THE BROOKLYN RAIL

ArtSeen

Michela Griffo: The Price We Pay

By Ksenia Soboleva

Michela Griffo, *Cadet Murder Case: Diane Zamora*, 2003. Oil, Pencil, and Ink on Canvas, 48 × 70 × 1 inches. Courtesy the artist and Pen + Brush.

Falling between the cracks of history is a common side effect of queer identity. Few of the queer elders that fought for LGBTQA+ rights in the 1960s have received their due recognition, and as time goes on, less and less of them are still around to receive it. Seasoned activist Michela Griffo was at the forefront of the gay liberation movement, deeply involved in groups including Redstockings, Radicalesbians, Lavender Menace, and the Gay Liberation Front. And happily, Griffo has seen an increased interest in her activist career emerge over the last decade. What has remained largely unknown, however, is Griffo's career as an artist.

This obscurity comes to an end with Griffo's first retrospective exhibition, *The Price We Pay*, at Pen and Brush Gallery. Featuring fifteen of Griffo's drawings and paintings that span from 1976 to 2022, the exhibition provides an overview that is not necessarily

comprehensive—there are many gaps—but in fact argues for the meaningfulness of incomplete histories and the potential of studying those fragments that remain.

Michela Griffo, *Mother*, 1984. Oil and Pencil on Canvas, 72 × 54 × 1 inches. Courtesy the artist and Pen + Brush.

The majority of the works in the exhibition date from the twenty-first century, and are marked by Griffo's signature use of imagery drawn from comics and Disney movies. The latter particularly appear in her large diptychs, which juxtapose colorful Disney imagery with monochrome pencil drawings illustrating real-life historical violence. *Cadet Murder Case: Diane Zamora* (2003), for example, references the notorious 1995 murder of Adrianne Jessica Jones by Zamora and her romantic partner David Graham. The left side of the diptych depicts Jones laying on her back with her legs entangled in barbed wire, her face invisible to the viewer. On the right, the three fairy godmothers look in shock at Sleeping Beauty, who has fallen face down and lost her tiara in the process, as Maleficent appears in flames on the right to witness what has happened. At the center top appears a five-blocked comic strip, a common device in Griffo's diptychs, which pictures Zamora describing her motive in the murder: Jones had engaged in a one-night sexual encounter with Graham.

Running away from home at the age of fourteen, Griffo's own childhood was marked by abuse and abandonment. This is perhaps best illustrated by a 1984 painting titled *Mother*, in which a female-presenting figure smashes a Greek pillar into chunks. The act of violence is witnessed by vibrant wallpaper featuring a repeated pattern of a frightened Mickey Mouse, suggesting that it occurs in a children's room. In New York, Griffo discovered a community of other teenage runaways, and squatted in the East Village until a woman named DeeDee, who ran a successful call girl business, took her in. Politicized through the fight for abortion rights in the feminist movement Redstockings, Griffo became an activist before coming out as a lesbian in 1970 and joining the Gay Liberation Front. Yet while confident with her lesbian identity in the realm of activism, Griffo struggled to navigate it in the artworld. In 1978, Harmony

Hammond invited Griffo to participate in the famous exhibition *A Lesbian Show* at 112 Greene St., which included artists such as Louise Fishman, Amy Sillman, Kate Millett, and Hammond herself. Advised by a close friend—a female curator—that being featured in a lesbian art show could ruin her career, Griffo declined Hammond's invitation. A surprising decision for someone so actively engaged in advocating for queer rights, Griffo's hesitancy to participate in a lesbian art show is telling of the misogyny and lesbo-phobia that then plagued the art world, and which has by no means fully disappeared since.

I first encountered Griffo's work in 2019 at the Leslie Lohman Museum, where her painting *My Funny Valentine* (1979) was part of the *Art After Stonewall* exhibition. Executed in oil and pencil on canvas, this diptych depicts a bathroom interior of muted colors on the left, while two femme-presenting women passionately make out on the right, their nipples exposed to the viewer. While I was initially hoping that the Pen and Brush exhibition would feature several works from this late 1970s series, I learned from Griffo that she destroyed much of this work in a drunken rage. One painting from the series, however, is on view. *Elegy for Judy* (1976) depicts another interior in muted colors, primarily cream and soft pinks. Half of a dresser is pictured on the left, a nightlamp resting on it with a circular mirror behind. On the right two female-presenting figures dressed as nuns appear to be pressing their ears against the wall, though their faces remain outside the frame of the painting. It is this enigmatic quality, a quiet secrecy, that most attracts me to Griffo's work of the 1970s.

Michela Griffo, ***Elegy For Judy***, 1976. Oil and Pencil on Canvas, 68 × 54 × 1 inches. Courtesy the artist and Pen + Brush.

A series of watercolors on paper also on view here locate Griffo's current interests primarily in comic imagery. Reminiscent of Roy Lichtenstein—a comparison that, while inevitable, in no way implies derivativeness—these works are imbued with messages that seemingly aim to appeal to queer-feminist viewers. An untitled watercolor from 2018 depicts a woman in a green dress doing dishes. A text block next to her reads: "The day she stopped loving her children was no different from other days," recalling a period when women were expected to stay home with the children at the cost of pursuing careers of their own. Perhaps the most revealing illustration of Griffo's current priorities

is a 2022 watercolor that spells out “WOMAN” in pink and shows an eraser resting next to the word. Upon closer inspection we find that certain parts of the letters are faded or partially erased. Griffo’s implied concern with erasure—while shared by many—gives reason for pause. The constructed identity of “woman” has shifted over time, entailing both losses and expansions, and works such as these risk promoting an outdated sensibility that privileges essentialist notions of womanhood. As Esther Newton said in 1972: “The revolution is made less authentic by every oppressed person it excludes.”[1] As much as comic imagery can be used to playfully convey political ideals, I found that some of the ideals expressed here were not in tune with today’s times. *The Price We Pay*, in this light, could address the feeling of falling out of touch with the changing investments of contemporary political movements, despite one’s critical contributions to historical ones. The exhibition is, nonetheless, an important addition to the growing archive of queer art history.

1. Esther Newton, ***Margaret Mead Made Me Gay: Personal Essays, Public Ideas*** (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 142.

ARTnews Est. 1902

Stonewall at 50: A Roundtable with Vaginal Davis, Michela Griffo, and Jonathan Weinberg

Peter Hujar, Gay Liberation Front Poster

In the early hours of June 28, 1969, the police raided the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in New York's Greenwich Village. Had it been any other night in what had become a monthly routine, the police would have confiscated the booze, collected their payoff from the Mafia men who ran the establishment, and Stonewall would have gone back to business as usual. But something about that sweltering night was different. Fed up with the constant harassment, the patrons rioted. While there had been queer uprisings before, what set the Stonewall Rebellion apart—and what turned it from a flashpoint into a kind of shorthand for queer liberation—are the groups and actions it has incited in the decades since. Among them, the Gay Liberation Front banded together as a group shortly after the riot and, in 1970, the first Christopher Street Liberation Day March set the stage for what would evolve into the annual NYC Pride parade that continues today.

What ignited the night that lived on as legend is a matter of conjecture. Was it patrons throwing coins and yelling "here's your payoff"? Or someone throwing a shot glass (or was it a brick)? A stiletto heel flung from a paddy wagon into a cop's chest? Still another possibility attributes the riots to gay icon Judy Garland's funeral, outside which fans stood vigil only hours earlier. Crucial actions were also taken that night by trans women of color, particularly Marsha P. Johnson, Sylvia Rivera, and Miss Major Griffin-Gracy, whose roles that night have only recently been acknowledged in a historical record that neglected them for years.

In 2016 President Barack Obama designated the Stonewall Inn and the surrounding area, including nearby Christopher Park, a national monument. What has been less commemorated is the role that Stonewall played not just in the lives of queer artists but in the art world at large. Last fall, the New Museum in New York staged an exhibition in which Chris E. Vargas invited fellow artists to reimagine monuments to Stonewall. This spring, a more comprehensive examination of the subject arrives in the form of "Art After Stonewall: 1969–1989," an exhibition opening in April at two venues in New York—the Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art and Grey Art Gallery at NYU—before traveling to the Frost Art Museum in Miami and Ohio's Columbus Museum of Art, which organized the exhibition.

In advance of the show, ARTnews spoke with Jonathan Weinberg (who curated the exhibition with Tyler Cann and Drew Sawyer) and two artists included in the show: Vaginal Davis, who was born in the 1960s and currently lives in Berlin, and Michela Griffo, a New Yorker who was 20 when Stonewall rose up.

ARTnews: Michela, you lived close to Stonewall in 1969. What was your impression of that night?

Michela Griffo: I was not gay when Stonewall happened. I was living with my fiancé on Horatio Street, and he had been my high school sweetheart. Homosexuality wasn't on my radar at all. I was an art student at Pratt Institute at that time. When Stonewall occurred, for me it was just another riot in the village. I was naive in many ways.

ARTnews: When did you realize you were gay?

Griffo: There was a feminist group, the Redstockings—women who would stand on the corner of Sheridan Square in 1968, ’69, getting spit on, getting called all sorts of names. That whole area was a hotbed of revolutionary movements. I used to go to their meetings at Washington Square Methodist church on West Fourth Street. There was a woman who used to go to the church; she was Eileen Ford’s top model at the time. One day, she asked me if I wanted to get coffee. This was August 1969, and my fiancé and I had separated in July. She asked me if I wanted to go to Andy Warhol’s party—her best friend was [actress and model] Viva. She used to come over all the time, but I had no idea we were dating. I didn’t know she was gay. Well, when she kissed me I knew. When I told my friends that I was with this woman, they were like, “You could lose your apartment and you’ll be fired from your job.” I looked in the Village Voice and saw a [notice] for the Gay Liberation Front and that was it. I never looked back.

ARTnews: What was the Gay Liberation Front like?

Griffo:
We welcomed everyone. We were all colors. It was a rainbow. Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera were part of our group. I marched in the first gay pride march for diversity. We worked with Black Panthers and the Young Lords Party [the Puerto Rican activist group]. Some of us went to Cuba with the [activist coalition] Venceremos Brigade. Our focus was on changing the world. There was no way I was going to sit around and do abstract paintings. I wanted to tell the truth of what I saw in our society. My paintings became very political. That was something that was very dangerous then—and sometimes even now.

Michela Griffo, My Funny Valentine, 1979.
JOSH NEFSKY/LESLIE-LOHMAN MUSEUM OF GAY AND LESBIAN ART, GIFT OF THE ARTIST

ARTnews: Vaginal, you were a child at the time. How did Stonewall impact your life and work?

