

# A Maiden, a Mother, and a Crone: Fishing in the Collective Consciousness

Tami Katz-Freiman

Brooches set with diamonds, decorative feathers, lace corsets, rippling fabrics, perfectly made-up eyes, lips painted with bright red lipstick, polished nails, lots of hands, some clad in gloves, lots of legs, some sporting seductive fishnet stockings, feet teetering on stiletto heels, wisps of blond hair fluttering in the wind, wide-brimmed hats, fans, belts and buckles, ornaments, precious stones and various notions: this is but a sampling of the numerous seductive female images cut out of magazines, dismantled and reassembled to create 60 humorous, graceful hybrids that present a new and subversive female model.

Jazzar began creating collages as early as 2012, as a means of self-expression, empowerment, and self-development. Given the meticulous, calculated, laborious and precise appearance of the final results, it is surprising to discover that she describes her work process as spontaneous and impulsive – lacking planning, or a predefined intention – a sort of stream-of-consciousness originating in a specific emotion or energy:

"I become compelled to cut random pieces of paper images. As I am working, I am unaware of the significance of the individual item that I select. It is only after cutting a few pieces and looking at what I have gathered, that I realize that most of these pieces match each other perfectly with no primary conscious decision on my part. Although disparate, it is as if they were meant to be together and they now form a reconstructed shape. It is only then, once they are assembled, that I find the significant information that the completed work has offered."<sup>1</sup>

The body of works assembled in this book – *All (W)hole of Me* – is the third series of collages created by Jazzar. Made from 2018 to 2020, the series includes 60 variously sized works, in which cutouts carefully removed from fashion magazines (*Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar*), art journals (*Art in America*, *ArtForum*), brochures, glossy advertisements and editorials feature female models in all of their long-legged, airbrushed perfection. These cutouts were assembled together on white sheets of paper, so that the new hybrid image formed out of body parts, fashion accessories and clothing items seems to hover against the white ground. The original context – the conventional, stereotypical representation of a seductive female body, which is common in advertising and fashion magazines – seems to have fallen away, to have been emptied out and charged with new meanings as an alternative female archetype. According to Jazzar, this archetype is a reflection of her own mental states. She notes that the process resembles "fishing" in the collective consciousness: "I am appropriating, repurposing and reinterpreting works originally belonging to other people in order to create what eventually depicts and expresses my true and unique vision."

<sup>1</sup> The statements of Jazzar are all quoted from her artist's statement concerning this body of works and from our correspondence.

Speaking of the “collective consciousness” out of which she extricates her booty, Jazzar attends to the female archetype, to that elusive female paradigm that emerges from the photographs, and which she attempts to capture in her collages:

“In light of the #metoo movement I started to probe the concept of femininity and informally begin to ask myself questions about what it means to be a woman and who I am as a woman. Tapping into my own inner world, I come to discover and understand the archetypal woman who is at the same time suggestive and ambiguous, meek and powerful, fecund and wise, and symbolizes the stages of all universal cycles in one woman’s life as a maiden, a mother and a crone.”

With this statement, Jazzar joins three, or perhaps even four generations of feminist artists who, since the 1970s, have repeatedly raised the controversial question of essentialism – that core essentialism which lies beyond biology, and which exists in representations of that “maiden, mother and crone.” Jazzar’s contribution to this discourse once again raises the following questions: are certain traits uniquely essential to women? Can one identify specific images as feminine? Is it possible to speak of feminine materials? Feminine colors? Are certain techniques related to female crafts? Over the years, there were those who associated round, fluid, liquid, and open forms, as well as soft, pastel-hued colors, with female characteristics, while others argued that art is genderless, or that the very search for a female essence amplifies stereotypical thinking. This issue had far-reaching implications for the web of thematic concerns that have preoccupied women artists over the past five decades, especially with regard to their choice about how to represent themselves and their bodies – given the worn-out conventions of representing women, throughout the history of Western art, as objects of desire camouflaged as high art.

There is little wonder that the most accessible and convenient site of action for women artists was the body itself, which soon becomes the display case of identity, an arena of battle in which the struggle for representation took place, the last front where the ideological struggle over its use and representation was fought. This was a battle in the course of which numerous voices spoke up about oppression, representation, and discrimination. In Jazzar’s case, as in the case of many other women artists, little has remained of the harmonious image of the homogeneous, desired body, as something new is born to replace what long existed before being dismantled: a body reassembled as a dynamic, subversive hybrid.

