Revised & Restored:
The Art of Kathleen Gilje

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Peter C. Sutton
John Yau
Linda Nochlin
Robert Rosenblum
Francis M. Naumann

Bruce Museum Greenwich, Connecticut

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Courtesy of the Artist

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Director's Preface

This exhibition offers an overview of Kathleen Gilje's satirically pointed and technically adroit reincarnations of Old Master and nineteenth-century paintings. Her works not only comment on social, political and art historical issues of our day, but also recast leading lights of the world of art scholarship, criticism and collecting. Drawing on iconic images from as diverse sources as Dürer and Bronzino, Rubens and Georges de La Tour, Ingres and Manet, Gilje portrays well-known figures in the guise of history with wit, sly selectivity, and a trained conservator's painterly aplomb. She often comments on contemporary fashions and manners by inserting anachronistic modern details into images from the distant past. Here, too, are juxtapositions of contemporary and older art, always with a topical thrust, and satirical sendups of famous people and images. At a time when "appropriation" has become a trope of contemporary art, she raises the standard of discourse with the art of the past.

All exhibitions incur debts, first and foremost in a monographic show on a living artist, to the artist herself. We also hasten to thank all of the museums and collectors who have temporarily foregone the pleasure of their art to lend to this exhibition. We wish to thank the Committee of Honor chaired by Fran and Bill Deutsch and Deborah and Alan Simon, and Honorary Chairs, Martha and Charles Zoubek, who have taken ownership of this show with their support and personal initiative. We are grateful for the support of the New York Foundation for the Arts and The Charles M. and Deborah G. Royce Exhibition Fund. I also wish to thank my fellow authors, the late Robert Rosenblum, Linda Nochlin and John Yau for their thoughtful contributions to the catalogue, and Francis Naumann for conducting his interview with the artist. Thanks too are extended to Kathleen's assistant, Gigi Chen, and the Bruce Museum's Zvi Grunberg Resident Intern, Margarita Karasoulas, who ably contributed to the project at all stages. As always I also wish to thank Anne von Stuelpnagel for her inspired design both of the book and the show, Jack Coyle for overseeing the movement and receipt of objects, Kathy Reichenbach for looking after all the details of the catalogue, and Martha Zoubek for her eagle-eyed editing.

Peter C. Sutton
The Susan E. Lynch Executive Director

Dialogues with the Past

Peter C. Sutton

Opposite:
Cat. 1
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
The Temptation of Christ on the Mountain, Restored, 1998
Gouache, egg tempera, oil, gold leaf on wood, 17 3/8 x 18 1/4 in.
Private Collection

Kathleen Gilje's art offers a virtual survey of Western painting but always with a contemporary, sometimes subversive twist. Trained as a restorer, she brings extensive knowledge of the techniques and materials of older art as well as considerable technical skill in mimicking earlier styles. Her tastes run to European Renaissance, Mannerist, Baroque and French Academic art, but she is equally at home translating Rococo, Impressionist or nineteenth-century American painting styles. The political views expressed in her "restorations" speak pointedly to modern feminist politics, inequities of wealth, the vicissitudes of contemporary fashion and sexuality, animal rights and many other topical issues, but also offer sly commentaries, at times even inside jokes, on the luminaries of the modern art world. Here, too, are more general but no less cunning parodies and sympathetic sendups of the icons of Western painting.

Beginning at the beginning, she addresses *The Temptation of Christ on the Mountain*, by Duccio di Buoninsegna (c. 1255–before 1319), the father of Sienese painting and, together with Giotto, the founders of Western painting. This tempera and gold ground masterpiece from the Frick Collection (ill. 1) was originally part of the vast Maestà altarpiece in Siena Cathedral and depicts the devil tempting Christ by offering Him "all the kingdoms of the world," if only He will worship him (Matthew 4: 8–11). Christ towers symbolically over the scene, which is not depicted naturalistically but like a series of miniature hill towns nestled in the mountains of Tuscany, rejecting the devil, who skulks away. But what a marvelously invidious devil it is, black with bat's wings, bird's talons and spiky hair! In Gilje's transgendered version, the devil is a hermaphrodite, adding another dimension to the temptation (Cat. 1).

Ill. 1
Duccio di Buoninsegna
(Italian, c. 1255–before 1319)
The Temptation of Christ on the Mountain, 1308–1311
Tempera on panel, 17 x 18 1/8 in.
The Frick Collection, New York

The great Netherlandish master, Jan van Eyck (c. 1390–1441), and his more shadowy brother Hubert have sometimes been mistakenly credited with having invented oil painting, but Jan certainly brought the new media to an astonishing degree of refinement. The so-called *Man in a Red Turban* of 1433 in the National Gallery, London, is often thought to be a self-portrait (ill. 2). He, in fact, is not wearing a turban but a headdress known as a *chaperon*, which had long ends that usually hung down, but which here are tied up over the sitter's head, conceivably as a precaution while painting. The original enjoined frame is inscribed JOHES DE EYCK ME FECIT ANO MCCCC 33.21 OCTOBRIS (Jan van Eyk made me on October 21, 1433), and on the top AIC IXH XAN in Greek letters (The best I am capable of doing), which are both a pun on the painter's name and his motto. In this instance, Gilje's "restoration" seems to be partly an homage to and identification with the great painter. She has copied the portrait very faithfully but changed the lower inscription to: KTRINA DE GILJE ME REFECIT ANO MXMVI 21 AUGUSTIS (Kathleen Gilje remade me on August 21, 1996) (Cat. 2).

Opposite:
Cat. 2
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
Man in a Red Turban, Restored, 1996
Oil on panel, 13 3/4 x 10 3/4 in.
Courtesy of RoseLee Goldberg and Dakota Jackson

Ill. 2
Jan van Eyck (Netherlandish, c. 1390–1441)
Portrait of a Man (Self Portrait?), 1433
Oil on panel, 10 5/16 x 7 1/2 in.
The National Gallery, London

Opposite:
Cat. 3
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
Marriage of Arnolfini, Restored, 1994
Oil on panel, 33 1/4 x 24 3/8 in.
Williams College Museum of Art,
Gift of Susan W. and Stephen D.
Paine, Class of 1954, 97.10.1

Ill. 3
Jan van Eyck (Netherlandish,
c. 1390–1441)
Portrait of Giovanni(?) Arnolfini and his Wife, 1434
Oil on panel, 32 3/8 x 23 9/16 in.
The National Gallery, London

Ill. 4
Joseph Cornell
(American, 1903–1972)
Soap Bubble Set, 1936.
Mixed media,
14 3/16 x 15 1/2 x 5 7/16 in.
Purchased through the gift of Henry and Walter Keney. 1938.27.
Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford
Art © The Joseph and Robert Cornell Memorial Foundation/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY
Photo: Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art / Art Resource, NY

Van Eyck's masterpiece, the *Ghent Altarpiece* of c. 1432, includ many different religious scenes and is flanked by life-size images of Adam and Eve, who stand turning toward one another in shallow niches. They are remarkable for their meticulous detail, subtle lighting and the unidealized conception of our first ancestors. Their expressions are solemn, even forlorn, as if reflecting on their original sin. Over the centuries these two figures have often been censored. In Gilje's versior their fig leaves flutter to the ground, as if in commentary on the ongoin debates about censorship (ill. 48). In a "restored" painting now in the Williams College Museum of Art, Gilje also addressed van Eyck's famo *Portrait of Giovanni(?) Arnolfini and his Wife* of 1434 (ill. 3). The paintir has long been admired for its astonishing illusionism and much discuss for its potential meaning and disguised symbolism. In recent years it has been discovered that the subject is probably Giovanni di Arrigo, or his cousin Giovanni di Nicolao Arnolfini, and an unknown wife. The Arnolfinis were a wealthy family from Lucca who settled in Bruges in the early fifteenth century. The double portrait has sometimes been assumed to be the pictorial equivalent of a marriage contract, especiall because of van Eyck's prominent inscription on the back wall, "Johanne de eyck fuit hic 1434" (Jan van Eyck was here 1434). In the original, the expensively dressed couple stands in a richly appointed room with a grandly covered bed, brass chandelier and a convex mirror decorated with medallions with scenes of the Passion. In the mirror one can see, addition to the couple, two figures standing in a doorway, presumably receiving Arnolfini's gestural greeting. Gilje's restoration is a creative anachronism (Cat. 3); she replaces the mirror with a small box by the twentieth-century artist, Joseph Cornell, *Untitled (Soap Bubble Set)* of 1936, which features, amon other objects, a map of the moon, an egg and a doll's head (ill. 4). For Gilje these objects allude to the hoped-for child of the yet-to-becon pregnant wife, while the box's enclosed space refers to the snug proportions and traditional order of pictorial depictions of Northern interiors.

Opposite:
Cat. 4
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
Portrait of a Carthusian, Restored,
1999
Oil on panel, 12 1/8 x 8 in.
Private Collection

The highly detailed paintings of Petrus Christus (c. 1410–1475/76) have often been misattributed to van Eyck, who has been thought to be his teacher but who was probably only one of several precursors. Gilje's *Portrait of a Carthusian, Restored* (Cat. 4) reprises Christus's illusionistic portrait of a bearded member of the contemplative order wearing his immaculate white cowl (ill. 5). But now in unsettling detail the monk is covered with flies, the traditional emblem of the *trompe l'oeil* artist. In yet another variation on a Christus, *Portrait of a Lady, Restored (Pierced)* (ill. 6), the impeccably dressed, almond-eyed aristocrat is updated with pierced jewelry in her nose, eyebrow, ear and lower lip. Gilje often introduces details of modern fashion into her images of traditional

Ill. 5
Petrus Christus (South Netherlandish, c. 1410–1475/76)
Portrait of a Carthusian, 1446
Oil on panel, 11 1/2 x 8 1/2 in.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Ill. 6
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
Portrait of a Lady, Restored (Pierced),
1995
Oil on panel, 8 3/4 x 11 3/4 in.
Private Collection

portraits, not only to underscore the attributes of contemporaneity but also to make works from a distant time current. The *Portrait of a Man with an Arrow* of c. 1470/75 by Hans Memling (c. 1435–1494) depicts the sitter bust-length with his hand just resting on the lower edge of the image (ill. 7). The small pin in his cap is decorated with an image of the Virgin on a crescent moon, possibly to announce his membership in a religious confraternity, while the arrow may symbolize his role in an archers' guild. However, in Gilje's restoration, the weapon becomes a handgun, once again introducing a topical social and political issue (Cat. 5).

Cat. 5
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
Portrait of a Man with an Arrow, Restored, 1996
Oil on panel, 12 1/2 x 10 1/8 in.
Private Collection

Ill. 7
Hans Memling (South Netherlandish, c. 1435–1494)
Portrait of a Man with an Arrow, c. 1470/75
Oil on panel, 12 9/16 x 10 3/16 in.
National Gallery of Art, Washington

Opposite:
Cat. 6
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
Portrait of an Old Man with a Child, Restored, 1993
Oil on panel, 24 3/4 x 18 1/4 in.
Collection of Nicholas Gordon

Ill. 8
Domenico Ghirlandaio (Italian, 1449–1494)
Portrait of an Old Man and a Boy, c. 1490
Oil on panel, 24 3/8 x 18 1/16 in.
Musée du Louvre, Paris

Ill. 9
René Magritte (Belgian, 1898–1967)
Le Château des Pyrenées (The Castle of the Pyrenees), 1961
Oil on canvas, 78 3/4 x 57 in.
Gift of Harry Torczyner, New York, to American Friends of the Israel Museum, Jerusalem
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Photo: Banque d'Images, ADAGP / Art Resource, NY

The Early Italian Renaissance artist, Domenico Ghirlandaio (1449–1494), had a talent for bringing a human dimension to his figures even when depicting religious subjects. One of the most sympathetic portraits of the Quattrocento is his *Portrait of an Old Man and a Boy* (ill. 8), possibly a grandfather and his grandson. The old man is portrayed with unapologetic realism, even including the rhinophyma on his nose, but also great tenderness. The sixteenth-century chronicler of artists' lives, Giorgio Vasari, informs us that Ghirlandaio was one of the first artists to largely abandon gilding in the background of his paintings. In the original of this picture, he introduced a window with a view of a mountainous landscape. In Gilje's "restored" version (Cat. 6), this view is replaced by a painting by the twentieth-century Surrealist, René Magritte, called *The Castle of the Pyrenees* of 1959 (ill. 9). The latter depicts a large boulder surmounted with a castle floating in the sky above a dark sea. While boulders were part of Magritte's repertoire of surrealistic objects, this particular painting was commissioned by one of his friends, a lawyer and poet, who in a letter specified that "over the dark sea or ocean there rises the rock of Hope topped by a fortress or castle." Thus in the juxtaposition of Modern and Renaissance art Gilje introduces free and unexpected associations.

As perhaps the most versatile and intellectually accomplished of all Renaissance artists, Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) has a special allure for Gilje. His early portrait of the young Ginevra de' Benci in the National Gallery of Art, Washington, possibly a marriage portrait, was painted when he was still apprenticed to Verrocchio and depicts the reportedly intellectual and literary sitter as somber and reserved (ill. 10). She appears before a juniper tree, and on the reverse of the panel is a juniper sprig with the Latin inscription VIRTUTEM FORMA DECORAT (Beauty Adorns Virtue). In the lower right, Gilje has inscribed the painting with the one surviving line of the sitter's poetry, "I ask your forgiveness and I am a mountain tiger." On her breast is a tattoo of a tiger bursting from her heart (Cat. 7). *Lady with an Ermine, Restored* (Cat. 8) is based on Leonardo's famous portrait in the Czartoryski Museum, Krakow, of c. 1489–90 (ill. 11). It has been assumed to depict the same woman as in the Leonardo in the Louvre, known as *La Belle Ferronnière*. Legend has it that she was Cecilia Gallerani, the mistress of Duke Ludovico Sforza, Leonardo's patron, and a member of the Order of the Ermine. The wonderfully alert stoat held so casually by the subject inspired Gilje to introduce yet another tattoo with a contemporary message: it reads, "Animals are not ours to eat, experiment on, or wear."

