulously unstitched and taken apart. A significant component of the labor in this and subsequent works involved the breaking down of these harnesses and garments. Once de-constructed, the odd shapes of these leather components suggested to Grossman new patterns and new ways to combine the elements.

She put these elements into play against a large canvas support where she compressed leather, tubes, and metal. The materials have been torn apart and fused to make the two dense masses floating on the otherwise white canvas. Black paint has been sparingly applied, creating on the left a ragged outline tailed by a splatter. The harness straps are used as lines, connecting and reconnecting within and across the two major shapes. While the masses do not form familiar contours, component objects within them are nevertheless recognizable. In addition to reins and bits, more than one boot is visible (see fig. 83). (One of the opened boots on the upper left is stamped "Endicott Johnson All Leather," referring to the Endicott Johnson Shoe Company, located in upstate New York near Grossman's hometown of Oneonta.) Across the surface of the large relief, tears, zippers, and splayed boots produced openings into the dense forms. In what proved a characteristic move in these reliefs, Grossman furthermore pierced the disassembled leather garments and harnesses with tubes and openings, around which writhes an infernal tangle of horse tack, stirrups, and straps. Wryly, Grossman used elements to suggest other bodily shapes – as with the mask-like form suggested by a folded element from a de-constructed harness at the top of the right figure or the labial allusions in the unlaced boot (on the lower appendage of the right figure) that prefigures the more explicit way she would use this same material in *Bride*, as I shall discuss.

Grossman has said that she worked on these reliefs in an active and often rapid fashion, moving from one element to the next intuitively. "I did them in the same spirit as Abstract Expressionist action painting," she recalled of her energetic and determined process.¹⁷ On the stretched canvas, reinforced



82 Detail of Nancy Grossman, *For David Smith*.



83 Detail of Nancy Grossman, *For David Smith*.

with a wood backing to support the heavy objects, Grossman continued to add density. The work doubled in size and she merged another canvas with the first to give more space. "Sculpture is usually something that is planned and sketched for, but I never did anything like that," she recalled.¹⁸ The result is a concerted and almost frantic layered density within the two masses. These two halves of the work, on separate but conjoined canvases, reflect each other's shapes in a pas-de-deux.

This work is predominantly abstract, but Grossman saw these piled-on masses as figures – part animal, part machine, part human. The vestiges of shoes, the folds of leather skin, the open orifices, and the pliable tubes give the masses a bodily resonance (figs. 82 and 83). In an interview with Cindy Nemser in 1975, Grossman recounted her trajectory from the earlier drawings, collages, and lithographs to these works:

First I would make the whole figure and then I became more involved with the torso. Then the work became more and more abstract and involved with the visceral and the internal. When I look back on it now, it was always saying the same thing – just where I am in myself is where my work is. At the same time they became more and more like machines. There are animal machine figures and human machine figures. First I made them from the outside. That one is not noisy but they look as if they were yakking or mooing.¹⁹

Nemser then remarked, with regard to *For David Smith*, “I find it hard to find a figure,” to which Grossman replied,

It is rather like an organic machine. It has insides and an outside. There are two figures in outer space. It’s funny because I would [previously] imagine these things in outer space. (This was before the Russians went into outer space and when they did I said, “Oh I know about that.”) I saw the space men floating there suspended without gravity. I knew what it would look like. These were done in ’65.²⁰

With her emphasis on the figures as organic machines, Grossman articulated an account of the body as material and process rather than as a customary morphology. Floating in space, her assembled bodies are rendered as unhampered by gravity and orientation, allowing multiple points of contact and intercourse to be imagined. Indeed, ports, interfaces, and openings are evident across the suspended figures of *For David Smith*, in which the distinction between inside and outside is broken down.

Even though she was working on the scale of monumental painting, Grossman dealt with these assemblage reliefs as if they were drawings. They are formally analogous to the compacted ink on paper drawings she was creating at the same time, such as *Bridey* and *Beever Slats*. Both articulate unorthodox hybrid forms against white grounds, and the narrow chromatic range of *For David Smith*’s source materials reinforced this connection. Grossman later recalled that she wanted to make sculpture from her drawings at this time so that “I could make them more real.”²¹ Despite their obdurate and heavy materiality, these dark brown and black masses jump out from their white ground as if they were large drawn figures on white paper. This was intentional, and Grossman repeatedly referred to these and related works as representing freefloating and tumbling figures “like spacemen.” Raven later reiterated this intention for the work, saying that, “The two figures in this work are bodies in a gravityless outer space.”²² As Grossman indicated in the Nemser interview, images of the Soviet cosmonaut

Yuri Gagarin’s 1961 pioneering space journey had been crucial to her as visual analogues to the kind of floating bodies she had wanted to draw and, starting with the reliefs in 1965, sculpt.²³ She had been carrying these images with her well before 1961, however.

It was the bundle of horse straps that Smith had given her that had prompted her to see these long thin pieces of leather as lines with which she could draw in three dimensions.²⁴ She explained her process to Nemser:

It seems a funny thing to do with such cumbersome material but when I am working this way those materials are nothing to me. I could draw with straps, I could draw with thirty-pound pieces of steel, if I had to. I set them in place and it becomes a great challenge to me that they be well made and solid. I do it quickly and with no sweat. I was always good with my hands in terms of drawing.²⁵

Ultimately, *For David Smith* is a kind of drawing of figures floating in space, made with horse harnesses. As such, it offers a humorously different kind of “drawing in space” from the kind for which Smith had become famous.²⁶ While Smith had used repurposed metal, Grossman demonstrated how the straps, harnesses, and boots could be orchestrated as lines capable of making equally “gravityless” forms.

I should pause to note, though, that with its tethered and suspended bodies, *For David Smith* bears an uncanny resemblance to the composition of another work that mapped sexual difference onto alien bodies and objects – Marcel Duchamp’s *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even* (1915–23), which had been reintroduced to American audiences following the influential West Coast retrospective of Duchamp just two years before in 1963. However, when I asked her about this (in relation to *For David Smith* and her subsequent *Bride*), Grossman rebuffed and deflected any such connection, asserting instead that the main intertext for this work was Smith’s sculpture.²⁷ Even without such a direct link, however, a comparison between these two large works nevertheless helps to show how both Duchamp and Grossman sought to render new bodily morphologies by extracting them from conventional representations of gravity and space. This was, as well, one of Smith’s tactics for attacking the statuary tradition.

As discussed in Chapter 1, Smith’s work of the 1960s had sought to eschew gravity and logical structure, presenting figures that not only vary from every side but that are also often held together in unorthodoxly structured ways solely by the sculptor’s fusing of parts. Seen in relation to the importance of action in Abstract Expressionism, Smith’s autographic gesture took the form of the weld that held disparate elements in the air

without relying on the conventional engineering of structures and bodies. His *Cubi* series, on which he was engaged during the time he knew Grossman, is made up of combinations of simple, regular geometric forms that seemed to have been juggled in the air (fig. 84). While the component forms look as if they are basic geometric building blocks, they are never simply stacked, nor do the masses of the lower forms serve as the structural foundations for the blocks above.²⁸ The welds hold them up. As noted earlier, these techniques allowed Smith to emphasize the independence of the sculptor from necessary structure and to explore the ways in which he could create previously unseen figures and compositions that varied from every point of view.

Grossman's *For David Smith* exhibits her careful (and irreverent) engagement with the terms of Smith's practice as well as the beginnings of her making of new bodies from the parts of others. It was this assembling of new figures that would drive her work over the next two years.²⁹ As Raven remarked, "Smith's totemic sculptural *personages* also found an analogy in Grossman's personas."³⁰ Grossman's personas, at this stage, were categorically dissimilar to the clean, concise statement of the leather heads she came to make. Instead, the bodies floating in space in *For David Smith* are unexpected concatenations of disparate reused parts. They do not resemble the bodies of either horses or humans, but one can see vestiges of both in the "ghosts" of the leather objects that Grossman has broken apart to make them. A boot, straps, laces, and buckles all point back to bodies and muscles, as do the allusive tubes and openings (see figs. 82 and 83). As hybrids of horse, human, and machine made from discernible found objects, these figures refuse to settle into mere abstraction. The bodily shapes of shoes and horse tack, belts, and leather keep all of those possible bodies in proximate suspension, playing the familiarity of their parts against the strangeness of new beings confronting the viewer. In this way, Grossman matched Smith on his own terms while also demonstrating the evocative bodily potential of the leather garments she used. Smith's own use of found or repurposed materials rarely foregrounded so blatantly such a tension between recognizable source objects and the abstract figures they comprise.

The dense constellations of disassembled harnesses, boots, jackets, rubber, and tubes against white canvas in *For David Smith* became the characteristic mode of Grossman's reliefs in 1965. She pursued this idea of using found leather to draw new figures in space. *Hitchcock*, *Brown and Black*, *Car Horn*, and *Ali of Nostrand* all take up this motif. Made in rapid succession, such works provided an escape for Grossman after Smith's death. "I felt cut off in the middle of my dialogue with David Smith. I worked literally night



84 David Smith, *Cubi XVIII*, 1964, *Cubi XVII*, 1963, and *Cubi XIX*, 1964.

and day as if trying to finish a sentence that had been cut off."³¹ In the series of works after the monumental *For David Smith*, Grossman extended her relief assemblages, creating a number of sculptures that she called "machine-animal hybrids." Slightly smaller than *For David Smith*, these works expanded on her source material of harnesses to create what Raven called "abstract recreations of the horses Grossman owned and rode years earlier."³² They were never just horses, however. These machine-animal hybrids were new bodies, made from the parts of others.

Jack Halberstam has argued that a central strategy for manifesting transgender issues in contemporary art is "through eccentric and extravagant representations of the body, body parts, neo-organs, and trans bodies."³³ Not uncoincidentally, in the essay from which these words come, Halberstam cites Grossman as one precedent for this practice:

Of course, there is nothing so new in and of itself in the representation of the body as a form of montage, collage, assemblage or aesthetic hybrid. Artists like Hannah Höch, Louise Bourgeois, and Nancy Grossman have all represented the body, and often the female body at that, as a grotesque and beautiful patchwork of the bodily and the machinic, the fleshly and the metallic, the unfinished, the imperfect, and the incomplete.³⁴

While Halberstam positions Grossman as a general precedent for the hybrid body rather than her examples of artists (like Eva Hesse) who “address the specific emergence of the transgender body in subcultural terms,” I would argue that a closer attention to Grossman’s abstract reliefs of the 1960s demonstrates how her work, more directly even than Hesse’s, offers an account of transgender capacity and the mutability of both bodies and genders. This is especially evident in the reliefs that followed in the wake of *For David Smith*.

SPARE PARTS: THE *BRIDE* AND RECONSTRUCTIVE ASSEMBLAGE

Grossman’s second exhibition at Krasner Gallery, in 1965, included many of the white-background relief assemblages in this mode. Just as the show was going up, however, she was transitioning to a different kind of making. As she zoomed in on the body, the white backgrounds began to disappear, and the subsequent reliefs became claustrophobically packed with materials. Grossman squeezed space out of the reliefs as she went inside the bodies she had been making. Exemplary of this transitional mode is the tondo *Bride* (fig. 85).

In *Bride*, white is not background but layers of repurposed skin. That skin frames what appears, to many, to be an uncompromising representation of a vagina. (For instance, its legibility as such was evidenced in the work’s inclusion in an exhibition titled *The Visible Vagina*.³⁵) At the center of a compacted circle of leather straps, de-constructed boots, and white paint, a partially laced slit runs up the middle of the work, opened to expose purple folds. “This collage is kind of obscene. It’s called *The Bride*,” Grossman said to Nemser in 1975. Nemser continued, “I see it’s a tondo and it has sewing on it. Did you see it as a woman’s sexual organ, a vagina?” Grossman’s response was contradictory and reasserted the abstractness of the work: “I was unconscious of that. I have a couple others like that. The others are landscapes – women landscapes.”³⁶ Those related works include the 1964



85 Nancy Grossman, *Bride*, 1966. Leather and mixed media assemblage, d. 57.15 cm (22½ in.). Collection of halley k. harrisburg and Michael Rosenfeld.

leather, cloth, and fur assemblage *Black Landscape*, which also showcases a vaginal form in its lower half. Similar motifs are evident in other works from 1964 and 1965 (such as *The Edge of Always*; see fig. 79) and are

expanded in slightly later works with multiple zippered and other orifices, such as *Potawatami* (1967) and *Ali Stoker* (1967), discussed in more detail later (see figs. 88–93).

Given these repeated forms, how is one to take Grossman's statement that she was unconscious of the genital imagery that is evident across these otherwise abstract works? Grossman both acknowledged the presence of sexed or sexual imagery while at the same time disavowing its meaning or her full intentionality in showcasing it. I see this less as a contradiction and more as a tactical means of bracketing the all-encompassing sexualized interpretations that her graphic imagery incites. (This dynamic became amplified in the many invested responses to the leather heads.) Grossman's characterization of her own practice drew from the attitudes common to many Abstract Expressionists in which non-representational or semi-abstract forms were mobilized as a means of staging the artist's act of creation, with the meanings of the work being rooted in the artist's struggle to achieve that act. From this perspective, discussions of artistic creation were often cast as being intuitive and partially unconscious, despite the deliberate and highly structured practices developed by Abstract Expressionist artists. Grossman's explanations of her own artistic process often take this form. In a 1975 interview with Kate Horsfield, for instance, Grossman remarked, "When it is happening, there's no consciousness....I can't take the credit."³⁷ In a discussion with me, she said about her work, "I make it from below the think, and I want you to receive it from below the think."³⁸

Grossman's declaration that she was unconscious of the vaginal imagery in *Bride* is a manifestation of this mode of characterizing artistic intention as intuitive or unthought, allowing her both to expose and to detach herself at the same time. She was aware of the image's blatant visibility and readability, as is evidenced by her prefacing the work to Nemser as "obscene." More recently, Grossman told me that she thought she could make such a "female and sexual" work at the time because "Nobody would dare ask about the vagina."³⁹ However, in her discussion with Nemser, published in the context of a feminist book of interviews with women artists, Grossman's disavowal of conscious intentionality served to call into question the seemingly unambiguous legibility of the image.⁴⁰

In effect, her reliance on abstraction and her deflection of readability offered a different feminist stance on the sexed body – one skeptical of its meanings and determinations. This is not the same as the use of vaginal imagery that became a major resource for feminist art a few years after Grossman's *Bride*.⁴¹ As I discuss later, for all its frankness, *Bride* resists the essentialism that would often be signaled by such imagery in the art of the

early 1970s.⁴² Indeed, Nemser and Grossman concluded their 1975 interview by decrying the work of Judy Chicago, whom they characterized as exemplary of this essentialism. Chicago had begun creating her infamous *Dinner Party* earlier in 1974 and had published with Miriam Schapiro in 1973 her theory of the importance of vaginal "central core" imagery for feminist art.⁴³ Nemser remarked, "That's why I resent people like Judy Chicago insisting women are asserting their identity by painting their vaginas. I'm not only a vagina....I have a brain and I have worked hard to learn how to use it," to which Grossman replied, "And the head is where the power is."⁴⁴ Nemser advocated a diversified aesthetic for feminist art, irreducible to a deterministic and single essential image.⁴⁵ Clearly, she understood Grossman's earlier *Bride* (which Nemser illustrated in her 1975 book) to be categorically different from such later uses of vaginal imagery. Perhaps this was because, in its formal organization, *Bride* cultivates multiplicity rather than essentialism through the use of other elements that humorously bracket and question just what it is that we think we have learned from recognizing that genital imagery.