Within the discourse on sexuality and eroticism in the history of feminist art, and specifically on representations of the body, there are three generally accepted options:

- (1) The “inside-out” option that involves observing the body from within, as given expression, for instance, in the early works of Mona Hatoum; (2) The disintegrated, distorted body with its lowly, abject aspects, as given expression, for instances, in the artworks of Judy Chicago, Cindy Sherman and Ana Mendieta; (3) The “perfect” body relating to stereotypes of the model or doll,



FIG 1 (PLATE - 4)  
Untitled (COMING OF AGE), 2018

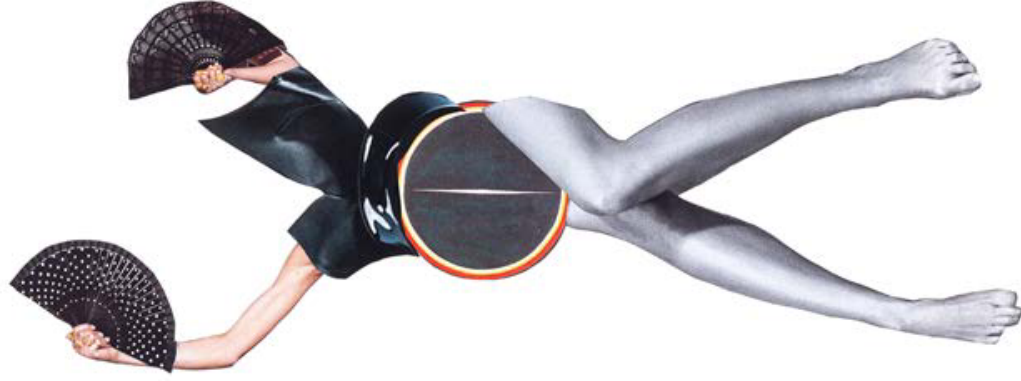


FIG 1 (PLATE - 5)  
Untitled (MOTHER), 2018

as given expression in the work of artists such as Mariko Mori, Anette Messager, Louise Bourgeois and Vanessa Beecroft. One could argue that in Jazzar's works, all of these options exist at once: the new body she creates is disintegrated and distorted; it sometimes seems to be depicted from inside, yet also related to the perfect body of the model or doll. The new assembled body created in her collages is no longer the familiar object of desire. According to her, it reflects her own mental states, a fact that probably accounts for the sense of repair and personal triumph that emanate from it.

The fact that most of the sources from which Jazzar culls the components of her new body are advertising and fashion magazines means that most of these images have already been filtered through stereotypical conventions of female representation based on the seductive paradigm of the model as marketing tool, or "living hanger" – conventions that enable us to take pleasure in the female body in the guise of consumer "aesthetics." The social construction of women was (and still is) based on disguise and deception: the culture of anti-aging, plastic surgery, beauty competitions and liposuction – all continue to circumscribe femininity within the limits of "prettiness." Jazzar makes use of these stereotypes not in order to directly challenge them, but – in her own words – "Perhaps because we are so used to seeing this type of woman in magazines I had to deconstruct the parts to find out what was true for me."

Using humor and a playful spirit, she disassembles the bodies of models, creating hybrids in which various body parts are interchanged: a head can be replaced by the signifier of a head in the form of sensuous lips, undulating hair, a wide-brimmed hat, wide-open eyes, a dangling, belt-like tongue, diamond jewelry, a ring, or a necklace; in some instances, the head is entirely missing, replaced by two hands that each point in a different direction, or a feather fan that extends across the entire torso, with a blue eye clad by heavy lashes and makeup peering out of it.

The body itself can be alluded to by an upside-down checkered bag, a gilded scarf, a bottle of perfume, heart-shaped ribbons, an elegant hand, a fan composed of arms that seems to erupt out of a black lace corset, or legs dangling straight out of a head. Oftentimes, the entire body is missing, replaced by gigantic lips and a dangling tongue, from which a pair of gloved hands emerges.

Although this is still a "body," it is a body that is always partial, fragmented, manipulated, replicated, cloned, or distorted. Its sexuality is the exposed sexuality of body parts that have been fused with luxury consumer items and objects of desire, forming a new type of cyborg.