Opposite:
Cat. 7
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
Ginevra de' Benci, Restored, 1999
Oil on panel, 15 7/8 x 15 in.
Private Collection

Ill. 10
Leonardo da Vinci
(Italian, 1452–1519)
Ginevra de' Benci, c. 1474/1478
Oil on panel, 15 x 14 9/16 in.
National Gallery of Art, Washington

Cat. 8
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
Lady with an Ermine, Restored, 1997
Oil on panel, 15 3/4 x 21 7/8 in.
Courtesy of the Artist

Ill. 11
Leonardo da Vinci
(Italian, 1452–1519)
Lady with an Ermine, 1489–90
Oil on panel, 21 9/16 x 15 7/8 in.
Czartoryski Museum, Krakow

La Donna Velata, Restored (Cat. 9) is based on *La Donna Velata* of c. 1516 by Raphael in the Pitti Palace, Florence (ill. 12). The same sitter, presumed to be Margherita Luti, Raphael's Roman mistress, appears in the nude in *La Fornarina* (Bakeress) (Palazzo Barberini, Rome) and as the Virgin in the *Sistine Madonna* (Gemäldegalerie, Dresden). The perfectly balanced composition with the sumptuous white and gold gown and diaphanous veil framing the woman's lovely face is startlingly disrupted by the sitter's black eye—a stark admonition to the timelessness of violence against women. For an artist of Raphael's peerless grace and poise, such a revision is particularly jarring.

Opposite:
Cat. 9
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
La Donna Velata, Restored, 1995
Oil on linen, 33 1/2 x 25 1/4 in.
Collection of Christina Polischuk

Ill. 12
Raphael (Italian, 1483–1520)
La Donna Velata, c. 1516
Oil on canvas, 32 x 23 1/2 in.
Galleria Palatina (Palazzo Pitti), Florence

Ill. 13
Agnolo Bronzino (Italian, 1503–1572)
Lodovico Capponi, 1550–55
Oil on panel, 45 7/8 x 33 3/4 in.
The Frick Collection, New York

Cat. 10
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
Portrait of Lodovico Capponi, Restored, 1993
Oil on panel, 48 7/8 x 33 3/4 in.
Private Collection, New York

With its stylized refinement and sensuality, Mannerism had a special attraction for Gilje. Agnolo Bronzino (1503–1572) is a particular favorite. The *Portrait of Lodovico Capponi, Restored* (Cat. 10) takes its point of departure from the highly refined portrait by Bronzino of a young aristocrat who was a page in the Medici Court (ill. 13). A curious fashion of the era, his prominent codpiece advertizes his masculinity (and was once overpainted by a prudish owner), but Gilje again modernizes the figure by removing the white sleeve beneath his doublet to reveal a well-pumped arm with a macho tattoo. One of the most puzzling paintings in the history of Mannerism is the so-called *An Allegory with Venus and Cupid (Venus, Cupid, Folly and Time)* by Bronzino of c. 1545 in the National Gallery, London (ill. 14). It was commissioned by Cosimo de' Medici and is a highly erotic allegory posed in a shallow, frieze-like space with a crowd of squirming nudes. While several of the individual figures can be identified by their attributes, the overall symbolic program is still disputed. The central embrace of Venus and her conspicuously adolescent and oedipal son, Cupid, inspired Gilje to replace the figure of Time at the upper right with a portrait of Sigmund Freud, once again interjecting a modern, psychological interpretation to the scene (Cat. 11).

Cat. 11
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
Allegory of Venus, Restored, 1998
Oil on panel, 58 1/2 x 46 3/8 in.
Private Collection, New York

Ill. 14
Agnolo Bronzino (Italian, 1503–1572)
An Allegory with Venus and Cupid, c. 1545
Oil on panel, 57 1/2 x 45 3/4 in.
The National Gallery, London

Ill. 15
Albrecht Dürer (German, 1471–1528)
Bernhard von Reesen, 1521
Oil on panel, 17 15/16 x 12 3/8 in.
Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister,
Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden

Cat. 12
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
Portrait of Louise Bourgeois after Dürer's Portrait of Bernhard von Reesen, 2012
Oil on panel, 19 x 13 1/4 in.
Courtesy of the Artist

One of the greatest Northern Renaissance artists, Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528) was distinguished as both a painter and printmaker, portraying leading figures of his day. His portrait of Bernhard von Reesen (ill. 15) was commissioned by the sitter when he was thirty in 1520, a year before he died of the plague. A handsome and youthful art collector, von Reesen (1491–1521) was from a patrician family in Danzig. Dürer's image, with the sitter's black, broad-brimmed hat cropped at the sides of the composition and hands just visible at the bottom of the image, confers an immediacy on the figure. It may seem ironical that Gilje should model her *Portrait of Louise Bourgeois* (Cat. 12), the long-lived French-American sculptor (who died recently at the age of 98), on this youthful prototype, but the affable expression on her deeply lined face shares a vitality with its source. Gilje portrayed other artists in historical guise. One of the most successful is *Basquiat as Velázquez's Portrait of Juan de Pareja* (Cat. 13). The original in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, depicts the Moorish assistant of the famous Spanish painter, Diego Rodríquez de Silva y Velázquez (1599–1660). Juan de Pareja (c. 1606–c. 1670) began his life as a slave but was freed by Velázquez (ill. 16). Born in Brooklyn to Haitian and Puerto Rican parents, Jean-Michel Basquiat (1960–1988) was a gifted graffiti artist famous for his social commentaries on racism, class divisions and the abuse of power; he rose to prominence, collaborating with Andy Warhol, before dying prematurely of a heroin overdose at age 28.

Cat. 13
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
Basquiat as Velázquez's Portrait of Juan de Pareja, 2011
Oil on linen, 32 1/4 x 28 3/4 in.
Courtesy of the Artist

Ill. 16
Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez (Spanish, 1599–1660)
Juan de Pareja (c. 1606–c. 1670), 1650
Oil on canvas, 32 x 27 1/2 in.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

With its animation, drama and emotional power, seventeenth-century Baroque painting has a special attraction for Gilje. In addition to the *Basquiat as Velázquez's Portrait of Juan de Pareja*, she has painted several modern sitters in the guise of Baroque portraits, including the collector Douglas Cramer, in *Douglas Cramer and His Dog Sutton* (Cat. 14), who take as their model an early portrait by Anthony van Dyck (ill. 17); and the esteemed art historian, Leo Steinberg, whose portrait (see ill. 41) is derived from a famous late self-portrait by the great Flemish master, Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640). One of Rubens's most notorious portraits is the so-called *Het Pelsken*, in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, which depicts his voluptuous young wife, Helena Fourment (1614–1673), nude and full-length, clad in a fur wrap (ill. 18). The 53-year-old painter had married his 16-year-old wife in 1630 and they subsequently had five children. Many of his contemporaries recognized her as the model for many of the beautiful, ample women in his later paintings. Although Rubens took the pose for *Het Pelsken* from the classical sculptural ideal of the *Venus Pudica*, rarely has there been a more corporeal piece of painting, her dimpled flesh and the fur masterfully juxtaposed. In *Het Pelsken, Restored*, Gilje satirizes the tactile nature of the work by adding two large, male hands emerging from the sitter's wrap to clasp her torso and thigh (Cat. 15).

Ill. 17
Anthony van Dyck
(Flemish, 1599–1641)
Portrait of an Old Man, c. 1618
Oil on panel, 42 x 29 in.
Liechtenstein Museum, Vienna

Cat. 14
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
Douglas Cramer and His Dog Sutton, 2004
Oil on linen, 19 x 11 1/2 in.
Collection of Douglas S. Cramer

Cat. 15
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
Het Pelsken, Restored, 2001
Oil on panel, 69 3/4 x 33 1/2 in.
Bass Museum of Art, Gift of Hubert Bush and Douglas S. Cramer

Ill. 18
Peter Paul Rubens
(Flemish, 1577–1640)
Helena Fourment ("Het Pelsken"), c. 1636/1638
Oil on panel, 69 5/16 x 32 5/8 in.
Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

Cat. 16
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
Susanna and the Elders, Restored,
1998
Oil on linen, 67 1/2 x 47 1/2 in.
Addison Gallery of American Art,
Phillips Academy, Andover,
Massachusetts, museum purchase,
2011.49a

Cat. 16a
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
Susanna and the Elders, Restored (X-ray), 1998
Fifteen sheets of X-ray film mounted on Plexiglas, 67 x 47 in.
Addison Gallery of American Art,
Phillips Academy, Andover,
Massachusetts, museum purchase,
2011.49b

Gilje has repeatedly addressed paintings by Caravaggio (see Linda Nochlin's essay) and his followers, notably Artemisia Gentileschi (1593–c. 1651/1653). Daughter of Orazio Gentileschi, another follower of Caravaggio, Gentileschi was one of the most accomplished woman artists of her era. *Susanna and the Elders, Restored* replicates her original of 1610 in the Schönborn Collection, Pommersfelden, Germany (Cat. 16). Her earliest dated painting, it was created when the precocious artist was only 17 and depicts Susanna spied upon in her bath by the two leering elders, in a composition inspired by Rubens. The copy is faithful, but beneath the surface Gilje painted a different image of Susanna in lead white (which as a trained restorer she knew is only visible in X-rays), not simply repulsed by the shushing and menacing voyeurs but wielding a knife and screaming (Cat. 16a). Gentileschi has been the focus of feminist studies not only because (after she painted the *Susanna*) she was raped by the artist Agostino Tassi and mistreated in a subsequent trial, but also because her art champions strong, often victimized women with remarkably violent subjects, such as the Old Testament heroines Jael and Sisera, Esther and Judith. A recent painting by Gilje (Cat. 17) replaces Judith with a self-portrait and the Assyrian general, Holofernes, in Gentileschi's original of c. 1620 with a huge rooster in a graphic, satirical decapitation (ill. 19).

Cat. 17
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
Self-Portrait Slaying a Rooster after Artemisia Gentileschi's Judith Slaying Holofernes, 2012
Oil on linen, 79 1/2 x 65 1/4 in.
Courtesy of the Artist

Ill. 19
Artemisia Gentileschi
(Italian, 1593–1651/53)
Judith Slaying Holofernes, c. 1620
Oil on canvas, 78 5/16 x 63 11/16 in.
Uffizi Gallery, Florence

Opposite:
Cat. 18
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
Bad Bets - Blind Hurdy-Gurdy Banker after Georges de La Tour's Hurdy-Gurdy Player, 2012
Oil on linen, 64 5/8 x 42 in.
Courtesy of the Artist

Gilje has reprised several paintings by the French seventeenth-century realist, Georges de La Tour (c. 1593–1652). De La Tour was often inspired by rural figures from country life in his native Lorraine, which he would privilege by depicting life-size before a neutral background. On four occasions he painted a blind hurdy-gurdy player. In the painting in the Musée des Beaux-Arts, in Nantes of c. 1620–1630 the old man is seated with his carefully observed instrument caterwauling a tune from his sideways mouth (ill. 20). In Gilje's version, he is surrounded by gold bars and coins and chalked on the back wall are games of tick-tack-toe—a parody of the banking industry that brought on the recent economic meltdown (Cat. 18).

Ill. 20
Georges de La Tour
(French, c. 1593–1652)
The Hurdy-Gurdy Player, c. 1620–30
Oil on canvas, 63 7/8 x 41 3/8 in.
Musée des Beaux-Arts, Nantes

Ill. 21
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
Melva Bucksbaum as Girl with a Pearl Earring, 2010
Oil on linen, 23 x 19 in.
Collection of Melva Bucksbaum and Raymond Learsy

Opposite:
Cat. 19
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
Mistress and Maid, Restored, 1997
Oil on linen, 35 1/2 x 31 in.
Private Collection

Subtler are her variations on the rare works of Delft painter, Johannes Vermeer (1632–1675). She not only portrayed Melva Bucksbaum in the guise of Vermeer's famous *Girl with a Pearl Earring* in the Mauritshuis (ill. 21), but also satirized the Frick Collection's well-known epistolary painting (Cat. 19) by adding lipstick and nail polish to the still life of objects on the table before the mistress, who receives a letter. Gilje's interpretation of Vermeer's *The Concert* (Cat. 20), in the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum until it was stolen, is a sly commentary on the painting's fate: in place of the two paintings on the back wall hang empty frames. Eighteenth-century quotations are not as numerous in

Cat. 20
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
The Concert, Restored, 2000
Oil on linen, 28 1/2 x 25 1/2 in.
Private Collection

Ill. 22
François Boucher (French, 1703–1770)
Hercules and Omphale, 1735
Oil on canvas, 35 7/16 x 29 1/16 in.
Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts,
Moscow

Opposite:
Cat. 21
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
Hercules and Omphale, Restored,
2001
Oil on linen, 35 1/2 x 29 1/2 in.
Collection of the Ulrich Museum
of Art, Wichita State University,
Wichita, Kansas

Gilje's works as seventeenth- or nineteenth-century references, but she addressed the painting of Hercules and Omphale (Cat. 21) by the French Rococo master, François Boucher, of 1735 from the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow (ill. 22). For murdering a friend in a fit of madness, Hercules was sold as a slave to Omphale, Queen of Lydia, who soon took him as her lover. While in her service, Hercules became effeminate, wearing women's clothes and spinning; the distaff and lion's skin held by the two putti in the lower right allude to the story's tale of women's power over men and gender reversal. But much as in the Ghirlandaio discussed earlier, the addition at the back of a modern neon piece by Bruce Nauman, *The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths*, introduces the idea, as Gilje explains (see Naumann interview, p. 99), that love is a mystic truth that transforms us all.