The work, after all, contains much more than just the central form. It is densely packed with material. Its tondo format calls attention to the object-nature of the relief assemblage, and no conventional figure-ground relations occur in its crowded interior. *Bride* offers no image of the human figure among the compacted abstraction created from found and repurposed materials. However, as a "bride," the assemblage's extensive use of white cannot be seen as neutral. A significant portion of the work is composed of leather that Grossman painted white (the painting is most visible on the laces). Given the connections between brides and white, the layered folds of the deconstructed boots mock the ruffles of a wedding dress, one of the most gender-specific of garments. (In a humorous passage, Grossman constructed to the right of the lacing a zippered orifice in white that playfully reprises the purple folds that seem so explicit; fig. 86.) One hostile and apparently uninformed reviewer tried to explain away *Bride*'s use of leather, derisively saying that the work "features mostly white leather, perhaps from a Western bride's outfit. A vagina-like area is exposed by the open bodice laces."⁴⁶ This overly literal and pedestrian reading, however, fails to accept fully that *Bride* and its crowded circular field of repurposed materials are not solely white. The densely packed tondo is bisected into white and brown registers by the other dominant element in the composition – a diagonal strap with a buckle that gives the effect of a belt. The white bride is below the belt, and it is hard not to ask what is above. The belt and the browns above it cannot be simply disregarded but must be understood in dynamic relation to what is

86 Detail of Nancy Grossman, *Bride*.

below. Given the blatant display of vulva-like forms and the title, the work incites a questioning about how consistently or stably gender can be located between these two halves. That is, the frank exposure of the genitals purports to reveal the “truth” of the body as sexed, but Grossman’s *Bride* keeps the question of gender – as distinct from anatomical sex – circling.

If the lower register seems to address directly the gendered title with its wedding-dress white folds, what is the “not-bride” of the upper register’s dirty browns and blacks? Taken together, they pose at least two different gendered options for the garments that surround the sexed body, rendered frankly through the exposure of genitals. Keeping the upper and lower registers in tension, *Bride* could be read, for instance, as conflating groom and bride or, as one alternative, the bride within (or underneath) the groom. Whatever is above the brown belt, it is in excess of the direct correlation that might be made between the vaginal imagery and the stereotypically feminine garment of the wedding dress. The certainty that the genital display, at first, seems to offer in its agreement with the gendered title and garment increasingly turns to disagreement and ambivalence when

the remaining elements of the packed composition are taken into consideration.

Grossman’s works often complicate and even collide genders, as I shall discuss. *Bride*’s overall organization is an early manifestation of this. Even though it seems explicit in its revelation of anatomical sex, it nevertheless detaches that bodily part from a one-to-one correlation with genders implied by the different kinds of garments evoked by the work. The uncertain relationship between the upper and lower registers of *Bride* prompts multiple plausible accounts of how gender could be identified in and among its component parts. *Bride* relies on the initial shock of recognition, but then slowly offers complications and inversions of that identification, bracketing its own apparent frankness. That is, the question of gender in *Bride* is more mobile, multiple, and uncertain than one might at first expect when confronted with the blunt flash of the genital imagery. In this, Grossman’s work presages later accounts of genders as temporal and successive, sexual difference as unfixed and potentially multiple, and bodies as transformable. As Gayle Salamon has recently argued, “if ones thinks sexual difference in other than bodily terms, the category can become unyoked from determinative bodily materiality in a way that makes it easier to resist the temptation to posit genital morphology as essentially determinative not only of sexual difference but also of the self.”⁴⁷ Grossman’s reliefs, for all their initial reliance on the sexed body, nevertheless treat genital imagery not as self-explanatory or deterministic but as something to be made and remade. Gender here is an open question rather than a fixed (binary) quality, unyoked from the genitals that are often taken to be its determining sign.

The source material Grossman used to make *Bride* was itself tied up with remaking and, in particular, with sex and sexual difference. She made this matrimonial work from an old boyfriend’s boots, which she de-constructed and painted white to become the wedding-dress-like layers. She explained: “The joke was that I had this boyfriend who gave me his work boots.”⁴⁸ The “woman-landscape” of *Bride* was made from a man, just as that man’s boots were made from an animal. The logic of taking apart and remaking is crucial to Grossman’s process in her found-object reliefs, and it is significant that the only recognizable images to emerge from her otherwise abstract assemblages are suggestions of sexual organs. Genitals might seem to be the least ambiguous of any body part, but Grossman plays with their frank display by making them from other objects that themselves have been made from other bodies. Her use of genital imagery undercuts its authority, instead prompting questions about how multiple genders could circulate – no matter what the parts are. This is why she reminds us that it is



87 Nancy Grossman,
Chiron, 1966. Mixed
media assemblage on
cardboard and wood,
123.2 × 91.4 × 16.5 cm
(48½ × 36 × 6½ in.).
Private collection,
Dallas, Texas.

not, simply, a vagina in *Bride*, and nor does that vaginal form delimit the multiplications of meanings and genders in the works. The exposure of the genitals starts rather than stops the question of how gender operates in this intense work of remaking.

Grossman's subsequent relief sculptures further pursue bodily metaphors, though they more playfully combine and recombine possible genital allusions rather than render such explicit and uncompromising imagery. The artist's *Walrus* (1966), for instance, was called by Raven "an emblem of the female."⁴⁹ *Chiron* (1966; fig. 87) recapitulates the vaginal imagery found in *Landscape* and *Bride* in the form of a zipper struggling to contain a round form that could be interpreted as the cresting skull of a baby. (This element was made from a man's toiletry bag.⁵⁰) Such readings, however, are never definitive. In Grossman's dense and layered compositions, discernible images emerge and recede. The mythological centaur Chiron, half-man and half-horse teacher of Achilles, again poses an ambivalent and far from fixed

question about how gender can be found in the work and further reiterates Grossman's interest in hybrid beings.

The 1967 *Potawatami* (named after the street in Tucson, Arizona where her parents had moved; fig. 88) is strewn with such forms. In addition to partially reconstructed leather garments that have been made to resemble jockstraps, there are a number of zippered and other orifices across its surface (such as at the now-vertical light brown pocket that has been given pride of place centered at the top) in addition to stuffed phallic forms (as with the curved light-brown protrusion hidden in the lower left.) Expanding on the more singular statement of *Bride* with its confounding of a reading of a single genital form confrontationally exposed, Grossman's subsequent work began to pile on these parts, detaching them from the body and making them preposterous in their combinations. This is most evident in the work that both summarized Grossman's relief assemblages and signaled the transition to her subsequent work and signature material: the 1967 abstract relief *Ali Stoker*.

RECEPTIVE MACHISMO: ALI STOKER'S "ORGY OF INTERCOURSE"

The intense production of the relief assemblages on white backgrounds in 1965 had depleted much of her store of horse harnesses and related objects. In 1966, after the Guggenheim fellowship had run out, Grossman decided to return to illustrating children's books as a means to "give myself a Guggenheim" to keep her production up that year.⁵¹ She took on a number of illustration projects at once, which arrested her production:

This was a terrible thing for me to do because if there is one concentration of ego in my whole self it is in my work. My work is my worth to myself. I loved it. It was my life. Without it I would have been stepped on, blotted out completely. The illustrations took me about three or four months longer than I had imagined they would. Doing them changed me totally. From being all action and little reflection I was stuck with my legs chained to the table night and day. It changed my metabolism.⁵²

Her illustration work was her primary occupation for nine months from 1966 to 1967, followed by another burst of activity in 1967 with the works *Yuma*, *Potawatami*, her *Slaves* reliefs, and *Ali Stoker*. Ultimately, the imagery of restraint in the leather head sculpture was informed by the experience



OPPOSITE 88 Nancy Grossman, *Potawatami*, 1967. Leather, rubber, and metal assemblage on plywood, 160.3 × 96.8 × 29.8 cm (63¹/₈ × 38¹/₈ × 11³/₄ in.).



RIGHT 89 Detail of Nancy Grossman, *Potawatami*.

of restriction caused by the need to stop her sculptural practice in order to do the illustrations for hire.⁵³

The relief sculptures completed in 1967 reflect the turmoil Grossman attributed to this point in her career. They are even more densely built and claustrophobic, with tortured and twisted forms made in black leather. She made a small group of reliefs titled *Slaves* that referred to Michelangelo's erotically bound and contorted slave sculptures. Works such as these and the conceptually related *Ali Stoker* were, she explained, the "microcosms of the macro-figures" from the 1965 reliefs on white backgrounds.⁵⁴ Most dramatically, the abstract assemblage *Ali Stoker* offers an intestinal tangle of black leather, tubes, and zippers (figs. 90 and 91). The metal and rubber tubes predominate, and they emerge out or move into zippered orifices and holes. Nemser said of this piece, "The black tubular piece is even more threatening than the women landscapes. I see them as something torn, as



OPPOSITE AND ABOVE 90 and 91 Nancy Grossman, *Ali Stoker*, 1966–7. Mixed media, 94 × 125.7 × 20.3 cm (37½ × 49½ × 8 in. Collection of halley k harrisburg and Michael Rosenfeld, New York.

if someone's insides were being pulled apart."⁵⁵ Her response was perspicacious. Unlike the previous works made mainly from harnesses, scraps, and boots, *Ali Stoker* was made from motorcycle jackets shaped like and patterned after the torso. Such garments – even when recombined and partially disassembled – more directly evoked the body in absentia. Grossman remarked that the construction of the jackets was highly influential on her, and she had to take the seams apart meticulously in order to reuse the scraps of material.⁵⁶ In this way, the use of the extant jackets (themselves made from the skins of animals) raised the bodily stakes of her work. These

works, like all the relief assemblages, were about tearing apart before they were about putting it together. As she later said, “Even when you take apart things that are everyday things, they are kind of shocking.”⁵⁷

Around 1966, Grossman managed to buy the mass of black leather motorcycle jackets that gave rise to *Ali Stoker* and the *Slaves*, and she also incorporated this material into the first of the head sculptures the following year. She recounted going to a Bowery loft where she had heard she could buy some leather cheap. She found there bales of old leather jackets, and the seller broke open a large bale for her to pick out the ones she wanted. Some were in fine shape but others were in tatters, she recalled, and she returned home with a duffle bag stuffed with them.⁵⁸

In *Ali Stoker* in particular, Grossman made the most of the black leather jacket. This was one of the most iconic items of fashion in the 1950s and 1960s, becoming in that time a symbol of rebellion, danger, alternative masculinities, and homosexuality. After the Second World War, it was first associated with bikers through movies such as *The Wild One* (1954). In his extensive and affectionate history of the black leather jacket, Mick Farren remarked, “What Marlon Brando didn’t know at the time was that his costume from the film would prove to be a codification of a youthful rebel uniform. It would remain fixed, with only the slightest mutation, for the next thirty years.”⁵⁹ As late as 1974, television network censors refused to allow the producers of the sitcom *Happy Days* to dress the character Fonzie in a leather jacket for the initial episodes of the series. The American Broadcasting Company said it would make him look like a “hoodlum,” and he was compelled to wear a windbreaker until the network could be convinced that the appearance of the leather jacket on television would not be misread as criminal.⁶⁰

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the black leather jacket had become popularized as a symbol of independence and anti-establishment values (most notably, around the ambivalent figure of James Dean).⁶¹ In the 1960s, it also became increasingly seen as an identifying garment within the ever growing and more visible gay communities in cities such as New York. Such connotations were fueled by its notable presence in underground films such as Kenneth Anger’s *Scorpio Rising* (1964) and Andy Warhol’s *Blow Job* (1964).⁶² In 1964, *Life* magazine clued its readers in to what this uniform meant, saying: “These brawny young men in their leather caps, shirts, jackets and pants are practicing homosexuals.”⁶³ Black leather had a predominant role within the material culture of s/m communities (both gay and straight) by the mid-1960s, but the black leather jacket was not exclusively associated with them. Rather, it had become a somewhat generic symbol of youthful



92 Detail of upper left of Nancy Grossman, *Ali Stoker*.

rebellion, outlaw bikers, and gay urbanites. In his remarkable 1968 crossover gay novel about the practice of s/m (loosely based on Pierre Choderlos de Laclos’s 1782 *Les liaisons dangereuses*), titled *The Real Thing*, William Carney decried the cheap and plentiful black leather jackets that could be found anywhere in the city. The main character warned his pupil, “I do not think much of the shop where [the leather jacket] is being made, however. It is a new establishment that caters to phonies and to phony tastes.”⁶⁴ It was exactly such a popularized demand for the black leather jacket that had produced the surplus from which Grossman was able to buy. Based on the details of *Ali Stoker*, that bale of black leather jackets contained items similar to (or cheaper versions of) those made by the New York-based Schott Brothers, one of the major producers at the time.⁶⁵

Just as with her earlier relief assemblages, such source materials influenced the works Grossman made from them. “Everything I used had a connotative relationship,” she has remarked.⁶⁶ *Ali Stoker* played off the various modifications of masculinity that the black leather jacket had come to stand for (see fig. 91). By 1967, it could be read as rebel, as gay, as outlaw, as poser, and as butch. That is, the black leather jacket signified “macho” – whether

hyperbolic, tragic, idealized, inauthentic, homoerotic, or performed. Grossman made sure the jacket was still recognizable in the surface of the otherwise abstract *Ali Stoker*, leaving elements such as the sleeve on the far right or the zippers and buckles that populate the work.

That the highly charged yet contested masculinity of the black leather jacket is key for *Ali Stoker* is most evident in the tentacular tubes that emerge from zippers and pierce holes, which cumulatively read as ludicrously penile. This can be seen, for instance, in the top center of the assemblage in which a thick tube seems to be coming out of a zippered pants pocket. It is not, however, made from leather pants but rather from a jacket that has been turned upside down, as indicated by the direction of the zipper mechanism. The waistlines of the jackets Grossman used regularly incorporated belt loops, belts, and buckles, and she slyly upended the jacket to make it look like pants, splayed open and exposed by the tubes that emerge from it. In this regard, *Ali Stoker* is comparable to *Bride*. Both play off the genders associated with clothing (the wedding dress, the black leather jacket) and set them against ersatz genital imagery, but both mock the supposed brash display that they at first glance seem to promise. In neither is the display of genital imagery as forthright, unambiguous, or explanatory as it first appears. These relief sculptures, after all, offer no rendering of the figure or image of the body. Rather, they use the found object and assemblage to produce a compacted abstract field that evokes garments and body parts only to dilute any meaning one would ascribe to them. Instead, the works offer preposterous allusions to their multiplications and combinations. They intimate but do not image the bodily and the sexual. This is accomplished in an open way, with their non-figuration and bodily allusion combining to solicit successive recognitions and identifications. For instance, Lowery Stokes Sims described *Ali Stoker* as a work that

ooze[s] a tense, turgid sexuality, reinforced in the allusive shapes and contorted arrangements that make us realize we're not in Kansas anymore. Pipes, vacuum hoses, zippers and studs swirl around one another, connect with one another, penetrate one another, emit one another. It is an orgy of intercourse: raised mounds suggest breasts, concavities vaginas, and the hoses and pipes, of course, penises.⁶⁷

Sims accurately describes the process of looking at *Ali Stoker's* "orgy of intercourse." The more one examines the work and follows its serpentine auto-penetrations, the more the initial obviousness of its imagery turns in on itself and metamorphoses (fig. 93).



