



it hasn't changed: and babies?

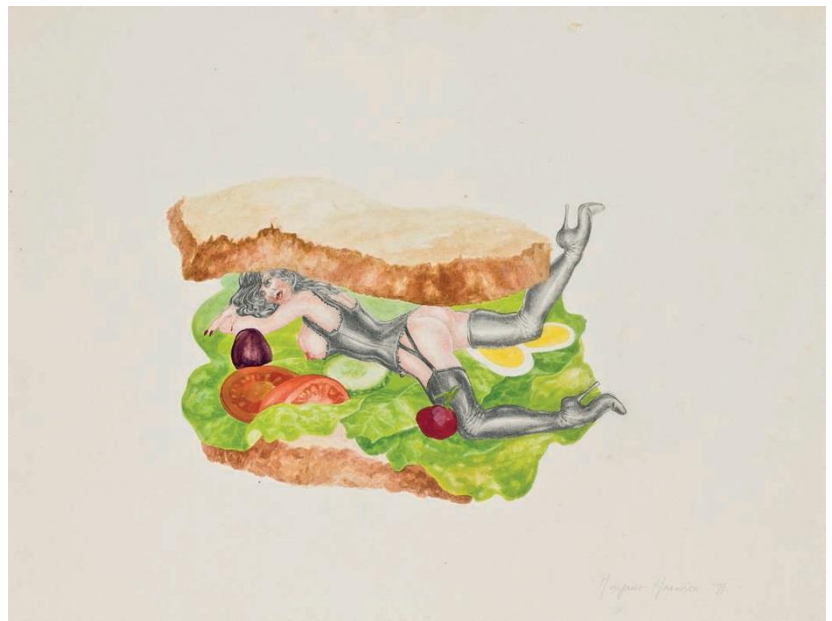
margaret harrison

26.09.2018 – 24.11.2018

[ADN Galeria](#) will present next Wednesday **September 26th** '[It Hasn't Changed: And Babies?](#)', the first solo show of [Margaret Harrison](#) (Wakefield, United Kingdom, 1940) in Barcelona. As part of the **Barcelona Gallery Weekend** 4th edition, ADN sets out a selection of works by this British artist with pieces from the 70s to the present. By doing so, [ADN Galeria](#) wants to be part of the artist's career who, as pointed out on the recent BBC documentary, [Rebel Women: The Great Art Fight Back](#), is part of an international group of leading figures such as Judy Chicago, Valle Export, Nancy Spero, and Lubaina Himid among others, whose works and projects have had an impact on the development feminist art production, leading to consolidation in recent times.

[Margaret Harrison](#) obtained a strong background in fine arts; she studied at the Carlisle College of Art and later at the Royal Academy of Arts in London. In parallel, she was actively involved in the 1960s, being member of some social movements and became one of the founder members in 1971 of the London Women's Liberation Art Group, an initiative that advocated on women's equality in the Cultural Industries, and presented an exhibition of Women's Work just after the famous protest at the Miss World Competition at the Albert Hall in London. This was followed by, the establishment of the Women's Workshop of the newly formed Artists Union.