Vaginal Davis: The work I do is influenced by the activities of that time. I was born and raised in Los Angeles. I've never been a New York–based artist, but since the early '80s I was going to New York and had a lot of mentors. I had first heard about all these rebellions that happened shortly before Stonewall in the late '60s: at the Black Cat Cafeteria in Los Angeles and Compton's Cafeteria in San Francisco. I was fascinated by the Stonewall Rebellion because of the connection to Judy Garland. That's always been something that has inspired me because of my connection to film. In my work I've referenced female golden era Hollywood film stars and that milieu.

When I moved to Berlin in 2005, I was fortunate to meet one of the early Stonewall-oriented personalities: John Edward Heys, who did a magazine, Gay Power, that featured artists like Robert Mapplethorpe. John later became a muse to [photographer] Peter Hujar. Knowing John, who was old enough to be active during that time, stays with me. And, of course, I admire people like Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson. Stonewall was such a big influence on the modern Gay Liberation Movement and its interconnections with the feminist movement and also with the Black Power struggle. In those days, even though it wasn't called "intersectionality," those movements did influence each other. They coalesced back then.

ARTnews: What are some of your other influences?

Davis: My mother became radicalized in the late '60s. She was known as the Barracuda of Femme Tops. She ruled a sort of lesbian separatist bevy of Butch Bottoms.

Weinberg: What was your mother's name?

Davis: Mary Magdalene Duplantier. She moved to California as part of the Great Migration of blacks from the South. My mother was very outsider and she ruled this bevy of proper Butch Bottoms who lived in a big Queen Anne–style house. I'm the youngest of four sisters, so it was definitely an all-feminine household. Having that wondrous background influenced the kind of work that I do.

[Read more from the Spring 2019 edition of ARTnews: "The Name of This Issue Is Not Queer Art Now."]

ARTnews: What do you make of Stonewall's legacy 50 years on?

Davis: People forget that Stonewall was a riot. [Laughs.] It's not just a brand name. It's important to think outside of commercialism, of consumerism, this horrible cutthroat capitalism. It's imperative that we think in terms of distancing ourselves from being co-opted into those kinds of power structures.

Griffo: Recently, I and several surviving members of the Gay Liberation Front went to the Heritage of Pride and the Reclaim Pride combined meeting [at The Center on West 13th Street in New York]. I stood up and said, “We risked our lives for you. And now . . .” I was in Hanoi with my family when I saw the tape of this year’s march, a “parade” as it is now called, and all I saw were corporations that would have fired our asses in 1969. I said to the people seated there, “Where is your anger? What has happened to our march that used to be for social justice?” When we marched with the Gay Liberation Front [in 1970], the Mafia wanted us dead. The police weren’t going to protect us. I went to Pablo “Yoruba” Guzmán because I worked with the Young Lords on the Lower East Side. And I said, “Yoruba, we have no protection whatsoever. Would some of your guys be willing just to stand along the route, just if you see anything.” And do you know, the straight, heterosexual Puerto Rican boys came and stood along the march. I never forgot that. That was the kind of protection we had. Nobody else.

Cathy Cade, Sisterhood Feels Good, Los Angeles, 1972.
COURTESY THE ARTIST

Weinberg: There's been a lot of research with claims that the funeral of Judy Garland—she died that week—wasn't what brought on the riots. But I don't care. There's something about that. This idea of: "We are fed up. We have to act out. We have been traumatized. We can't deal with this anymore." But as much as I believe in what you two are saying about making trouble, I also realize that people were at very different places at the time. For somebody to come out [of the closet] was a huge thing, right?

Griffo: Absolutely.

Weinberg: For a person who was young, to be on the barricades, that was huge. I remember in the '80s going to ACT UP, but I didn't want to get arrested. It just wasn't in me to be hauled off to prison. But I wanted to be there. That's one thing that we have to keep in mind: that people were at many different levels. I worry when people say, "Well, there were these guys and all they wanted was to have sex together. That's all they cared about." But the act of having sex together—that was radical at the time. That was making trouble too.

Griffo: We just wanted to live our lives.

ARTnews: How important is it for young people to know their history? If we forget the struggle, is history bound to repeat itself?

Griffo: History is repeating itself. The Gay Liberation Front had a reunion in 2015, when gay marriage became legal. People who had been at Stonewall were there. The New York Times sent a reporter. The only thing this guy wanted to know about was what we thought about gay marriage. I said, "I'm thrilled that we've got parity to heterosexual marriages." But I also said, "I am very aware of the fact that there are people whose homes are being burned in Oklahoma, and drag queens and transgender people are being set on fire in Georgia." Our whole attitude in the Gay Liberation Front is, "We are not free until we are all free." I told the reporter, "I prefer to be an outlaw." When he wrote the article, the only thing he said was, "Michela Griffo prefers to be an outlaw"—with no explanation.

Weinberg: That's one of the things that we talked a lot about in the exhibition because we have so many different artists. Having an exhibition and having this stuff on the wall makes it seem like everybody is on the same page, that we are all marching together. In fact there were tremendous disagreements.

Griffo: Oh, the arguments!

Weinberg: One of the things that we felt was really important in the exhibition was that we weren't going to make all these hierarchies about what is good art or bad art, or distinguish between mediums. A poster shares the same wall with a painting and a sculpture and a video because these are the things that kept people going—it wasn't about necessarily getting your work into an art gallery or a museum. It was about putting it out on the streets, making trouble within as well as outside the community. The Gay Activist Alliance headquarters [in SoHo] burned down, and they never discovered who did it.

Griffo: Not just their headquarters but, all over the country, gay community centers were burned down over one weekend in 1974.

Weinberg: A 40-foot mural by John Button and Mario Dubsky burned down with the GAA headquarters. [A re-creation will be included in "Art After Stonewall."]

John Button and Mario Dubsky, Agit-Prop, 1971. (Click to enlarge.)
©JOHN BUTTON ESTATE, MARIO DUBSKY ESTATE/JOHN BUTTON PAPERS, 1964–2004,

Davis: Knowing your history is important. A lot of people put down millennials as having no sense of anything other than their computers and cell phones, but I get invited to teach at a lot of colleges and high schools, and there are always young people who do their own personal investigating. When I was young, it was really important to me not just to be around other young people but to be around people of varying ages and generations. Those were the people who mentored me. Young people I encounter now are interested in social justice. When I mention something they've never heard of, they research it.

Weinberg: As both an artist and a queer historian, there's a lot of anxiety about feeling boxed in. What I thought was so fantastic about Vaginal's work in the show is the way it troubles the idea of anybody having any identity, because you have all these different layers of what the self might be. Recently there has been a revival of this sort of essentialized notion of identity, and that troubles a lot of people who are radicals in the queer movement.

Davis: When I started out, I never really thought of myself as doing art. I was the first person in my family to go to university, but I didn't study art. I was just always being creative, like my mother. She's the real artist in my family. I just basically copied her. I was doing it because I had to. I never thought in terms of having any kind of career in the art world. It wasn't fathomable because of my not coming from privilege, coming from a very poor background growing up in Los Angeles. Nowadays, younger people are much more career-oriented. Younger artists are groomed from art school to be part of the hierarchy of the art world. I feel very fortunate that I had mentors who recognized that there was something special in me even if I didn't see it myself.

ARTnews: How did your practice become so multifaceted?

Davis: People would say, “You need to stick with one form of art, either performance or poetry or making the little crazy short films that you do.” I never really listened to that. I was doing installation art and photography and sculpture. I followed my own path organically, what I felt that I should be doing.

ARTnews: Michela, you said you stopped participating in the gallery system at a certain point. Why?

Griffo: I have always made art because it was my voice. In the ’60s, ’70s, and early ’80s, it was rare to see a woman doing anything that was provocative or political because galleries wouldn’t support it. Early on, when I was starting to show my work, my mentor was [gallerist] Holly Solomon. When I started doing work that was provocative and political and slightly gay at the time, she said, “I can’t show that.” And she kept saying that to me. Then there was a lesbian art show in 1978. I wanted to put a piece in it. She said, “It will ruin your career.” She wasn’t homophobic, because she was also showing Thomas Lanigan-Schmidt’s work. But that was the attitude: lesbians were the bottom of the barrel.

Weinberg: Louise Nevelson was supposedly approached to do the Stonewall monument. She was interested in doing it and then was talked out of it.

Griffo: It wouldn’t be until years later that I would find out that people like Agnes Martin were lesbians. I didn’t think there were any lesbian artists.

Weinberg: In interviews I’ve done, a lot of gay artists say, sadly, that it was often gay curators and gay gallery owners who were the least supportive of out gay art in the ’70s. They say, “I don’t want to be known as a queer artist. I want to be known as an artist.” Is that something that worries you?

Griffo: I don’t lose sleep over it because a lot of my paintings are not just about gay stuff. The only thing that stopped me from producing was that I became so depressed. I got involved in the ’70s/’80s drug and alcohol scene. From probably about 1984 until 2002 I disappeared. I had to leave the whole idea of the art world behind. I got sober in 1984, and I have been sober ever since. But it was a very difficult time for me. I am glad that I didn’t hang my future on the idea of making a lot of money. I lived across the street from Julian Schnabel, and I’d see the limousines pull up. I thought, “That’s never going to happen to any woman.” It has now—and God bless. I’m happy for every woman’s success. But it wasn’t going to be my story.

Weinberg: I am also a painter and I have no problem being called a queer artist, but I’ve found it very frustrating. Let’s say I were an artist who did paintings about miners. Critics wouldn’t say, “This is only of interest to people who work in mines.” But somehow when you do queer art, people think it’s only for that constituency.

Davis: Whatever label they want to throw on me is fine. In my work I never really expected that there would be any interest in the mainstream commercial art world. I paint with makeup and household items that you find in your bathroom or kitchen. When I first started to be in group

shows in the ’80s, I was more known for my performance work and writing with the queer zines that I did. They were cut-and-paste-style zines made on a 1920s Royal typewriter. My day job at the time was at UCLA’s Placement and Career Planning Center. I would go in to the office on the weekends and use the Xerox machines to make my zine and then have parties with people to help me staple them together. I always joke that that was my grant.