93 Detail of Nancy Grossman, *Ali Stoker*.

Grossman further connected this work explicitly with gender through the obscure title, naming it after a large, unruly German Shepherd she purchased to protect her after she moved to Eldridge Street. Named "Petz Ali Baba," the dog proved to be a headache. "That miserable dog," Grossman has recalled, "he was mopping the floors with me. He was black, and he had these muscular paws. He was practically bursting. Not cute at all."⁶⁸ For her, the dog became a competing presence in her studio, full of muscular energy. "Everything that was black and macho I named after that dog," she has said.⁶⁹ An earlier relief assemblage on white canvas, *Ali of Nostrand* (1965) also referred to the beast (and humorously gave it noticeable breast-like forms in the upper left). Returning to this motif a year later, Grossman amplified the macho image with "stoker," referring to "stoking coal in the bottom of the world. Black coal. Intestinal."⁷⁰

Combined with the loaded imagery of the black leather jacket, the churning and tentacular *Ali Stoker* was an image of restless masculine energy. She has explained, "It's a coal stoker, it's Ali the dog, it's energy."⁷¹ Mark Daniel Cohen once called it "an assembly of black leather, metal and

rubber that is a fury of teeming coils, serpentine and torturous, and tortured in its windings – the writhing intestinal mass of a painful revolt.”⁷² Nevertheless, the very excess of such imagery and the endless penile looping of the tubes ultimately tempers the flaying and contortions of these skins with absurdity (see fig. 93). Even more so than *Bride*, *Ali Stoker* flouts the exposure of genital imagery as a means of deflating its power and questioning its relationship to gendered behaviors (and garments). Just as the frank exposure of *Bride* fails to limit gender, so too does *Ali Stoker* caricature “macho” in a work that penetrates itself. In so doing, the work relies on the gay male connotations of the black leather jacket to show how exaggerated masculinity is also the receptive object of sexual desires. Nevertheless, the work does not settle on this reading but keeps gender and sexuality transforming through its abstract bodily topographies. Remember, Sims saw this same work’s “orgy of intercourse” suggesting breasts and vaginas as well as penises.⁷³ Both ways of looking at *Ali Stoker* – as many sexes or as the same sex penetrating itself – complicate and caricature the idea that the masculinity one might attribute either to the black leather jacket or to the penis is inviolable. As Catherine Lord has remarked, “Grossman understood earlier than most feminist theorists the performative aspects of masculinity.”⁷⁴

Overall, in Grossman’s relief assemblages, every revelation that the exposure of the sexed body or the gendered garment seems to promise is undercut, and genitals and genders are made to appear insufficient, exaggerated, unrooted, or ludicrous. “There’s always something funny about the assemblages. Something hilariously funny,” Grossman has asserted.⁷⁵ The reliefs are still tortured, tangled, and dark but their seriousness has been tempered by absurdity. Like black humor, they incite discomfort and laughter at the same time.

This humor is frequently directed at the authority of the genitals in determining who a person is, and Grossman’s work mocks their truth-value as supposed primary trait of gendered personhood. In this, she attacks the assumption that the genitals are a natural sign – manifested most baldly with the assignment of a gender to a baby at birth.⁷⁶ This presumption is culturally invested as a precursor for assigning personhood, as Susan Stryker has argued. Speaking of the ways in which both the investment in dimorphic reproductive organs and the consequent assignment of binary gender are ideological, she explained:

[B]odies are rendered meaningful only through some culturally and historically specific mode of grasping their physicality that transforms the

flesh into a useful artifact. Gendering is the initial step in this transformation, inseparable from the process of forming an identity by means of which we’re fitted to a system of exchange in a heterosexual economy. Authority seizes upon the specific material qualities of the flesh, particularly the genitals, as the outward indication of future reproductive potential, constructs this flesh as sign, and reads it to enculturate the body. Gender attribution is compulsory; it codes and deploys our bodies in ways that materially affect us, yet we choose neither our marks nor the meanings they carry.⁷⁷

Grossman’s abstract assemblages bracket and parody the power of the “construction of this flesh as sign” by detaching these parts from the body and absurdly playing them off cultural artifacts (the wedding dress, the leather jacket) that are themselves hyperbolically but arbitrarily gendered. There is nothing “natural” about the white dress as feminine or the black leather jacket as macho, and Grossman plays with both projections of gender onto them, inverting their terms and forcing other gendered imagery to complicate any one-to-one correlation. Grossman’s assemblages compel us to look at the ersatz genitals on display as constructed (as with her ex-boyfriend’s boots) and to recognize them as just one more unstable sign of gender circulating in the works, unattached even to bodies themselves. Just as Grossman’s abstract works could be seen to contribute to the exploration of the “part-object” in postwar art, her work again aligns with what Halberstam has characterized as the specific use of the part-object (with reference to Hesse) as a central tactic for visualizing transgender through the “fetishistic practice of detaching organs from bodies.”⁷⁸

The practice Grossman used to engage with abstraction – that of assemblage – increasingly brought her back to bodily imagery in the form of detached parts. Contrary to Berkson’s claim that she had “nostalgia” for them, however, I would argue that the nostalgia was his. Her works do not look backward to a past wholeness from which her parts came. They wryly recombine them into new futures. The items she used, from the horse harnesses to the boots to the clichéd leather jackets, all pointed to the bodies they once clothed and held but also celebrated the new constellations they had become. In turn, her material of leather itself allegorized this process of de-constructing one body to make another, which would play out in her works. During this phase of her work, bodies became visible through their parts, but these parts were opportunities for play, possibility, and humor amid the grave imagery of sex and gender.⁷⁹ She has recalled, “In my work, especially in those machine-animal figures, they’re both male and female.

And I didn't have to think about it consciously, because maybe it would have made me feel self-conscious, but they're definitely that way."⁸⁰

The mobility of gender and its detachment from the supposed determination of the sexed body are recurring themes in Grossman's discussions of her own practice. For instance, in a diary entry from 1991, Grossman recalled an encounter with one of her abstract assemblages from the 1960s in which she reiterated their openness with regard to gender:

This afternoon the temperature has reached a humid 100° in New York City. Very uncomfortable. I've been suffering with a headache all day but for an interlude when I opened the door of my un-air-conditioned sculpture studio where, a few days ago, I had begun to remove the mitred one-by-twos which framed a 1960s wall construction. Some of the leather in the piece had become dry and needed to be restored or, perhaps, replaced. Although I had no intention of working on the piece today in the light, airless space, somehow I began to approach it. An hour passed, another – no headache, no worries, no gender, no body. A closed space, a dream space, an ecstatic losing of my care-worn conscious self. That's the way it is sometimes, like going out to play.⁸¹

The recombinant forms of the Sixties assemblages call for such accounts of potentiality and unenclosed possibility through their staging of reworking of skins, bodies, and compositions. With their detached, preposterous parts and their humorous play with the signification of gender, these sculptures call for an open-ended account of the body's mutability and gender's inhabitation of it. They evoke the body through garments even as they atomize it into mere components that promiscuously form new constellations.

When she made her figurative turn and started making the head sculptures in 1968, Grossman asserted that she was "reclaiming the body."⁸² Not without a touch of humor, her reclaiming of the body left it behind to focus on the head. Moving from the genitals to the head was the next step in taking the body not as a biological given but as something that could be remade and re-inhabited. She told Nemser,

The figure, male or female, is an erect phallus since it is walking upright on the earth. Its head, which is equivalent to the head of the phallus, is its most aggressive part. After all, your head which is the seat of your hang-ups is also your most powerful organ, not your penis or your vagina. I know male artists experience making art in a so-called very female way. It is not about getting a hard-on. The whole concept of inspiration is

about being filled. Actually in this act of art-making we are really bisexual and it's too bad the word is so distorted and politicized at this point. People feel so fugitive about saying it and will insist everything is black and white while the world is greying all around them.⁸³

In her subsequent work, Grossman pursued these grey areas. Her consistent demand that viewers see the leather heads as self-portraits has just that unsettling effect, as I shall discuss. The same thing happens with the reliefs. The unabashed and gleeful toying with genitalia casts them as just parts that explain little. These detached genital forms float among tangles made from the skins of animals that were, themselves, remade as bodily containers (garments, harnesses, boots) before being de-constructed and re-constructed by Grossman. In this process, from cow to human garment to leather scraps to the assembled allusion to a vagina or a penis, Grossman does nothing less than ask us to see the body as raw material, to be remade. Hers is a preposterous account of the body that, in all its earnestness and struggle, ultimately questions sexual difference as determining who we are or can become.

MAKING AND HIDING: GROSSMAN'S PRACTICE OF SELF-PORTRAITURE

The abstract relief assemblages of 1965 to 1967 disrupt gender's identification with the sexed body, mock the importance given to genitals as a determinant of personhood, and stage the body's mutability. Arising from a feminist stance, these works mark Grossman's attempt to wrestle with the body and its supposed determinism. At first, she recast it through the lens of abstraction, leaving only hints of recognizable bodily imagery in the non-figural fields presented by her compounded and layered relief constructions. This process of bodily abstraction, paradoxically, continued as Grossman turned to figuration in 1968 with the works that became her most famous, the leather-bound heads (fig. 94). As one critic summarized it in 1972, "Heads are her figures."⁸⁴

Despite their apparent straightforwardness, the head sculptures are far more complex and compacted than they first appear. In other words, they lend themselves to being "misrecognized," as Nayland Blake has compellingly argued.⁸⁵ That is, Grossman's head sculptures have been seen not just as representational but as uncomfortably explicit. Viewers often greet her works with a shock of recognition and a knowing nod. The use of leather and



94 Nancy Grossman, *No Name*, 1968. Leather, wood, paint, epoxy, and hardware, 38.1 × 17.8 × 25.4 cm (15 × 7 × 10 in.).

restraints has led many viewers to assume that these works depict s/m practices, which often take black leather as their favored material. At first glance, the works do seem to resemble the world of bondage hoods, ball gags, sensory deprivation gear, and the rest. The buckles and snaps, the evidence of the inner wooden core straining against the tightly bound leather, and the violation of the human head and face could find a place among the material culture developed by communities for whom sexual and erotic practices of domination and submission were the organizing themes. Importantly, however, these sculptures are not these things. Their leather skins are not mere garments. They cannot be removed and replaced. They are integral and formed in direct and intimate contact with the wooden sculptural core. These mere heads do not represent sex, though it is assumed that they scandalously do.

An inquiry into Grossman's process helps to clarify the apparent contradiction between others' assumptions about the explicit content of these

works and Grossman's own claims that these are self-portraits that speak to broader human and political themes. While one might think that they are simpler in form than the tangled abstract reliefs of the previous years, Grossman's heads, in fact, rely on an equally intense project of reworking, binding, and transforming. They are meticulously made and are the products of Grossman's extensive, but often hidden, labor.

Grossman's art training was in drawing and illustration, and her early recognition came as a painter. Only when she started "drawing" with leather straps did she more decisively turn to sculpture. This led, as discussed earlier, to the complex re-assemblies of clothing, shoes, and objects for which Grossman drew on knowledge she had gained as a child working in her family's garment factory. Her experience with the patterns and structures of the clothing and shoes fostered her understanding of the shapes and possibilities of the garments that she dismembered and reassembled. She was never really trained in conventional sculptural practices, however. When she decided to make the head sculptures, she taught herself to carve wood.

The first stage of Grossman's making of a sculpture was to create a fully carved wooden head with details and nuances (see fig. 95). Grossman tells stories of using the wrong tools and the wrong materials as she was learning to make these. "When I started to do these head sculpture, I didn't even know how to carve. I was whacking away with carpenter's tools. I didn't even know the difference."⁸⁶ In keeping with her attitudes toward remaking, even the wood was repurposed and transformed. For the first years of the heads, the wood was not solid but instead made of planks that were glued together to make a block.⁸⁷ Grossman would scavenge two-by-fours and other scraps for this purpose. Sometimes, noses and other protrusions would be made separately and covered in cast shells made from a special mix of epoxy paint that she developed to give them their shiny, sealed surface. As with the leather, this shiny candy-coating layer protects and obscures the underlying wooden sculpture. When there are exposed teeth, dentures are embedded into the wood sculpture, hiding the core as well. The open mouth of *M. L. Sweeney* is even covered in black leather (see fig. 105). Once fully carved and assembled, these elaborate heads would then be covered by not one but two layers of leather. Between the black outer skin and the wooden core, Grossman added a precisely molded layer of thinner leather (usually red, but sometimes tan or purple) that is visible only as it peaks out in details around the nose (figs. 95–97). In this process, the double covering of the initial sculpture has great significance, for it embeds within the final sculpture two reiterative inner layers that are



95 Richard Avedon, documentation of Nancy Grossman studio, 13 November 1970.

heavily worked but largely invisible to the viewer. As she said in 1971, “It’s the idea of making something, then hiding it again.”⁸⁸

After binding colored-leather-clad wooden heads in black leather, Grossman would then create intricate lines of force across the landscape of the head and neck with straps, zippers, and nails hammered in rows through the leather into the wood. She has often talked of these works – that others see as sexual and scandalous – in dynamic material and formal terms, reminding viewers to attend to the variation across the surface of the works established by her invention of lines from her material. Without a doubt, however, these same elements are also read through the intense physicality required to make them. Tightly laced, buckled in, and bound, the surfaces of these works exhibit real material tension as the pliant leather bears the



96 Nancy Grossman, *Blunt*, 1968. Leather, wood, hardware, and lacquer, 43.5 × 19.1 × 22.2 cm (17¹/₈ × 7¹/₂ × 8³/₄ in.). Private collection.



97 Detail of Nancy Grossman, *Blunt*.

evidence of being stretched to take in the head. The denominator for this is Grossman’s own physical exertion, the history of which is evident in the perfectly crafted surfaces and their tautness.

Grossman’s sculptures (and the full extent of her artistic labor) are never simply or fully visible from the exterior skin. (fig. 98) These works trade on the idea of covering. Cumulatively, her heads problematize visibility, both by blinding her depicted characters and by doubly protecting their faces and her sculpting from our gaze. Despite what many take to be its frankness and blatancy, that is, Grossman’s practice reminds us that we should distrust our urge quickly to decode visually and to categorize the exterior. As with the use of recycled and repurposed materials, what is easily visible to us at present never tells the whole story.



98 Richard Avedon, Nancy Grossman sculptures in progress, 13 November 1970.

The material practice of “making something, then hiding it again” is integral to Grossman’s repeated assertion that these works are self-portraits. With the great care it took to make then sheath the deeper layers of the sculptures, she invested in a process resulting in works that were evocative of her identifications, empathies, and thoughts. The head sculptures are, in this way, part of the tradition of conceptual self-portraiture in which the resemblance of the artist’s body to the artwork is not assumed.