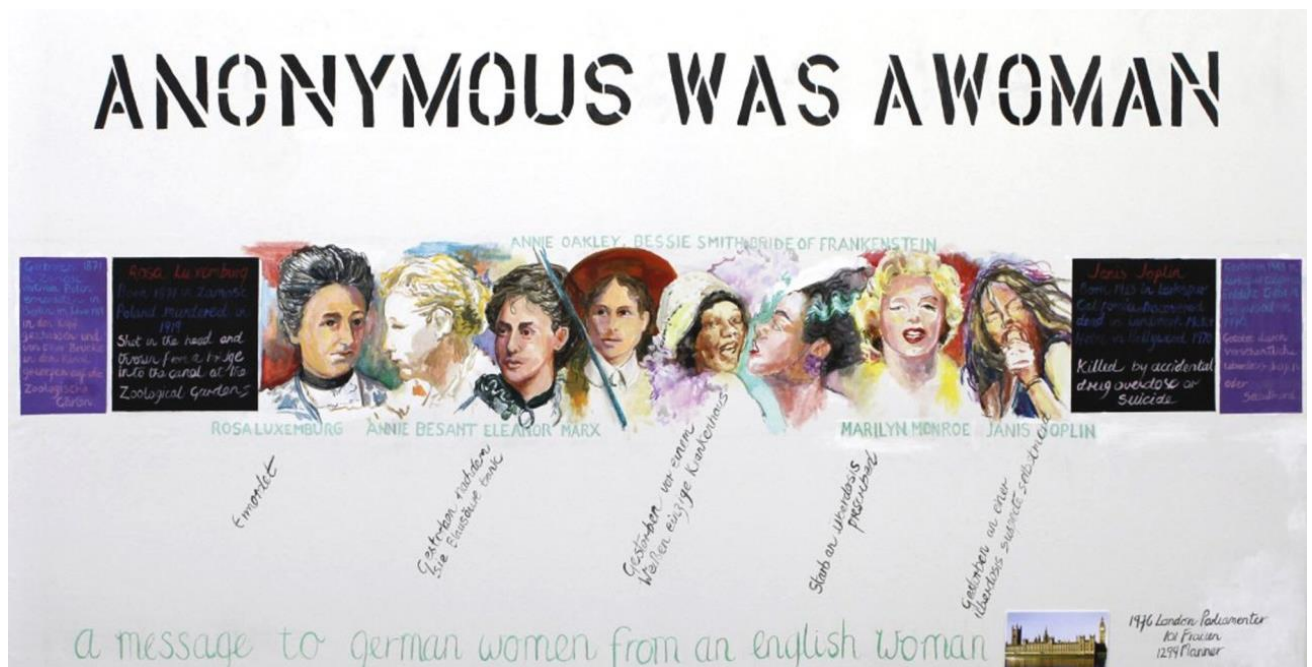
In her Works, [Margaret Harrison](#) questions with irony the gender preconceptions making clear the critical need to reflect about women's status. By utilising different strategies, such as the feminization of the male body, the research about the women's labour situation or the recovery of women of importance neglected in history. Harrison reports on the imposition of power roles. This critical view, at the same time ironic and clever was triggered by an unexpected reaction at her first solo show. Presented in 1971 at the Motif Editions Gallery in London, the exhibition was closed after only being open 24 hours. The police thought that Harrison's altered drawings of men were offensive. This exhibition included sensual and voluptuous *Pin Ups* turned into food ('*Take One Lemon*' '*Good Enough to eat*' 1971), ready to be literally consumed, and, on the other hand she included masculinity and patriotic icons such as as Captain American. Harrison represented them with feminine attributes and clothing, such as high heels and artificial breasts or, in the case of the magnate and Playboy's empire owner Hugh Hefner, with rabbit ears and a corset like one of his popular *playboy bunnies* 'He is Only a Bunny Boy but he is quite Nice' and later in (*Old Bunny Boy*, 2010). These feminized males, questioned the traditional idea about sexuality, were the cause for scandal and censorship. As expected, in spite of the humour involved, these pieces that bring together the aesthetic of Pop Art and an early queer aesthetic were not accepted by the more conservative sectors of society.



Old Bunny Boy (detail), 1971-2010 and *Good Enough to eat*, 1971

Despite being a shock for Harrison, the unpleasant incident was very useful for rethinking her career. She decided then to focus on an exhaustive study about women and their social reality. This new attitude brought her to work with Conrad Atkinson (her partner) assisting on his Iconic and influential show **STRIKE** at the ICA London (a Strike by Women in his birth place for better working conditions) to gain an understanding of the conditions out of which dissent is born & which the Strikers and Politicians were involved) this played a key role in enabling the production between 1973 and 1975, (with Mary Kelly and Kay Hunt) on a study about mainly, women workers in a metal factory in Bermondsey, London. The results of the research were presented in 1975 as the installation [Women and Work: A document on the Division of Labour in Industry 1973-1975](#). The Project, gathered together 150 women's experiences by facing their precarious work situations and standing out wide disparities in regard with men. Despite the fact that other artists worked with similar issues before, *Women and Work* was the first project that treats this question from an open feminist view. Coinciding with the application of the Equal Pay Act 1970 in the UK, reactions to this installation immediately followed: factory owners prohibited the access of their workers to the exhibition. It was clear that the message struck home and it was a treat inside the system that serves the interests of some members better than others.