Ill. 23
Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres
(French, 1780–1867)
Amédée-David, the Comte de Pastoret, 1823–26
Oil on canvas, 40 1/2 x 32 3/4 in.
The Art Institute of Chicago

Cat. 22
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
Robert Rosenblum as Ingres's Portrait of the Marquis de Pastoret, 2005
Oil on linen, 40 1/2 x 33 in.
Courtesy of Francis Naumann Gallery

The artist that Gilje has turned to most often was the great Neo-Classical master, Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (1780–1867). Student of Jacques-Louis David, Ingres sought to emphasize clarity, order and restraint in his art, turning to the traditions of Raphael and Poussin rather than the emotional art of Romanticism. When Gilje portrayed the renowned art historian Robert Rosenblum (Cat. 22), who had written a book on Ingres, she took as her inspiration his *Amédée-David, the Comte de Pastoret* of 1823–26 (ill. 23). The son of the Chancellor of France, de Pastoret was a learned aristocrat who wrote history and poetry. His elegantly crisp silhouette and the exquisite detail of his costume seem a fitting tribute to Rosenblum's excellent scholarship and distinguished prose. Gilje's portrait of Lowery Sims, Curator of the Museum of Arts and Design in New York and formerly Executive Director of the Studio Museum in Harlem (see Cat. 35), takes as its model Ingres's *Napoleon I*

on the Throne of 1806 (ill. 32). The sitter has a sense of humor and reportedly requested not only the source, who holds the scepter of Charlemagne, but also a shotgun (Robert Rosenblum first noted that the inspiration for Ingres's composition is *God the Father* in van Eyck's *Ghent Altarpiece*, which was then hanging with Napoleon's spoils in the Louvre). Gilje's *Comtesse d'Haussonville, Restored* (Cat. 23) takes as its inspiration Ingres's charming portrait of the Princess de Broglie (1818–1882) of 1845 in the Frick Collection (ill. 24). The sitter was an accomplished author and biographer, the granddaughter of Madame de Staël and an outspoken liberal. She leans casually against a mantel,

Cat. 23
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
Comtesse d'Haussonville, Restored, 1994–96
Oil on linen, 52 1/2 x 36 1/8 in.
Ethel and Elie Romano

Ill. 24
Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres
(French, 1780–1867)
Comtesse d'Haussonville, 1845
Oil on canvas, 51 7/8 x 36 1/4 in.
The Frick Collection, New York

Opposite:
Cat. 24
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
Le Violon d'Ingres, Restored, 1999
Oil on linen, 58 1/2 x 39 3/8 in.
Collection of Richard and Eileen Ekstract

Ill. 25
Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (French, 1780–1867)
The Bather (The Valpinçon Bather), 1808
Oil on canvas, 57 1/2 x 38 3/16 in.
Musée du Louvre, Paris

Ill. 26
Man Ray (American, 1890–1976)
Le Violon d'Ingres, 1924
Gelatin silver print, 11 5/8 x 8 15/16 in.
Private Collection
© 2013 Man Ray Trust / Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY / ADAGP, Paris
Photo: Bridgeman Art Library

having just discarded her wrap and opera glasses. But in place of her reflection in the mirror, Gilje has subversively inserted the image of a female bodybuilder. *Le Violon d'Ingres, Restored* (Cat. 24) is based on Ingres's lovely bather in the Louvre but again combines the older source with more recent art, adding the clef marks on her back inspired by Man Ray's famous photograph of his mistress (ills. 25 and 26). Ingres was one of the greatest nineteenth-century draftsmen, executing exquisite portraits in pencil. Gilje has in turn done a series of variants of Ingres's portrait drawings with whimsical additions—a portrait with Bruce Nauman's floating heads, a hybrid lion-eagle animal replacing a lap dog, Charles-François Mallet accompanied by a female snorkeler, Madame Bertin and an oversized bonnet filled with Barbie dolls, or Andy Warhol making a cameo appearance in a group portrait (Cats. 25, 26, 27, 28 and 29).

Cat. 25
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
John Russell, Sixth Duke of Bedford, Restored, 2000
Pencil on paper, 18 x 14 in.
Collection of Bernie Toale and Joe Zina, Boston, MA

Cat. 26
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
Mademoiselle Henriette-Ursule Claire (Thévenin?) and Her Dog Trim, Restored, 2000
Pencil on paper, 14 1/2 x 11 1/2 in.
Collection of Jasmine Lobe

Cat. 27
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
Charles-François Mallet, Restored, 2000
Pencil on paper, 14 1/2 x 11 1/2 in.
Private Collection

Cat. 28
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
Madame Louis-François Bertin, née Geneviève-Aimée-Victoire Boutard, Restored, 2000
Pencil on paper, 14 1/2 x 11 1/2 in.
Collection of Robert Dance

Cat. 29
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
Joseph Woodhead and His Wife, née Harriet Comber, and Her Brother, Henry George Wandesford Comber, Restored, 2000
Pencil on paper, 14 1/2 x 11 1/2 in.
Private Collection
Photo: Jetart Company www.jetart.biz

Opposite:
Cat. 30
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
Self-Portrait after Bouguereau's The Assault, 2012
Oil on linen, 61 1/4 x 41 1/2 in.
Courtesy of the Artist

The French nineteenth-century academic painter, William-Adolphe Bouguereau (1825–1905), was even more conservative and traditional than Ingres, painting highly refined and often sentimentally conceived mythological, Biblical or genre themes. Gilje's *Self-Portrait after Bouguereau's The Assault* (Cat. 30) is based on *The Assault* (originally called *Love's Awakening*) of 1898 in the Musée d'Orsay, Paris, which depicts a young woman with a swarm of startlingly large putti and recalls eighteenth-century works like those of Joseph-Marie Vien (ill. 27). The painting took its popular name from a reviewer who, when it was first exhibited, observed, "It's a veritable assault. Alas, the girl is besieged. The girl is smitten!" In Gilje's version Cupid's arrows are replaced by paint brushes and a palette to acknowledge her true love. Bouguereau's art was the avowed antipode to the Realist movement of Gustave Courbet and the Impressionists. However, Gilje has also created

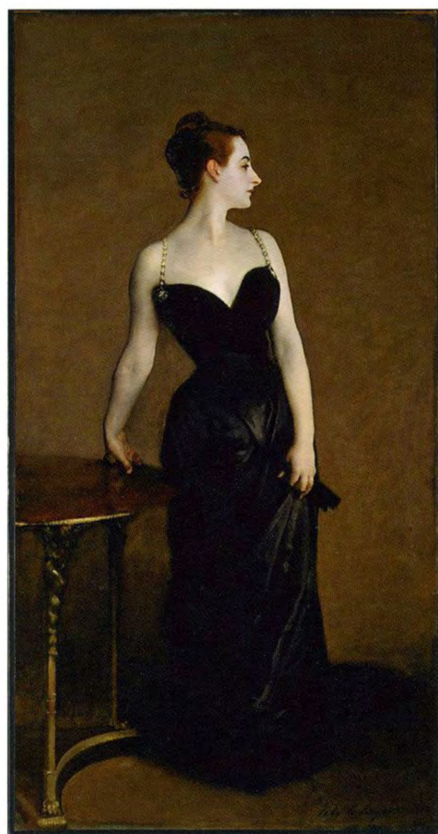
Ill. 27
William-Adolphe Bouguereau (French, 1825–1905)
The Assault, 1898
Oil on canvas, 61 3/8 x 41 5/8 in.
Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Cat. 31
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
Linda Nochlin at the Bar at the Folies-Bergère, 2005
Oil on linen, 37 5/8 x 50 7/8 in.
Courtesy of Francis Naumann Gallery

several works in the style of Courbet (see Nochlin's essay), Manet and Degas. Particularly successful is the portrait of *Linda Nochlin at the Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (Cats. 31 and 31a), based on Manet's canvas in the Courtauld Institute, London (ill. 28). Professor Nochlin, who is a pioneer of feminist art history and has written extensively on Manet, substitutes for the barmaid, Suzon, at the famous nightclub. Behind her is a mirror that reflects the audience enjoying the performers, including a trapeze artist whose legs are just visible at the upper left, and a mustachioed gentleman in a top hat who approaches the bar and, by implication, is the surrogate of the viewer. When portraying Robert Storr, Dean of the Yale School of Art, and his wife, Rosamund Morley, who plays the viola da gamba, Gilje turned to Edgar Degas's portrait of Manet and his wife (Kitakyushu Municipal Museum of Art, Japan), who was a pianist. The original canvas was dismembered and survives only as a fragment, with Mme. Manet severed from her instrument. Gilje followed the proportions of the original but also painted a new fragment to complete the revised image (ills. 42 and 43).

Cat. 31a
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
Linda Nochlin, 2006
Colored pencil on stained paper,
12 3/4 x 10 1/4 in.
Courtesy of Linda Nochlin

Ill. 28
Édouard Manet (French, 1832–1883)
A Bar at the Folies-Bergère, 1881–82
Oil on canvas, 37 13/16 x 51 3/16 in.
The Courtauld Gallery, London



Ill. 29
John Singer Sargent
(American, 1856–1925)
Madame X (Madame Pierre Gautreau), 1883–84
Oil on canvas, 82 1/8 x 43 1/4 in.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Cat. 32
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
Portrait of Toby Lewis as Madame X, 2004
Oil on linen, 82 1/2 x 43 1/4 in.
Collection of Toby Devan Lewis

Nineteenth-century American painting has also attracted Gilje. She painted the collector Toby Lewis (Cat. 32) in the guise of the portrait of Madame X (the French socialite, Mme. Pierre Gautreau) by John Singer Sargent (1856–1925). The painting depicts the subject in a black satin dress with jeweled straps, face in profile, her right arm torqued behind and resting on a table. Her white skin and plunging décolleté caused a minor scandal when it was first exhibited at the Paris Salon of 1884, indeed it damaged Sargent's career in France; but when he sold it to the Metropolitan in 1916, the painter declared that it was the best thing he had ever painted (ill. 29). Gilje also painted a series of 48 portraits after

Cat. 33
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
Michael Kimmelman after Eakins's The Thinker, 2006
Oil on linen, 81 x 40 5/8 in.
Courtesy of Francis Naumann Gallery

Cat. 33a
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
Michael Kimmelman, 2006
Colored pencil on stained paper, 14 x 11 in.
Courtesy of the Artist

Ill. 30
Thomas Eakins
(American, 1844–1916)
The Thinker: Portrait of Louis N. Kenton, 1900
Oil on canvas, 82 x 42 in.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Sargent (see ills. 34, 35 and 36), which took as their points of departure actual portraits of women by the master, but she depicted them half-length and in the nude, matching the model to the face. Their impact in the aggregate is greater than the sum of the parts. When Gilje turned to portray the *New York Times* art critic, Michael Kimmelman, (Cats. 33 and 33a) he selected the portrait of Louis N. Kenton of 1900 by Thomas Eakins (1844–1916). Known as "The Thinker," it depicts the artist's brother-in-law life-size, silhouetted against an indeterminate space, hands in pockets, with downcast eyes and lost in thought (ill. 30). For the author of the regular series of thoughtful articles in the *Times* called "Postcards," it is a fitting prototype.

Finally, the artist has rarely addressed twentieth-century works in her paintings, except as details in the background, but made an exception in depicting the collector and President of the Board of the Guggenheim Museum, Jennifer Stockman. Together with the sitter she chose *The Dancer* of 1916–1918, a late work by the Austrian symbolist painter and leader of the Vienna Secession movement, Gustav Klimt (1862–1918) (ill. 31). In the original, the unidentified dancer appears full-length in a colorfully patterned kimono, holding a bouquet of daffodils and surrounded by a background of flowers and small figures. In Gilje's portrait, she turned the garment's patterns and decorative background into a medley of details of art objects in the Stockman collection, once more updating and making current the art of the past (Cat. 34).

Ill. 31
Gustav Klimt (Austrian, 1862–1918)
The Dancer, 1916–18
Oil on canvas, 70 7/8 x 35 3/8 in.
Private Collection

Cat. 34
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
Portrait of Jennifer Blei Stockman after Gustav Klimt's The Dancer, 2012
Oil on linen, 72 x 34 1/4 in.
Courtesy of the Artist

Kathleen Gilje's Bold Challenge

John Yau

I.

When I state that Kathleen Gilje's relationship to art history is unlike that of any other contemporary artist, I am not being hyperbolic. In fact, I am stating the obvious, but sometimes that is the best place to begin. Gilje's engagement with art history, particularly with Old Masters, can be understood as follows: she is a conceptual artist who uses painting to reread well-known works from a feminist perspective. In her work, conceptual thinking and the practice of painting are inseparable.

Gilje's unique and complex understanding of art history was influenced by the years she spent in Italy (Rome and Naples) and New York, working as a restorer of Old Master paintings by artists such as Bellini, Caravaggio, Ribera, El Greco, Titian and Zurbarán. As a restorer, her job was to mimic an artist's unique style in order to help return a painting as closely as possible to its original state. Working as a restorer, originality was never the goal.

By applying brushes and paint to actual Old Master paintings—rather than viewing them from a respectful distance—Gilje gained a unique perspective on an artist's particular methods and use of materials. Her experience also demystified the works to the extent that she came to see them as vulnerable things made by imperfect individuals. While the works might have lost some of their aura, they impressed Gilje in other ways —the combination of genius and fallibility, for example, became more evident through her close examination of a painting's every detail. She learned that not all masterpieces are flawlessly realized at every point; that they are not in that regard perfect.

Having majored in art and literature while in college, Gilje continued to work at her painting during the time she was a restorer. Eventually she was able to synthesize her different, seemingly incommensurable passions—painting, restoration, reading and research—into a single, flexible approach that embraces both contemporary art and Old Master paintings. Through her ability to replicate an Old Master style, Gilje is able to bring together both past and present and use the collision between them to arrive at a new perspective. This is what sets her work apart from those contemporaries who use parody to suggest a rupture between present and past. Her understanding of the past is not from the same emotional and intellectual distance as that of her peers.

II.