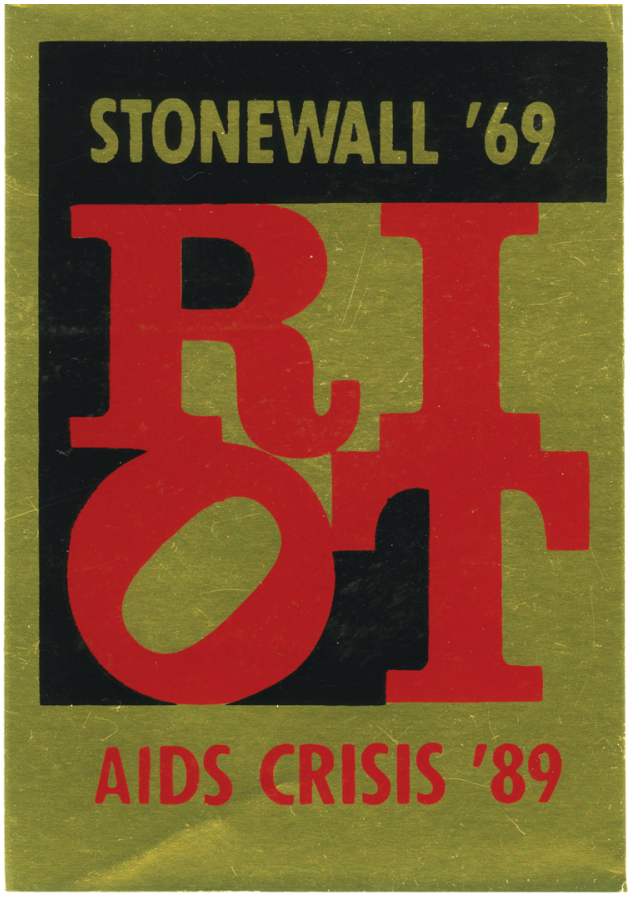
Vaginal Davis’s zine, Fertile La Toyah Jackson no. 2, late 1980s.
COURTESY THE ARTIST, ADAMS AND OLLMAN, DAN GUNN, INVISIBLE-EXPORTS, AND ONE NATIONAL GAY & LESBIAN ARCHIVES AT THE USC

ARTnews: What was your reaction when people started paying attention to queer zines?

Davis: When mainstream publications started to write about the queer zine movement, I couldn't believe it. It seemed so odd. I think the reason why it got this much attention was it looked so different from anything else that was out there. I was surprised because I knew that getting attention wasn't the kind of thing that someone from my background does. If anything, you just get erased.

Weinberg: We talk about history and why it's so important. We are in this terrible moment now, and I don't want to be like an old fart and say, "Oh my God. We suffered then." Because that's not the point. Just as [the AIDS activist art collective] Gran Fury was such an incredible model for other groups that were fighting the government. There is such a model here for how to resist, how to sustain radical movements. That's why history is so amazing. It was Walter Benjamin who said that you can use history and tradition against the present. People tend to use tradition as a way to maintain prejudice. But now you can use tradition against that.

Griffo: Alicia Garza, who founded Black Lives Matter, is a lesbian. She based the whole movement on the principles of the Gay Liberation Front—they would have no recognizable leader so that nobody could focus on one person. In 1970, Huey Newton, who was the head of the Black Panthers, gave a speech saying that gays were the most revolutionary of all groups.



Gran Fury, Riot, 1989.
COURTESY THE ARTISTS

Weinberg: The mural at the Gay Activist Alliance headquarters had Huey Newton right at the center. He said that gays have to be part of the movement. That was a big deal for him to say that.

Griffo: Even now, these young kids like the Stoneman Douglas high school kids in Parkland, Florida, the young woman who is a lesbian, that spirit is the same spirit that motivated us: This is unacceptable, something has to be done, and we are not going to sit here and take it anymore.

Davis: When I see young people like the Parkland youth, I see a new generation blossoming. They have a voracious spirit of inquiry, and also whimsy. A lot of them use humor in a wonderful, lively way. That brings tears to my eyes and makes me really excited—and happy.

ARTnews: Are you seeing any artists today who are taking up the kinds of tools that groups like Gran Fury used?

Griffo: There are a lot of artists [from whom] I know I am going to see something, like Tommy Lanigan-Schmidt, Eileen Myles, Sue Coe. But I am disappointed by a lot of the art I see. There are some shows that I call "Whitney Speak." They've got this big huge thing as you enter, and their artist statement, this crazy salad of words. When I was living in Buenos Aires, I saw amazing political work. The first biennial in Colombia, in Cartagena, I saw work that was mind-blowing.

Davis: When I get invited to Germany and Austria and smaller cities with art schools like the Academy in Malmö, Sweden, what excites me is that there are wonderful feminist collectives who get together, create, and put on incredible shows. And they do it with no funding, with no major support. They're doing things almost in the same do-it-yourself fashion of people in the '80s, during the queer-core scene. They work in such wonderful mediums. They all do zines. They all paint. They all do sculpture. They make films. They have art-punk bands. In the States, students from NYU, the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, schools in Portland and Southern California—they have wonderful manifestos that they put out.

Griffo: I saw this in Mexico City.

Weinberg: The universities in the U.S. are now tremendously supportive of political art and of a kind of post-minimalist conceptualism coming out of artists like Felix Gonzalez-Torres and Robert Gober, who are in the exhibition. But a lot of the work in "Art After Stonewall" is not art that was sanctioned by universities and museums and galleries at the time it was made. There were attacks on it. Being, as you say, "outlaws"—working against something—gives you a lot of energy. It's not good when artists are oppressed or not allowed to show their work. But on the other hand, there is some kind of energy that is missing.

Davis: I tell my students, "Don't listen to me. I'm going to give you my opinions about things, but don't take anything that I or your other professors tell you as gospel truth." I love it when they fight back and don't just take everything that the teachers tell them. I love those kinds of students the most.

Weinberg: Often they say to me, “We don’t feel like we are getting enough criticism. You’re being too supportive.” It’s almost like they want something to react against.

ARTnews: What is the significance of a show like “Art After Stonewall”—with a focus on the impact of queer art in New York and beyond—now?

Weinberg: People have a fantasy that there have always been shows like this. In the late ’90s, they were saying, “Queer art is over. Queer theory, it’s passé.” The reality is, there have been very few shows like this where a major museum has put money into a show that looks at Stonewall in terms of the art world. There have been very few queer survey shows, and almost none in mainstream institutions. There have been gay artists who have been celebrated, usually men. But nothing like this. It’s so important to get artists out there. One of the best paintings in the show, by Delmas Howe, had been under somebody’s bed for, like, 20 years.

Davis: You are completely right. The first institutional show I was in was “Dress Codes” at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston in 1993. Before that was “Against Nature” at Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (LACE) in the late ’80s. But these were very rare.

Weinberg: It’s been hard to put together this show. There is a tendency to see everything through biography, seeing every work of art as just an expression of the artist’s identity. It worries me that people will say everything is just a kind of coming out. It shouldn’t be a matter of what is the artist’s identity? Who are they sleeping with? It should be, what is the work about? How does it activate? How does it work with other works? The key issue is visibility. This is central to the notion of coming out—making things visible. That’s what artists do well. They show you things. But then it’s up to you to make sense of it and to understand it. Putting works together in the same room that were made at the same time can be radical.

Shelley Seccombe’s Pier 52, 1978, shows sunbathers near a Gordon Matta-Clark cutout on the Hudson River.

ARTnews: Radical in what way?

Weinberg: I am fascinated by the fact that in the ’70s, Gordon Matta-Clark, who is now so celebrated, was making huge cutouts in the exterior walls of buildings on the West Side Piers, right alongside gay men having sex. Around the same time, Tava, who nobody’s ever heard of, was doing gigantic murals of naked men near Matta-Clark’s cutouts. Most people had no idea who Matta-Clark was, but they saw Tava’s murals. I’ve been told that when you took the Circle Line boat cruise [in those days], the announcers would say, “Everybody look: We are going by Hoboken. This is where Frank Sinatra was born”—so that nobody would see the naked men. In 1979 Tava’s murals were much better known than the Matta-Clark cutouts, but Tava’s disappeared. Visibility is really important.

Griffo: I am excited about getting to know some of these artists in the show who may have had the same reaction to the gallery scene that I did. A lot of lesbian artists became well-known for abstract art. They weren’t necessarily doing political art. For me, this is a chance to see work that would not have been in a gallery somewhere, that I would not have seen before. I cannot tell you my gratitude toward Jonathan and [art historian] Flavia Rando, who pushed my work. I’m sure, Jonathan, you had no idea who I was, right?

Weinberg: I have to admit that Flavia introduced me to your work. One of the things that the show does is put Michela’s work alongside works by artists who also aren’t well-known, like Lula Mae Blocton or Fran Winant. It’s going to be interesting to see works that are more in-your-face next to works that are, as you say, more abstract. Audre Lorde had this notion that the erotic is a source of power. To put Mapplethorpe in the same room with Harmony Hammond’s work or with your work—it’s going to be interesting.

Griffo: It makes me proud now to say that I am a lesbian artist, whereas I never would have said that before. My identity was basically that I was an artist. But the thing is, my work comes from being an outlaw, somebody who was put on the sidelines. It does not come from being a part of the system.

Davis: Lesbian visibility is important. When I was doing performances in Los Angeles, it wasn’t the punky gay boys that supported all the bands that would perform. The gay boys only came once in a while. It was always the women, the feminist collective. Queer women would come every single week.

ARTnews: How different was it to be political back at the time of Stonewall?

Griffo: I would go to the marches. When the march became a parade, I stopped marching.

Weinberg: In the ’60s there was lots of rioting, but people didn’t think of queers rioting. The stereotype of a gay person was effete.

Griffo: A swish, a fag. And a dyke was somebody who drove trucks.

Weinberg: When Vaginal brought up Judy Garland, I reacted. But a lot of young people wouldn't because they don't watch Judy Garland movies. One of the paintings in the show is called Friends of Judy. To understand camp, you have to know the history. It is a secret language—a secret language that is now public.

ARTnews: How would you explain Friends of Judy to someone of my generation?

Weinberg: There were very few gay characters in movies, so you would project yourself onto these incredible women who were strong and also very vulnerable and sad. It's the idea of living vicariously. We lived our lives not having works of art that necessarily reflected us, but we empathized.

Griffo: We had a culture that was unto itself. Like any other culture, we had our language, which was camp. We had secret signals. We knew who we were. [Filmmaker and AIDS activist] Vito Russo once said, and it's burned in my brain, "When our secret world is no longer secret, we are going to miss it." I knew exactly what he was talking about. I guess that is what I was saying to the reporter for the New York Times: I wanted to be an outlaw.

