

# ARTFORUM

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I N T E R N A T I O N A L

ARTIST-RUN GALLERIES  
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Mary Kelly, *Interim*, Part I: *Corpus* (detail), 1984–85, thirty panels, laminated photo positive, acrylic, and silk screen on Plexiglas, each 48 × 36 × 2".

emphasis on deconstructing “woman as image.” Nevertheless, as I was walking through Mary Kelly’s show at Vielmetter—an installation of her work *Interim*, Part I: *Corpus*, 1984–85—the comedienne, to my own surprise, immediately came to mind.

*Corpus* is composed of thirty framed panels that measure four feet high and three feet wide. The suite is divided into five parts, each marked with a French word—*EXTASE*, *MENACÉ*, *SUPPLICATION*, *ÉROTISME*, and *APPEL*—taken from the captions of nineteenth-century neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot’s famous photographs depicting “female hysteria.” Within each section are a trio of panels that feature an item of clothing or an accessory (a leather jacket, a pair of boots, a silky negligee) alongside three more that present handwritten accounts of a woman coming to terms with aging. Despite the reference to hysterics, the work is serialistic and coolly conceptual. The artist created each individual piece by adhering an image to Plexiglas in such a way that its shadow impassively falls on the mounting board behind it. Walking into Kelly’s show and knowing the work’s premise, I began at first to slot *Corpus* into the art-historical genealogy that I’d been taught, wherein she is the actual textbook example of the postmodernist feminist artist. I considered this position in relation to her shrewd theoretical writing, her elegant takedowns of modernism, her creation of a feminist art devoted to deconstructing essentialist ideas about women. Admittedly, I have always connected more to Kelly’s texts than to her art itself. Her most famous piece, *Post-Partum Document*, 1973–79, a highly conceptual project about the birth of her son, is full of complex charts and graphs that have long stymied me—but I also knew that refusing the viewer’s pleasure was part of the plan.

What I wasn’t expecting, then, was to be pleasurably absorbed by the narrative in Kelly’s fifteen confessional texts, full of familiar experiences

and humor, several of which offer up stories on women troubled by mirrors. Recounted in the first person, Kelly’s tales are partially based on real events, and part fiction. In one scene, a pair of friends try on bathing suits: ‘IT WAS NEVER THIS DIFFICULT WHEN WE WERE YOUNGER,’ I COMPLAIN, ‘EVERYTHING JUST SEEMED TO LOOK GOOD, I DON’T UNDERSTAND IT, NOTHING IS RIGHT.’ WE ARE LOOKING IN THE MIRROR. I BLAME THE ANGLE OF REFLECTION, LIGHTING, ANYTHING, BUT CAN’T ACCEPT THAT THAT IS ME. Even though they are framed by her theorizations of woman as construction, the texts read like Ephron’s writing. Is it blasphemous to compare the two, I wondered? (I imagined feminist art historian Griselda Pollock rolling her eyes at me.) Still, a quick Google search revealed that both women were born in 1941, and that *When Harry Met Sally*—for which Ephron wrote the screenplay—was released in July 1989, a mere seven months before Kelly’s *Corpus* made its debut at the New Museum in Manhattan. Ephron was beloved for her ability to capture something about female life that felt, above all, relatable. And *Corpus* added a dimension of relatability to my understanding of Kelly’s practice. Even if viewers didn’t know anything about Charcot, Jacques Lacan, or the ins and outs of poststructuralism, they could still connect with Kelly’s descriptions of being socialized as a woman. Seeing this older piece installed anew gave me a fresh perspective on the artist’s work. In addition to being rigorous and intellectual, it also poignantly got inside the emotions, chaos, and conflicts of inhabiting a body marked as “woman.”

—Ashton Cooper

## Dorothy Iannone and Sarah Pucci

HANNAH HOFFMAN GALLERY

Sarah Pucci was born in Everett, Massachusetts, in 1902 and died there at the age of ninety-four, never having lived more than four miles away, spending a few years in an apartment in East Boston and two and a half decades at the house she bought in Medford. She worked in candy factories—Schrafft’s, Foss—putting designs on chocolates, and at the Leopold Morse garment factory, the Navy Yard, and General Electric.



Sarah Pucci, *A Heart That Sees You*, ca. 1990, beads, sequins, pins, foam, locket, stand, 13 × 11¼ × 2¾".

She outlived two husbands and had just one child, Dorothy Iannone. At fifty-seven, Pucci began to create a distinctive kind of craft object, covering Styrofoam forms in sequins, beads, and fake pearls. For more than three decades she turned out spangled spheres and hearts, some two hundred of them, always destined for her daughter. As soon as one was finished, she would mail it to Iannone in Berlin, Düsseldorf, London, or Reykjavik.

They are devotional objects—tinsel impressions of church regalia—captivating in the countless little acts of maternal zeal they record: the repetitions of fastening, gluing, trimming, each jewel stuck on with aging fingers, year after year. “I didn’t care about art,” Iannone quotes her mother: “I made the objects for *you*.” We can call them sculptures, even if Pucci just called them “balls,” but we cannot pry them from the account of their making or their itinerary. They depend on Iannone’s authority as an artist and on the storytelling that has often accompanied their exhibition. Perhaps for this reason, though not this reason alone, I can’t help but find affinities between the glittering curios of the Catholic widow from Everett and the erotic beatitudes of her itinerant bohemian child.