In her "History Portraits," Cindy Sherman (b. 1954) made thirty-five large color photographs (c. 1989–90) in response to well-known paintings by European masters. This is what Sherman had to say about this body of work:

> When I was doing those history pictures I was living in Rome but never went to the churches and museums there. I worked out of books, with reproductions. It's an aspect of photography I appreciate conceptually: the idea that images can be reproduced and seen anytime, anywhere, by anyone.[1]

Sherman does not feel she needs to see the art because it is the reproduction that interests her. She is focused intently on the image and its surface, while Gilje is preoccupied with the work itself, with the intention of revealing what is hidden and unseen. As a restorer Gilje became familiar with all the layers that went into a finished work, from the underpainting to the final coat of varnish.

Sherman's response to Old Masters is often both mocking and disturbing—the image of a woman standing rather stiffly, with a misplaced, prosthetic breast held up to the swaddled infant in *Untitled #216*. Sherman's photograph underscores the misconceptions that many early Renaissance artists—almost all of whom were male—had about a woman's anatomy. It capitalizes on an earlier ignorance as it was visually recorded in well-known paintings. In Gilje's version of Raphael's painting, *La Donna Velata, Restored* (1995), the artist faithfully copied the Old Master painting, but gave the woman a black eye, reminding us that abuse has had a long, often hidden history (see Cat. 9).

Another difference between Sherman and Gilje's approach to subject matter is that the former is interested in exploring the grotesque, while the latter is concerned with the larger social context in which women existed. Both literally and metaphorically, Gilje's response to Old Masters goes beyond the surface. By admiring an Old Master painting, as well as using it as a lens with which to examine the continuing inequities between the sexes, she takes a very different approach to the past than Sherman and her other contemporaries.

Beginning in the early 1990s, when Gilje completed paintings such as *Portrait of Lodovico Capponi, Restored* (1993) (see Cat. 10), in which she faithfully redid the Bronzino portrait while adding a sexually explicit tattoo of a woman with spread legs to the young man's bare arm, she has "restored" paintings by Ingres, Vermeer, Raphael, Rembrandt and Artemisia Gentileschi. Technically, this requires her to paint a believable version of an Old Master work. Each of these restorations results in an intervention by Gilje, a thorough restating of the original painting. The motivation is both expansive and critical. Gilje wants to dislodge her source from its historical context and make it contemporary. By doing so, her paintings become a commentary on the social world in which the originals were made, as well as on our own.

Whereas Sherman's *Untitled #216* suggests a historical distance between now and then, Gilje's *La Donna Velata, Restored* advances the likelihood that

Cat. 9 (detail)
Cat. 10 (detail)

Cat. 23 (detail)

society has not evolved as much as many of us would like to think. Gilje's restorations are conceptually driven: she wants to retell history, to gain redemption and understanding for some of her subjects, while exposing others for who they are. The focus of her attention is women's long historical struggle to achieve autonomy.

Gilje often celebrates women's innate power, self-determination and hard-won independence. In her redoing of Ingres's *Comtesse d'Haussonville*, the artist used Robert Mapplethorpe's well-known photograph of the bodybuilder Lisa Lyon dressed in a bustier as the source for the Comtesse's reflection in the mirror (see Cat. 23). Gilje presents a woman as simultaneously feminine (demure and soft) and masculine (muscular and hard), transforming an exquisite nineteenth-century social portrait into a painting contemporaneous with society's changing understanding of gender roles. Yet the painting does not feel the least bit didactic. Its provocative and rather jolting conjoining opens up a space of reflection for the viewer to consider the different ways in which women are viewed.

Both in their making and their outcome, Gilje's paintings embody a very different response to the history of art and culture than the portraits of Kehinde Wiley (b. 1977), who employs workers to make his paintings of young African American men in heroic settings. By recasting his subjects in heroic poses derived from Old Master paintings while dressing them in contemporary clothes, Wiley uncouples the present from the past. Gilje, on the other hand, believes that the transformation of women remains an incomplete project. It is this sense of incompleteness that drives her work forward and pushes her to ever more challenging subjects, such as her recent reworking of *Judith Slaying Holofernes* (c. 1620) by Artemisia Gentileschi (1593–1651/53), the most accomplished woman artist of the Renaissance (see ill. 19).

In her "restorations," Gilje both preserves the original composition by staying true to the image while introducing fresh, often jarring details. By doing so, she asks viewers to reconsider their opinions on a wide range of subjects, from sexuality and society's definition of women to child abuse and our treatment of animals. At the same time, by working in the medium of paint without relying on the handiwork of others, as does Kehinde Wiley, Gilje challenges the postmodern notion that painting and craftsmanship are obsolete. In her work, conceptual thinking, painting and craft are inseparable and therefore not to be ignored. By embedding women's issues so deeply in her work, Gilje advances the view that those who declare that painting is dead continue to marginalize women.

III.

For Gilje, Artemisia Gentileschi holds a special significance. In restoring two of her renowned paintings, Gilje both enhances and interprets their underlying theme, which is the constant power struggle between men and women. In contrast to Sherman, who has shied away from this difficult subject throughout her career, Gilje goes right at it, particularly when restoring works by Gentileschi.

Susanna and the Elders, Restored (1998; Cat. 16) is Gilje's scrupulous copy of a Gentileschi painting, dated 1610. In both the Gentileschi and Gilje paintings the young Susanna spurns the sexual advances of two older men. Like the Biblical Susanna, Gentileschi had endured such advances, and worse. When she was nineteen, her father accused her teacher, Agostino Tassi, of raping her, and the court found him guilty. Gentileschi's painting is understandably sympathetic to the young Susanna and her attempt to spurn the unwanted attention of the older men. Gilje goes a step further.

Next to her version of the Gentileschi painting, Gilje has placed an X-ray of her own underpainting, which shows a very different scene from the finished version. Working in lead white, which was used by Old Masters for their underpaintings, something Gilje would have known from her work as a restorer, she depicted Susanna wielding a knife and defending herself against the men's violent aggression. On a literal and metaphorical level, Gilje's pairing of the painting and X-ray evokes the untold story as well as the cover-up, a male-dominated society's attempt to excuse the inexcusable (see Cat. 16a).

Cat. 16a (detail)

Gilje's painterly ambition is inseparable from her desire to challenge perceived notions of art history—the story of Susanna depicted by men, who might not be completely understanding of her plight. Rather than make paintings about paintings, she considers the social conventions in which the work was originally made. Art, she reminds us, is not separate from the world, however much we might try and cloister it in a museum or gallery.

More than a decade after Gilje dealt with the theme of violence in *Susanna and the Elders, Restored*, she returned to it in *Self-Portrait Slaying a Rooster after Artemisia Gentileschi's Judith Slaying Holofernes* (2012). As with her earlier work, Gilje reads Gentileschi's painting from a feminist perspective, challenging how male artists have dealt with the subject. The primary source of the many paintings on this subject is the Biblical story of the beautiful widow, Judith, who saves Israel from an Assyrian general, Holofernes, by getting him drunk and then decapitating him. At the core of this Biblical tale is feminine sexuality transforming itself from an object of desire into an act of violent "male" aggression—woman as powerful protector. It is a subject that many renowned male artists have depicted, including Caravaggio, Giorgione, Lucas Cranach the Elder, Michelangelo, Goya, Stuck and Klimt.

Cat. 17 (detail)

Artemisia Gentileschi's version is comparable to any of the ones I have listed and is by far the most direct in its depiction of violence. According to Mary Garrard, Gentileschi's biographer, the artist depicted herself as Judith and her rapist Agostino Tassi as Holofernes. In Gentileschi's painting, Judith and her maid are the aggressors who are able to overcome the general and, despite his struggle to survive, begin to decapitate him. On another level, the painting can be read as the narrative of two women banding together in order to overpower their oppressor. If Garrard is right in her speculation, then Gentileschi's painting can also be read as the explicit staging of a revenge fantasy—a loaded subject seldom discussed in terms of women artists.

In Gilje's restaging of the Gentileschi painting, the artist substitutes a larger-than-life-size rooster for Holofernes. The other change she makes is that she replaces Gentileschi's possible self-portrait with her own. The rooster can be read as Gilje's symbol of any repressive, overbearing male given to constant crowing. At the same time, by replacing Holofernes with a giant rooster, Gilje adds a powerful visual note of macabre humor, something we have not encountered in her earlier work. The rooster elevates the painting into the realm of allegory, compelling viewers to unravel its possible meanings (see Cat. 17).

In her work, Gilje defines "looking" as both an act of unraveling and discovering. As viewers, we do not simply see what is in front of our eyes; we must also read what we are looking at. For example, there is the X-ray of the underpainting in her *Susanna and the Elders, Restored*. Since the outset of her career, she has rejected the aesthetic credo as summed up by Frank Stella: "What you see is what you see." [2] She knows there is more to art and life than what is on the surface.

IV.

In another group of paintings, Gilje revises well-known portraits by artists as different as Thomas Eakins, John Singer Sargent, Diego Velázquez, Gustav Klimt and Jacopo da Pontormo by replacing the faces of the historical figures in their paintings with those of contemporaries, who are often artists, critics, art historians and collectors. In many cases it is the sitter who determines the choice of the painting. In accordance with his wishes, Gilje substituted the *New York Times* art critic Michael Kimmelman for the standing figure in Eakins's full-length portrait, *The Thinker: Portrait of Louis N. Kenton* (1900; see Cat. 33). The art historian Linda Nochlin chose to be the barmaid in Édouard Manet's *A Bar at the Folies-Bergére* (1881–82; see Cat. 31).

The art historian and curator Lowery Sims chose to be Napoleon in Ingres's 1806 portrait of *Napoleon I on the Throne* (ill. 32), but with the addition of a rifle (Cat. 35). Both the original pose and the imperial attributes Napoleon is holding bear an uncanny resemblance to the famous photograph of the Black Panther leader Huey P. Newton sitting in a rattan chair holding a rifle in one hand and a spear in the other (ill. 33). If Sims, who is African American, realized the similarity between the photograph of Newton and Ingres's portrait—which I suspect she did—she was able to underscore that parallel with Gilje's help. In this sense the painting is a collaboration and a critique, which challenges our common understanding of portraits.

In both her "restored" paintings and "revised" portraits, Gilje is brash and respectful, imaginative and rigorous. Exactitude and change go hand in hand. Rather than appropriating, parodying or citing works by other artists—which are common postmodern practices—Gilje brings them into the present through substitution and updating. Together, her "restored" and "revised" paintings form an imaginative oeuvre that defies categorization. In her "revised" portraits, she has reinvented the genre by going to the opposite end of the spectrum from the last innovative portraitist, Chuck Close (b. 1940).

In place of the photographic verisimilitude that Close achieved in his early, justly famous and emotionally neutral black-and-white portraits, Gilje brings together the sitter's fantasy life with well-known historical masterpieces to arrive at something that feels very contemporary—the desire to be both ourselves and someone else. If you could insert yourself into any painting, which one would you choose? It is a loaded question, at once direct and fraught with possibilities. For doesn't your choice become an avenue for revealing yourself? Is it not a kind of confession? Certainly, a lot remains to be written about the various choices Gilje's subjects have chosen.

At the same time, in her "restored" paintings Gilje has proven herself to be a social critic who is remarkably free of didacticism. Initially hooked on the combination of craftsmanship and provocation—one that is certainly oriented toward very different concerns than those of John Currin (b. 1962)—Gilje can be said to have mounted a strong critical alternative to those artists who continue to mine the misogynistic tropes society finds entertaining. Whereas Currin has depicted bedridden and anorexic-looking women, Gilje's women are strong heroines and self-sufficient beings.

Opposite:
Cat. 35
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
Lowery Sims as Ingres's Napoleon with a Gun, 2006
Oil on linen, 84 3/4 x 57 1/2 in.
Collection of Melva Bucksbaum and Raymond Learsy

Ill. 32
Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (French, 1780–1867)
Napoleon I on the Throne, 1806
Oil on canvas,
102 3/8 x 64 3/16 in.
Musée de l'Armée, Paris

Ill. 33
Eldridge Cleaver (American, 1935–1998)
Untitled (Huey P. Newton in a Wicker Peacock Chair), 1967
© The Dr. Huey P. Newton Foundation Inc.

V.

In the series, *48 Portraits: Sargent's Women, Restored* (2007–2008), Gilje cleared and claimed a space for herself that cannot be reduced to a simple narrative, and, at the same time, contributed a body of irrefutable evidence to the highly contested field of painting. She did so by completing a group of 48 full-color portraits of women as both a challenge and an alternative to Gerhard Richter's widely-known *48 Portraits* (1971–1972), which were based on black-and-white photographs of highly acclaimed men he found in an encyclopedia. In a sense, this is what Gilje has been doing all along in her work: revising history in order to expose the prejudices embedded in the initial telling (ills. 34, 35 and 36).

And, if that is not enough, Gilje's *48 Portraits* are first and foremost views of the heads and torsos of bare-breasted women. However else we see them, it is to this fact that we must inevitably return. In doing so, we must acknowledge that her subjects are not horrified by the flesh and the erotic, but in fact quietly celebrate them. They are women who look back at the viewer proudly. This alone distinguishes Gilje's portraits from Richter's depictions of suited, severe, tight-lipped men (ill. 37).

In electing to use John Singer Sargent's portraits of women as the focus of her investigation, Gilje chose a late nineteenth-century artist who gained fame as a portraitist, particularly of women from the upper classes of England and France. Sargent was not an innovative modernist, though he learned from the Impressionists and was friends with a number of radical artists, including Claude Monet and Auguste Rodin. Gilje chose the subjects that she would "restore" from paintings that Sargent did between 1878 and 1912, a thirty-four-year

Ill. 34
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
Mrs. Fisk Warren, Restored (48 Portraits: Sargent's Women, Restored), 2007–2008
Oil on linen, 25 x 20 in.

Ill. 35
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
Louise Burckhardt, Restored (48 Portraits: Sargent's Women, Restored), 2007–2008
Oil on linen, 25 x 22 in.