Michela Griffo – Interviewed by Gwen Shockey in 2018

Michela Griffo is an artist and activist and came of age on the piers and streets of New York City in the 1950s and '60s. She was as an early member of the Redstockings and a founding member of Radicalesbians, Lavender Menace and the Gay Liberation Front. She was active in the Civil Rights, Women's Rights and Gay Rights Movements, working closely with activists such as Yoruba Guzman and radical organizations such as The Young Lords. Michela risked her life with other queer and lesbian activists on the front lines of the Gay Rights Movement paving the way for younger generations to come out and live safe and productive lives. In her visual art practice Michela explores themes such as the queer and lesbian woman's voice and desire as well as childhood trauma and addiction. This conversation was recorded on September 12, 2018 at 6pm in Michela's loft in New York, NY.

Riya Lerner, Michela Griffo at Home, Gramercy Park, New York, NY, 2020, Archival pigment print, 16 x 20 in. Courtesy of the artist.

Gwen Shockey: What was the first lesbian or predominantly queer-female space you were ever in and what did it feel like to be there?

Michela Griffo: The Sea Colony was the first bar I ever went to. I was sixteen years old and this woman came up to me and asked me to dance and DeeDee said, "You touch my baby and I'll kill you!" I used to love it! The girls were great. They loved me and would fuss over me. I only went about two or three times on Sunday afternoons for the Tea Dances. DeeDee was like a mother to me, she WAS a mother to me. I was fourteen years old when I ran away from home the first time. All I had was my

babysitting money and some chocolate chip cookies that my friend Judy gave me. She was the one who initially said to me, “You’ve got to leave home, you’re going to end up dead if you don’t get out of there.” I came from a very dysfunctional home and was scared to death, but I knew she was right.
GS: Did your parents look for you?

MG: Are you kidding? My parents never looked for me. I was living with a bunch of kids in the East Village some of whom I still know. In those days the Village Voice would come out every Wednesday and we would see where there was an apartment for rent. Nobody locked their doors then so we would go and stay in the apartment! We would turn on the refrigerator and take showers and whatever until the landlord discovered us and then we’d just go to the next place! One Sunday I was sitting down by the old piers that used to line the West Side Highway where everybody used to go (they used to call it tar beach). It was August and I knew I needed to go back to finish my senior year of high school but I really didn’t want to. DeeDee was down there. She had her beach chair and was reading the New York Times and she struck up a conversation with me. We just started talking and she was so nice. Years later she told me I was the most interesting teenager she’d ever met. She asked me where I lived and I said: I don’t have a home I just live in the street and in vacant apartments. She said, “You’re coming home with me!” She took me to her apartment which was in the 70s off of Central Park West. DeeDee ran a very high-end Call Girl business for the mafia out of an apartment on the Upper East Side. I lived with DeeDee until I was 19 and moved to the West Village to live with what had been my high school sweetheart. He was then a Medical Student at NYU and I was at Pratt Institute getting my MFA. DeeDee was always an important person in my life because she taught me how to live as an independent woman. I would not have the life I have today if she had not taken me under her wing. She died of breast cancer in 1983. That’s how I ended up getting sober. The pain was just too much and I would have killed myself. That was probably the most difficult loss for me in my life. She died in 1983 and I got sober in 1984 after two failed rehabs.

GS: Prior to moving in with DeeDee did it feel dangerous to you to be living on the streets as you were?

MG: No! We were all around Saint Marks and Avenue A. It was all Ukrainian there in those days. In the ‘80s it started to get unsafe. Alphabet city was where’d you go to get heroin but when I was fourteen or fifteen years old it was all Ukrainian restaurants and Orthodox Jewish people and the old 2nd Avenue Theater was where they would have the Yiddish plays. There was nothing to be afraid of and nobody would lock their doors.

GS: The transitions this city has gone through are really remarkable.

MG: Oh yes! That was in the early ‘60s. I’m old. (Laughing)

GS: You’ve had so many incredible life experiences!

MG: I have! I’ve had an incredible life. I really have. I came out very late. My first female lover was Agneta Frieberg. She was one of Eileen Ford’s top models at the time. She was really kind and interesting woman. When we first met, I didn’t know she was cruising me – that was the

best part! I had been living with my high-school sweetheart, Peter, who I was going to marry when I graduated from Pratt Institute. I met him when I was fourteen and I was going to the University of Rochester to take classes because I was so smart and they didn't know what to do with me. There was a program for bright children at the University of Rochester where Peter was a freshman at the time. We started talking while I was waiting for the bus one day and it was like I'd known him for my whole life! He asked me to the movies on Saturday and I told him I couldn't go on a date with him because I was fourteen. That went on for years and I went off to Michigan and he went to medical school here in New York and so when I came back to go to Pratt Institute he was already doing his internship. The summer of Stonewall we were living together on Horatio Street and that December I went to meet his family. We got all dressed up, and the door opens to this apartment in Sheepshead Bay and his mother, her sister and two grandmothers are all sitting on this couch, they look up and in unison they all say, "Ah Hah! Shiksa." I had never heard that word and had no idea what it meant. Peter turned around and gave me money for a cab and told me to go home and that we'd talk about it later. I had never met his family because they were Orthodox. Anyway, we tried and in the end it was either going to be his family or me. In August of 1969 Peter and I broke up and I had begun freelancing for Clairol. My friend Bob was an art director there. Bob had a Harley Davidson and he invited me to this small folk festival in upstate New York one weekend. We were driving and driving and I thought there must have been an accident because there were so many people, my god! The traffic was terrible! Well, the small folk festival of course turned out to be Woodstock. I was nineteen then. Every Saturday I would go to Redstockings meetings at the Washington Square Methodist church, which was a hotbed for all of these political groups. I don't remember how I found out about Redstockings. I think I must have seen them one day when I was walking down the street in the village. I decided to start going to meetings because a friend of mine almost died from getting an illegal abortion in Harlem. Having lived with DeeDee at the age of sixteen I knew where to go. I took my friend and she was bleeding all over. I couldn't bring her to hospital because we both would have been charged with manslaughter. Luckily DeeDee had a friend who was a nurse who helped us. That was it for me. After that I found the Redstockings which was the first group to change the abortion laws in New York. We would stand on Sheridan Square and people would spit at us and call us names. One Saturday as I was leaving a Redstockings meeting there was this attractive blonde woman standing there. She started asking me all about the Redstockings and asked me out for coffee. I was so naïve I had no idea,

you know. She told me she had a loft and nobody had lofts in those days! She was in a group at the church for foreigners applying for citizenship. Much later I would find out of course that every week she would ask the woman at the desk what the Redstockings group was. (Laughing) So, she was cruising me for like two or three weeks! I went out for coffee with her and she asked me if I wanted to go with her to Andy Warhol's party and I said: Well yeah! Her best friend was Viva. We started going to parties together! I would go with her and met Andy and the hangers-on and it was just great! I didn't know we were dating! For six months! She was always going off to model in various parts of the world and then she'd come home to her beautiful loft on Great Jones Street. Actually, Kate Millet's sister Mallory lived right down the street. I knew Kate from the National Organization for Women which I also joined. Agneta would come over when she was in town and we'd watch The Late Show and eat Chinese food and then she'd put on her coat and go home. I met her in August and it was now February and there was a big snow storm outside. She said to me, "Some night you come and stay with Agneta, yes?" I thought she meant like a pajama party but then she kissed me! I used to think I was going to have to be thirty before reached that zenith of my sexuality. At least that was what all the magazine articles said. I was having sex with Peter and it was enjoyable but it wasn't like what you read about in the books and I thought it was because I wasn't thirty. But the minute she kissed me I knew I was not going to have to wait until I was thirty. When Agneta kissed me for the first time that was it! I never even called myself bisexual after that. (Laughing) She said, "I want to make love to you!" I was so scared I made her sleep with her jeans on!

GS: Really? Oh my god!

MG: Oh yeah, I was terrified!

GS: What did it feel like? That first experience? If that's not too personal a question…

MG: Not at all! It felt like the greatest firework show you've ever seen in your life! That's what it felt like. It was like: Wowwww. This is amazing! I was in LOVE. Then, all my straight friends told me I'd get thrown out of my apartment and get fired from my job. I couldn't believe it! I thought I'm the same person that six months ago was engaged to be married to my fiancé and now you're telling me all these horrible things are going to happen to me? I couldn't believe it! My only thought after that was: This is unacceptable! I became an instant activist. In January of 1970 I hauled my ass to the GLF [Gay Liberation Front] and the rest is history.

GS: Did you consider yourself to be queer or a lesbian prior to her kissing you? Had you been aware of feelings for women or was it totally new?

MG: I had been aware of these women lovers at Pratt! I was never homophobic. I just never thought of what would attract two women to each other. It just wasn't on my radar at the time.

I knew about lesbians because DeeDee had all of these gorgeous women working for her and they used to love to go to the Sea Colony. I was sixteen years old when I first went with DeeDee to the Sea Colony. DeeDee was crazy about Maria who was the bartender there. She was a really nice-looking woman. I think she was some mafioso's sister or whatever. Everybody who worked in these bars, like the bartenders, – they were all in the mafia. There was this one girl there who looked like that '50s movie star Jeff Chandler. She used to call herself Jeff! (Laughing) Everybody in those days was either butch or femme. Femmes didn't go out with femmes and butches didn't go out with butches. It was very regulated. I didn't have this dichotomy in my life. I knew who I was! It didn't appeal to me. The lifestyle didn't appeal to me. These dark bars.

When I met Agneta I was still working with the Redstockings. There was a publication called The Rat on the Lower East Side. It was a radical publication. Martha Shelley and Karla Jay both worked as writers there. Some men worked there too, until the women took it over. They needed a paste-up artist and Jane Alpert who had been one of the editors had to go underground because she was wanted by the FBI. I knew how to do mechanicals and paste-up so I went and I was surrounded by a lot of women who were both gay and straight because some of them were from Redstockings and some of them were from the Women's Movement. I was one of the first twelve members of the National Organization for Women!

GS: Was sexuality openly talked about in the Redstockings or at the Rat?

MG: There were a lot of women who were closeted but that's where I heard talk of the Gay Liberation Front. Once I met Agneta I decided to start attending the meetings. I was very active in the GLF. We planned the first Pride March. Flavia [Rando] and I were both Italian and spoke the language and we would do actions like trying to move women out of Kooky's, which was mafia-run, and into Alternate U. which was where we had dances down the street. Flavia and I would stand out there handing out leaflets about the dances and these goons who sat in the front with guns would come out. I only went to Kooky's once and I found it so repressive and so horrible. The drinks were so expensive and Kooky would put her finger in your drink and say, "It's warm. You better get another one." I really wasn't a part of that bar scene, even though by now I was drinking heavily. I never felt that this was the only part of my life. I had a much bigger life! I had a lot of friends, I had a lot of interests, and so meeting gay women was not my only objective in doing things. And I was beginning to show my art and getting involved in the Lower East Side cultural world.