Iannone first presented her mother’s sculptures in 1972 at her friend Daniel Spoerri’s Eat Art Galerie in Düsseldorf, and occasional showings have followed, whether staged by Iannone or, more recently, not. The latest, organized by curator and writer Scott Portnoy at Hannah Hoffman Gallery, featured fifteen of Pucci’s pieces, dating from the 1970s to the 1990s. They sat on pedestals arranged in a row running the length of the long exhibition space on a strip of blue carpet—a display, like the work itself, both mannered and domestic. We saw wreaths, globes, circles, and hearts, some incorporating little goblets or figurines as structural elements, others embedding a medallion or mirror among the dense patterns of sequins and gold trim.

Ecstatic ornamentation and horror vacui are qualities Pucci’s art shares with her daughter’s well-known paintings and sculptures (qualities pointedly absent, however, from the four Iannone works in the show: spare, elegant paper-and-gold-leaf collages from 1962). Iannone added another commonality in turn: She solicited a life story from her mother to accompany the sculptures, much as Iannone’s own work is consumed with autobiography. Initially printed in the catalogue for a mother/daughter show at Ludwig Forum for International Art in Aachen, Germany, in 1980, the text mixes seemingly minor trivia from Pucci’s life (learning to drive a Maxwell) with more poignant recollections (a vision of the Virgin Mary while breastfeeding, or the exact sums of money set aside every week in order to send her daughter to college). Many of these details appeared in the autobiographical texts accompanying later shows that, like the myths, varied slightly with each retelling.

Iannone reads something closer to her mother’s original narrative in her video *Sarah Pucci: A Piece About My Mother and Her Work*, 1980, which was also on view. In a tightly framed shot, she displays several of Pucci’s sculptures against an all-black ground and backdrop, the vignette calling to mind a puppet theater or a QVC product close-up. Occasionally a hand enters the void, reworking the cramped staging or ushering pieces in and out of the frame. Iannone inserts family photos and grumbles that the colors aren’t right. She plays a tape of her lover and muse, Dieter Roth, reciting a scatological stream-of-consciousness tribute to Pucci. Later, Iannone recounts a mystical, orgasmic dream she had while sleeping in Pucci’s bed and delivers her own lilting tribute to her mother in an unplaceable pan-European accent—in any case, not the voice from Everett. “I had to fight you every inch of the way,” Iannone slips in among her otherwise adoring declarations. In this way, we get a glimpse of friction threading through the rapturous mutual regard: Even from great distances, it’s all rather claustrophobic.

—Eli Diner

## “Flanagan’s Wake”

KRISTINA KITE GALLERY

“Flanagan’s Wake” was like entering the aftermath of an unbridled party: A debauched spirit lingered dimly over this group exhibition organized in honor of writer and performance artist Bob Flanagan (1952–1996). Curated by Sabrina Tarasoff, the show was conceived as an ex post facto conversation with the late artist, whose transgressive oeuvre pursued pain, ecstasy, and restraint.

Flanagan faced every day as though it were his last. Born with cystic fibrosis, he was told by doctors that he would not live long; yet he miraculously endured the disease for forty-three years. Raised in Glendora, California, he endured multiple near-death experiences and constant medical interventions, ordeals that set him apart from his peers in baby boomer suburbia. Flanagan discovered his masochistic sexuality early on and began mitigating his physical pain with erotic pain, laying the groundwork for his future writings and performances. As a young adult he penned poetry, which eventually led him to Los Angeles and to Beyond Baroque, an experimental literary hub where he met and befriended writers Dennis Cooper and Jack Skelley, poet Amy Gerstler, and John Doe and Exene Cervenka of the punk band X. It was through this community that Flanagan also met Sheree Rose, who became his creative collaborator, life partner, and dedicated dominatrix. Their perfect dominant/submissive union propelled Flanagan to chronicle his relationships to love and mortality, and his therapeutic bond with sadomasochism. Beyond the algolagnic spectacle of, say, nailing his penis to wood for his 1989 performance *Nailed*, his work spoke broadly to issues around guilt and the vicissitudes of inhabiting a sick body with candor and brilliantly dark comicality.

View of “Flanagan’s Wake,” 2022.  
 Foreground, from left: Amy O’Neill, *Post Prom Dance Floor*, 1999/2022; Michael Queensland, *Black Balloon Group*, 2018. Background, from left: Mike Kelley, *Pansy Metal/Clovered Hoof*, 1989/2022; Sheree Rose, *Untitled (Bob Flanagan Reading)*, date unknown, printed photograph; Robert Gober, *Heart in a Box*, 2014–15; Nayland Blake, *Pink Posture*, 2019; Jack Goldstein, *Portfolio of Performance*, 1976–85/2001.



Fitting, then, was Mike Kelley’s contribution to the show: *Pansy Metal/Clovered Hoof*, 1989/2022, a collection of color serigraphs on silk banners that mock homespun Catholic-school art. Reverently hung across the gallery’s back wall were images featuring a crowned phallus, the biblically loaded number 13, and a long-toothed demonic figure. Though Flanagan never considered his family overtly religious, he attended catechism until junior high, leading him to ponder guilt and the saintliness of suffering with childlike and fetishistic wonder.

Amy O’Neill’s installation *Post Prom Dance Floor*, 1999/2022, was set at the center of the gallery and featured a raised platform, dismally