Grossman’s nomination of her head sculptures as self-portraits is neither straightforward nor emotionally singular. In the next section, I shall examine the implications of this with regard to gender, but it is helpful to provide an example of how the works incorporate more than that concern and how they result from complex identifications and emotions on Grossman’s part. Although they seem to exhibit relatively small variations to some viewers, the head sculptures often relate to specific moments of her history and life. Many of her titles have autobiographical or anecdotal cues (especially the often unexplained initials attributed to some of the heads). More

broadly, she has often spoken of the head sculptures as embodying her own frustrations and emotions. She would spend long hours in her studio while listening to the news on the radio, and many of the early works register her responses to political events of the late 1960s and 1970s, in particular the Vietnam War. This was the case with the sculpture *Mary*, which was named after the disgraced Lieutenant William Calley, as Raven explained in her monograph on Grossman (fig. 99). She reported that Grossman said of this work, “*Mary* was a sissy boy.”⁸⁹

To understand this statement and its identificatory complexity, one must think through the implications of a sculpture such as *Mary* both emerging from a political context and being a “self-portrait.” Grossman was disgusted by the Vietnam War, and Calley came for many to embody American atrocities in the conflict. He had ordered the killing of unarmed civilians in the infamous 1968 “My Lai Massacre,” and he was a recurring topic of discussion in the press following his being charged with mass murder. He was ultimately found guilty of murder of only a small number of those killed (only to have his life sentence reduced to house arrest by a presidential pardon from Richard Nixon in 1971), and the highly publicized trial brought home for the American public the savagery of the conflict. News of the My Lai massacre had prompted outrage but the guilty verdict nevertheless proved divisive, with some defending Calley’s role as a soldier (and, by extension, the “good” being done by American intervention in the region) and others decrying the indiscriminate murder of civilians. Debate on questions of guilt and responsibility circled around the coverage of the trial, leaving opinion raw and polarized.

Grossman’s work on *Mary* coincided with the trial, which went on from the winter of 1970 through to the spring of the following year. Listening to radio coverage and reading the newspapers, Grossman would have become aware of the reporting on Calley and his personality in which his masculinity and maturity were questioned. Reporters often mentioned his short height (about the same as Grossman’s, in fact). There was much speculation about his over-attachment to parental figures (including a transference onto his commanding officer, Ernest Medina). A profile in the *New York Times Sunday Magazine* described him as “altogether too much a pathetic cipher of a man to be anyone’s hero, villain or symbol of anything. Five-foot-3, puffy-eyed, lop-eared.” The reporter continued: “It is no wonder that Calley craved affection. He told psychiatrists that in the primary grades he always tried to be near his music teacher so he’d be the one she’d choose to sit with her at the piano and turn the pages of the music.”⁹⁰ As James Olson and Randy Roberts have explained in their history of the massacre, “Most



OPPOSITE AND RIGHT
99 AND 100
Nancy Grossman, *Mary*,
1970–1. Wood, dyed
leather, metal, paint,
epoxy, and thread,
33 × 24.1 × 20.3 cm
(13 × 9½ × 8 in.).
Collection of Mr. and
Mrs. Julian Taub.

of [Calley's] men regarded him as something of a pint-sized joke, a Napoleon want-to-be who demanded a level of respect he never earned. He reminded one of his platoon members of 'a little kid trying to play war.' Medina, they reported, called Calley "Sweetheart."⁹¹ It was this context that informed Grossman's referring to him as a "sissy boy."⁹² As Raven explained, "Grossman considered the Vietnam War to be a rank failure of the American Dream, and representative of a pathological stunting of growth – a preadolescent worldview that produced aberrant masculinist behaviors."⁹³ Probably titling the work with reference to the gay slang term for an effeminate man, "Mary," Grossman created this work as an image of frustrated and stunted masculinity, needing to be contained. She talked about the fact that the leather-clad face was itself under an additional layer of flaps that covered its emotive facial expression and that could be snapped shut over the entire face (see figs. 99 and 100). "The form completely changed when it was

snapped shut,” she said, indicating how the specific elements of the sculpture related to its themes of containment and disclosure.⁹⁴

While being critical of Calley with her association of this work with him, her description of him as a “sissy boy” nevertheless cast him as lonely child made to compensate for his physical and emotional difference. The brutality of that lifetime of compulsory compensation was evident in his adult atrocities. *Mary* offers a particularly complex case of Grossman’s conflicting emotions and identifications with her work. In it, the physical intensity of the binding and (in this case, triple) covering is revealed to be both aggressive and protective as it attacks the adult and registers the frustrations of the misunderstood child. This work, however, is not a portrait of Calley, even though its title encapsulates Grossman’s political anger at the Vietnam War (something known only from Raven’s insider information). It is, according to Grossman, a self-portrait, and we can see seething within its political critique an empathy with the misunderstood, diminutive boy and the shame he was made to feel for failing to live up the ideal of masculinity that was laid onto him. This work, in other words, fears the policing of “proper” masculinity that stunted this boy. She did not forgive Calley or justify his actions so much as rail against a society that produced this monster. Her political anger and feelings of individual frustration in the face of war – and her rage at the burdens of normalcy laid onto children – make *Mary* both deeply political and deeply personal.

Often, however, we are not given the context for Grossman’s titling of the works and she prefers to leave their individual histories opaque. Nevertheless, Raven’s disclosure about *Mary* helps to illustrate how Grossman’s head sculptures engage with larger political and social contexts while also being vehicles for questions of personal history, self-determination, and identity. Cumulatively, the works speak to such emotional conflicts and frustrations. The carved sculptures sometimes (but not always) have contorted or screaming faces for this reason. As one critic wrote, “Sheathed in anonymity, straining to be free, these make ferocious gestures and a strong, silent bid for human liberation.”⁹⁵ Again, Grossman linked her practice to a mode of Abstract Expressionism, seeing the work as an evocation of the things for which she could find no words.⁹⁶ “The words are used up,” she once said.⁹⁷ As with the relief sculptures, the intense physical exertion of creating these works was her version of the Abstract Expressionist painters’ gestural actions. The wood she chose was intended for building and construction, and it was resistant to being carved. Hacking away these assembled blocks of wood only to obscure them, Grossman directed her thoughts and energies into the process of carving and transforming. The buckles,



101 Nancy Grossman,
M.U.S., 1969. Wood,
dyed leather, metal,
paint, epoxy, and thread,
40.6 × 17.1 × 20.3 cm
(16 × 6¾ × 8 in.).
Collection of
Daniel W. Deitrich II.

straps, laces, and snaps all provide visualization of the two contrasting forces at work in a Grossman sculpture – the struggle to express outwardly and the struggle to hold in (fig. 101).

While most people assume that Grossman’s heads are simply and explicitly being tied in and restrained, the heads are also being protected and buffered. “Grossman’s pieces come much closer to armor and prosthetic than restraint and fetish,” as Nayland Blake has noted.⁹⁸ Indeed, Grossman was looking at a wide range of masks and faces, as can be seen in Richard Avedon’s previously unpublished 1970 photographs documenting her studio wall (fig. 102). Grossman looked to such disparate sources as Mexican Lucha Libre wrestlers, African facial painting and decoration, protective masks, medical prosthetics, and animals as sources for her exploration of facial



102 Richard Avedon,
documentation of Nancy
Grossman studio wall,
13 November 1970.

protection and covering. For instance, in one of Avedon's photographs, the corkboard has a range of such materials including a prominently attached triptych showing the evolution of hockey masks (at the right is the famous progenitor of the modern hockey mask designed by Bill Burchmore for the Montreal player Jacques Plante, who became the first goalie to wear a mask when he premiered this invention at a match at Madison Square Garden on 1 November 1959.⁹⁹) This emphasis on protection also informs the physicality of her work, and the bi-directional energy embedded in her protective bindings is crucial. If one takes seriously that these are self-portraits (and one should), then the layers of leather tightly bound to these cores are recognizable as defense from the exterior. The outermost level of leather functions as armor just as much as it functions as restraint, and Grossman is adamant that the wooden core sculptures be completely covered. They are vessels for her identifications. They are for her, and she is their only viewer.¹⁰⁰ The two-ply leather blocks intrusive gazes. Like the use of explicit and confrontational genital imagery in the relief assemblages, the extravagantly buckled, zippered, and strapped exteriors of the head sculptures use extremity and bluster as decoy.

Grossman is not forthcoming about the autobiographical specifics of her works. The complex identifications she has with her head sculptures (which she summarizes through the nomination "self-portrait") are themselves hidden within her technique and in the scene of their creation. Consequently, most viewers of a Grossman sculpture remain arrested by the exterior layer.

EXPLICIT ASSUMPTIONS: S/M AND THE RECEPTION OF GROSSMAN'S SCULPTURE IN THE 1970s

Grossman's head sculptures are confrontational, there is no doubt. The tight laces and the straining zippers spark proprioceptive memories of straining to tie, to zip, to buckle, to hold in. The impact of viewing a Grossman head can activate sense memories and fears in some – whether or not they have ever experienced any degree of restraint or bondage. Recognizing this can help explain the visceral and direct effects these works often have. Understanding the feel and resistance of leather bound so tightly, the viewer is also confronted with an image in which eyes, ears, and sometimes nose and mouth have been covered. This prompts some viewers to imagine themselves as binding or bound in restraints such as those they think they see when looking at a Grossman sculpture.

The affective impact of her work drives many viewers' rush to see Grossman's use of black leather and binding as simply equivalent to s/m devices. Such associations have determined Grossman's reception since the first head sculptures of 1968. Bondage gear was commercially available throughout the 1960s. Leather hoods and masks had become part of the visual vocabulary of illicit erotica propagated in magazines.¹⁰¹ This is attested by the remarkable tell-all book about the sexual subculture of heterosexual "swinger" couples and fetishists late in the 1950s and early in the 1960s, Michael Leigh's *Velvet Underground*, first published in 1963.¹⁰² In that book, Leigh discussed the mail-order catalogues where leather masks and hoods could be ordered. Such material culture became identified with Grossman's head sculptures soon after they began to be exhibited. John Perreault cited Leigh's book in his 1971 review of Grossman's exhibition in New York at Cordier & Ekstrom, saying "This is and is not a manifestation of the velvet underground." He continued:

Leather is not a neutral art material. It is a "loaded" material, a fantasy material. The fantasies involved are of a dark sort, fringed jackets and cowboy boots aside. We are in the realm of S.S. uniforms, odd sex. (Come to think of it, all sex is odd if you really think about it.) But leaf through a porno shop or cruise the West Village; visit dark bars, not all of them along the waterfront.¹⁰³

The context for this riff was Perreault's puzzling over Grossman's popularity with collectors. After all, Grossman's turn from abstraction to figuration ran counter to dominant trends of the 1960s.¹⁰⁴ Her sculptures of heads overtook her practice and quickly became a sensation. First shown at the Whitney Annual in 1968, these sculptures soon sold rapidly, and Grossman kept up a frantic pace of production. The success of her 1971 solo show led Perreault to observe:

Not everyone is having a bad year. A red dot next to an art work in a gallery usually means "sold" (blue means "reserved"). On one level, red dots are the equivalent of grade school stars, and there are red dots all over the place at Cordier & Ekstrom where Nancy Grossman is showing her "leather heads" to full advantage.¹⁰⁵

While, as mentioned earlier, her work would increasingly sit uneasily in mainstream conceptions of 1970s contemporary art, at the beginning of the decade she had a surge of attention from critics and collectors. Many of these collectors were drawn to her work because they misrecognized it as

emblematic of the s/m community (both gay and straight) that was burgeoning in New York, as Perreault's comments attest.

A close study of the heads reveals that few of them would actually function well as bondage gear nor do they resemble the commercially available hoods at the time in any but the most general way (figs. 101, 103–105, 107). It was, however, the association with black leather and the projective inhabitation of the heads by viewers that allowed collectors and critics to jump to that conclusion. This misrecognition overtook Grossman's reputation. In addition to reviews in the art press, her works soon began to be discussed in magazines noted for their erotic content. For instance, in 1971 the German magazine *Tiven* published a sensationalist article titled "Nancy Grossman's leather monsters" that played up this content.¹⁰⁶ In 1972, Playboy Enterprises' *Oui* magazine included Grossman in a story about "young s/m artists."¹⁰⁷ This led to errors of association, such as when Gert Schiff put Grossman's *Caracas* (1971) in the "Sex–Sadism" section of his exhibition *Images of Horror and Fantasy* at the Bronx Museum, New York and declared in the catalogue that the sculpture "pays tribute to a recently much publicized elite, the leather scene."¹⁰⁸ As noted earlier, Nayland Blake has succinctly yet decisively refuted such misreadings of Grossman's work in his 2012 essay on the artist. He rightly noted that "The leather heads, in their graphic power and profound isolation, are easily mistaken for artifacts from a sexual community rapidly devolving into a 'lifestyle' as it grew into visibility."¹⁰⁹

Grossman claims to have been unaware of this flourishing s/m culture when she started making the head sculptures, and she has been consistent in this. While her work evidences a general familiarity with such related aspects as the popular iconography of gay male culture (as in the black leather jacket in *Ali Stoker*; see fig. 91), there is little of the range of s/m's dense and varied material culture such as that catalogued in Leigh's *Velvet Underground* and other contemporary sources. Despite the fact that s/m was neither Grossman's source nor her aim, she was quickly exposed to it when she started exhibiting the head sculptures. Viewers and fans approached her thinking she was "in the know." She has recounted to me a story of an English neighbor who, on seeing her works early on, said "Oh, you're one of those people" and proceeded to invite her over to peruse his catalogues and magazines filled with such material.¹¹⁰

Most have followed suit, ignored Grossman's protestations to the contrary, and chosen superficially to associate her work with s/m practices. So, while s/m may not have been central to Grossman's stated or conscious intentions



103 Richard Avedon, Nancy Grossman's *Andro* sculptures in progress, 13 November 1970.

at the outset, it was nevertheless crucial to her works' reception history. This is most true in the case of Grossman's many gay male collectors. As Blake observed about Grossman's early reception, "What does it mean when one's work is made emblematic in spite of oneself? Grossman's work was taken up and championed by a group of gay men who misread the ideas and desires in the work through their hunger for the types of representation they lacked."¹¹¹ Indeed, within a few years of their debut, the head sculptures could be spotted in interior design articles, such as those in *Home and Garden* and *Connaissance des arts*, where they were set in men's elaborately decorated apartments and houses.¹¹² As Perreault snarkily commented in reference to this trend in 1971, "Grossman's heads are male. Although it may be irrelevant and a bit insulting, it is amusing to imagine the wooden craniums bound by leather as belonging to male fashion designers."¹¹³ This was registered more than a few times by those who noted the presence of Grossman's sculptures in "designer" houses. A 1977 article in *Residential Interiors*, for instance, illustrated the designer Bill Goldsmith's New York



104 Nancy Grossman, *Andro III* and *Andro IV*, 1969–71. Both wood, dyed leather, metal, paint, epoxy, and thread, each 30.5 × 25.4 × 15.2 cm (12 × 10 × 6 in.).