GS: It seems as though you had many different types of communities but it seems like you also found community primarily through politics.

MG: Oh definitely. Absolutely! Once I found GLF, that was it. The writer, Susan Brownmiller, was my neighbor, she lived on Jane Street, and she had talked me into going to a New York Radical Feminism consciousness-raising group when I was living with Peter. She would use all of this feminist language with me and say to me, "He's oppressing you!" I was like: Well, wait a minute! He does all the cooking, he's the one who fixes up the apartment, and he bought the linens! I could have cared less! All I wanted to do was be an artist! He would take me to the opera and the ballet and he really gave me a whole cultural education that I didn't have before.

My friends would tell me they'd have to give their boyfriends valium to get them to go to the ballet.

GS: Did you end up going to one of the consciousness-raising groups?

MG: Oh yes! I was in a consciousness-raising group with Susan and about twelve other women. One of whom was a really interesting artist. I wanted to get to know her better because I wasn't familiar with that many women-artists. I was in this group. I had resigned from The National Organization for Women and joined the GLF.

GS: Was seeking out the GLF a sort of personal safety reaction after your straight friends suggested you might be harassed?

MG: I was young, and as all young kids are, you feel you are invincible. I was filled with this energy and purpose. This is unacceptable! was all I could think of. About a month ago I attended a combined meeting of Heritage of Pride and Reclaim Pride with five of my GLF alumni who were there to remind HOP what the word "Heritage" meant. I stood up and said: We risked our lives for you! We did! We had no protection at all in the first Gay Pride March! The mafia wanted to kill us and the police wouldn't protect us because they were bought lock, stock and barrel by the mafia. In 1970 I was working with Yoruba Guzman and the Young Lords, the Black Panthers and other social justice programs. We weren't just gay-focused we wanted liberation for all subjugated people. We were a very radical, revolutionary group. I went to Yoruba and said: We have no protection! Can you get some of your guys to just stand along the March route down in the Village and just look to see if there is anybody with guns or weapons. They showed up! All of these straight Puerto Rican guys and they stood along the sides of the

March route and that was our protection! The Young Lords! Most people don't know that story but that is the truth of what happened. Yoruba did it as a favor to us because many of us worked in their breakfast programs, all their different crisis centers, we marched with them in their marches and many of us went to Cuba with the Venceremos Brigade. One night the mafia came to our dance at Alternate U. I saw the guns first. To get to the second floor where our dance was being held you had to walk up this long staircase. I saw the Mafia guys at the bottom of the staircase with their guns flashing. As the began to climb the stairs I took the box that had the money in it, handed it off it to Donna Gottschalk and told her to stuff it in a garbage bag and get it downstairs as fast as she could. She threw the box in a garbage bag and started running down the stairs while the mafia guys were running up the stairs. This was all while the dance was going on! Everybody was there dancing and drinking beer and having a great time! The guys were holding their guns and asking me where the money was so I told them we didn't charge anything and that these dances were free. We just stood up to them and finally they left!

GS: Were you scared?

MG: I was but you know we were such revolutionaries. They would run after Flavia and I and we would yell at them in Italian: Don't touch me! I'm blood! I could have been Carlo Gambino's daughter for all they knew! Flavia is Sicilian so we both knew the language and we were the only ones brave enough to do it! We handed out flyers at Gianni's, at the Sea Colony – all the mafia bars – there was no Henrietta Hudson or anything like that in those days. It was the women, the lesbians, who closed those bars. We were not going to stop until we closed every single one of those mafia bars.

GS: I'm curious how you saw the butch/femme dynamic playing into all of this. It's my understanding that your age-group didn't feel comfortable with this dynamic and there was more emphasis on androgyny?

MG: There were a few women who did – there was Mark Giles who was a very attractive blonde woman and a stone butch – but most of us were hippy flower children!

GS: Were there still butch/femme couples in these bars?

MG: Oh yes! But they weren't in the GLF. I think they were very threatened by the changes we wanted through the movement. If you look at the pictures of the people who marched in the first Pride March many of them looked almost androgynous. Certainly, if you were to come to the GLF dances you would not see any butch women there. It was mostly hippy shit going on. Girls were into wearing flowing outfits, lipstick and so on. I think that was the beginning of a big change that really came about in the '70s when the bars were closed and college girls were coming out and they didn't look butch or femme necessarily, just like young women in college. My relationship with Agneta wasn't this power dynamic, we were just two women who were very much in love. I didn't find butch women attractive, although I fought just as hard for their protection and right to self-expression, and always will. Self-sufficiency was what was most important to my generation of lesbians. We didn't necessarily want to look like guys or be butch but we wanted to know how to fix our own cars, do our own plumbing and electrical

work, do carpentry as well as grow and cook organic food. We wanted our own safe spaces where we could pitch our tents and listen to music we had written and read books by women.

GS: It just seems like such a radical break I guess and it must have had so much to do with the times that all of this was taking place in, with Civil Rights and Feminism taking center stage alongside Gay Rights.

MG: Yes. Butch/femme was 1950s among women older than I am. In order to be in a relationship, you had to have a clear role. I would hear that in the bars all the time, women would ask me what I was and I would say: I'm a woman! That's what I am! What are you? If you didn't identify as butch or femme they didn't know how to respond to you or interact with you. It didn't make any sense to me then. I understand it more now.

GS: This might be a rhetorical question but the butch/femme dynamic wasn't just about sex it was a lifestyle decision too for instance if you identified as femme you lived in that way and acted in that way and vice versa?

MG: Right! I've heard that actually in the 1950s butches stayed home because they couldn't get jobs and the femmes were the ones that went out to work and supported the butches and it was a very oppressive situation. Femmes were treated the same way a straight woman would be treated by her husband, except she had to work.

GS: Can you tell me a little bit more about your social group in the GLF and later Lavender Menace?

MG: In the 1970s you knew everybody. It was like the art world. There were only a couple of galleries and that was the way it was. It was the same in the movement! Whether I went to Washington D.C., which was where I met Joan [E. Biren], or California or Boston or Chicago we all knew each other. Everybody knew who the players were. I often went to D.C. which is where I met Charlotte Bunch and the Off Our Backs collective [a radical feminist periodical that ran from 1970 to 2008].

GS: Could you talk a little bit about your involvement with the Lavender Menace?

MG: Very few people know the truth about what actually happened. We were having these dances and we'd gotten these women out of the bars and I had already resigned from the National Organization for Women because of their policies about lesbians not really being women. The straight feminists from NOW and the NY Radical Feminists had this huge action where they were going to take over the Ladies' Home Journal. Susan Brownmiller had asked me to design the cover, which I did. The morning of the action I wasn't there and nobody knew why. The action was on Monday and on Sunday Susan had written an article in the New York Times about the rise of feminism and when she got to the part about lesbians she wrote, "A lavender herring perhaps, but surely no clear and present danger." I was incensed. I didn't show up on Monday for the action. They had the cover that I had designed and no one called me. I considered Susan Brownmiller a friend. That Friday night we had a dance and I had made a t-shirt that said "Lavender Herring". Everybody loved it and then we started talking about how awful it was that Susan had written this and how oppressive Betty [Friedan] had been. We

knew the Congress to Unite Women was coming up and decided to call ourselves the Lavender Menace instead of the Lavender Herrings. Jessica Falstein and I were the ones who scoped out the school and I had worked on a stage so I knew how to work the lights in the auditorium. The minute Betty got up on stage to welcome everybody to the conference BOOM the place goes pitch black and Martha Shelley grabbed that microphone and when the lights came back on the Lavender Menance were standing there. A lot of women left. They were afraid of lesbians – like they were going to catch some kind of flu or something – but a lot of women stayed. That was the beginning of an actual dialogue. It wasn't until 1978, eight years later, in Houston that Betty finally relented because we were all there en masse saying how the women's movement had just thrown us to the wolves. That was how the Lavender Menace started.

GS: What were the years like directly following the Stonewall Riots and the first Pride Parade? Did you feel there was a lull in activism or burn-out or a continuation of the movement?

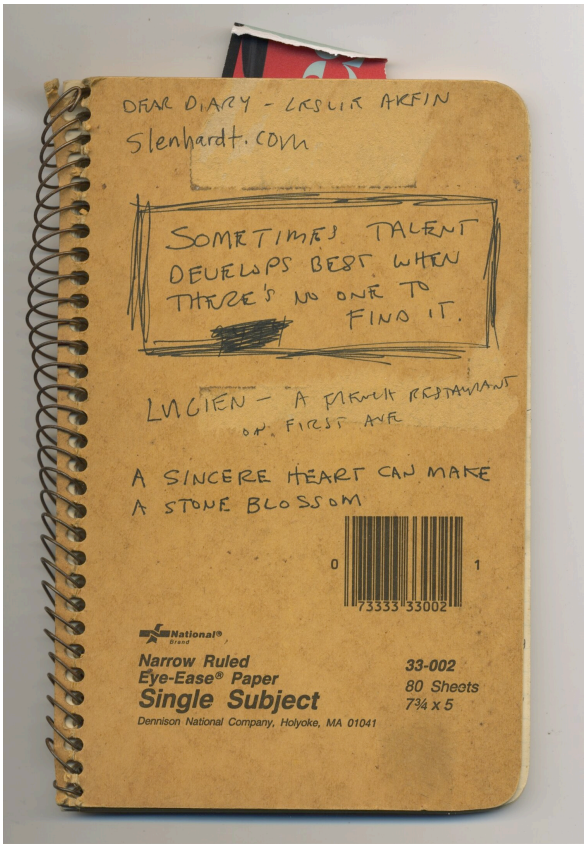
MG: I marched in all the marches. The GLF kind of split apart because the GAA [Gay Activists Alliance] came in and they did not want anything to do with social justice. They wanted to fuck their brains out in bars, clubs and bath houses and they were for the most part all young, white college kids. To them, gay liberation meant they could have sex anywhere they wanted, as much as they wanted and that was it.

GS: What did gay liberation mean for you?