FIG 3 (PLATE - 28)  
UNTITLED (THE RISE), 2018



FIG 4 (PLATE - 44)  
UNTITLED (RESTLESS PURSUIT), 2018

What recurs as a leitmotif in almost all of the works is movement – nearly all of the figures exist in a state of soaring, leaping or flying. Some have body parts resembling wings, or are surrounded by exuberantly fluttering, luxurious swaths of fabric, fluid folds that enhance their sense of momentum. The female figure arising from this series of works is thus a dynamic, deracinated, fragmented figure, whose anatomy is patched-up, floating in a fluid mental space that has no limits.

The language of Jazzar's fantastic collages is created, according to her, out of poetic, intuitive, and spontaneous transformations, in the course of which the familiar becomes uncanny and different mental and emotional states of consciousness are given expression. Familiar clothing items, fashion accessories, and beauty products are glued to one another and undergo a process of estrangement, representing her mood at a given moment. The feminist discourse is enhanced here by a cosmic dimension, due to Jazzar's involvement with astrology, which explains the fact that the subtitles of the works, put in parenthesis, allude to astronomical terms – a language which, she attests, enables her "to grasp my inner and outer reality." So, for instance, speaking of a work whose subtitle is **SQUARE MAKE IT ROLL** (PLATE – 17), she explains:

"In this collage, the two black arms form a 90-degree angle and the legs symbolize the necessary traction to move out of the square. A square is an aspect that describes a 90-degree angle between two celestial bodies from the earth point of view. It often symbolized a paralyzing energy, because the energies involved belong to a different mode of consciousness: like earth (sense) and fire (intuition) or water (emotion) and air (thinking). They can't understand each other because in our perception one is rational and the other irrational. But a square can be powerfully creative once we galvanize all of our inner selves to move out of the inertia."

In another case, Jazzar explains the subtitle **AQUARIUS PLATE – 35**: "The house where Aquarius is in our Natal Chart is where we feel the need to be free and unconventional – whether or not we manifest it. It is the area of life where we can be truly creative and unique, and contribute our utmost to humanitarian progress. After making this collage I understood that I was ready to go further in my inner quest to discover and hopefully embody that singularity."

In about eight of the 60 collages assembled in this book, the body appears as a creature with multiple legs or arms, a fan composed of limbs that stick

2. Hélène Cixous (1976) "The Laugh or the Medusa", translated by Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (Summer, 1976), p. 886.

out in all directions, and whose center is set with a precious gem: FAMILY JEWELS (PLATE 48) or a pair of lips, as in the work whose subtitle is: LA VEUVE NOIRE: AN HOMAGE TO Louise Bourgeois (PLATE 5).



FIG 7 (PLATE 5) SARAH COHEN SHABOT, LA VEUVE NOIRE: AN HOMAGE TO LOUISE BOURGEOIS, 2018

Inevitably, the first association that comes to mind is the Medusa's head, or more precisely the essay *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1975) by the critical thinker Hélène Cixous, one of the most important voices to define postmodern feminism. In Greek mythology, Medusa was a monster in the form of a woman, who transformed anyone gazing at her into stone. According to Freud, the head of the Medusa represents the female genitals, and is related to castration. Given the long tradition of female oppression, Cixous argues that "Women must write through their bodies; they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetoric, regulations and codes; they must submerge, cut through, get beyond the ultimate reserve-discourse". Like other feminist thinkers, Cixous encouraged women to speak in a language outside the realm of masculine language, a language that would not reflect woman as a mute mirror, an object constituted in relation to the male subject, but rather as a speaker whose enunciations emerge from within the female body. Woman, in short, must bring into language the desires, sensations, and rhythms of the body. In Cixous' words, this amounts to "writing in white ink" – the ink of the body.<sup>3</sup>



FIG 8 Cammezzini, *Medusa*, 1897, Oil on canvas mounted on wood, 24 x 22 in (60 x 56 cm), Uffizi Gallery, Italy

Medusa thus appears as a representation of the non-normative female body, which is related to the idea of the grotesque, and more generally to the image of the monster: her identity is fluid and devoid of clear boundaries; she is not foreign to us, but is rather constructed out of familiar materials, and is thus simultaneously attractive, threatening and repulsive. One of the most dominant characteristics of the grotesque is that it is nourished by existing materials, and invents nothing new – making use of concrete reality and distorting it. In Jazzar's case, these are images from the worlds of fashion and advertising, as well as a smattering of artworks by other artists.<sup>4</sup>