apartment (featuring a Grossman sculpture on the first page of the article) about which the cheeky author reported that it "reflects his enthusiasm for involving and expressing his interests in his personal habitation."¹¹⁴ Grossman has noted, as well, that during these years the association of her work with gay men also led Jack Smith, Andy Warhol, and Robert Mapplethorpe to ask to visit her studio.¹¹⁵

Without a doubt, gay men became central to Grossman's success and were, ultimately, her main patrons in the 1970s. It was during the 1960s and 1970s that an urban, gay male leather culture grew rapidly in New York and other cities. Grossman's heads became quickly absorbed into that iconography. While there had been covert s/m (both gay and straight) net-



105 Nancy Grossman, *M.L. Sweeney*, 1969–70. Wood, dyed leather, paint, thread, and cast resin, 41.3 × 17.5 × 24.4 cm (16¼ × 6⅞ × 9⅝ in.).

works for decades, gay men in the 1960s began to establish meeting places (bars and clubs) for the s/m community, and leather began to be adopted more widely as a particularly gay male signifier (as discussed earlier in relation to *Ali Stoker*). This expanded and deepened in the 1970s, becoming a general topic of fascination regularly discussed in the press.¹¹⁶ Highly visible at the start of the decade, Grossman's sculptures became inadvertently iconic of these developments. Jack Fritscher, the editor of *Drummer* magazine, recalled: "Whatever Nancy Grossman intends with her beautiful beheaded sculptures, the Satanic quotient of her existential decapitations exerts a dynamic voodoo pull. Rich, gay, New York leather men particularly respond to her severed male heads in bondage, as if the sculptures are the 'speaking oracles' of some kind of leather fith-fath."¹¹⁷

Fritscher was referring to a specific event that he had experienced in 1978 (he mentions it a few times in his voluminous writings). He had been

sent to a sex party at a townhouse in Manhattan's Upper East Side by Mapplethorpe (his lover at the time). The gathering was hosted by a well-known television actor (whom he did not name). As Fritscher described it, the party was "scatalogically satanic sadomasochism" and involved a ritualistic scene:

The afternoon's sensuality centered around artist Nancy Grossman's sculpture of a head wrapped in black leather bondage. A large leather dildo protruded from the head's mouth. I don't know whether that was part of the original sculpture or something added to enhance its powers of conjuration....Under the looming presence of the Grossman totem sculpture, the featured players moved to the heights of ecstasy of flesh and blood.¹¹⁸

Telling of the violation and alteration of a sculpture, this sensational anecdote may well be apocryphal. However, the ritualistic scene described by Fritscher (with Grossman's work named each time he repeated this story) attests to the powerful association with s/m culture that her sculptures incited. In other words, even though it is unclear if this was an actual work of hers that had been modified and exploited, its presence in the story attests to the fact that she was, at the very least, iconic enough to have gay s/m scat witches as forgers.

Fritscher would have known about Grossman through Mapplethorpe, and the same associations of her work with s/m had drawn the photographer to her. Grossman and Mapplethorpe developed a friendship, and he was anxious to take photographs of her sculpture. She has recalled: "When I made the heads he was really knocked out. He said, 'I'd love to photograph them. Can I just borrow them? I'd love to photograph them in my basement.' And I said, 'You can't because I don't want them to be actors in your play.' They're full figures. They're already doing their thing. They're already themselves."¹¹⁹ Nevertheless, Grossman allowed Mapplethorpe to photograph the works (at her studio) and found that he still attempted to make them into characters (fig. 106). "He made the light into a drama....I didn't want them to be anybody's props."¹²⁰ Grossman's resistance to Mapplethorpe's taking over of her work was no doubt influenced by the way he and others began to treat her as familiar and experienced with s/m culture (against her own protestations). She recalled that Mapplethorpe was "a sufficiently secure kid, he was a very middle-class kid, so that he could be excited by outrageous things."¹²¹ Much like the English neighbor who showed her his bondage gear catalogues, Mapplethorpe felt enabled by his

projection onto her work to show Grossman sexually explicit materials. She continued, “He used to put out the signal – come and talk to me, come and show me everything. He was definitely a voyeur, very excited, but scared too.”¹²²

A similar confidence was paid by Diane Arbus, with whom Grossman became friends near the end of the photographer’s life. (Grossman and her best friend and roommate Anita Siegel were, according to Arbus’s biographer, Patricia Bosworth, the last people to see her before she committed suicide in 1971. That year, Grossman titled a head sculpture *Arbus*.¹²³) Arbus had started photographing s/m establishments and bringing those photographs to Grossman. As Bosworth recounted, “She’d shown Nancy Grossman a picture of a woman done up in high boots and not much else debasing a naked man on all fours. The image was assaulting, Nancy says. It was like looking at a literal description of the act. Diane seemed a little scared and shocked when she handed it to her, but she said nothing.”¹²⁴ The stories of Arbus and Mapplethorpe both attest to the ways in which Grossman was understood by many to be familiar with s/m culture. While she was, as she said, not “one of those people,” her unjudgmental attitude toward these friends no doubt allowed her to offer a sensitive ear despite their misconceptions of what her work meant about her.

Again, this belief that Grossman was “in the know” affected not just her personal relationships but also the ways in which her work was discussed – and misappropriated. For instance, the *Village Voice* ran a salacious article on s/m in 1975 with a Grossman head sculpture as its central illustration. The contradictory caption dutifully read: “While she is not a part of the leather scene, Nancy Grossman’s sculpture of confined males such as the head above, are highly regarded by SM devotees.”¹²⁵ Problematic as this article was, it contains several interesting details about Grossman. For instance, she is reported as saying about Scott Burton’s 1975 *Five Themes of Solitary Behavior*, “that’s really SM.” His reply: “I guess I’ll have to accept that, coming from you.”¹²⁶ This statement serves to register Grossman’s growing awareness of s/m by 1975 as well as the general misapprehension that she was an authority on it. More importantly, the article then went on to explain Grossman’s exhaustion at this association. The reporter conveyed Grossman’s rejection and discomfort with this narrow view of her work, noting that she asked to be excluded from the article (a request the reporter gleefully conveyed and summarily ignored). Despite his attempt to cast doubt on her, she nevertheless gave the reporter a concise retort to the common misreading of the imagery of confinement in her work: “That’s not SM. That’s the human condition.”¹²⁷

Through such unsolicited encounters (with strangers and friends) and sensationalist appropriations of her sculptures, Grossman’s success did, in fact, lead to her growing recognition of the iconography of s/m and the resemblance of her work to its material culture.¹²⁸ As her words just quoted indicate, by 1975, she had become familiar with the reasons why her work was misread as s/m. During this time, however, a discernible shift began in her head sculptures. Gradually, the style of the earlier, heavily restrained heads gave way to a less accessorized and more simplified way of working that came to characterize her head sculptures of the 1980s. Starting around 1975, Grossman redirected her work, saying that her newer heads were less autobiographical and not self-portraits in the same way: “These heads, which are much more open, are much more themselves. They become themselves.”¹²⁹ In the sculptures of the later years of the 1970s, Grossman more often showcased cleaner, uniform surfaces with few (or no) bindings or buckles. (See, for instance, the work *Cob II*, 1977–80, that is on the left of Mapplethorpe’s photograph, fig. 106.) They began to have eyes that were open and uncovered. Most significantly, this new phase depicted physiognomies that approximated traits associated with individuals of African descent, though most of the noses continue to be colored white. It seems that the iconography of restraint and resistance so important to Grossman’s earlier head sculptures was recast through an empathetic identification with the struggle against racism. This would accord with her support of the Civil Rights movement, which is voiced in some interviews. The black leather now seems less like binding and more like the skin itself. Grossman’s late 1970s shift of physiognomy coupled with the abandonment of her bindings and buckles can be understood as her attempt to find an iconography that would not be misread as kink but that nevertheless explored the idea of the struggle for self-determination against resistance and prejudice. However, the contorted faces that characterized the Vietnam-era work no longer dominate. Instead, Grossman gave most of her later heads calm and dignified faces. With their more self-possessed affect and their open eyes, these heads convey a resolve and strength that is different from the conflicted emotional expressions and the restraint/armor of the earlier head sculptures.

Even when looking at this different work of the late 1970s and 1980s, however, critics and the press continued to be happier with their “exposure” of Grossman and with the mischaracterization of her work as bondage iconography. The relationship between Grossman’s work and s/m has remained a constant topic in the reviews and writings on the artist. This descended to the point of caricature and an inability to see the works for themselves, as when one *Village Voice* writer tried to win points with her



106 Robert Mapplethorpe, *Untitled (Nancy Grossman sculptures)*, 1980.

readers by starting a particularly specious review in 1980 with “I wouldn’t want to meet one of Nancy Grossman’s figures in a dark alley, but her militia of leather boys can be seen safely at Barbara Gladstone Gallery.”¹³⁰

Later, this same author fantasized about Grossman (whom she clearly never met in person) as a dominatrix, saying that the artist “cracks her whip seeking a feminist vengeance.” Such viewers imagined that they saw sex in Grossman’s heads, despite the fact that there was no representation of it or of the body. As with the more intentionally provocative 1964 film by Andy Warhol, *Blow Job*, the focus on the head and a bit of leather incited viewers to imagine the body and bodily relations not pictured.¹³¹

Grossman was not silent on this issue, as noted, and she never shied away from the importance of sexual and gendered content in her work, as I shall discuss presently. The heads, however, are not the s/m totems that many have made them out to be. As often happens with intimations of sex or desire, anything seen as evidence of a non-normative sexuality quickly dominates interpretations to the point where viewers claim to have more authentic knowledge about an artist than they themselves do. On this pleasure in assuming knowledge, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick remarked, “After all, the position of those who think they *know something about one that one may not know oneself* is an excited and empowered one.”¹³² In Grossman’s case, this has proven a constant obstacle, as viewers have chosen to ignore her passionate and committed statements, believing that they know better what this work is *really* about. Grossman’s works have been difficult for some museums to collect and display precisely because of this ungrounded fear that these head sculptures explicitly depict deviant sex – not, as Grossman has maintained, “the human condition.” Such misrecognitions generate the self-satisfied nod and wink that many viewers and critics have brought and continue to bring to Grossman’s sculpture. They have been snared by what they think is an explicit disclosure, never realizing that they are looking at a work that thematizes depth’s hiddenness, that grapples with the disjunctions between the inside and outside of personhood, and that allegorizes the struggle for self-determination.

THE POSSIBILITIES OF BODILESSNESS

Grossman emphasized the head because it left the determinations of the sexed body behind while nevertheless consolidating the emotional and psychological aspects of personhood. It was this decision that caused her to refashion her assemblage technique from the covering of relief sculpture’s flat planes to the acts of enveloping a psychologically charged and totemic image in three dimensions. The full implications of Grossman’s evocation of the body in the absence of its image come into focus when one asks



107 Nancy Grossman, *B.Y.K.*, 1969. Wood, dyed leather, metal, paint, epoxy, and thread, 40.6 × 17.1 × 20.3 cm (16 × 6¾ × 8 in.). Collection of Daniel W. Deitrich II.

not about sexuality but about gender. As with her earlier work, the quick read that many give either the assemblages or the head sculptures is eroded when Grossman's statements about the work are taken into consideration. In particular, the claim that the head sculptures are self-portraits disrupts assumptions not just about authorship but also about gender. During the time when Grossman started making the heads, the work of women artists was all too often read solely as if it somehow expressed or reflected femininity. Grossman's style visibly clashed with those expectations but she nevertheless claimed for her works the status of the genre that was most closely tied to biography and self-expression – self-portraiture. When I asked her about this, she reiterated the answer she has given to all interviewers since the early 1970s – “absolutely, they're self-portraits.”¹³³ None seem to resemble her. They are often given obscure initials to evoke different names. Their physiognomies appear, to many, to be those of male-bodied persons – though, on close analysis of the range of head sculptures,

there is variation and ambiguity that exceeds such assignments. They seem, based on external appearances alone, to be patently not her. Nevertheless, she absorbs them into the genre that we understand as being most personal, most self-reflective, and most rooted in accounts of the self.

Her assertion that these works are self-portraits is thus a performative speech act. When using a performative, “to say it is to do it,” and any artist who nominates one of their works as a self-portrait cannot be refuted. Grossman's consistent claim, then, has iterative force: it affects the ways in which these works can be interpreted. Again, the first look of recognition with a Grossman work is never the whole story, and one must move beyond the decoy of the explicit. Remember, with her 1960s abstract assemblages, she presented supposedly shocking imagery only to complicate the certainty that the exposure of the genitals was said to guarantee. With her head sculptures, she introduced work that resisted being read in relation to her gender (according to the predominant assumptions of the day) while demanding that they be read as self-expressive. What you first see is never what you get with Grossman, and an aim of her works has been to make the viewer nonplussed when attempting to recognize or to nominate gender. One of the central lessons of transgender history is that gender is not always readable as or on the surface; one must resist the impulse to assign gender to others as a predicate for recognizing personhood. Grossman's works demand that one asks about gender beyond (or, more accurately beneath) what one sees on the exterior.

By denying the importance of the body as determining of gender, Grossman's work departed from much 1970s feminism that, increasingly over the course of the decade, rooted its claims in the body as a source of meaning and in an essentialist account of sexual difference. Grossman's divergence from this position was already evident in the abstract assemblages of the 1960s – as was her emphasis on the mutability of the body and of gender. Starting with the head sculptures, the possibilities of multiple identifications with gender became more directly readable through the contradiction produced by the performative nomination of them as self-portraits. For this reason, many increasingly found the leather heads difficult to accommodate fully into the varieties of feminist art-making as they developed in the 1970s.¹³⁴ Already by 1972, it was reported that Grossman “has been criticized by women's lib organizations for neglecting the female figure...”¹³⁵ Despite Grossman's own feminist statements, her head sculptures seemed to disrupt the aims of mainstream feminist art practice that sought to locate an essential and core femininity in the (securely dimorphic) female body. Grossman's head sculptures, on a cursory glance, offered neither the female nor the

body, and her critical engagement with gender's complexity and mobility went unrecognized by many.

The misrecognition of her practice as s/m also pitted her against feminist discourse as it developed in the 1970s. As Gayle Rubin chronicled in the remarkable 1981 essay "The Leather Menace," s/m became a target not just for the popular media who sought to caricature political bids for lesbian and gay rights but also for feminists who saw lesbian s/m communities as unwelcome. Rubin's essay offered a sustained and compelling defense of s/m and its politics, charting how feminist attitudes to lesbian s/m over the previous decade evidenced a move away from a critique of gender and of oppression to a celebration of essential femininity. "Assumptions which now pass as dogma would have horrified activists in 1970. In many respects the women's movement, like the society at large, has quietly shifted to the right."¹³⁶ This shift in feminist discourse away from a critique of oppression coincided with the end of the period of "transgender liberation" in 1973 that I discussed in the Introduction.¹³⁷ Rubin offered an account of this shift by noting how the term "male-identified" in 1970 meant "a woman lacked consciousness of female oppression." This criticality was lost over the course of the decade:

By 1980, the term *male identified* had lost that meaning (lack of political consciousness) and became synonymous with "masculine." Now women who do masculine things are accused of imitating men not only by family, church, and the media, but by the feminist movement. Much contemporary feminist ideology maintains that everything female – persons, activities, values, personality characteristics – is good, whereas anything pertaining to males is bad. By this analysis, the task of feminism is to replace male values with female ones, to substitute female culture for male culture. This line of thinking does not encourage women to try to gain access to male activities, privileges, and territories. Instead, it implied that a good feminist wants nothing to do with "male" activities. All of this celebration of femininity tends to reinforce traditional gender roles and values appropriate female behavior. It is not all that different from the sex-role segregation against which early feminists revolted.¹³⁸

Cast as both s/m and male-identified in this latter sense, Grossman became inassimilable to feminist art practices from later in the 1970s that were reliant on essentialist accounts of gender and the body. All the things that many misread in Grossman's sculptures – their being men, their being gay, their being s/m – clashed with the trajectory of feminist debate in the 1970s.