MG: Gay liberation to me meant that I could march for all the people that couldn't march. Many of those people where people of color, they were Hispanic, they were people whose culture would have killed them. In 1973 we marched down to Washington Square Park instead of marching up to Central Park and Sylvia [Rivera] got on stage and the GAA boys were booing her. These white boys were all booing her and she said, "Your brothers and your sisters are in prison and are dying and you don't care about them!" They had already booed Jean O'Leary off the stage – they didn't want a woman – that's the other thing that most people don't know! After the first Gay Pride March when GAA came in, lesbians were not allowed to march – it was all about gay men. They fought us so hard. This was how dykes on bikes started! The women showed up on motorcycles and this is why it is now traditional that they start the march! But the gay men did not want us in the march, they did not want us in the organization and they made it very clear that their dances were not open to women. The boys and the girls did not play well together.

GS: So, there was a huge amount of segregation along gender lines and racial lines?

MG: Oh yes! Except in the GLF! We were a rainbow of colors and cultures. Some of the guys in the GLF were very receptive to our struggles as women and lesbians, others not so much. But as a group we were aware of how we were treated by society. We were a Revolutionary group that stood for Social Justice and worked with all other Revolutionary Groups including the Young Lords and the Black Panthers – I mean, we really were social justice warriors. We were actively against anything that was oppressing any minority. It was unified until the GAA came along and then it became a boy's club only. By then the women had left the GLF and formed Radicalesbians.



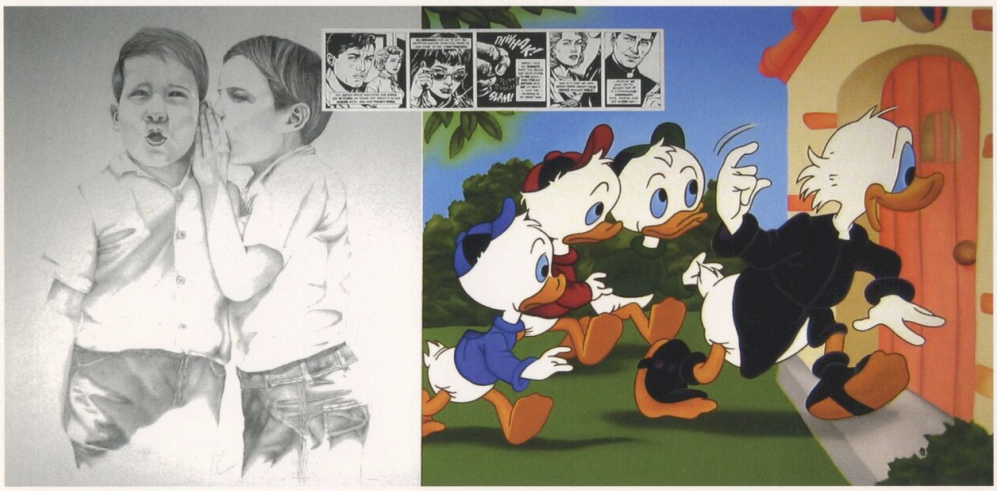
GS: Do you feel like the AIDS crisis changed that?

MG: Oh definitely. That was the beginning of a huge change but after that march where the GAA didn't want lesbians to join I disappeared from politics for a while and started doing my art. It wasn't until 1977 when Anita Bryant opened her mouth, starting the Moral Majority and praying to save the children from queers, and I was really angry. That to me was as bad as my friend saying that I was going to lose my apartment and lose my job. Somehow we all found each other again – the Gay Liberation Front was reunited after five years. We hadn't been meeting and everything had kind of fallen apart. I decided to march again but with gay Catholics that day. I hope I don't start crying talking about this… We were marching up 5th Avenue and we were about to reach the front of Saint Patrick's Cathedral and the steps were packed with people. Across the street were protestors with Sodom and Gomorrah signs and "God Hates Fags", "Die Fags" signs. I'm with all the gay Catholics and I said to them: Listen, I've been in these marches before. There's going to be trouble. Everybody try to stay really close together and just march as fast as you can past the Cathedral because they're probably going to start pelting us with oranges and God only knows what else. But there might be violence. So, we were all fear and trepidation and we get in front of Saint Patrick's Cathedral and all of the sudden the people on the steps unfurl all of these banners and they started singing this beautiful song about unity. It was Catholics from all over the country that had come to support us. Baltimore, Philadelphia, Washington DC, Boston – not even all gays – just Catholics from all these cities. That's why no one was ever allowed to stand on Saint Patrick's Cathedral steps again. Now you know the story behind the Dykes on Bikes and why no one was ever allowed to stand on the cathedral steps again during the march.

GS: What were you feeling in that moment that you saw the banners and heard their singing?

MG: Oh, I was probably crying. I couldn't believe it. I was just like: Wowww. That was another big turning point in 1977. After that a lot of things for gays changed! It wasn't as frightening to go on a regular cruise for instance instead of a gay cruise with your boyfriend or girlfriend and the world started getting bigger for us and then by 1980 word was spreading that there was some sort of disease going around. I knew a guy in the East Village who died in 1980 from AIDS and nobody knew what it was. He went BOOM just like that and another guy died from pneumonia and I remember saying to a woman I was dating at the time: There's something going on… I used to read The Advocate which was published in California and there were all of these obituaries and I'm reading the ages of the deceased as being twenty-two or twenty-four and thinking: What the hell is going on here? These guys are all dying! Something's happening

that nobody is paying attention to! Finally, in July of 1981 the New York Times published the story about a “gay cancer”. So, from 1980 until probably ‘93 was when the men and the women came together. I went to ACT UP, supported Gran Fury and The Lesbian Avengers but was really invested in being a caregiver for so many of the men I got cleaned and sober with. Up until then I always felt like my activist life and my art life were separate but that my work was always going to be very political because I refused to hide who I was. I was starting to make work that felt dangerous. This was long before Robert Mapplethorpe. I was told I couldn’t do this kind of work and that nobody would show it. I think it was 1976 when they had the Lesbian Art Show and a very well-known gallerist who was my mentor told me I shouldn’t put my work in it because it would be the end of my art career. I just kept thinking that I wasn’t going to do abstract paintings which was what a lot of women who became well-known (bless them) were doing! My work was always political. And at the time I felt very strongly about being called a “lesbian artist”… hell no, I was an artist period. This conundrum was when my drinking and drugging really took a turn for the worse.



“What About the Girls?”, Oil, Ink, Pencil on Canvas, 46 in. x 72 in., 2004

GS: And deeply personal. I think that is part of what makes your work so political is that you are unabashedly forward with your life and the trauma you've experienced and in all of your pieces there is no shame, it's just there! I have this conversation a lot with friends of mine since the passing of marriage equality, that now we can be intimate with each other in public spaces without as much fear of harassment so maybe lesbian-specific spaces aren't necessary anymore. Did you feel a similar feeling of almost being sucked into straight culture along with acceptance in 1977 or was it more like thank god we're finally not being harassed all the time?

MG: I can't remember exactly because I went to my first rehab in 1979. I was already part of the drug culture. I'm still friends with some of those people since we all got clean around the same time. A lot of filmmakers, poets and musicians… I knew all these people when we were all like half-smashed, drinking and drugging. Now I see them all in 12 Step meetings, it's great! I think all of this was a response to losing our community. I know for me it was. I'll tell you an interesting story. We had a reunion for the Gay Liberation Front in 2009 and we were all telling stories about the GLF and the New York Times sent a writer. The only thing he was interested in was what we thought about gay marriage! I said: I'm going to be honest with you! One of the things I'm most proud of is that gays brought gender-parity into all marriages. I think gay marriages mirrored that for straight people that, oh, the wife isn't cooking, the husband isn't having to take out the garbage, the woman isn't the only one doing the childcare – that these amazing examples of gender parity work, whether it's seen through the example of friends or relatives or neighbors. But as a lesbian woman I also told them that I am aware that there are people in Oklahoma that are having their houses burnt down because they're gay. There are people being shot and beaten up in Alabama because they're gay. I cannot rest until I know

these people are free. The GLF slogan was “We are not free until everyone is free”. I said: I prefer to be an outlaw! What do you think they published under my name? “Michela Griffo prefers to be an outlaw.” Nothing else. Gay media I will talk to. It’s amazing because now I’m contacted by PhD students and people who finally woke up all over the country realizing there are only fourteen or so people left alive who marched in the first Pride March! So, now my phone’s ringing off the wall! There’s going to be a lot of media coverage and panel discussions. I can’t believe fifty years have gone by.

GS: Looking back from this point in time (now that the Pride Parade is exactly that, a parade) can you tell me a little bit about how you perceive the changes that have transpired in the movement over the decades since AIDS?

MG: I haven’t marched since it became a parade. That was it for me. I’m horrified that companies who probably would have fired our asses want our money now. At some point all of these companies, whether it was Coors Beer, Budweiser, or all of these “too big to fail” banks, realized, “Wow. Gays have money!” I was in Vietnam this summer during Pride Month and somebody sent me a video of the march and I was like: What the fuck is this! All you could see was Citibank, Wells Fargo, Chase… Where were the gays?! I heard that the gay groups were not allowed to march until later in the evening at five-fifteen. That’s when all the social services groups, all the political groups, and the resistance groups were allowed to join. That was it. I said to Karla [Jay]: That is it. I went to the combined Heritage of Pride/Reclaim Pride meeting with five of the GLF members. Karla stood up and said, “We fought for you not for Citibank!” They just want the publicity. It has just broken my heart. I don’t understand who is allowing money to take precedent here. Nobody paid us to march! Everybody would make their floats and there would be a little card table at the end of the street so if people wanted to know about the community center or GMHC someone would be there answer your questions. We didn’t have to spend thousands of dollars for a table to sell mortgages to gay couples which is what’s happening now.

GS: What do you think the consequences of this will be for younger generations?