Ill. 36
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
Betty Wertheimer, Restored (48 Portraits: Sargent's Women, Restored), 2007–2008
Oil on linen, 25 x 20 in.

stretch that parallels the challenges to taste mounted by Impressionism, Fauvism, Cubism, and Futurism. Little of it affected Sargent, whose world was a narrow social realm largely populated by the titled and the wealthy. For the most part, his subjects were married to rich men or were the daughters of financially successful families. In contrast to his friend Monet, Sargent focused enormous amounts of energy on securing commissions to do portraits and, in this regard, is a precursor to Andy Warhol.

In using an encyclopedia as a source, Richter chose a book that claims to be objective and comprehensive, and thus positions itself as something society could collectively agree upon. His slightly blurred portraits are of men born in the nineteenth century (with four exceptions who were born at or near the beginning of the twentieth century). Made up of European and American intellectuals, they include writers, scientists, composers and philosophers, but neither artists nor architects.

While there seems to be no hierarchy or clear reasoning to Richter's choices, we are also unsure of who was included in (or left out of) the encyclopedia that functioned as his source. He does portraits of the writers H.G. Wells, John Dos Passos and Saint-John Perse, for example, but leaves out James Joyce, William Butler Yeats, William Faulkner and Marcel Proust. Other figures have faded into obscurity and their names are no longer as recognizable as they once might have been. An encyclopedia is not impervious to time and history, as Richter must have known. It is an interpretation rather than a collection of indisputable facts.

Sargent painted portraits ranging from stately full-length poses to smaller seated ones. No doubt their size was determined by the size of his commission. Bigger was not a sign of artistic ambition. More likely, it simply meant that the owner had deeper pockets and more money to spend. The subjects are often known by their married names. In most cases, their names do not strike any bells. We know about these women because Sargent painted them. Rather than being defined by what they had achieved in the world of science,

Ill. 37
Gerhard Richter (German, b. 1932)
48 Portraits, Igor Strawinsky, 1882–1971, 1971–72
Oil on canvas, 27 1/2 x 21 9/16 in.
Museum Ludwig, Cologne
© Gerhard Richter, 2013
Photo: Gerhard Richter Atelier

philosophy or the arts, they have married wealthy men who can afford to commission their portraits. Instead of transcending their time and place, they are part of the fabric of history. Therein lies one challenge Gilje makes to Richter and other male painters.

Gilje has a deep-seated argument with the same social mechanisms that Richter seems to provisionally accept, which neither offered women similar chances nor gave them as many opportunities to contribute to culture. There are notable exceptions, of course, but those examples should not be taken as proof that society was equally open to men and women. It is highly unlikely that the encyclopedia Richter used would have had an equally large number of accomplished women for Gilje to choose from. Rather, Sargent's women are caught in their circumstances, however privileged they might be. Their cages might be gilded, but they are cages nevertheless.

Gilje never calls attention to the changes or interventions she makes. We do not see her paintings as copies or another example of photorealism. In removing the women's clothes, or "restoring" them, as the series's title makes plain, the artist extricates them from their social positions, effectively liberating them from their imprisonment, which she seems to be equating with the nineteenth-century institution of marriage.

Gilje's argument goes deeper than this. While she and Richter use ready-made images, she does not emphasize that hers are mediated. They are not paintings of photographs and it is not apparent that they are paintings of paintings because technically they are not. They are painted interventions, a precise and expansive revisioning of history. They are also portraits of torsos based on direct observation.

By removing the women from their social circumstances, Gilje dares viewers to see her subjects anew and full of untapped potential, to see Sargent's women differently, to make a break with the past and to understand it differently. Consistent with her other work, *48 Portraits: Sargent's Women, Restored* is concerned with social circumstances. In this regard, Gilje's critique extends to both Warhol and Elizabeth Peyton, both social portraitists who are content to maintain the status quo.

As in her other work, where she becomes Vermeer, Velázquez, Klimt, Artemisia Gentileschi, Ingres and Bouguereau, Gilje seems to be able to effortlessly submerge herself in each of Sargent's paintings and become him at different moments in his career without ever losing her own identity. In this sense, Gilje has never settled into a painterly or signature style.

At the same time, her paint handling never sinks into parody or slavish copying. There is freshness to the work and the women, who seem like our contemporaries. They exist in the present tense, which is the legacy of Abstract Expressionism and Jackson Pollock. And by working in ways associated with renowned male artists, from Bellini and Caravaggio to Eakins, Sargent and Magritte, isn't Gilje pointing out that she can paint as well as any man?

This is the other argument that Gilje has with those who declare that painting is dead or believe that it is unable to embody an imaginative intervention and critique. Refusing to align herself with any external agendas, she has steadfastly set her own course through painting's contested field. By becoming someone else, in this case John Singer Sargent, an immensely talented yet problematic painter, she is able to free a group of women from their social constraints. This, of course, is the dream of painting—to be free to go its own way without devolving into a shell of its former self. That Gilje does this through the acuity of her intelligence and paint handling is a remarkable achievement.

This is what is so clearly Gilje's strength: from *La Donna Velata, Restored* and the series *48 Portraits: Sargent's Women, Restored*, to the recent *Self-Portrait Slaying a Rooster after Artemisia Gentileschi's Judith Slaying Holofernes*, her work is incontestable proof that conceptual intelligence and insight can be inseparable from the act of painting. Gilje "restores" both the women and the art of painting to the realm of imagination and open-ended possibility, challenging the patrilineal narrative that painting died in the early 1960s, with the rise of Andy Warhol. As she has done throughout her career, Gilje challenges the narrative of painting's death by becoming someone else. In this case, she does so by recreating Sargent, but without social pretense, the most unlikely outcome imaginable. By revising his paintings, she liberates him from his self-imposed bondage as well as transforms him into something he never was, a radical artist.

1 Michael Kimmelman, "At the Met with Cindy Sherman; Portraitist in the Halls of her Artistic Ancestors," *New York Times*, May 19, 1995: B16.

2 Donald Judd and Frank Stella, "Questions to Stella and Judd." Interview by Bruce Glaser and edited by Lucy R. Lippard. *Art News* 65 (September 1966): 55–61.

Seeing Beneath the Surface

Linda Nochlin[1]

Opposite:
Ill. 38
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
Woman with a Parrot, Restored, 2001
Oil on linen, 51 x 77 in.

Ill. 38a
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
Woman with a Parrot, Restored (X-ray), 2001
X-ray film mounted on Plexiglas,
50 x 75 1/2 in.

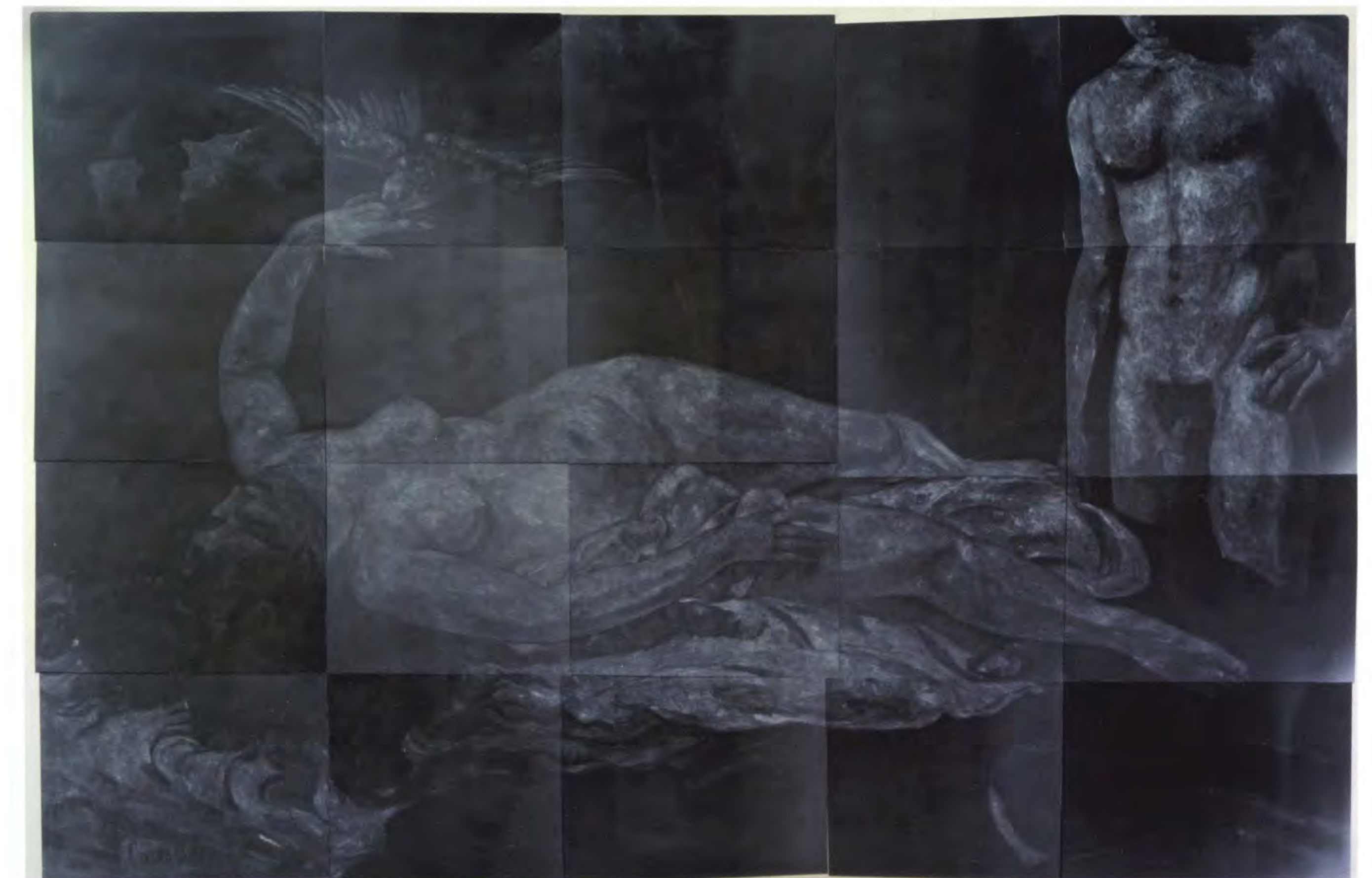
Kathleen Gilje's re-creations of iconic paintings—flawlessly executed and slyly doctored—challenge the old boys' club of traditional art history. Fortified with dead-on parodies of academic discourse, her travesties combine satire with visual panache.

In her 2001 exhibition at New York's Gorney Bravin & Lee Gallery, Kathleen Gilje showed utterly convincing full-scale replicas of nudes by such art-historical superstars as Rembrandt, Rubens and Courbet. Yet despite an almost frightening technical prowess acquired during years of practice as a conservator of Old Master paintings, Gilje is as much a conceptual artist as she is a dyed-in-the-wool painter. Her show revealed the work to be an art of ideas at the same time that it is a tour de force of technical bravura; or, rather, idea and materiality coincide so neatly in Gilje's work that at times we do not know we are being fooled, both visually and conceptually, until the spell wears off. But we are being deceived to some end: the subtle and not-so-subtle alterations Gilje wreaks on the time-honored icons of Western painting make us think and see differently. These new incarnations of old masterpieces, "contemporary restorations," as Gilje calls them, seem to reveal the hidden implications of the works themselves, implications that, for the most part, only a present-day feminist would be privy to.

Yet this is not merely a feminist project. On the contrary, the work provides an answer to a very different kind of question. Can we ever look at the Old Masters with new eyes, see the great works of the past with virgin vision, as though for the first time? Gilje's thought-provoking "restorations" shock us, gently or blatantly, into doing just that.

Perhaps the most striking work in that show, especially if you happen to be a Courbet specialist, was Gilje's absolutely accurate version of the artist's lush and lascivious nude, *Woman with a Parrot*, one of the treasures of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Titled *Woman with a Parrot, Restored* (2001), it is accompanied by an X-ray that reveals a startling pentimento: under the banal vertical of the parrot's perch is another scenario, and a much more exciting one, in the shape of a well-set-up young male nude (ills. 38 and 38a).

Gilje also added a tongue-in-cheek wall text (which must be considered as much a part of the work as the painting and the X-ray), transforming the project from mere playful *tricherie* to a more serious undermining of art-historical doctrine. Gilje, in the role of academic scholar, takes seriously Michael Fried's reference to "Courbet's struggle with his own spectatorship." Alluding to the male figure, art historian



Gilje argued, "This remarkable presence not only resolves the nagging problem of the painting's composition, but also the problem that has plagued viewers as to the actual orientation of model and painter, Fried insisting that Courbet could not have painted the woman's face without himself having approximated the position of the newly revealed figure." Assuring us that the nude young male is indeed Courbet, the wall text went on to tell us why he had to disappear in the final version: he realized, perhaps, that "he had *gone too far*" and, "having put himself into the painting, Courbet ... took himself out again."

The wall text concluded with a neat nugget of psychoanalytic "theory," complete with a trendy reference to the phallus and the gaze: "In a countervailing act of self-abnegation, Courbet replaced the portrait of himself—an embodiment of youthful virility ... with the portrait of a stick. The phallus stands, but desiccated, withered, as if to atone for the imperium of a gaze the painter finds it, finally, impossible to shake. The restored painting testifies nevertheless to the extent to which even the most conventional appearing of Courbet's nudes is scarred by the painter's struggle with that most fundamental of painterly problems, the very act of beholding itself." The wall text should no more be taken as a total put-down of contemporary art history than Gilje's replicas should be seen as complete rejections of the art of the past. Far from it. She just uses both to call attention to the generally unexamined assumptions common to both painting and text.