Even into the 1980s, many simply could not see past the binary and dimorphic understandings of gender and sex that Grossman's work problematizes. The perceptive critic and artist Mira Schor, for instance, struggled to overcome this contradiction (based on a misreading of the work as "gay male attire") when she wrote in 1988: "Grossman, as a lesbian artist, is in an interesting position culturally. Her work reflects gay male attire and sensibility, her figures are phallically erect, yet action is prevented by bondage. Whose action, one wonders? That of the male image or of the woman artist?"¹³⁹ While Schor was attentive to what she called "the identification of the female artist and the male model," a binary conception of sexual difference disallowed the full sense of what Grossman meant when she called her sculptures "self-portraits."

Over the course of her career, Grossman voiced a feminist stance that called into question the meanings of the body and that posited a mobility of gender and identification.¹⁴⁰ In many ways, the difficulties Grossman faced with her reception have reflected the broader problems of recognition that transgender issues encountered within the politics of gender and sex in the second half of the twentieth century.¹⁴¹ Early on, Grossman began making work that addressed such issues as nonascribed genders and female masculinity, but these aims were not visible to many owing to the ways in which her work was appropriated and misread.

The significance and sophistication of Grossman's work, in other words, is newly visible when one sees its exploration of genders in relation to transgender politics and transfeminism. This allows for a better understanding of what often goes under-acknowledged in Grossman's discussions of her own work – its emphasis on the mobility and multiplicity of gender. For instance, in an interview from 1972 with an Arizona newspaper, the reporter recounted a conversation in which Grossman responded to the question often posed to her: "People ask her why she doesn't do women (her heads are bald) and [Grossman] asks, 'What is a woman?' What is a man?"¹⁴² Similarly, she said in 1992, "I think I am specifically female and specifically male. And so is everyone, sometimes less one, and I don't mean just what you're acting out at the time....It's much more arbitrary than people think....I've lived long enough to see both men and women shift."¹⁴³ Such statements about her work are, despite changing terminology, consistent. To recall the 1970s interview with Nemser, she said that "we are really bi-sexual and it's too bad the word is so distorted and politicized at this point. People feel so fugitive about saying it and will insist everything is black and white while the world is greying all around them."¹⁴⁴

Grossman's work demands a more open account of genders' inhabitations of bodies. She confounds the self-evident. What many see as a contradiction – the feminist artist who sculpts work that is misread as male, gay, and fetishistic – is an effect of Grossman's fearless detachment of gender from the sexed body and her thematization of the self's struggle between the interior and the exterior. In response to a question by Nemser about why many of Grossman's works seemed to be male-bodied, Grossman replied: "I don't feel that the male forms are outside of me. I don't feel I have to conform to a political identification, although, naturally, I'm a feminist. But if we have to split hairs, I'm a humanist."¹⁴⁵

Such statements repeatedly question how others might read (or misread) the body's external traits as signs for an individual's gender. Her performative nomination of the head sculptures as self-portraits serves to disrupt a one-to-one correlation between the reading of bodily or facial characteristics and the mapping of gender onto that body's exterior. As she later remarked in an interview, "It's about how mysterious it is when we move from one gender to the other...We have no way of knowing about the interior, we mark it, we signal it with our exterior inventions and metaphors, there's nothing except metaphor. [It is] a better way [than] male/female, active/passive."¹⁴⁶ With such statements and with her artistic practice, Grossman has articulated a theory of gender that differentiates it both from its bodily determinations and from binary models. This accords with how many in transgender studies call for new accounts of personhood that do not rely on bodily determinations. As Gayle Salamon has argued, "Though it cannot fail to have meaning, the body's morphology does not in any of these instances script either identification or desire, and those who understand bodily morphology to be constitutive of a truth that exceeds ideologies of gender would do well to take seriously some of the ways in which gender is currently being lived."¹⁴⁷ Grossman's heads are not limited to one gender and her statements about them always raise that question of others' assignments. The exterior does not signify the interior in her armored sculptures.

Grossman's sculpture is invested in bodily remaking and in the binding of genders to one another. She makes problematic all that is visible as exterior, and her work refuses the body as a limit to the intellect, to gender, and to a sense of self. In this, both her abstract assemblages and her precise head sculptures abstract the body, leaving it as something suggested and offstage. She saw this refusal of the figure, the body, the genitals, and sexual difference as feminist and argued for a non-binary and mobile account of gender. As she once said about her head sculptures: "This *was*



108 Installation view of Nancy Grossman: *Heads* at Museum of Modern Art, New York, PS1, 2011. Foreground: *No Name*, 1968.

the figure – and the most dangerous part of the sculpture. The most sexy part...is between your ears. It's not below your waist."¹⁴⁸ Or, more directly, she declared, "The head was representing the whole body *with all its possibilities*. The head will stand in for the body."¹⁴⁹

From her abstract reliefs made up of just parts to her hidden heads, Grossman has pursued the possibilities of bodilessness in her work. Her sculptures demand that one think differently about what the body contains and what it can be. As she would often say, "The head is where the power is."¹⁵⁰

recycling – spills over into my other subjects or materials – foam and glass”; repr. in Schwarz, *John Chamberlain*, 92.

64 A recent overview of the complex relationships among biology, psychology, and social context for the emergence of gender is given in Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sex/Gender: Biology in a Social World* (New York: Routledge, 2012). See also Rebecca M. Jordan-Young, *Brain Storm: The Flaws in the Science of Sex Differences* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2010).

65 See the important book by Elisabeth Reis, *Bodies in Doubt: An American History of Intersex* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009). See also Melanie Blackless et al., “How Sexually Dimorphic Are We? Review and Synthesis,” *American Journal of Human Biology* 12 (2000): 151–66.

66 Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 10.

67 Susan Stryker, *Transgender History* (Berkeley, Calif: Seal Press, 2008), 1.

68 The phrase “idealization of dimorphism” is Judith Butler’s from *Undoing Gender*, 203. On the topic of the body and the cultural inscription of sex, see further her *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993).

69 Thomas E. Crow, “Figures of Emergence in the Recent Sculpture of John Chamberlain,” in Vander Weg, *John Chamberlain*, 6.

70 Obrist, *John Chamberlain*, 115.

71 A related but distinct claim is made about Eva Hesse in Anne Middleton Wagner, *Three Artists (Three Women): Modernism and the Art of Hesse, Krasner, and O’Keeffe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

72 In a late interview, Chamberlain remarked about his titles’ ambiguity, “And the titling has nothing to do with the object, any more than, for example: Hans is your name, you’ve had it all your life, you’re quite used to it, everybody would know you...But there’s nothing specific about

the word ‘Hans’ with the person other than everybody’s got used to it”; Obrist, *John Chamberlain*, 111–12. Despite its arbitrariness, however, naming does, as Chamberlain’s words reflect, come to affect how we know, recall, and relate to the named person or thing.

73 Chamberlain, “A Statement,” n.p.

74 Chamberlain and Auder, treatment for *Secret Life of William Shakespeare*.

75 See discussions in Jay Prosser, *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); J. Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York University Press, 2005); Jay Prosser, *Light in the Dark Room: Photography and Loss* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

76 Henry Geldzahler, “Interview with John Chamberlain,” in *John Chamberlain: Recent Work* (New York: Pace Gallery, 1992), n.p.

77 Elizabeth Baker urged such a distinction in 1972, when she wrote, “The idea that Chamberlain remains a ‘Tenth Street Abstract-Expressionist’ dies hard – and it was not much of an insight to begin with. This is the crudest of misconceptions still in circulation about his work today”; Baker, “Chamberlain Crunch,” 27.

78 As David Bourdon explained, after Ondine failed to arrive in Arizona for the filming of *Lonesome Cowboys* (1968), Chamberlain was offered his role as “Padre Lawrence, described in the scenario as a ‘degenerate and unfrocked priest who tries to hide his addiction to opium-laced cough syrups.’...[He] was also invited to play the father of the cowboy brothers, but declined that part, too, on the grounds that he wasn’t old enough”; David Bourdon, *Warhol* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1989), 271. See also Andy Warhol and Pat Hackett, *POPism: The Warhol ’60s* (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980), 260–2. As Matthew Tinkcom has discussed, *Lonesome Cowboys* explicitly problematized the heteronormative mascu-

linity that was seen as definitional of the Western genre: “Indeed, the hostility towards masculinity voiced at moments in the film would suggest that part of the film’s effect is to offer no identificatory pleasure for the straight male spectator, a turnabout from the usual expectations of the Hollywood Western”; Matthew Tinkcom, *Working Like a Homosexual: Camp, Capital, Cinema* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002), 112–13. For further discussion of Warhol’s relation to Chamberlain, see Edward Leffingwell, “A Box with a Hole in It,” in *Wide Point: The Photography of John Chamberlain*, ed. Donna De Salvo (Southampton, N.Y.: Parrish Art Museum, 1993), 33–9.

79 See Larry Rivers and Arnold Weinstein, *What Did I Do? The Unauthorized Autobiography of Larry Rivers* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992); Gavin Butt, *Between You and Me: Queer Disclosures in the New York Art World, 1948–1963* (Durham, N.C. and London: Duke University Press, 2005), 74–105.

80 Robert Smithson, “Entropy and the New Monuments,” *Artforum* 4, no. 10 (June 1966): 30.

81 Chamberlain in Sylvester, “Auto/Bio,” 11. Emphasis mine.

82 Clearwater, “John Chamberlain interview,” 16.

3 SECOND SKINS: UNBOUND GENDERS OF NANCY GROSSMAN’S SCULPTURE

1 Transcript of Arlene Raven presentation, Photography Institute, New York, 1999; archived at <http://www.thephotographyinstitute.org/www/1999/raven.html>, accessed 3 April 2014.

2 Grossman’s engagement with abstraction and assemblage (and the shift to “figuration” in the form of head sculptures) could be productively positioned in the narrative about hybrid practices and realist aims for American and Euro-

pean art in the postwar period offered by Alex Potts in his recent book. He compellingly argues that oppositions between abstraction and figuration are not just artificial but have hindered recognition of postwar art’s political and social engagements; Alex Potts, *Experiments in Modern Realism: World Making, Politics and the Everyday in Postwar European and American Art* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013).

3 Much more attention, e.g., has been given to Philip Guston’s shift to figuration in 1970, two years after Grossman had also pivoted from abstraction. For a detailed assessment of Guston’s “return” to figuration and the context for such shifts, see Robert Slifkin, *Out of Time: Philip Guston and the Refiguration of Postwar American Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 237–54.

4 B[rian] O’D[oherty], “Nancy Grossman (Krasner),” *New York Times*, 23 February 1964, X18.

5 Cindy Nemser, *Art Talk: Conversations with 12 Women Artists* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1975). Early in the 1970s, Grossman appeared in the pantheons offered in Barbaralee Diamonstein, “100 Women in Touch with Our Time,” *Harper’s Bazaar*, 3110 (January 1971): 104–16 and Mary Beth Edelson, “Some Living American Women Artists,” *Off Our Backs* 4, no. 2 (1974): 10–11.

6 By 1976, one writer was claiming about the artist’s mixed success and isolation from the mainstream art world that “She has been in a half-dozen solo shows, been included in group exhibitions around the country, is represented in the collections of some of the most sophisticated art patrons around. But Nancy Grossman, at 35, remains almost unknown to the general public and much of the art world. Her name is not one of the ‘musts’ automatically included in any big art-now museum survey. Her work is rarely discussed or even listed in new books”; Emily Genauer, “Big ‘Unknown’ Talent: Drawings by

Nancy Grossman,” *International Herald Tribune*, 29 December 1976, 9.

7 See e.g. Norman Kleebblatt’s comments in Ann Landi, “The Best Underrated Artists,” *ARTnews* (September 2010): 97.

8 See discussion in Susan Stryker, *Transgender History* (Berkeley, Calif: Seal Press, 2008), 103–5 and in Introduction above. See also Leslie Feinberg, “Transgender Liberation: A Movement Whose Time Has Come” (1992), in *The Transgender Studies Reader*, ed. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), 205–20; Susan Stryker, “My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage,” *GLQ* 1, no. 3 (1994): 237–54; Cressida Heyes, “Feminist Solidarity After Queer Theory: The Case of Transgender,” *Signs* 28, no. 4 (Summer 2003): 1093–120; Sandy Stone, “The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto,” rev. in Stryker and Whittle, *Transgender Studies Reader*, 221–35; Viviane K. Namaste, “Undoing Theory: The ‘Transgender Question’ and the Epistemic Violence of Anglo-American Feminist Theory,” *Hypatia* 24, no. 3 (Summer 2009): 11–32.

9 Full-figure imagery does continue in her drawing and collage practice but the focus of this chapter will be on her sculpture and her central artistic theme: the bound head. She experimented with one major figurative sculpture, her 1971 *Untitled* (Israel Museum, Jerusalem). The full range of her practice across her career is discussed in Ian Berry, ed., *Nancy Grossman: Tough Life Diary* (Saratoga Springs, N.Y. and Munich: Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College with Prestel Verlag, 2012).

10 In this way, Raven’s characterization of Grossman’s identifications resonates with what Jack Halberstam has analysed as “female masculinity” in *Female Masculinity* (Durham, N.C. and London: Duke University Press, 1998).

11 A discussion of gender complexity in

Grossman’s work and its relationship to Surrealist precedents can be found in Anne Swartz, “The Erotics of Envelopment: Figuration in Nancy Grossman’s Art,” *n.paradoxa* 20 (2007): 64–70.

12 W[illiam] B[erkson], “Nancy Grossman,” *Arts Magazine* 39, no. 9 (May–June 1965): 70.

13 The works before 1968 have rarely been discussed in detail. Notable exceptions are Arlene Raven, *Nancy Grossman* (Brookville, N.Y.: Hillwood Art Museum, C. W. Post Campus, Long Island University, 1991); Arlene Raven, “True Grit,” in *True Grit*, ed. Halley K. Harrisburg and Michael Rosenfeld (New York: Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, 2000), 2–5; Lowery Stokes Sims, “Loud Whispers,” in *Nancy Grossman: Loud Whispers: Four Decades of Assemblage, Collage, and Sculpture* (New York: Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, 2000), 6–11; Mark Daniel Cohen, “Review: Nancy Grossman: Loud Whispers: Four Decades of Assemblage, Collage, and Sculpture,” *Review: The Critical State of Visual Art in New York* (15 December 2000). Of related interest is Robert C. Morgan’s essay on Grossman’s return to relief assemblage in the 1990s, Robert C. Morgan, “Nancy Grossman: Opus Volcanus,” *Sculpture* 17, no. 6 (July–August 1998): 36–41. A key source for these works is Nemser’s interview with Grossman, in Nemser, *Art Talk*, 327–67.

