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# Judith Bernstein's Penis Paintings Stick It to the Man

ARTSY EDITORIAL  
BY ALEXXA GOTTHARDT  
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Judith Bernstein in 1973.

Judith Bernstein has drawn or painted at least 500 phalluses—of all shapes and sizes—over the course of her 50-year career. And that’s just the number I could count across the pages of the artist’s new tome, *Dicks of Death*, which is released in the U.S. this week.

The timing for the book’s launch is auspicious. Bernstein’s titular “dicks” have served as a form of protest—against sexism, against war, against oppression of every stripe—for the feminist art pioneer since her days in Yale’s MFA program during the 1960s. At the time, she was propelled by the burgeoning momentum of the feminist art movement and her frustration with the chauvinism of the art world and American society at large.



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Judith Bernstein  
*DICK IN A HEAD*, 2015  
Mary Boone Gallery



Judith Bernstein  
*Dick in a Head*  
"Judith Bernstein" at Kunsthal...



Judith Bernstein  
*Dick in a Head*  
"Judith Bernstein" at Kunsthal...



Judith Bernstein  
*Dick in a Head*, 2015  
"Judith Bernstein" at Kunsthal...



Judith Bernstein  
*Dick in a Head*  
"Judith Bernstein" at Kunstha

For her, the phallus, which in her work usually resembles a weapon or a piece of machinery, became a visual metaphor for “feminism and male posturing.” But, as Bernstein will tell you, not all that much has changed since the '60s, so she's kept drawing penises ever since. This week, as a man with a long record of sexist rhetoric is inaugurated as America's new president—and as women gather together in defense of their rights in marches across the world—Bernstein's big, bold studies of male-centric power feel more relevant than ever.

“Once again COCKMAN HAS RISEN, endangering our civil liberties and the little peace that women, minorities, immigrants, LGBTQ individuals, and others felt during President Obama's administration,” Bernstein wrote via email. Cockman is one of the penis-shaped characters that morphs across Bernstein's body of work as a proxy for a particular type of belligerent and oppressive male ego she's encountered over the course of her life.

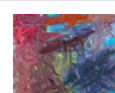


Judith Bernstein  
*Cockman #1*, 1966  
"Judith Bernstein" at Kunsthall Stavanger



Judith Bernstein  
*Cockman #2*, 1966  
"Judith Bernstein" at Kunsthall Stavanger

Bernstein first conceived the schlong-faced, suited fellow in 1966 in response to the governor George Wallace, famous for spouting the racist slogan, “Segregation now. Segregation forever.” “He was racist and reactionary,” Bernstein recalls, “and a real DICK!” So it



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From then on, Bernstein would make the phallus—and the bigoted and hostile actions of a range of powerful men—the subject of her life's work. Her dicks have taken the form of spewing guns, as in *The Fun Gun* (1967) and *Shooters* (2010), and wall-scale screws-cum-carnivorous monsters, like in *Double Header* (1976). In an ironic twist, one such “screw” work, *HORIZONTAL* (1973), was censored from a 1974 exhibition in Philadelphia titled “FOCUS: Women's Work— American Art in 1974” for “lacking redeeming social value.”



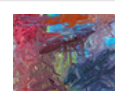
Judith Bernstein  
*Double Header*, 1976  
"Judith Bernstein" at Kunsthall Stavanger



Judith Bernstein  
*Vertical Screws*, 2014  
"Judith Bernstein" at Kunsthall Stavanger

Bernstein has also been an ardent critic of war. In the late 1960s, a series of works protesting the Vietnam War cloaked penises in the American flag, as the caskets of dead soldiers might be. In other drawings, phalluses stand erect, like rigid middle fingers, and are decorated with the words “Fuck Vietnam” and “Union Jack-Off.” Bernstein's anger toward the war is still hot to the touch. “The draft created an enormous amount of terror and rage throughout the country,” she explains. “That was another source of inspiration for Cockman: the elephant-sized male ego that rises to the top, no matter the consequence.”

And while Bernstein moved away from depicting Cockman in the '70s, '80s, and '90s, in favor of more abstract phallic forms, the character made a comeback last year, around the same time that political journalists started comparing then-presidential hopeful Donald Trump to the aforementioned late governor George Wallace. “Trump has brought out the worst in our country, and in doing so, reminded us all (especially women): WE HAVE TO FIGHT!,” Bernstein bellowed via cyberspace.



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Judith Bernstein  
*Birth of the Universe*, 2015  
"Judith Bernstein" at Kunsthall Stavanger

Judith Bernstein  
*The Voyeur*, 2015  
"Judith Bernstein" at Kunsthall Stavanger

It's a call to action that Bernstein, in her mutating depictions of the male member and her no-holds-barred opinions, has been issuing since 1966. And it's one that the artist—along with countless other women and men—believes has become all the more urgent as Trump's inauguration approaches and renewed threats to women's freedoms are felt across the country.

—Alexxa Gotthardt

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