Perhaps the most ambitious effort in this conceptual direction was a 1997 collaboration at the MIT List Visual Arts Center between Gilje and Joseph Grigely, word artist and professor of art and critical theory at the University of Michigan, that involved a "newly discovered" version of Caravaggio's *Musicians*. In a catalogue essay liberally studded with erudite endnotes, Grigely-as-art-historian convincingly supported the existence of another, quite different image beneath the surface of the painting, one that is disclosed in Gilje's X-ray. In the subsurface image, a mirror reveals that the foreground boy is not singing but masturbating. "Instead of grasping a love madrigal in his left hand, he grasps a metonym of this madrigal: his erect penis," declared the scholarly text. Combining art-historical fact and deconstructive fiction, the collaboration worked its magic. The show even included a mock reconstruction of the art historian's cluttered office, replete with slide carousels and coffee cups as well as relevant books and articles (ills 39 and 39a).

In a solo exhibition at the Williams College Museum of Art, also in 1997, the scholarly apparatus was less prominent although still

Opposite:
Ill. 39
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
The Musicians, Restored, 1993
Oil on linen, 34 5/8 x 47 1/16 in.

Ill. 39a
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
The Musicians, Restored (X-ray), 1993
X-ray film mounted on Plexiglas,
33 x 46 in.

Ill. 40
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
Portrait of Cardinal Niño de Guevara, Grand Inquisitor, Restored, 1993
Oil on linen, 67 7/8 x 42 3/8 in.

present in the form of "comparative" reproductions of the originals of the newly "restored" works. Among the memorable images in that show, each of which was constructed with meticulous attention to detail and technique, was a 1994–96 version of Ingres's elegant portrait of the Comtesse d'Haussonville, built up in the layers of glaze habitually employed by this nineteenth-century artist. But in the mirror behind the comtesse is reflected not the back of the subject, but a startling image of female bodybuilder Lisa Lyon as photographed by Robert Mapplethorpe, one fetishized image substituting for another (see Cat. 23). This might suggest a rather different and less passive comtesse, who was, in fact, a productive historian in private life.

Among other works in the Williams College show that more or less spoke for themselves without accompanying texts were versions of Raphael's suave *La Donna Velata* with a black eye (1995; see Cat. 9) and El Greco's famous portrait of the Grand Inquisitor, Cardinal Fernando Niño de Guevara, now seated before Andy Warhol's *Orange Disaster*, which includes multiple images of a photograph of an electric chair (1993; ill. 40). About this "restoration," Gilje said in the catalogue, "You see, the electric chair is in exactly the same three-quarter turned position as the Inquisitor's throne ... Visually, the most horrifying thing about this painting to me is that there is such calm masking on this man's destructiveness." Although it is usually a sexual innuendo that is revealed by Gilje's additions, it may, as this powerful image demonstrates, be a political one as well.

Gilje has "restored" a painting by a woman only once, to my knowledge.[2] Her version of Artemisia Gentileschi's Old Testament subject, *Susanna and the Elders, Restored* (1998), was on view at the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, D.C. from October 2001 to January 2002 (see Cat. 16). The X-ray of what lies beneath the cowering Susanna shows a powerful, shrieking, knife-wielding Susanna, but the didactic and factual text in the accompanying brochure (authored in this case by critic Laura Cottingham), far from encouraging us to accept the underlying figure as Artemisia's own, destroyed the X-ray's illusion that a more militant Artemisia was registered beneath the visible surface (see Cat 16a). We don't want to know that Kathleen Gilje, modern "restoration" artist, created a furious and vengeful Susanna beneath the conventional image. We want to believe that the victimized Artemisia did it herself, acting out her retribution in pictorial form against the man who raped her. Gilje's images work best in a setting of textual complicity, not scholarly literalism.

In the 2001 Gorney Bravin & Lee exhibition, Gilje combined painting and text to great effect in revisions of several other major works besides the Courbet. Most striking was a seductive *Het Pelsken, Restored* (2001), a version of Peter Paul Rubens's seminude portrait of his 16-year-old bride (Sir Peter Paul was 53 at the time) clutching a fur coat around her, with the addition here of a pair of avid, masculine hands grasping at her rounded body (see Cat. 15). Gilje's accompanying text maintained that "Helena in *Het Pelsken* is doubly possessed: as wife, *by social man*, by Sir Peter Paul Rubens, Lord of Steen; as sexual body ... *by the beast*." This feminist reading is particularly interesting in light of the fact that John Berger, many years ago in his *Looking at Pictures*, selected this nude image as a relatively benign one, demonstrating Rubens's pride in and affection for his young bride. Gilje will have none of it. "The painting says: 'This woman is *universally desirable*.' The painting says: 'She is *mine*.' The painting says: '*I* am Rubens!'" So proclaimed Gilje in the wall label. The clutching hands say the rest.

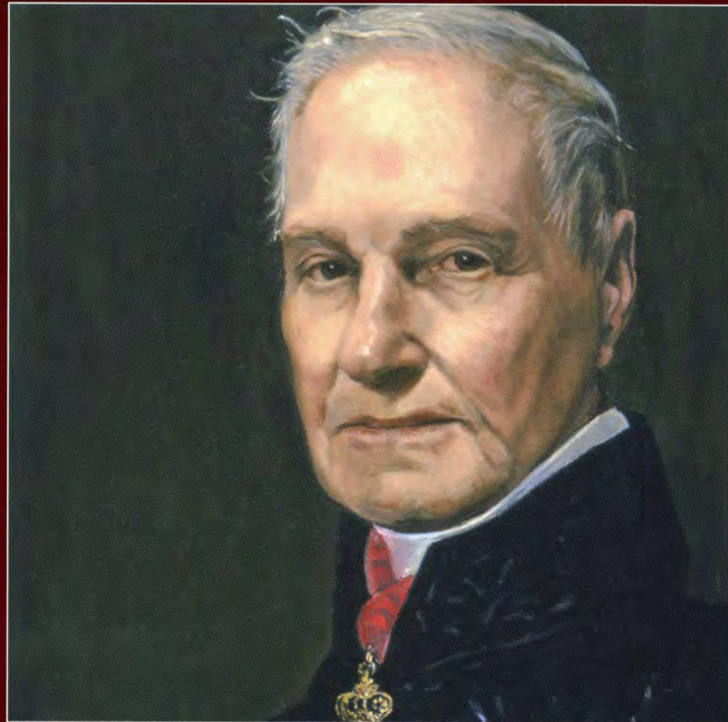
The other large painting with text in that show was a version of Rembrandt's *Danaë* (in the Hermitage), in which Gilje commemorates the 1985 attack on this work by a man who threw acid on it, destroying about 30 percent of the canvas. An amorphous white blotch, somewhat like ectoplasm, startlingly mars the upper left-hand portion of Gilje's *Danaë, Restored* (2001). The artist astutely commented, "By replacing the painting's 'golden semen' here with the acid that literally and figuratively takes its place, we are also forced to ask whether the arm Danaë raises—and which historically has not been seen as welcoming the god—has not from the outset been raised rather to ward off an assault?" Shower of gold or acid, ancient god or modern madman: they are all equivalent in the kingdom of violence toward women.

Lastly, I would like to consider some of the small, textless images that were on view at the gallery, representations of individual women that make their point in both visual and conceptual terms. All of them were nudes and convincing as renderings of specific persons. In the touching *Portrait of a Young Lady, Restored (Love)*, 2001, a prim and proper Memling sitter with conical hat and wispy, transparent veil is transformed into a Catherine Opie subject by the blood-rimmed word "love" cut into her left arm. For those familiar with Opie's work, the reference helps emphasize the latent androgyny of the original as well as the restoration, the boyishness of the homely face with its pulled-back hair and protruding ear. In still another work from this group, *Portrait of a Lady, Restored (Lady Lisa)*, 2000, which replicates a Rogier van der Weyden work, a pair of masculine-looking hands enter the scene, pinching the woman's exposed nipples and, at the same time, suggesting one of Stieglitz's portraits of Georgia O'Keeffe, where the subject is represented grasping her own breasts.

In these single-figure works, it is simply the bodies of women that are at stake—displayed, gripped, wounded—and they may be the images that touch us most with their pathos, even as they startle us with their bluntness. In a rather dismissive review of the show in the *New York Times*, critic Ken Johnson reproached Gilje for remaining "a kind of dutiful daughter," her conceptual interventions not venturing "much beyond the pale of academic respectability," and he urges her to be more like Peter Saul or Robert Colescott. Johnson has it all wrong. Gilje is badder than those overt parodists, because her wickedness is bound up in the very reality of the Great Masterpieces themselves and in the Great Minds who interpret them. These are fierce and often funny paintings, offering intense visual pleasure—at a high price indeed.

1 Reprinted with permission from Linda Nochlin, "Seeing Beneath the Surface," *Art in America* 90, no. 3 (March 2002): 118-121.

2 Since the writing of this review, Gilje has completed a second appropriation after Artemisia Gentileschi, titled *Self-Portrait Slaying a Rooster after Artemisia Gentileschi's Judith Slaying Holofernes* (2012).



Kathleen Gilje's Reincarnations

Robert Rosenblum[1]

Opposite:
Ill. 41
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
Leo Steinberg as a Peter Paul Rubens Self-Portrait, 2005
Oil on linen, 44 x 34 1/2 in.

Back in the twentieth century, modern art seemed to look straight ahead, eyes on the windshield of the future, speeding away from the past. But in the last decades, younger generations have begun to look into their rear-view mirrors, fascinated rather than burdened by the enormous weight of art history. In recent decades, more and more artists have turned to dead and buried art, whether as recent as Barnett Newman or as ancient as Pompeii, resurrecting it in endlessly surprising ways. By now we have seen everything from Caravaggio's *Medusa* to Goya's *Disasters of War* shift tenses from past to present.

Within these waves of neo/retro art history, portraiture, once at the bottom of the ladder of twentieth-century art, looms large, a point that could not be made better than in a current anthology of New York art-world personalities by Kathleen Gilje, who, with her long professional experience as a hands-on conservator of Old Master paintings, seems to be able to clone just about any oil on canvas, whether by Bronzino or Courbet. Being part of this group of sitters, I must put my cards on the table and tell my own somewhat eerie story about the portrait Gilje made of me (see Cat. 22). Over the years, several people reported how the Art Institute of Chicago had an Ingres portrait that looked just like me, the one of the Comte (later, Marquis) de Pastoret (1826; see ill. 23). Having once written a book on Ingres and recognizing that the thirty-seven year old Count looked both handsome and intelligent, I naturally liked the comparison but, not having a drop of either blue or French blood, I didn't take it too seriously. Then, to my surprise, Gilje asked if she could include me in a series of hybrid portraits she was making, contemporary sitters morphed into Old Master art. I of course wanted to know immediately whom she had in mind as my forefather and was startled to hear that it was, of all people, the Comte de Pastoret. This was almost enough to make me believe in reincarnation; and when I later saw the other portraits in this show, I began to believe not only in my own Second Coming, but in that of the other people I knew whom Gilje had transformed into what often seemed their perfect ancestral figures, unique and indissoluble matches.

I was particularly stunned by the uncanny fusions that provided alter egos for Arthur Danto and the late William Rubin. As for Danto, professor of philosophy and art critic, whose DNA would provide a better source than that of Socrates? Luckily, the ancient Greek's features were recorded many times in classical busts and, in the eighteenth century, even reconstructed in David's waxworks-like depiction of his death. In Gilje's hands, the archetypal Socrates portrait is seamlessly

metamorphosed into the New York art-world thinker we all know, a marmoreal but living presence who, against all odds, can stare at us through his pupil-less white eyes while thinking thoughts deeper than ours. And the original Greek inscription, SOCRATES PHILOSOPHER OF ATHENS, has been updated, too, as ARTHUR DANTO PHILOSOPHER OF NEW YORK, but again inscribed in Greek. The botanical background, seemingly decorative, also lends the portrait an unexpected aura of intellect, since it is the work of Leonardo da Vinci, an excerpt from his frescoes at the Sala delle Asse in Milan. As for Rubin's portrait, the choice for a source was not one of Picasso's own self-portraits, but a famous photograph by Cartier-Bresson that forces us into an up-close, eyeball-to-eyeball encounter with genius. It is no secret that this giant of a MoMA curator must often have thought that he and Picasso, the artist who loomed largest in Rubin's scholarly writings and exhibitions, were separated at birth. Not only could they be seen as resembling each other in stocky, forthright presence, but Rubin's own legendary confidence and dogged determination were strong and fearless enough to confront Picasso's daunting personality on equal terms.

Identity theft is an abiding theme here, and we may marvel at the rebirth of Peter Paul Rubens as Leo Steinberg, who, incidentally, was one of Rubin's major adversaries in scholarly disputes about Picasso (ill. 41). Often identified with cosmopolitan breadth, verbal eloquence, and an elegant, courtly demeanor, Steinberg fits perfectly the template offered in Rubens's dapper self-portrait in Vienna. Slimmed down from Rubensian girth, he looks at us from on high, his erudite glance a mixture of aristocracy and connoisseurship. It is a lofty pose light-years away from the earthbound, work-weary, and counter-hugging barmaid in Manet's *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, now taken over by Linda Nochlin, whose lifelong concerns with art-historical issues of feminism and nineteenth-century class struggle, whether in the lives of Courbet's unskilled laborers or Berthe Morisot's wet nurse, are perfectly mirrored here in Manet's anonymous sales girl, who before our eyes becomes another steadfast woman, a mixture of poignancy and resolute determination, namely, the sitter herself (see Cat. 31). Distracted as we may be for the moment by Gilje's dazzling replication of Manet's brushwork that captures the glitter of reflections and the sumptuous display of flowers, fruit and alcohol, we keep returning to Nochlin's face. Accustomed to time-travel in these paintings, we begin to intuit that her expression, which seems to be marked by years and decades of public and private experience, can magically lead us back to the psychological realities of late nineteenth-century Paris, where Nochlin spends much of her imaginative life.