14 Raven, *Grossman*, 105.

15 Nancy Grossman, interview with the author, 30 October 2009. She and Smith initially met at the Museum of Modern Art café. Someone had knocked Grossman’s coffee over, and Smith offered to buy her a new one. They struck up a conversation, and Smith was intrigued by the black cigarettes Grossman smoked at the time. She sent him a pack, and he eventually invited her up to Bolton Landing.

16 Nancy Grossman, telephone conversation with the author, 2 December 2011.

17 Grossman, interview with the author, 30 October 2009.

18 Grossman, telephone conversation with the author, 2 December 2011.

19 Nancy Grossman in Nemser, *Art Talk*, 336. In Nemser’s book, the last word is “moving,” but I think it likely that this is a typographic or transcription error.

20 *Ibid.*, 337.

21 Nancy Grossman, interview by Kate Horsfield, “Art and Artists: Nancy Grossman 1975,” video produced by Lyn Blumenthal and Kate Horsfield, 1975, Video Data Bank, School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

22 Raven, *Grossman*, 103.

23 This is mentioned in *ibid.*, 50. Grossman reiterated Gagarin’s importance in her visual vocabulary in a telephone conversation with the author, 23 October 2011.

24 Grossman, telephone conversation with the author, 2 December 2011.

25 Grossman in Nemser, *Art Talk*, 340.

26 E.g., in 1956 Clement Greenberg called Smith “the best sculptor of his generation,” explaining that “Smith was among the first in this country to practice the art of aerial drawing in metal”; Clement Greenberg, “David Smith,” in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, ed. John O’Brian, 4 vols (University of Chicago Press, 1993), 3: 277. This became a standard appreciation of Smith’s practice, which Greenberg called in 1964 “the cursiveness of Smith’s drawing-in-air”; Clement Greenberg, “David Smith’s New Sculpture” (1964), in *ibid.*, 4: 190.

27 Grossman, telephone conversation with the author, 2 December 2011.

28 As Greenberg described it, “The regularity of contour and surface, the trued and faired planes and lines, are there in order to concentrate attention on the structural and general as against the material and specific, on the diagrammatic as against the substantial; but not because there is any virtue in regularity as such....The relatively simple and forthright has been put together to form unities that are complex and polymor-

phous”; Greenberg, “David Smith’s New Sculpture,” 4: 191.

29 Grossman’s *Totem* sculptures from 1966 to 1967 should be considered a further reflection on Smith’s practice. “Totem” was a key concept for Smith and it provided a vehicle for a return to figuration in his *Tanktotem* series; see Ch. 1 above; Rosalind Krauss, *Terminal Iron Works: The Sculpture of David Smith* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1971), 88–116; Rosalind Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1977), 147–73.

30 Raven, *Grossman*, 102. Emphases original.

31 Grossman quoted in *ibid.* That Smith’s death was a catalyst for Grossman was reiterated in Corin Robins, “Man is Anonymous: The Art of Nancy Grossman,” *Art Spectrum* 1, no. 2 (February 1975): 36. This early article confused the objects and chronology, erroneously claiming that *Potawatami* (1967) was the first relief sculpture made from the harnesses Smith gave her.

32 Raven, *Grossman*, 100.

33 J. Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York University Press, 2005), 124.

34 *Ibid.*, 117.

35 Francis M. Naumann and David Nolan, *The Visible Vagina* (New York: Francis M. Naumann Fine Art and David Nolan Gallery, 2010).

36 Nemser, *Art Talk*, 340.

37 Grossman, interview by Horsfield, “Art and Artists: Nancy Grossman 1975.”

38 Grossman, interview with the author, 30 October 2009.

39 Grossman, telephone conversation with the author, 23 October 2011.

40 Nemser was the outspoken editor of *Feminist Art Journal* from 1972 to 1977 and conducted the interviews that made up *Art Talk* with a purposefully feminist aim. As perhaps the first book about contemporary women’s art, it was pioneering in the development of feminist art history and remains a key document of the decade. On

Nemser, see Judy K. Collischan Van Wagner, *Women Shaping Art: Profiles of Power* (New York: Praeger, 1984), 165–79.

41 See e.g. Barbara Rose, “Vaginal Iconology,” *New York Magazine* 7 (11 February 1974): 59; Lisa Tickner, “The Body Politic: Female Sexuality and Women Artists Since 1970,” *Art History* 1, no. 2 (1978): 236–49; Margo Hobbs Thompson, “Agreeable Objects and Angry Paintings: ‘Female Imagery’ in Art by Hannah Wilke and Louise Fishman, 1970–1973,” *Genders* 43 (2006): n.p.; Anna C. Chave, “‘Is This Good for Vulva?’: Female Genitalia in Contemporary Art,” in Naumann and Nolan, *Visible Vagina*, 7–27.

42 Rachel Middleman has also argued that Hannah Wilke’s use of vaginal imagery and ambiguity in her work of the 1960s is distinct from the later accounts of 1970s essentialism into which it has often been absorbed; Rachel Middleman, “Rethinking Vaginal Iconology with Hannah Wilke’s Sculpture,” *Art Journal* 72, no. 4 (2013): 34–45.

43 Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro, “Female Imagery,” *Womanspace Journal* 1 (Summer 1973): 11–14. For discussion of the *Dinner Party* and its contentious reception, see Amelia Jones, ed., *Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago’s Dinner Party in Feminist Art History* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996).

44 Nemser, *Art Talk*, 345–6. Nemser and other co-editors of the *Feminist Art Journal* often decried Chicago’s work and its singular reliance on genital imagery. For context, see Christine Rom, “One View: *The Feminist Art Journal*,” *Woman’s Art Journal* 2, no. 2 (Autumn–Winter 1981–2): 19–24.

45 See Cindy Nemser, “Towards a Feminist Sensibility: Contemporary Trends in Women’s Art,” *Feminist Art Journal* 5, no. 2 (Summer 1976): 19–23.

46 Virginia Pitts Rembert, “Review: Fiber and Form: The Woman’s Legacy,” *Woman’s Art Journal* 18, no. 1 (Spring–Summer 1997): 65.

47 Gayle Salamon, *Assuming a Body: Transgender and Rhetorics of Materiality* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 138. See further Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004).

48 Grossman, telephone conversation with the author, 23 October 2011.

49 Raven, “True Grit,” 5.

50 This was also mentioned in Sims, “Loud Whispers,” 10.

51 Grossman, interview by Horsfield, “Art and Artists: Nancy Grossman 1975.” She relates in detail in this interview the challenges she faced with publishing companies and reiterates the story told to Nemser.

52 Grossman in Nemser, *Art Talk*, 341.

53 This experience of restriction is discussed at length in Raven, *Grossman*, 106–10.

54 Grossman, telephone conversation with the author, 23 October 2011.

55 Nemser, *Art Talk*, 340.

56 Grossman, telephone conversation with the author, 23 October 2011.

57 Grossman, interview with the author, 30 October 2009.

58 Grossman, telephone conversation with the author, 23 October 2011.

59 Mick Farren, *The Black Leather Jacket* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1985). For further histories of the black leather jacket, see the exhaustive taxonomy in Rin Tanaka, *Motorcycle Jackets: A Century of Leather Design*, 2nd ed. (Atglen, Penna: Schiffer Publishing, 2006) and Lily Phillips, “Blue Jeans, Black Leather Jackets, and a Sneer: The Iconography of the 1950s Biker and its Translation Abroad,” *International Journal of Motorcycle Studies* 1, no. 1 (March 2005), online at http://ijms.nova.edu/March2005/IJMS_Art-clPhilipso305.html.

60 Garry Marshall, oral history interview conducted by Karen Herman, 28 August 2000, part 5 of 6, *The Archive of American Television*, Museum of Broadcast Communications, online at

<http://emmytvlegends.org/interviews/shows/happy-days>. Fonzie’s jacket was even dark brown, not black.

61 See Michael DeAngelis, *Gay Fandom and Crossover Stardom: James Dean, Mel Gibson, and Keanu Reeves* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001) and Roy Grundmann, *Warhol’s Blow Job* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003).

62 See Juan A. Suárez, *Bike Boys, Drag Queens, & Superstars: Avant-garde, Mass Culture, and Gay Identities in the 1960s Underground Cinema* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996); Matthew Tinkcom, *Working Like a Homosexual: Camp, Capital, Cinema* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002); Jack Hunter, ed., *Moonchild: The Films of Kenneth Anger* (London: Creation Books, 2002); Grundmann, *Warhol’s Blow Job*.

63 Paul Welch, “Homosexuality in America,” *Life* (26 June 1964): 66.

64 William Carney, *The Real Thing* (1968; New York: Masquerade Books, 1995), 25.

65 See Tanaka, *Motorcycle Jackets*, 130–1, as well as the related jackets made by Schott and distributed by Beck Motorcycle Distributors (p. 152).

66 Grossman, telephone conversation with the author, 2 December 2011.

67 Sims, “Loud Whispers,” 9.

68 Grossman, interview with the author, 30 October 2009.

69 Grossman, telephone conversation with the author, 23 October 2011. I should note that Grossman’s comments on the use of black in *Ali Stoker* do not appear to have racial undertones. Given Grossman’s lifelong sympathies with the Civil Rights movement and her belief in self-determination, however, one could contend that the work’s parody of macho might also be extended as a critique of the cultural clichés of black masculinity. As with her attempts to derail assumptions that the body’s exterior seamlessly equates with gender, Grossman mocks such stereotypes for their inadequacies to the complexities of personhood.

70 Ibid.

71 Grossman, interview with the author, 30 October 2009.

72 Mark Daniel Cohen, “Review: True Grit,” *Review: The Critical State of Visual Art in New York* (15 April 2000): 20.

73 Sims, “Loud Whispers,” 9.

74 Catherine Lord, “Their Memory Is Playing Tricks on Her: Notes Toward a Calligraphy of Rage,” in *Wack!: Art and the Feminist Revolution*, ed. Cornelia Butler (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2007), 448. Lord is here referring not just to Grossman’s post-1968 leather heads but also to the “butch sculptures of industrial jetsam [made] during the 1960s.”

75 Grossman, interview with the author, 30 October 2009.

76 As Reis has chronicled, however, there is a long history of human bodies’ resistance to this binary assignment of gender based on the infant’s genitals and on doctors’ beliefs that such bodies should be “normalized”; Elisabeth Reis, *Bodies in Doubt: An American History of Intersex* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009). See further the discussion in the Preface and Introduction.

77 Stryker, “My Words to Victor Frankenstein,” 249.

78 Halberstam, *In a Queer Time*, 118–19. On the part-object in contemporary art, see Helen Molesworth, ed., *Part Object Part Sculpture* (Columbus, Ohio: Wexner Center for the Arts and Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005). On Hesse and the part-object, see Mignon Nixon, “Posing the Phallus,” *October* 92 (Spring 2000): 96–127; Mignon Nixon, “o+x,” *October* 119 (2007): 6–20. On the part-object as a protofeminist gesture for postwar sculpture, see Mignon Nixon, *Fantastic Reality: Louise Bourgeois and a Story of Modern Art* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2005), 248.

79 In this, Grossman’s work aligns with other artists who used assemblage as a medium through which to address issues of sex and gender in a

climate where positions of difference or dissent could not be articulated openly. This is compellingly argued in Jonathan D. Katz, “‘Committing the Perfect Crime’: Sexuality, Assemblage, and the Postmodern Turn in American Art,” *Art Journal* 67, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 38–53.

80 Grossman, interview with the author, 30 October 2009.

81 Nancy Grossman, diary entry, 28 June 1991; facsimile repr. in Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, *Nancy Grossman: Loud Whispers* (2000), 43.

82 Nancy Grossman quoted in Corin Robins, “Nancy Grossman,” *Arts Magazine* 51, no. 4 (1976): 12.

83 Grossman in Nemser, *Art Talk*, 345.

84 Barbara Schwartz, “Letter from New York,” *Craft Horizons* 32, no. 1 (February 1972): 42.

85 Nayland Blake, “Misrecognized,” in Berry, *Nancy Grossman*, 105–7.

86 Grossman, interview with the author, 30 October 2009.

87 In a public conversation with Elizabeth Streb on 18 February 2012 at the opening of her retrospective at the Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, N.Y., Grossman said that she used PC-7 epoxy to bind the planks into blocks.

88 Nancy Grossman quoted in Grace Glueck, “A ‘New Realism’ in Sculpture?” *Art in America* 59, no. 6 (November–December 1971): 152.

89 Raven, *Grossman*, 122.

90 Stephan Leshner, “The Calley Case Re-examined,” *New York Times Sunday Magazine* (11 July 1971): 14.

91 James Olson and Randy Roberts, *My Lai: A Brief History with Documents* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), 13. Such comments often came in the reporting on Medina, who many thought should also have been convicted: e.g. Thomas Buckley reported: “On the advice of his lawyers, Kadish and Truman, who monitored my conversations with him, Medina declined to give

his opinion of Calley’s performance in Hawaii and in Vietnam, but the statement of other members of the company and of Calley himself indicate that, despite the generally good rating Medina gave him, the opinion could not have been high. Most shavetails are a nuisance to their troops and their superiors, and Calley, with his limited abilities and attainments, his small size and apparently deeply rooted sense of inferiority, made matters worse through a compensating and highly transparent bluster”; Thomas Buckley, “The Captain Who Commanded Lieutenant Calley: Captain Medina,” *New York Times Sunday Magazine* (20 June 1971): 26.

92 Most likely, Grossman’s relaying of this phrase to Raven (for her 1991 book) was informed by the popular press surrounding the publication, four years before, of the controversial study of homosexual etiology by Richard Green, *The Sissy Boy Syndrome and the Development of Homosexuality* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987). Terminology and assumptions from Green’s book circulated widely in the years following its publication. For a critique of Green, see “How to Bring Your Kids Up Gay: The War on Effeminate Boys,” in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993), 154–66.

93 Raven, *Grossman*, 122.

94 Grossman, interview by Horsfield, “Art and Artists: Nancy Grossman 1975.”

95 Schwartz, “Letter from New York,” 42.

96 For general context, see Ann Gibson, “Abstract Expressionism’s Evasion of Language,” *Art Journal* 47, no. 3 (1988): 208–14.

97 Grossman, interview by Horsfield, “Art and Artists: Nancy Grossman 1975.”

98 Blake, “Misrecognized,” 107.

99 See “The night [Jacques] Plante made goaltending history,” *NHL Insider online*, 1 November 2012, <http://www.nhl.com/ice/news.htm?id=383063>, accessed 23 September 2014.

100 Nancy Grossman has generously allowed

me to reproduce the previously unpublished photographs by Richard Avedon that illustrate some of her process on the core sculptures. I am grateful both to her and to the Richard Avedon Foundation for permitting the publication of this important documentation of her studio in 1970. In particular, Eugenia Bell provided much encouragement and support that helped these to come to light.