MG: I feel that because most younger women now never had to worry about getting an illegal abortion and most younger gay people never had to worry about getting the crap beat out of them walking down the street with their partner ever if they weren’t holding hands or anything that there is a removal from the activism. Granted there are parts of the country in which this is not the case and those are the people that I am concerned with. I’m a volunteer with Remote Area Medical. We go to the poorest parts of the country. I mean POOR. I’ve been with them for two years and we bring free dental care and vision care. Many of the people that come to us are lesbians or gay people and I may be the only gay person who they’ve ever talked to who asked them if they were receiving proper services and what their experiences were like, especially members of the trans community. I am the only social worker and these people really just need someone to talk to. You can tell they’re just so relieved to be able to talk to somebody who isn’t going to respond with homophobia. This is what they tell me their lives are like in these small towns in West Virginia and Kentucky. I know I’m privileged. I’m privileged just by the fact that I’m white. If I were black I think my life would be completely different. I experienced the most prejudice as a lesbian in the art world. Gay guys could get anything they wanted. There were only a few galleries in the 1960s and ‘70s but the dealers and the people

who chose the artists were mostly gay men. If you were a twink it didn't matter what the fuck your art looked like. If you were a lesbian they didn't want anything to do with you. It made me angry because I was marching for their lives and all most of them cared about was making it in the art world. Right after The Great American Lesbian Art show I had no money. I was so poor I was living in Chinatown. I applied for the New York State Council on the Arts grant and I knew that Dona Nelson and Louise Fishman were part of the panel of judges. Do you know that every single artist in the Lesbian Art Show got a grant but not me? I look back at the difficulty of being a woman artist and I understood that they must have thought I was some dismissive, arrogant lesbian… none of which was true on either side. I am very supportive of all women artists because I know just how difficult it has been to achieve parity with male artists. During the AIDS crisis it felt like men and women came together more. It was a really sad time. I can't begin to tell you how many memorials I went to. I got clean in a 12 Step program. The first groups I went to were full of straight men who would say things that made me want to start using again. I don't know how I found out about it but the gay community center had just opened in 1984 and there was a gay narcotics group every Tuesday night there. The group was crowded and almost all men. I was in the group for about two months and one day someone would come in saying they had a sore throat and the next week he would be dead. All of the sudden they were all dropping like flies around me because they were gay, they were IV drug users and most of them were not white. I got clean mostly with Hispanic men. By the time I was ten years sober my entire group was dead. All of them. I buried every single one of them. Once that was over and once the '90s hit that's when I went to social work school. The impetus started with AIDS and having been a survivor of sexual abuse I wanted to work with victims so that became a big part of my life. I started painting again in 2002. So, for those years in between 1994 and 2002 I didn't make art and I worked in a hospital psychiatric emergency room. Lesbians were burned out by the time the AIDS crisis came to a slow down. All those men that didn't want anything to do with us, they needed us and it was our community. That was when we all came together. A friend said to me that some of these people probably think they've got it made because they're venture capitalists, chefs, lawyers or whatever but you know what, when people find out they're queer that's all they see! They just see a queer. They don't see a lawyer or a doctor or whatever, they see a queer! That's the way it's always going to be. I feel like that's true. The same way I think that's true for black people in this country. Their fight is never going to end. Every single minority has come to this country and become citizens and gotten the full rights of citizenship but the only people who are never treated like citizens of this country are black people. I feel like there is going to be a backlash. This whole thing with Kavanaugh and Trump especially, I think we're going to be in for a rough ride! I don't think it's over. I see it every day in the papers. There is not one guy that every single fucking day does not believe he has the right to rape his date, to get a blow job as the president of a company, it's just rampant! Whether it was all underground I don't know but now it's all coming out and it's terrifying to me! There is always backlash with progress. Trump is going to undo everything that Obama did including Obamacare because it was done by a black man. From 1969 to 1977: Gay Rights. Laws are passed, Gays get the right to marry blah, blah blah. What is happening now… THE EVANGELICAL BACKLASH. African countries are particularly affected. Small towns and big cities in the USA are making America great again by killing gays. I lived in Argentina for seven winters. The most gay-friendly city, Buenos Aires, was taken over by Evangelical churches and now the homophobic backlash has begun. In 2014 My partner of three years, a woman I loved deeply, became involved with an Evangelical group in Akron, Ohio. She was "relieved of her shame" (and me) by a Pastor who believed that "homosexuality was not a part of God's plan". This was

a woman who had been in an eighteen-year relationship with an out actress but when she met these Evangelicals, all of this history was sept away. Agneta was murdered by the way. We were together for two and half years and there was this photographer who used to follow us all the time and finally I noticed him. When I pointed it out to her she told me to just ignore him because he was in love with her and couldn't accept that she wasn't interested in him. He was a well-known photographer too! Her birthday was May 31st and this one May she went to Paris to model for the September issue of Vogue. Her body was brought back to the States and she's buried in Solvang, California which was where her family lived. Eileen Ford paid a large sum in 1972 to keep Agneta's sexuality out of the press. The modeling industry wanted people to believe she committed suicide but it was a lie. The photographer who was stalking her knocked on her door and she thought it was room service, he broke into the room and threw her out of an eleventh story window in a hotel in Paris. If you look it up on the internet it says she died under mysterious circumstances. That was when I really started drinking and drugging. People couldn't even reach me. I was just nuts. I was showing my artwork but I was just…

GS: That's absolutely devastating. I'm so sorry.

MG: In those days nobody cared if it was a lesbian. Agneta wasn't out though because she would have been deported. That was the law in 1970's. I've seen it all…

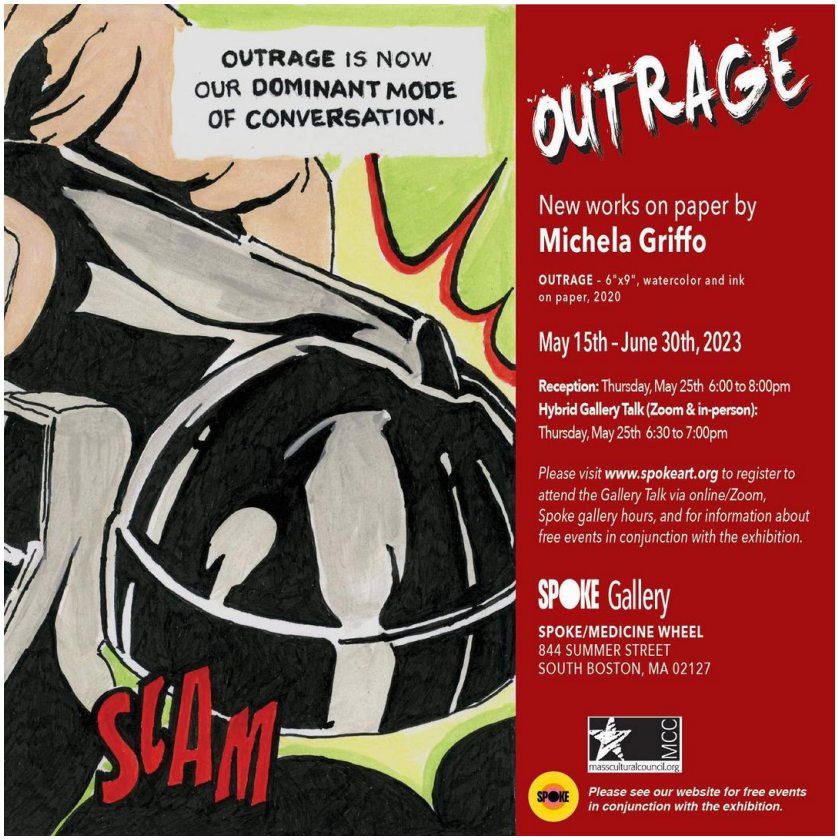
GS: Thank you for sharing these stories with me Michela. Thank you for all of the work you've done through activism, art and healthcare.

MG: And I thank all these young people coming up now. They are going to change the world the same way my generation did. These kids, like those kids from Parkland High… they are going to get it done and they are not going to take shit from Evangelicals or deadbeat politicians.

Feminine Moments
Queer Feminist Art Worldwide

Michela Griffo – Outrage

June 3, 2023



Outrage
New works on paper by Michela Griffo
May 15 – June 30, 2023
at SPOKE Gallery, SPOKE/MEDICINE WHEEL, 844 Summer Street, South Boston, MA 02127

Outrage by Michela Griffo features new and recent small works on paper that she refers to as “Observations”. Michela has also exhibiting four drawings on paper from an on-going series that draws upon well-known imagery from Disney animated fairy tales.

Since the early 1980’s, Michela Griffo has been creating impeccable drawings and paintings based in a realist figurative tradition that echo the political and layered meanings found in history painting, historical portraiture painting and in contemporary comic book genre. Her

works offer biting commentary on the reality that society has chosen to construct and believe, while at the same time calling attention to the so called truth or the actual reality that society as a whole avoids acknowledging.

About Michela Griffo

Michela Griffo (b.1949) is an artist and activist who came of age in New York City in the 1950s and 60s. Griffo studied at the University of Michigan, but ultimately established herself as a New York based artist after graduating from Pratt Institute with a Master's in photography and a Minor in Painting. Griffo was an early member of the Redstockings and a founding member of the Radicalesbians, Lavender Menace and the Gay Liberation Front. Michela risked her life with other queer and lesbian activists on the front lines of the Gay Rights Movement paving the way for younger generations to come out and live safe and productive lives.

Stellarhighway

Michela Griffo

b. 1949, Rochester, NY

Biography.

Michela Griffo is an artist and activist who came of age on the streets of New York City in the 1950s and '60s. She was an early member of the Redstockings and The Gay Liberation Front and a founding member of Radicalesbians, whose Lavender Menace Action invaded Betty Friedan's First Congress to Unite Women in May, 1970. She was active in the Civil Rights, Women's Rights and Gay Rights Movements, working closely with activists such as Yoruba Guzman and radical organizations such as The Young Lords. She risked her life with other queer and lesbian activists on the front lines to pave the way for younger generations to come out and live safe and productive lives.

Griffo was born into a large, mostly Italian but culturally mixed, family—what she calls the United Nations of families—whose common denominator was alcoholism. By the time she was eleven, a flask of vodka accompanied her to the convent school she attended. Griffo left home at sixteen, but her life, as she views it, began when she attended The Pratt Institute, in Brooklyn NY, where she received her MFA in Photography, with a minor in painting. In July of 1970 her pending marriage to her high school sweetheart, an Orthodox Jewish man, was nixed by his family over religious differences. A month later, after a quick detour to Woodstock in August, the artist met and fell in love with Agneta Freiberg, an Eileen Ford model. Never having been with a woman, she did not realize that they were dating until Agneta invited her to spend the night, about which Griffo states, "I never even called myself bisexual after that." Expecting to be supported by her New York Radical Feminist Consciousness Raising Group, she was beyond disturbed when instead they told her that if she pursued this new path, her life would be ruined, which made no sense to her—there was no new path, she was the same person she had been when she was going to marry her heterosexual lover, and always would be. Spotting an ad in the Village Voice for a group called the Gay Liberation Front, Griffo went down and joined. She loved the group's focus on social justice and intersectionality. She also participated in the Lavender Menace's uproarious action to interrupt the totally lesbophobic NOW National Convention. "I was an outlaw then," she says, "and I'm an outlaw now."