The sexual, professional and emotional repression of women is a recurrent topic on Harrison's career. This repression appears on the historical context, where women are invisible because they are undervalued or because they had to opted for the anonymity. Departing from this consideration and playing with some ideas that she took from *A Room for One's Own*, by Virginia Wolf, Harrison makes a gallery with eight prominent women for their cultural



Anonymous Was a Woman (detail), 1977-1992

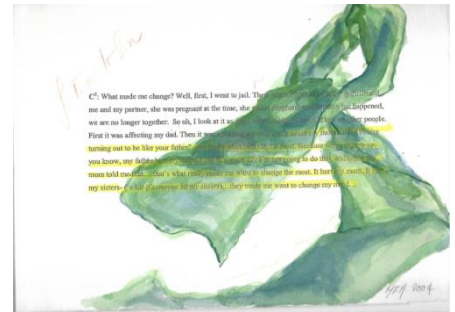
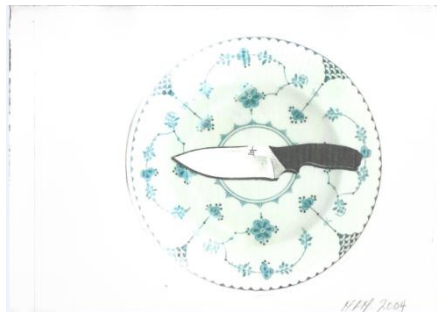
From Rosa Luxemburg to Janis Joplin, *Anonymous Was a Woman : A message from and English Woman to German Women* (1977 & 1992) shows the portraits of Rosa Luxemburg, Annie Bessant, Eleanor Marx, Annie Oakley, Bessie Smith, the Bride of Frankenstein, Marilyn Monroe and Janis Joplin. Six of who died violently as a result of a life out of the bounds assigned to their gender or because of the suffering from a great social pressure that subjugated them. *Anonymous Was a Woman* appeals to the desperate need to rewrite history from a fair point of view to all women whose work was silenced, ignored or undervalued, in order to be recovered and recognised.



Craftwork (the prostitution piece) detail, 1980. Exhibition view at Azkuna Zentroa (Bilbao)

It was clear that companies were circumventing the Equal Pay Act by re-inventing their employment terms so that the women's jobs were downgraded. Concerned about how labour issues affected women at a moment of great change, Harrison presented in 1980 one of her more emblematic pieces, *Craftwork / Prostitution (working with the English Collective of Prostitutes)*. This work was created expressly for the International exhibition *ISSUE: Social Strategies by Women Artists*, curated by **Lucy R. Lippard** for the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, subsequently recognized by lots of experts as one of the most important feminist exhibition in history. *Craftwork* shows up three versions of craft from patchwork to lace dolly pieces: the original one (handmade), a painting of it and a photograph. In this sense she reported the deskilling process of working class women following deindustrialization; while she was reporting this, an alarming situation was emerging of many working-class women without income having to become street prostitutes, in order to contribute to the family income or as a way to run away from the nefarious factory conditions or taking in HOMEWORK (see Tate Collection).