101 For aspects of this history, see e.g., David Kunzle, *Fashion & Fetishism: Corsets, Tight-lacing & Other Forms of Body-sculpture* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing, 2004); Valerie Steele, *Fetish: Fashion, Sex and Power* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

102 Michael Leigh, *The Velvet Underground* (New York: Macfadden Books, 1963).

103 John Perreault, “Leather: Associations For Your Own Good,” *Village Voice*, 9 December 1971, 32.

104 Again, see Slifkin, *Out of Time*, on the concern caused by such “returns” to figuration in relation Philip Guston’s infamous 1970 Marlborough Gallery.

105 Perreault, “Leather,” 32.

106 Thomas Schroeder, “Nancy Grossman Ledermonstren,” *Twen* 5 (May 1971): 39.

107 Allan Mankoff, “Ouch Art: The Pain Aesthetic,” *Oui* 7 (July 1973): 76.

108 Gert Schiff, *Images of Horror and Fantasy* (Bronx, N.Y.: Bronx Museum of the Arts, 1977), n.p. Not surprisingly, the salaciousness of this error led to it being repeated in reviews of the exhibition, such as in Annette Kuhn, “Horror Hot and Cold,” *Village Voice*, 12 December 1977, 88.

109 Blake, “Misrecognized,” 106.

110 Grossman, interview with the author, 30 October 2009. See variation of this story in Nemser, *Art Talk*, 342.

111 Blake, “Misrecognized,” 106.

112 Grossman’s works appear hanging in an opulent bathroom in the home of Valerian Rybar, the famous interior designer to the rich, in “An

Apartment That Works Like a Fine Watch with Precision and Beauty,” *Home and Garden* 142, no. 4 (1972): 123, or on a hall table next to a mask from Cameroon in R.-J. V., “À Rome: Chez le directeur d’une galerie d’art,” *Connaissance des arts* 259 (1973): 99.

113 Perreault, “Leather,” 32.

114 Richard Jones, “Living with Change,” *Residential Interiors* (November–December 1977): 62.

115 Grossman, interview with the author, 30 October 2009.

116 As evidenced in the passage from the Carney novel *The Real Thing* quoted above, such newfound popularity was a source of distrust for established members of s/m networks. One chronicler lamented the loss of the more clandestine and selective pre-Stonewall s/m community, saying: “Once the lure of s/m was discovered by those outside the ranks of aficionados, the trappings of the scene, stripped of its essence, became fashion. Leather bars, at least for men, proliferated, and publications featuring fetishes and kinks were sold on newsstands. Thousands, then tens of thousands of gay men adopted a carefully studied Tom of Finland look, but the sexual flavor of choice for the vast majority, once out of their clothes, was still plain vanilla”; David Stein, “S/M’s Copernican Revolution: From a Closed World to the Infinite Universe,” in *Leatherfolk: Radical Sex, People, Politics, and Practice*, ed. Mark Thompson (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1991), 148.

117 Jack Fritscher, *Popular Witchcraft: Straight from the Witch’s Mouth*, rev. ed. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 170; 1st ed. (lacking the reference to Grossman) Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1972.

118 Jack Fritscher, *Mapplethorpe: Assault with a Deadly Camera* (Mamoreneck, N.Y.: Hastings House, 1994), 41–2.

119 Grossman, interview with the author, 30 October 2009.

120 Ibid.

121 Grossman quoted in Swartz, “Erotics of Envelopment,” 69.

122 Ibid.

123 Patricia Bosworth, *Diane Arbus: A Biography* (1984; New York: W.W. Norton, 2005), 318–19.

124 Ibid., 311–12.

125 Richard Goldstein, “S&M: The Dark Side of Gay Liberation,” *Village Voice*, 7 July 1975, 10.

126 Ibid., 13. This article conflates Chris Burden, whose 1971 *Shoot* is mentioned just prior, with Scott Burton, known in the 1970s for elaborate and slow-moving performances based on body language and movement. Grossman’s response was to a performance in which “a woman was compelled to execute a series of awkward and painful body movements.” This description does not match Burden’s practice but it does resemble Burton’s *New Tableaux: Five Themes of Solitary Behavior* performed by Elke Solomon at Idea Warehouse, New York in March 1975. On Burton at this time, see the introduction to David Getsy, ed., *Scott Burton: Collected Writings on Art and Performance, 1965–1975* (Chicago: Soberscove Press, 2012), esp. 1–32. As I shall discuss in a future book, Burton’s work (unlike Grossman’s) was deeply invested in the culture and politics of s/m in the 1970s.

127 Goldstein, “S&M,” 13. Similarly, Grossman later said, “If my figures are closed in, it’s a state of being; it isn’t perverse entertainment”; quoted in Rosalind Constable, “New Realism in Sculpture: Look Alive!” *Saturday Review* (22 April 1972): 40.

128 It is possible, however, that Grossman’s exposure to the imagery of s/m’s material culture by others provided her with some ideas about how to imagine the use of her bindings and buckles. This is less the case with the head sculptures than it is with the ambitious figure drawings (but which also incorporate firearms and other elements). Nevertheless, this reactive appropri-

tion of the images foisted on her by others should not necessarily be taken as evidence for any deep involvement with the s/m community or s/m practices.

129 Grossman, interview by Horsfield, “Art and Artists: Nancy Grossman 1975.”

130 Elizabeth Hess, “Of Human Bondage,” *Village Voice*, 17 December 1980, 111.

131 See Grundmann, *Warhol’s Blow Job*.

132 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 80. Emphasis original.

133 Grossman, interview with the author, 30 October 2009.

134 In addition to the context discussed in relation to *Bride*, Grossman also does not feature in accounts of alternatives to feminist figurative work. E.g., in a survey of feminist debates in the 1970s, Whitney Chadwick wrote of a division between women-identified figuration and feminist Postminimalism. Her dichotomous account is useful in that it helps to clarify how an artist such as Grossman – despite her success as both abstract and representational artist during the late 1960s and early 1970s – failed to register as sufficiently abstract or sufficiently representational of women. Whitney Chadwick, “Balancing Acts: Reflections on Postminimalism and Gender in the 1970s,” in *More than Minimal: Feminism and Abstraction in the ’70s*, ed. Susan L. Stoops (Waltham, Mass: Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, 1996), 14–25.

135 Constable, “New Realism in Sculpture,” 40.

136 Gayle Rubin, “The Leather Menace: Comments on Politics and S/M,” (1981/82), in *Deviations: A Gayle Rubin Reader* (Durham, N.C. and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 127.

137 The phrase and periodization is drawn from Stryker, *Transgender History*, 59–89. See the discussion in the Introduction above.

138 Rubin, “Leather Menace,” 127.

139 Mira Schor, “Representations of the

Penis,” *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* 4 (November 1988): 12.

140 An exemplum can be found in the video interview by Horsfield, “Art and Artists: Nancy Grossman 1975.”

141 E.g., in addition to the resistance transfolk encountered in some feminist communities, there were also pitched debates on the relationship among FTM, butch, and lesbian. See Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, 141–73; Jacob Hale, “Consuming the Living, Dis(re)membering the Dead in the Butch/Ftm Borderlands,” *GLQ* 4, no. 2 (1998): 311–48; Gayle Rubin, “Of Catamites and Kings: Reflections on Butch, Gender, and Boundaries” (1992), in *Deviations*, 241–53; Henry Rubin, *Self-made Men: Identity and Embodiment Among Transsexual Men* (Nashville, Tenn: Vanderbilt University Press, 2003) and Salamon, *Assuming a Body*, 95–128. More generally with regard to feminism, see Heyes, “Feminist Solidarity After Queer Theory,” 1193–120 and Namaste, “Undoing Theory,” 11–23.

142 Sheryl Korman, “Nancy Grossman: Doing the Only Thing That’s Real,” *Tucson Daily Citizen*, 22 January 1972, 9.

143 Grossman quoted in Swartz, “Erotics of Envelopment,” 66.

144 Grossman in Nemser, *Art Talk*, 345.

145 Ibid., 344.

146 Grossman quoted in Swartz, “Erotics of Envelopment,” 67.

147 Salamon, *Assuming a Body*, 93.

148 Grossman, interview with the author, 30 October 2009.

149 Grossman quoted in Swartz, “Erotics of Envelopment,” 64. My emphasis.

150 Grossman in Nemser, *Art Talk*, 346.

4 DAN FLAVIN’S DEDICATIONS

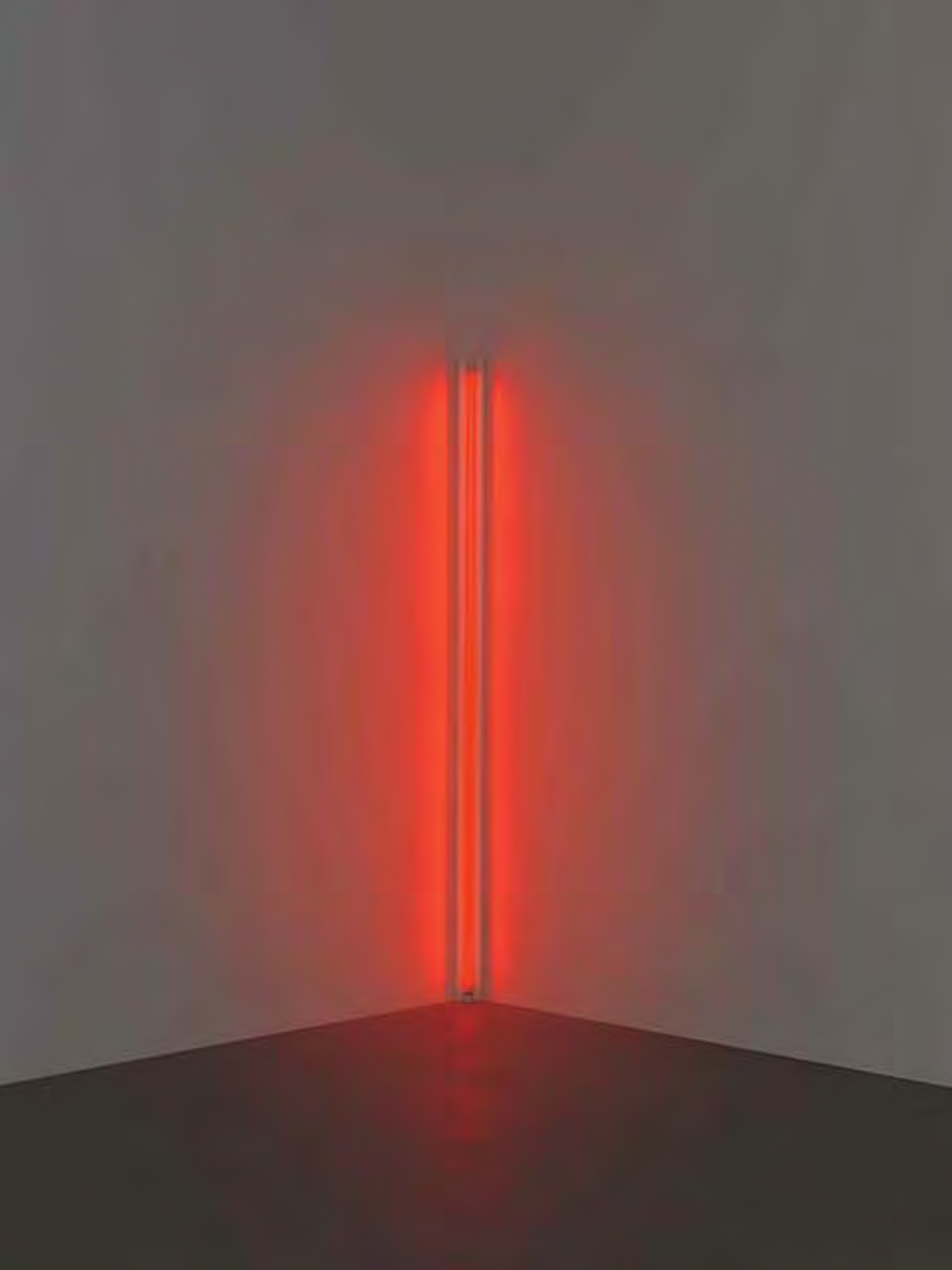
1 John Perreault, “Snotty Remarks,” *Village Voice*, 25 March 1971, 17.

2 Dan Flavin in Phyllis Tuchman, “Dan Flavin Interviewed by Phyllis Tuchman” (9 March 1972), in *Dan Flavin: A Retrospective*, ed. Michael Govan and Tiffany Bell (New York: Dia Art Foundation, 2004), 194.

3 However, see the useful discussions in Alex Potts, “Dan Flavin: ‘In...Cool White’ and ‘Infected with a Blank Magic,’” in *Dan Flavin: New Light*, ed. Jeffrey Weiss (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), 6; and Michael Govan, “Irony and Light,” in Govan and Bell, *Dan Flavin: A Retrospective*, 19–107.

4 See e.g. Flavin’s defense of his titling in a letter written in response to Corinne Robins, “Object, Structure or Sculpture: Where Are We?” *Arts Magazine* 40, no. 9 (September/October 1966): 33–7. The terms of Flavin’s riposte were clearly sexist, as he implied that his titles had “balls,” a metalepsis registered and refused in Robins’s letter of reply; Dan Flavin and Corinne Robins, “A Poetic Exchange” (Letters to the Editor), *Arts Magazine* 41, no. 4 (February 1967): 8. Flavin did not wait for *Arts Magazine* to publish his letter after he sent it, and he included it in his December *Artforum* contribution, “Some Remarks...Excerpts from a Spleenish Journal,” *Artforum* 5, no. 4 (December 1966): 29.

5 In a 1965 letter to Richard Bellamy asking for a reference in support of his application for a Guggenheim fellowship, Flavin summarized his work and its prospects by saying that the support would bring “my use of fluorescent light further into the range of environmental ‘sculpture’”; Dan Flavin to Richard Bellamy, 24 August 1965, Richard Bellamy Papers, Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York, III.A.22. Ever the contrarian, Flavin gave a lecture in the Sculpture Department at the Rhode Island School of Design the following year, on 9 March 1966. In an implicit snub to the sculpture faculty who had invited him, he remarked: “Don Judd, who has one of the most deft intellects at work in New York, has claimed that painting on canvas is obsolete. Now, could



ABSTRACT BODIES

SIXTIES SCULPTURE IN THE
EXPANDED FIELD OF GENDER

DAVID J. GETSY

YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS
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CONTENTS

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Frontispiece: Dan Flavin, *red out of a corner (to Annina)*, 1963/70 (detail of fig. 116).
Page vi: Detail of Nancy Grossman, *For David Smith*, 1965 (fig. 82).

Acknowledgments	VII
Preface	VII
Introduction:	I
“New” Genders and Sculpture in the 1960s	
1 On Not Making Boys: David Smith, Frank O’Hara, and Gender Assignment	43
2 Immoderate Couplings: Transformations and Genders in John Chamberlain’s Work	97
3 Second Skins: The Unbound Genders of Nancy Grossman’s Sculpture	147
4 Dan Flavin’s Dedications	209
Conclusion:	267
Abstraction and the Unforeclosed	
Notes	281
Bibliography	329
Index	356
Illustration Credits	372