Her first piece of political art was a poster for the first Pride march in June 1970. It read, "I am your worst fear, I am your best fantasy." It enraged her that the very people who fetishized lesbians were terrified of their actual existence. She wasn't going to sit on the sidelines producing abstract paintings: "I wanted to tell the truth of what I saw in our society." Over the course of the 1970s and early 1980s, Griffo's early art career flourished, even as she descended into the world of drug addiction and alcoholism. Over time, she found her sobriety, earned a master's degree in social work at New York University, worked for many years in the Corporate Communications department at Colgate-Palmolive, and continued to privately practice her art. She has also been deeply involved with Remote Area Medical (RAMUSA.org), which provides essential dental, vision and medical services to the poorest communities in the U.S.

For decades, Griffo's visual art practice has centered on exposing societal injustices and fictional narratives, exploring themes such as the queer and lesbian woman's experience, as well as childhood trauma and addiction. Her paintings often use primary colors to depict familiar scenes, but have also taken the form of expertly composed muted whites and soft shadows often mixed with pencil drawings in order to critique issues of class, sexism, racism and divisive rhetoric that are often not rooted in the reality of our shared experience.

Griffo exhibited widely in the 1970s and 1980s, and holds an MFA in painting from Pratt Institute and an MSW from New York University. She has been included in several important queer art shows, such as the seminal traveling group exhibition *Art After Stonewall: 1969-1989* (Leslie-Lohman Museum, Columbus Museum, Frost Museum; 2019-2020) and *Queer Forms* (Katherine Nash Gallery, Minneapolis, MN, 2019). Historical exhibitions include those at The Alternative Museum, New York, NY; Soho Center for Visual Artists, New York, NY; Josef Gallery, New York, NY; Alexander Milliken, New York, NY; Flint Institute of the Arts, Flint, MI; and, Aldrich Museum for Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, CT.; The DeCordova Museum, Lincoln, MA. Recent exhibitions include solo shows at SPOKE Gallery, Boston, MA; Pen + Brush Gallery, New York, NY; and group shows at Leslie-Lohman Museum, New York, NY; ArtspaceNH, New Haven CT, Plaxell Gallery, Long Island City, NY; University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN; Housatonic Museum, Bridgeport, CT; Artists Space, New York, NY; Exit Art, New York, NY; NY.

Griffo has been interviewed by Steve Dansky (The LGBT Pioneers Oral History Project), Mason Funk (Outwords Archive), Mike Balaban (stories from the LGBTQ Community), Andrew Rimby (Ivory Tower Boiler Room), August Bernadicou (LGBTQ History Project) and Mark Lynch (NPR/Boston Public Radio), as wel as the Arthur Dong Documentary for PBS and WGBH Boston “A Question of Equality: Outrage ‘69” (1995); and has been featured in ArtNews, The Brooklyn Rail, The New York Times, and The Boston Globe. Collections include Treadwell Corporation, Chemical Bank and the Leslie-Lohman Museum. The artist is currently based in New York.

Stellarhighway

Michela Griffo

b. 1949, Rochester, NY

Education

1970 Masters in Fine Art, Painting, Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, NY

Solo, Two and Three-Person Exhibitions

2025 Stellarhighway, Brooklyn, NY (forthcoming)
2024 NADA Projects New York with Stellarhighway, New York, NY
2023 Outrage, SPOKE Gallery, Boston, MA
2022 The Price We Pay, Pen + Brush Gallery, New York, NY
1982 Pencil and Brush Show, The Alternative Museum, New York, NY (3-person)
1978 Recent Paintings, Josef Gallery, New York, NY
1976 Michela Griffo and Anita Steckel, Soho Center for Visual Artists, New York, NY

Selected Group Exhibitions

2024 Dyke+Arthouse, Bureau of General Services, New York, NY
The Art of Memory, Connect Gallery at the University of Chicago, Chicago, IL
2022 Well Behaved: Expectations, Socialization & Gender, Culture Lab at The Plaxall Gallery, Long Island City, NY
2021 International Pride: Culture Lab at The Plaxall Gallery, Long Island City, NY
2020 The Beginning of Everything: An Exhibition of Drawings, Katherine Nash Gallery, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN
2019 Art After Stonewall: 1969-1989, curated by Jonathan Weinberg and Drew Sawyer, Leslie-Lohman Museum, New York, NY; The Patricia & Phillip Frost Museum, Miami, FL; The Columbus Museum of Art, Columbus, OH
Queer Forms, Katherine Nash Gallery, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN
2015 Wonder Women, Katherine Nash Gallery, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN
2014 Wish You Were Here, A.I.R. Gallery, Brooklyn, NY
Same Sex, City Lights Gallery, Bridgeport, CT
By Land, By Sea: Hidden Histories, Spoke Gallery @ Medicine Wheel Productions, Boston, MA
2012 There's So Much I Want To Say To You, catalog collaboration with Sharon Hayes, Whitney Museum, New York, NY
2011 Same Sex, City Lights Gallery, Bridgeport, CT
2010 Who Are You Close To, Jane Kim/Thrust Projects, New York, NY
2008 Why Not, Housatonic Museum, Bridgeport, CT
American Sandwich, Primo Piano Gallery, Lecce, Italy
Election 2008, Art Gotham, New York, NY
International Exquisite Corpse Project, a collaborative web-based project (online)
Night of 1,000 Drawings, Artists Space, New York, NY
2007 Small is Beautiful, Klemens Gasser & Tanja Grunert, Inc., New York, NY
Modes of Disclosure, Form + Content Gallery with the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN
Lovely, Dark and Deep: Women Artists Retake the Fairy Tale, Pelham Art Center, Pelham, NY
Word of Mouth: Fits in a Box, Bridge Art Fair, Miami, FL

Night of 1,000 Drawings, Artists Space, New York, NY
Postcards from the Edge, James Cohan Gallery, NY, NY
2006 The Studio Visit, Exit Art, New York, NY
Transparanoia, Blue Elephant Gallery, Frederick, MD
Night of 1,000 Drawings, Artists Space, New York, NY
2005 HOMOMUSEUM, Exit Art, New York, NY
Night of 1,000 Drawings, Artists Space, New York, NY
Postcards from the Edge, Robert Miller Gallery, New York, NY
Pretty Sweet: The Sentimental Image in Contemporary Art, DeCordova Museum, Lincoln, MA
2004 Enchantment, Artspace, New Haven, CT
Night of 1,000 Drawings, Artists Space, New York, NY
Postcards from the Edge, Brent Sikkema, New York, NY
2003 Between Fear and Freedom, Artspace, New Haven, CT
Trash Can: Public Art Project, Black Rock Arts Center, Bridgeport, CT
1987 Group Show, Limbo Gallery, New York, NY
1982 Pencil and Brush Show, The Alternative Museum, New York, NY (3-person)
Mixed Bag, The Alternative Museum, New York, NY
1981 Group Show, Alexander Milliken, New York, NY
1980 New Talent Show, Alexander Milliken, New York, NY
1979 Drawing Invitational, 112 Greene Street, New York, NY
1977 Twenty Contemporary Artists From New York, Flint Institute of the Arts, Flint, MI and Oakland University Art Gallery, Oakland, MI
Blum Helman Gallery, New York, NY
1976 Michela Griffo and Anita Steckel, Soho Center for Visual Artists, New York, NY
1975 Contemporary Reflections, Aldrich Museum for Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, CT

Panels, Lectures, Interviews

2022 Podcast. “Michela Griffo is not afraid to be canceled and speaks openly and honestly about being a lesbian artist and activist,” Ivory Tower Boiler Room (Andrew Rimby); December 19. (online)
2020 Interview. “Michela Griffo,” Outwords Archive (Mason Funk), New York, NY.
2019 Panel Discussion. “Art After Stonewall,” Frieze Art Fair, hosted by Deutsche Bank, Randall’s Island, New York, NY.
Artist Lecture. University of Minnesota, Regis Arts Center, Minneapolis, MN
2016 Speaker Series, Leslie-Lohman Museum, New York, NY
2008 Artist Lecture. Minneapolis College of Art and Design, Minneapolis, MN
2005 Radio Interview. “Inquiry” interview with Michela Griffo, NPR/Boston Public Radio (Mark Lynch), 25 minutes, February 12. (online)

Selected Bibliography

2022 Soboleva, Ksenia M. “Michela Griffo:The Price We Pay,” Art Seen: The Brooklyn Rail, Dec. 22, 2022 - Jan. 23, 2023.
2019 Duran, Maximillian. “Stonewall at 50: A Roundtable with Vaginal Davis, Michela Griffo and Jonathan Weinberg,” ArtNews, Spring.
“Artists Speak about How Stonewall Changed Art.” Artsy, June 14.
Lease, Zoe. “13 Artists Reflect on the Stonewall Riots”, T-Magazine, New York Times, June 27.

2018 Shockey, Gwen “Addresses Project: Oral History Archive” (funded by NYFA), September 12.
2008 Gengo, Lorraine. “Female Artists Tackle Open Ended Taboos,” Fairfield Connecticut Weekly News, September 18.
Armbruster, Jessica. “The A-List: Art and Popular Culture,” Minneapolis Citipages News and Arts Weekly, September 10-18.
2007 Gouvenia, Georgette. “Through The Looking Glass,” Journal News, Pelham. NY, March 30.
Strias, Elizabeth. “Original Spin,” Lavender Magazine, June 22-July 5.
2005 Cotter, Holland. “Homomuseum: Heroes and Monuments,” New York Times, June 24.
Kennedy, Louise. “A Modern Day Sentimental Journey,” The Boston Globe, Sunday, February 13.
Temin, Christine. “How Sweet It Is...or Is It? Prettiness Gets Tart Treatment,” The Boston Globe, Sunday, February 13.
2004 Burke, Judy. “Fractured Fairy Tales,” The New Haven Register, Sunday, December 5.
Agish, Meral. “Enchant Terribles,” New Haven Advocate, November 25.
Post Road Magazine, Issue Number 9, Fall; Michela Griffo: Paintings and Drawings, Introduction by Kathleen Bitetti, Director, Artists Foundation, Boston, MA.
Giuliano, Charles. “Pretty Sweet: The Sentimental Image in Contemporary Art.” Featured column, Big, Red and Shiny, Issue 18, Feb 14.

Public Collections

Treadwell Corporation Collection, Thomaston, CT
Chemical Bank Collection, New York, NY
Leslie-Lohman Museum, New York, NY