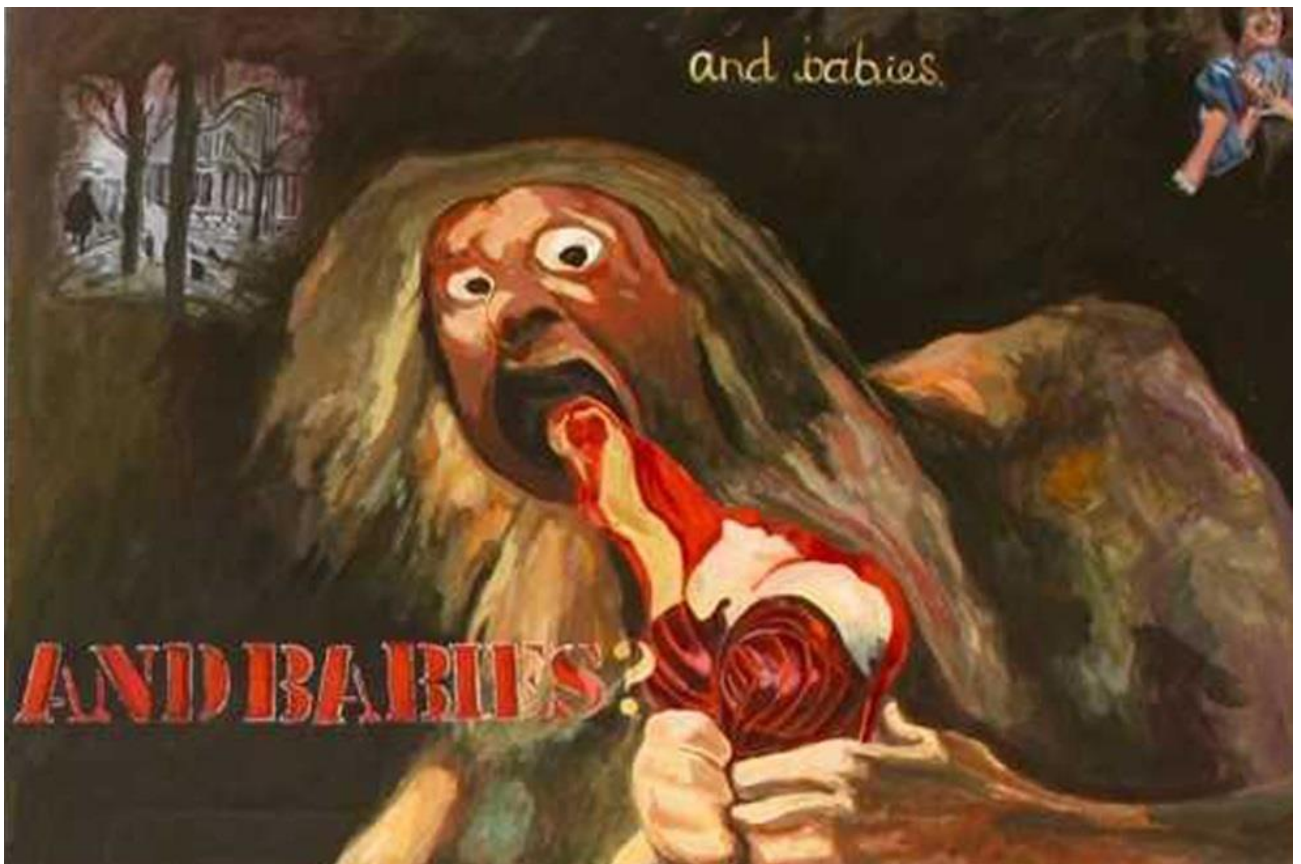
Thus, one could say that Harrison's works' are a sort of mirror (a theme she returned to in Works in 2013 at Leeds City Art Gallery for which she was awarded the Northern Art Prize) to the world that challenges the gender and class precepts, as well as political power, in order to break down barriers by proposing new points of view. *Scents of Identity Series* (1993) takes as a starting point a conservative approach seeking to alter it and, thus, to prove that anything can be discussed when considered from different and new perspectives. In this painting series Margaret Harrison was inspired by the composition and technique of the popular *Un bar aux Folies Bergere* (1882) by Manet (the girl in the Picture is looking directly at presumably Manet) but situating the spectator, in this case, inside the makeup and perfume departments of a shopping mall. Pictures of shop assistants are juxtaposed with images of dazzling women on advertising banners that surround them. This way, Harrison revealed a completely opposite reality to the idealist and unobtainable standard of the consumer society. A society in which, as Naomi Wolf said, "Beauty is a currency system like the gold standard. Like any economy is determined by politics and, in the modern age in the West, it is the last, best belief system that keeps male dominance intact."