In the context of the extensive discourse concerning representations of the human body in contemporary art, the grotesque has metaphorical significance as a representative of a certain Zeitgeist. In her article "On the Grotesque Body," Sara

Cohen Shabot argues that the grotesque metaphor is "the quintessential expression of resistance to representation, resistance to the idea of a single, whole, defined, normal entity that can be represented within a frame ... the grotesque expresses change, dynamism, the possibility of being several things at once. The kingdom of the grotesque is that of multiplicity, hybridity,

3 In *Untitled (THE CROWN SATURN THE MAGNIFICENT)*, 2010 (PLATE 58), the image of the legs is taken from a work by the artist's mother, *Untitled (THE REVENUE)*, 1997 (PLATE 57). In *Untitled (THE REVENUE)*, 1997 (PLATE 58), the body is composed of four Chavakis sculptures in *Untitled (THE REVENUE)* OF WOMANHOOD, 2018 (PLATE 54), the body is made of a Richard Erdman sculpture.

fusion and distortion, of chaotic connections between different worlds and beings, whose boundaries are blurred within the grotesque entity." Indeed, the most salient characteristic of the grotesque is the hybridity,<sup>4</sup> embedded in the composite technique of collage, as evident in Jazzar's work. As part of the inversion of the established order, in which what is central becomes peripheral, the grotesque is characterized by hybrid combinations of distinct entities. This idea of hybridity, as distilled in the collage series *All (W/Hole) of Me*, thus reflects a fusion of different orders, a constant intrusion of different body parts and objects into one another.

The act of hybridity is related to three additional discourses, through which one can examine Jazzar's series of collages: metamorphosis, the cyborg model, and the syntax of Surrealism. Both metamorphosis and the cyborg model commonly relate to hybrid creatures. The first relates to the transformation of humans into animals, while the second pertains to the hybrid combination of human and machine. In Jazzar's case, the metamorphosis is not from human to animal, but rather from a homogeneous, normative body to a hybrid creature with multiple parts. Nor does she fuse human and mechanical parts – rather, she fuses body parts with clothing, textiles, purses, feathers and gems.

The feminist discourse on the politics of the body has adopted Donna Haraway's cyborg model as one of absolute otherness. Being the absolute other involves multiplicity, the erasure of boundaries, creativity, and above all – liberation from the ideals of authenticity and naturalness, terms that were once automatically associated with femininity, enslaving generations of women to their wombs. Hi-tech culture, virtual reality, and the principle of cloning appealed to the feminist discourse by challenging traditional notions of duality, while promising liberation from reproductive activity. The aesthetic of the cyborg centers on replaceable parts, particles, prosthetics, substitutes and supporting accessories. In the aftermath of disaster, according to Haraway, when everything falls apart, only cyborgs will know how to reassemble all the parts.<sup>5</sup>

The context of the cyborg, with its prosthetics and hybrids, as well as the context of metamorphosis and the recasting of familiar objects in new roles, beg for a discussion of Surrealist imagery, from which Jazzar seems to frequently draw inspiration. Among the avant-garde movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Surrealism was the one that turned to the dark realms of black humor, irony and the absurd. The gloom that pervaded in the aftermath of World War I gave rise to a form of fantastic humor filled with paradoxes, blurred identities, metamorphoses



FIG 9 Don Muir, *Untitled (Herod Sheel)*, ca. 1954, Giclée silver print on page 9, 9 x 6 1/2 in (22.9 x 16.5 cm), Centre Pompidou



FIG 10 Hermann Häh, *The Beautiful Girl (Das Schöne Mädchen)*, 1920, Giclée silver print 8 x 10 in (20.3 x 25.4 cm), New Orleans Museum of Art © 2015 Ariata Rights Society (ARS), New York / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

4 Sara Cohen Shabot, "Notes on the Grotesque Body," in *Wit (Exaggeration) (enh. cat.)*, Haifa Museum of Art, 2009, pp. 39–61.

5 Donna J. Haraway, "Cyborgs and Symbols: Living Together in the New World Order," *The Cyborg Handbook*, ed. Chris Hables Gray (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 11–20.