A very different kind of Manet, one from 1863 that was shown at the notorious Salon des Refusés with the *Déjeuner sur l'Herbe*, offers fashion-plate surfaces rather than psychological depths. A staged, dress-up portrait of Manet's brother Gustave, *Young Man in the Costume of a Majo* reflects the artist's love for clothing in general—from military uniforms to ladies' footwear—and for things Spanish in particular. Here, the sitter, like so many other figures in Manet's paintings of the 1860s, dons Spanish attire, readily available among the artist's studio props, in this case the exotic Andalusian outfit that identified the flashy clothing worn by *majos* and *majas*, men and women of the working classes whose boleros, cummerbunds and polished, high-heeled shoes conjure up the kind of flamenco dance that Manet also depicted in a decade when France, with its Spanish empress, was eager to look south of the Pyrenees. It's an image that matches perfectly the professional persona of RoseLee Goldberg, famous for her lifelong involvement with performance art and avant-garde theater, whether in books or in actual spectacles. Here she is, very much on stage, with a seductive smile that is part real, part mask and a casual but studied posture that contrasts her lithe figure, all somber black and white, with the weighty, sumptuous fabric of the fringed red-and-yellow mantle she carries so effortlessly. This is a sitter, we know, who is keenly aware of the proscenium.

Hardly as aware, however, is Ingres's deliriously imperial image of Napoleon, who, from on high, seems to be granting us earthlings the momentary privilege of glimpsing, from down below, the ultimate spectacle of his supreme presence, an awesome mixture of the Olympian Zeus and Darth Vader (see ill. 32). But this chilling, absolute authority, eternally fixed by the sitter's rigid, immobilized posture, is suddenly thawed by the good-natured smile of Lowery Sims, who, when asked by Gilje which portrait she would like to become, confessed that she had always wanted to be "Napoleon with a gun" (see Cat. 35). Herself a major force in the New York art world—in 1999, she switched jobs from twentieth-century curator at the Metropolitan Museum to director of the Studio Museum in Harlem—she now, as requested, holds a rifle (right next to the Hand of Charlemagne) as she usurps Napoleon's gilded throne, the circular frames of her eyeglasses perfectly aligned with his fearful symmetry and frontal stare. We are grateful to realize that beneath these daunting trappings of power, a much-loved art world personality is lurking.

The range of Gilje's anthology covers not only an encyclopedia of styles—from ancient to soft-grained photography, from the hard archaic clarity of Ingres's hyperrealism to the pulsating warmth of Rubens's living flesh—but also the widest range of human situations that can switch abruptly from public personae to domestic intimacies. As for the latter, there is her reinvention of Thomas Eakins's *The Thinker*, a portrait of the artist's brother-in-law, Louis N. Kenton, as Michael Kimmelman, chief art critic of *The New York Times* (see Cat. 33). Stripped of all worldly goods, including even a clear distinction between the plane of the blank wall and the blank floor that merge into a nowhere environment, the sitter—hands in pockets, head bowed—is so totally alone that we feel like noisy intruders, accidentally glimpsing a private moment of introspection. Substituting jeans, sport jacket and open white shirt for Philadelphia 1900 men's wear, Kimmelman emerges magically from Eakins's icon of thought triumphing over action. And in the case of an art critic associated with constant museum-and-gallery going, international travel, symposia and interviews, this transformation is a tonic reminder that even the most public members of the art world can have their moments of thought or doubt, a surprising but therapeutic halt to the chores of the profession.

Comparable domestic solitude and meditation are found in Gilje's tour-de-force reinterpretation of Degas's double portrait of Manet and his wife Suzanne in which the artist, finger on temple, lolls about on a sofa in so informal a pose that you would never guess anyone was painting his picture. He is, presumably, listening with unfocused attention to the music his wife is playing on the now invisible piano, invisible because Manet, apparently displeased with the image of his wife, slashed and removed a wide vertical strip of canvas, which totally annihilated the piano as well as Mme. Manet's profile, leaving the canvas looking like the victim of a demented slasher. (This said, it should also be remembered that Manet had a history of cutting his paintings into often incoherent fragments, as was the case with two major works of the 1860s, *Episode in a Bullring* and *Execution of Maximilian*). Degas, when he saw his painting defaced, was of course furious. He eventually made up with Manet and took the painting with him, planning to revise and replace the offensive part, a revision which never took place until Gilje, in fact, reinvented this notorious narrative of Impressionist civil war. Her actors in this living room drama are now Robert Storr, former MoMA curator and now professor at NYU, and his wife Rosamund, a professional musician who plays the viola da gamba, an early form of the cello (ills. 42 and 43). Gilje first painted the whole double portrait, but then, imitating Manet, cut off the right-hand strip, which she exhibits as a separate fragment. Storr assumes Manet's pose of complete, at-home comfort as he half-looks across to his bisected wife, who, we realize, is not seated at a piano but must be seated astride her

Ill. 42
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
Robert Storr and His Wife (Rosamund Morley) as Degas's Portrait of Manet and His Wife, 2006
Oil on linen, 26 3/4 x 29 1/2 in.

Ill. 43
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
Rosamund Morley Fragment with the Viola da Gamba, 2006
Oil on linen, 26 3/4 x 8 1/2 in.

viola da gamba, whose scroll and neck are just visible above her left shoulder. But then Gilje, unlike Degas, goes on to complete the missing section, including now this vertical fragment in which we at last see the profile, but not the head of the musician, as well as her bow and music stand. The strange facts of this dismembered double portrait have turned into perhaps an even stranger fiction.

The two other portraits in this show differ from the other nine, insofar as their sitters do not masquerade as specific figures culled from a specific work in an art historian's image-bank, but are recreated more generally in the style of a famous artist, as if to answer the question, "How would long-dead Artist A paint a living Sitter B?" One answer is the portrait of Charlie Finch, the famously uninhibited art-world gossip columnist who has never had any problems publishing exactly what he thinks about this critic or that painter. Here, his leonine power and intensity, instantly recognizable from real life, are immersed in oceans of brown that have flowed from the ennobling, shadowy murk of Rembrandt's late signature style, a flood that almost disembodies the sitter, leaving him with nothing but a fierce gaze and a dramatic shock of unruly hair. The other answer is the

portrait of Rosalind Krauss in the manner of Degas. Her name synonymous with critical cerebration, Krauss is seen by Gilje in a double-feature of time travel. Her portrait, a far more sharply focused variation of the Eakins/Kimmelman posture of contemplation, takes us back to her youth as, hunched over in thought, she firmly places her profiled head and chin on her 1960s typewriter (today almost as archaic a writing instrument as a fountain pen), before continuing the argument in her text. Against what has now become a vintage photograph of 1969 from the early years of art-world biographies, there is another leap of a full century back to the floral wallpaper pattern that covers the background of Degas's *Bellelli Family*. And with this prompt, we may also intuit a correspondence between Degas's ability to capture the expression of focused discernment and the photograph of Krauss at work that inspired Gilje's art-historical fantasy.

It remains to be said that, singular as Gilje's work may be (and whether it's painted like Hals or Sargent it always looks more like Gilje), its delight in offering contemporary variations on Old Master authority has a long tradition in the history of portraiture. As for some recent parallels, there are the art-historical masquerades of photographers Cindy Sherman and Yasumasa Morimura, both of whom, right down to exact historical costume and nude male or female flesh, recreate themselves in the guise of paintings by anybody from Fouquet and Caravaggio to Goya and Ingres. And as always, there is Picasso, who, from youth to old age, kept seeing himself, his friends and his lovers as museum images come to life, whether he was transforming his teen-age self into a bewigged Goya courtier, his first wife Olga into an anthology of Ingres portraits, or his second wife Jacqueline into Manet's *Lola de Valence* or Velázquez's equestrian *Isabella de Borbón*. Or one can go back to the late eighteenth century when Sir Joshua Reynolds wittily depicted himself as a contemporary successor to Rembrandt's self-portrait of 1640 or when Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun painted herself, hat and all, as a bravura recreation of Rubens's so-called "Chapeau de paille," a portrait of his sister-in-law Susanna Fourment. It's good to know that in Gilje's new work, the same restless ghosts from the pantheon of art history continue to haunt the twenty-first century.

1 Reprinted with permission from Robert Rosenblum, "Kathleen Gilje's Reincarnations," in *Kathleen Gilje: Curators, Critics, and Connoisseurs of Modern and Contemporary Art*, exh. cat. (New York: Francis M. Naumann Fine Art, 2006).

Interview with Kathleen Gilje

Francis M. Naumann
November 16, 2012

Francis M. Naumann: Kathleen, can you recall your first impulse to become an artist?

Kathleen Gilje: My first impulse, if you're talking about childhood, is that I don't ever remember not making drawings, ever. My mother was an artist and I would sit and watch her paint. And as soon as I could hold a pencil or a crayon, I was making art. Basically, I was always the class artist. In college, I majored in art and literature. But if you're asking about being a professional artist and making art for a living, that's another question. When I was in college I worked two days a week for family friends who did high-end furniture restoration. I had a job there and every time a painting would come in, I would be asked to fix the painting. Initially I did that because—even though I made art on the side all the time—I thought that that was how I might make a living.

After I graduated from college, I went to Italy. My father gave me a gift of a ticket to Europe and I traveled. After some months, I ended up in Italy, and I didn't want to leave. Winter was setting in and I didn't have a coat. I managed to talk my way into a job. Actually, the job was with Antonio de Mata, a major Italian paintings conservator in Rome. I barged in on him and, with my limited Italian, told him that I was a conservator. He asked me what experience I had. Although I was only twenty-one years old at the time, I looked him straight in the eye and told him that I was a conservator for the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York! Although he later expressed disbelief in my story, he decided to give me a try anyway, and that's how I started.

FN: Wow, talk about padding your résumé!

KG: I started working as an apprentice for very little money in this grand Renaissance building. I began at first just working around the studio. It seemed that I had a gift for in-painting, so Mr. de Mata taught me conservation. I started with minor paintings and was later able to work on some great paintings. As part of a team, I traveled to Naples and at the Museum of Capodimonte, I worked on [Michelangelo Merisi da] Caravaggio, Massimo Stanzione, [Jusepe de] Ribera, Giovanni Bellini—the most important paintings in the museum.

FN: How long did that last?

KG: About three years. I maintained an apartment in Rome and in the Museum of Capodimonte. I actually had an apartment within the museum that overlooked the Bay of Naples and traveled back and forth between the two cities every few weeks.

FN: Were you able to wander about the museum at night?

KG: No, not exactly, but I did often stroll through the museum. It was my second home and I knew those paintings backwards and forwards.

FN: Was that your first exposure to Old Master paintings?

KG: It was my first exposure and my experience of falling in love with Old Master paintings. By being around these paintings, it was very different from being in art school, where they just put up a slide. I could really start to understand the logic of where the painting came from—the influences, the time, the materials, etc. ...

FN: This must have had a profound effect on your general approach to painting, since you were able to "put your hands" on Old Master paintings and, as a result of your job as a restorer, alter them.

KG: You develop an intimate relationship with a painting when you work on it and live with it for some eight-to-ten hours a day. It's not the same as viewing a painting in a museum; piece by piece, you start to understand that painting in a very precise way. At the same time, I used to visit churches in Naples, early in the morning, in order to broaden my knowledge about paintings outside of the museum. Eventually I would travel to see shows throughout Italy. It just seems as though, when you're there, you live and breathe painting, history and art.

FN: When you restore a specific painting, I know that restorers usually do an extensive amount of research on the artist and their time. This is very similar to the approach you now use in making your paintings, no?

KG: Research is something else. I was always making art and, as you know, when I returned to New York, I worked for the restorer Marco Grassi for years. Then I worked for the dealer Stanley Moss. I restored his paintings in my own studio, where I had the opportunity to work with paintings by [Francisco de] Zurbarán, [Jacopo] Tintoretto, Titian, and El Greco. As I said, I had always been making art, and then, I did restoration. Even though the two activities are connected, they are very separate. I remember once, Stanley had given me a little El Greco, a work called *The Fable*. This may seem strange but when you work on a painting and you spend all this time, you see everything about the painting. You can almost take your hand and follow the hand of the artist as he paints the picture. You see the brushstrokes, the brilliant passages. This great master then becomes even more human as you continue and see the less brilliant passages. With me, sometimes, as I'd work on this painting inch by inch, I would almost feel the presence of the artist, almost as though the artist were looking over my shoulder. It's very difficult to explain, but sometimes you feel intimately connected to the work of art. Sometimes you feel as though, by doing conservation, you understand it in a way you never could if you were a scholar.

I remember this one time when I was sitting there, I was feeling this sense of El Greco and this sense of history, and I realized that all artists were like beads on a string ...

FN: Like part of an historical continuum?

KG: Yes, we're a continuum. When I was working on the El Greco, I just stopped working and I got up. I walked out and bought a stretcher. I stretched a canvas to the same scale and started doing a copy of that little painting, *The Fable*, because I understood it so well and I saw it so well and felt so close to it. And when I had completed it, I made a change to it, what I have come to call a "restoration" (ill. 44).

FN: You said that there are certain passages that weren't done as well—not necessarily in this painting, but you

Ill. 44
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
The Fable, Restored, 1989
Oil on linen, 20 1/8 x 26 in.

noticed them in others. When you were making the copy, did you take advantage of the opportunity to make those passages better?

KG: No, because I don't think that's the point. Part of the beauty is that there are passages that are extraordinary and then there are passages that are restful.

FN: What change did you make to the El Greco?

KG: This particular painting—you know the fable, the man, the boy, the monkey—they're lighting these little sticks. I just hung a light bulb down the middle of the painting, almost like a [Philip] Guston, in that it was a bare light bulb with a chain attached. Its presence is subtle and painted in a manner more compatible with an El Greco, but it still was a contemporary light source, so it was very playful.

FN: Does this painting still exist?

KG: Well, the story is that Stanley Moss comes in and I show him the painting. He took a look at it and he said, "That's exactly the same size. That looks exactly like the painting you're restoring. I didn't give you permission to do this and I could sue you." I said, "Stanley, get off of it. Cut it out!" He said, "Well, if I don't sue you, can I buy it?"

FN: Did he buy it?

KG: He bought it.

Ill. 45
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
El Espólio, Restored, 1990
Oil on linen, 50 3/4 x 63 in.