Beautiful Ugly Violence Series, 2003-2004

Violence that women suffer, to which Harrison continuously refers, is posed with great ability in *Beautiful Ugly Violence* (2003-04), include oil paintings watercolors showing a group of everyday objects (a nail file, a kettle, a plate or a kitchen knife) that have been used as weapons in domestic violence cases. The shiny knife edge contrasts with the transcripts of the participant's statements from a reinsertion social program of San Francisco's police department, town where the artist lived many years. Even though Harrison's works often reflect on physical and social violence against women, she rarely shows this violence in an obvious way. The artist points out that audience was so habituated to violent pictures, that they have developed an immunity already warned by Pascal Bruckner when highlighting the vanity of the violence scenes in *mass media*: "In the information era we have gone from the restriction-censure to the saturation and suffering of others has been turned into a familiar issue". Knowing this, Harrison opted for a new strategy, to run away from the obvious violence in order approach to this topic through beauty, which resulted disturbing and, because of that, much more shocking.

Harrison's latest production, *Guernica/Aleppo* (2018) it's a large tryptic specifically produced for this show. The piece has inspired the exhibition's title, [*It Hasn't Changed: And Babies?*](#) and brings to mind the *Bergsonian* notion of time in which the historical events are constantly repeated, even if under different manifestations. Thereby shows up a clear relationship between past and actual wars such as the Holocaust, and the Syrian conflict. If we would establish an analogous connection we will be able to point out that, "Anna Frank is a Syrian kid nowadays", that the Aleppo's ruins remained the Guernica's bombing and patriarchy is embodiment on Goya's Saturn, who devoured his own sons, taking advantage of their youth and consequent weakness, in order to protect his own status of power. This idea is present in all Harrison's works, from *Anonymous was a Woman*, through *Craftwork* to her most recent *Guernica/Aleppo*, and notes that her first censured drawings on the early seventies and her latest productions, both remain in force nowadays.



Aleppo/Guernica (detail), 2018

For [Margaret Harrison](#) there is no question isolated, society is expanding as a chain of events and interconnected dynamics, and because of this most of her exhibitions and projects are sustained over performative actions, as lectures, theoretical writings, archive researches and direct activism. As a result her message opens a debate to exam different problems and to encourage new and fairer alternatives. As a woman, artist, activist and feminist, [Margaret Harrison](#) has never stops to take a chance on the power of knowledge by researching the power of art as a tool of communication, conversation and, in the end, action.

DUET: September 28th at 12.00 at ADN Galería

The solo show of [Margaret Harrison](#) also includes an open event next Friday, September 28th, at 12pm at ADN Galería. A discussion between the artist, and the independent curator Miguel Amado. A casual talk in which both will speak about the works in the exhibition, her career and the implications within today's contexts.

Margaret Harrison (Wakefield, United Kingdom, 1940)

Lives and works between Carlisle (U.K.) and San Francisco (U.S.A.)

Pioneer of British and European feminist art, **Margaret Harrison** questions notions of gender, identity, politics, social class, domestic violence and exploitation of women's labor and sexuality. Over her more than 40 years working as an artist, Harrison has reported local and international cultural and political issues throughout a variety of media including drawings, oil paintings, watercolors and large installations. She uses iconography, pop art and consumer brands to reflect upon female, male and transgendered identity, often subverting with humor gender roles that the society has assigned.

She has exhibited solo in several institutions such as the New Museum in New York, MiMA in Middlesbrough and Azkuna Zentroa in Bilbao. She has participated in many group shows such as Tate Modern and Victoria & Albert Museum in London, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles and Museo Chiado in Portugal.



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