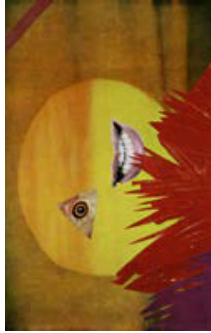


FIG 11 Hannah Höch, *Life Sun* (1926), collage, 6 1/2 x 4 3/4 in. (16.3 x 24.2 cm), Landsbank Berlin AG

and mutations. The technique of collage, which is rooted in domestic female crafts, first appeared ca. 1910 as part of the formalist Cubist shift initiated by Picasso and Braque. It appealed immediately to the Dada artists by enabling them to work with available materials – from newspaper and magazines to maps, train tickets and photographs – which they tore and reassembled to formulate a political critique and an “anti-artistic” statement. This was a perfect medium for the iconoclasm of Dada artists and their social protest. The Surrealists, by contrast, saw in collage and photomontage a perfect expressive tool for composing hybrid, visually dynamic images, reflecting the unconscious and creating illogical, dreamlike worlds. This cut-and-paste technique complemented their “automatic” approach to the creative process, much in the same way as Jazzar describes her seemingly automatic creative process.

One Dadaist artist whose works seem to herald those of Jazzar is the German artist Hannah Höch (1889–1978), a pioneering feminist artist who created the first photomontages featuring female body parts. An



FIG 12 (Left) Hannah Höch, *Untitled* (from an *Ethnographic Museum*, 1926), collage, 19 x 12 1/2 in. (48.3 x 32.1 cm)

FIG 13 (Right) Hannah Höch, *Made for a Party (Für ein Fest gemacht)*, 1926, collage, 19 x 12 1/2 in. (48.3 x 32.1 cm), collection of IFA, Stuttgart

entire century ago, Höch seized the potential embedded in the mass media. In an act of self-irony, she returned collage to its female, domestic roots, and was one of the first to use fashion magazines, illustrated journals and photographs in art. Her oeuvre dealt with the status of women in Germany and with gender roles, and included androgynous motifs and protest against social dichotomies and constructions. So, for instance, the work *The Beautiful Girl* (1920) (FIG 10) is composed of the body parts of different women, and represents the myth of the New Woman, the female model of beauty dominant in Berlin at the time. In the work *Little Sun* (1969) (FIG 11), Marilyn Monroe's smiling mouth hovers alongside the eye of a fish. In other works, she combined sentimental 19<sup>th</sup>-century pictures of women with photographs of athletic young females whose limbs, freed from the restrictions of the previous century, were echoed by the towering forms of skyscrapers. The female image arising from her works is that of an energetic, professional, androgynous woman, who is ready to take her place as equal to any man. Like Jazzar's collages, her works featured many bare legs that bend and skip, and in many cases are

6 Domus U. Heraway, “Cyborgs and Symbols, Living Together in the New World Order,” *The Cyborg Handbook*, ed. Chris Hables Gray (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 11–20.



FIG 14 Claude Cahun, *Confession Your Pleas 3* (left) *Confession Your Pleas*, 1930, photomontage, illustrations published in Cahun's autobiographical essay, *Avant mon Avenir*, (Paris, Editions du Carrefour, 1930), images: Courtesy of Getty Images

severed from the body itself. This motif aptly captured the graphic energy of the New Woman and a Surrealist vision of the grotesque, as the severed limbs were imbued with a life of their own.<sup>6</sup>

To the list of woman artists who influenced Jazzar I would also add the Surrealist artist Claude Cahun (1894–1954), who is known for her collages that deconstruct traditional concepts of gender and sexuality. Höch and Cahun were undoubtedly unusual in their anticipatory contribution to a new discourse. Several more decades elapsed before the consolidation of a feminist voice

that offered an alternative to the linear, binary logic of a male-dominated discourse, based on hierarchical organization and contrasts. Feminist theorists such as the psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray in her book *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1977), or Julia Kristeva in *Abjection: The Powers of Horror*, gave rise to a sphere of female discourse, which stripped language of its single, cohesive meaning and opened up the expression of female experience. Jazzar's collages operate in a similar sphere of communication – one that is open, noncommittal and disruptive of boundaries. The female experience traverses them like a code that connects the plethora of images cut and reassembled together, and is based on doubling, hybridity, cloning, echoing and repetition. This language enables her to create a place of her own, and to express her desire, her body and her thoughts through a continuum of archetypal and stereotypical images, which seem to exist in a state of constant flow, on a two-lane highway between the conscious and the unconscious.