FN: After this, did you follow up? Did you continue to make alterations like this to paintings?

KG: That was my first experience. I then did a second painting for Stanley, a large *Espólio* by El Greco. He had clients who wanted to sell their El Greco and Stanley asked me to do a copy for them, but the deal fell through. I had already painted the copy so I changed the background to the New York City skyline with the Twin Towers and the Brooklyn Bridge (ill. 45). I had been doing other paintings [prior to that], and they were very influenced by the Old Masters too—Tintoretto and so forth—but they were much more expressionistic. Before then, I had never actually done something that was that detailed. I think it happened bit by bit. I thought about it a great deal. I didn't run out and start doing this

work right away, but it went into my mind and stayed there. Slowly, it dawned on me—this is really being true to myself, because as far as I can see, there is no one who should be doing this sort of work but me, because of my background and because of how many Old Master paintings I had restored, my love of Old Master paintings and my love for ideas and playing around with ideas. What's interesting is that in the paintings that I make, the ideas sometimes seem contemporary, but the ideas are not nearly so contemporary—the method of showing the idea is contemporary, but many of the issues that I approach can be traced back to the beginning of time.

FN: What do you mean by that? The issues? Do you mean, for example, the light bulb in that painting?

KG: Let's use as an example *La Donna Velata*, this beautiful woman painted by Raphael, whom I render with a black eye (see Cat. 9). People talk about the subject of abuse today, but it has always existed.

FN: I see, you mean the social issues. That brings up a number of questions. Firstly, I can imagine that someone could criticize your work and say that, in making alterations to Old Master paintings, you are not showing respect for that painting. By going in and altering the picture in one way or another, you are abusing the original concept that went into making the picture in the first place. I don't know how you would respond to those critics, because you have said repeatedly that you love Old Master paintings.

KG: I love Old Master paintings. They move me very much. Maybe it's arrogance on my part, but I feel connected, almost like family. I've never thought about it like this before, but maybe that's what makes me feel that it's fine. When I painted that El Greco, and I had this spiritual feeling of his presence, I felt that there was an embrace of what I was doing.

FN: If nothing else, by putting a light bulb into an El Greco, you're bringing that El Greco up to our time, and since you just told me that you felt his presence in the room with you, it makes perfect sense. The other issue that came to mind was the whole idea of feminism. When you start your works, do you consider yourself a feminist? Put another way, how do you believe that feminism figures into your work? Since this subject comes up so often, you must have a position that gets expressed through the paintings.

KG: I don't think about my work as being feminist in that respect, but I do think that each individual case is worth considering. With the *La Donna Velata*, for example, it would seem that I was really looking at the issue of abuse. That came about because when my daughter was in school, she happened to be in the same grade with a girl who was murdered by her father, the famous "Steinberg Nussbaum" story.[1] My daughter became very upset. It was a difficult period for all the children who knew this child. Then, years later, I came across a book that dealt with the subject of abuse, and Hedda Nussbaum's picture was in that book. It was then that I realized I had to do something about this subject. Most of the time when I address these issues, they're individual incidents. It's not as though I have a program. When I did the piece on Susanna and the Elders, it was a story that was so fascinating, so beyond anything that you could imagine, that it just had to be addressed (see Cat. 16). Each of the pieces that I do is motivated by a very individual story, not an agenda.

FN: Was there a specific story for *Susanna and the Elders*?

KG: I love to read art history. In reading Mary Garrard's book on Artemisia Gentileschi,[2] I identified with the subject and felt that it was necessary to do this work after her *Susanna and the Elders*. Because of my experience as a conservator, and having used methods employed in conservation—X-rays, under-painting, etc.—sometimes I just can't stop myself!

FN: Well, in that painting you actually give the nude figure—Susanna—an instrument to defend herself, a knife.

KG: In the transcript of the trial, Artemisia says, "I'd like to kill you with this knife because you have dishonored me" and then threw the knife at him. The story behind the painting of *Susanna and the Elders* is very similar to Artemisia's own story of sexual abuse. Even though it was painted before she was raped, she was exposed to sexually abusive situations preceding the assault. She talks about all this in the trial. When I painted that under-painting in lead white—so that it could be seen in an X-ray machine—it was as though the upper surface—the painting that we all know as *Susanna and the Elders*—covers the lower surface, which is her own personal story. It's as though her ghost is there telling the story: "Yes, I painted this, but here is my real story."

FN: So you worked as a restorer for many years, and when you made the picture for Mr. Moss, two parts of your life came together, your independent life as an artist and your work as a restorer. At some point, one overtook the other. Did that happen all at once?

KG: Well, it didn't really happen all at once. I had been offered a job, possibly working at a museum, and I did have to make the decision. Do I follow a career as a conservator and put myself 100% into it, or do I become a painter? I loved conservation, but I felt more fulfilled making my own paintings.

FN: When did you first exhibit them?

KG: The first big exhibition that I had of this new work was at the Curt Marcus Gallery in 1994. Robert Rosenblum[3] had seen my work and called Curt Marcus. It was a group show but I had the entire front space.

FN: How did you meet Robert Rosenblum?

KG: I met him at a dinner that I had been invited to by Mary Ellen Mark.[4] I used to see Robert all the time because I swam at NYU and so did he. I asked him to come see my paintings.

FN: In this show were there paintings similar to your *Bacchus, Restored* of 1992?

KG: Yes. The *Portrait of an Old Man with a Child, Restored* of 1993 after Ghirlandaio (see Cat. 6) is a painting I wrapped in plastic [because it was raining], and I carried it over to show Curt Marcus. In the open window behind the figures, I inserted the detail of a painting by Magritte, *The Castle of the Pyrenees*, which has a huge

rock with a castle placed on top hovering over an ocean. In my mind it represented the magical and loving relationship between the old man, the grandfather, and the young child. Curt Marcus loved it and told me that he was going to show my work.

FN: Ironically, this Ghirlandaio has been known for decades—possibly centuries—for the scar on the forehead, a marring of the paint surface that was just now recently restored. It was exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum for one of the first times since its restoration.[5]

FN: Is this the first painting you did after the El Greco "light bulb" picture?

KG: I did a Caravaggio at this time, *Bacchus, Restored* (1992), and some paintings after Vermeer (1993).

FN: When you select an Old Master painting, what comes first: the idea you want to address, or the Old Master painting you select to represent that idea?

KG: That's a hard question, and I don't know if there's a single answer. I think I tend to gravitate towards the works I love most. Very often, it is a work that I have had the good fortune to see, to spend many hours standing before, or just works that strike me and from which I get ideas.

FN: Like *Bacchus, Restored* (1992)?

KG: Well, this was back when AIDS was a big issue. There are ideas that come when you're living in a time when certain things happen. You feel that you have to express some sort of awareness of it. This painting was about the wrapping of things. The fruit is wrapped because the fruit is poisoned. The condoms represent the sense of sexuality of Bacchus. The whole concept of protection from people and disease is part of this picture.

FN: You know, it was discovered and made known only in comparatively recent history that Caravaggio was a homosexual. It was a subject that was glossed over and not really talked about for years, until a famous article published by Donald Posner in the mid-1970s made this subject public.[6] This is a self-portrait of Caravaggio. Did that inspire you to select this picture?

KG: This is not necessarily a self-portrait of Caravaggio. My painting, *The Musicians, Restored*—does contain a self-portrait of Caravaggio (see ill. 39). He is the figure in the background. That particular painting—with the X-ray—I showed at the List Visual Arts Center at MIT. *The Musicians* makes a reference to Caravaggio and his homosexuality. In the X-ray, the central musician holds a mirror, which reveals the figure opposite him to be masturbating, rather than holding sheets of music, as he does in the original painting (see ill. 39a).

FN: In that particular instance, was this picture inspired by the knowledge that Caravaggio was a homosexual, or by the AIDS epidemic?

KG: No, I don't think this is about the AIDS epidemic. This is really about the knowledge of Caravaggio being a homosexual, but even if I hadn't known that, there is this feeling of beautiful young boys, which is self-evident.

FN: In your painting after Bronzino, *Portrait of Lodovico Capponi, Restored* (1993; see Cat. 10), and in many of your subsequent pictures, I notice that you give the figures tattoos.

KG: The Bronzino is a painting that I've spent many hours in front of. It was bought by the Frick in 1915. They cleaned it and discovered that, in an earlier time, in order to make the painting easier to sell, someone had painted over the white codpiece. With cleaning, the codpiece was revealed. So, then I had a fantasy. First they cleaned it and discovered the codpiece; in my mind the painting is re-cleaned to reveal a tattoo of a bound Asian woman with her legs spread and, on the inner part of her thighs, are the wings of a bird. So the painting makes reference to a shocking sexual implication.

FN: This again brings back the idea I mentioned earlier, of bringing an Old Master painting up to date. When looking at your paintings from a distance, you see an Old Master painting. Yet when you zero in on elements like the tattoos, they can only exist in modern times. To me, this reflects a certain respect for the art of the past, for you make it relevant for an audience today. The art of the past has no real significance unless we—particularly artists—continue to look at it and make it part of our everyday lives. Even though art historians are writing about the past, they are still writing for an audience who reads their words today.

KG: And of course it's not the same audience they had 200 or 500 years ago. Earlier you asked what happens, do I look at the painting and get an idea, or do I have the idea first? Well, very often paintings come with stories, as in the case of Artemisia Gentileschi. And this painting also had its story. If I read these stories and they have meaning for me, then that might motivate my choice of a specific restoration.

FN: The Bronzino had an interesting story because the first "restorers" did essentially what you do, but in reverse. They covered up what they thought was offensive in order to make the painting easier to sell or exhibit, whereas you expose it. Anyway, since we're looking at your pictures in an approximate chronological order, next is your El Greco, *Portrait of Cardinal Niño de Guevara, Grand Inquisitor, Restored* (1993; see ill. 40).

KG: The El Greco is in the Metropolitan Museum. The technique is fascinating to me. If you look at the painting you'll see that the robe was under-painted in lead white, and then glazed over with an alizarin crimson or a lake red, a process that creates a luminosity that can't be achieved in any other way. How El Greco captured this man—the tension in his hand, the throne, the Inquisition and what it represented—I just felt compelled to bring it up to date with Andy Warhol's *Orange Disaster*. It's painted in a series of panels, just like the original background of the El Greco. Also, the electric chair is in a three-quarter position, just as the Cardinal's throne was placed.

FN: Is the general idea, then, that the Cardinal passed judgment, to the extent that he caused people to live or die?

KG: Yes, he persecuted and killed people.

FN: On that level anyway, it's very similar to the theme of Warhol's electric chair. You have also inserted something behind Ingres's *Comtesse d'Haussonville*, a painting that is also at the Frick. But this, I believe, is a [Robert] Mapplethorpe photograph (see Cat. 23).

KG: I just reread Linda Nochlin's article to refresh my memory (see pg. 74), and the Comtesse herself was a writer and an art historian, a very talented woman. In the mirror I placed in reflection Mapplethorpe's photograph of the bodybuilder Lisa Lyon in a leather bustier. Here we see both the softer, very feminine Comtesse juxtaposed with the powerful, more masculine Lisa Lyon, and we become aware of the two sides of woman.

FN: In 1995, you painted a work after Petrus Christus, *Portrait of a Lady, Restored (Pierced)* (see ill. 6).

KG: On this very small painting, I recreated the losses, that is to say, the abrasions and cracks in the pigments that are the result of drying and wear over the centuries. I do this to make my panels look aged as well. On the Ghirlandaio, for example, I recreated the scars on the forehead that for decades existed, and which only recently have been restored. *Portrait of a Lady, Restored (Pierced)* is a beautiful small painting of a young woman, maybe twelve or fourteen years old. My restoration here was to put in piercing, which seems absurd, because it is so out of its time. It's also about a fashion statement made by young people today and maybe an expression of their rebellion and anger, but the fifteenth century was, of course, an epoch in which no one rebelled. There was no room for rebellion.

FN: The 1990s is also a period in our history when we first observed prominent piercing on teenagers in the United States.

KG: It seemed shocking then that beautiful young people would pierce their bodies and deform themselves in this way.

FN: You mentioned that the original Petrus Christus is on view at the Metropolitan. Do you go to have a careful look at the picture when it is accessible, like this one?

KG: Yes, I did that at the time. My framer, Diego Salazar, also visited the museum to copy the frame and make an exact replica for me.

FN: In your Jan van Eyck, *Man in a Red Turban, Restored* (1996), there is no alteration to the picture, per se, but there is, of course, the inscription at the bottom (see Cat. 2).

KG: There is no alteration. I recreated the losses, and I made the gold-leafed frame. In the original, it reads "JOHES DE EYCK ME FECIT ANO MCCCC.33.21 OCTOBRIS." In this one I inscribed "KTRINA DE GILJE ME REFECIT ANO MXMVI 21 AUGUSTIS."

Ill. 46
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
Odalisque with Slave, Restored, 1996
Oil on linen on panel,
29 1/2 x 40 1/8 in.

FN: Since you say "refecit," you're actually acknowledging the fact that you are remaking the picture. In most cases, however, you interject alterations to the picture, as is especially obvious in a painting like *Odalisque with Slave, Restored* (1996).

KG: In his book on Ingres, Robert Rosenblum talked about a diplomatic couple who traveled to Turkey. The wife got into a harem and was amazed at the life in there. When they returned to France, the knowledge of harems in nineteenth-century France became very popular.[7] French painters then started to depict harems and odalisques. Linda Nochlin, who wrote on the subject of sexism in the nineteenth century, cleverly wrote that the French male would say that we don't treat our women like this, but isn't it tantalizing to look at? So it became part of the subject matter of the day. Linda Nochlin also says that usually two women are together—one dark and one light—with undertones of lesbianism.[8] In the original, there is the black eunuch, who is there to protect the odalisque, or fair woman. So I wanted to play on both the issues of racism and sexism, indirectly commenting on the fact that a black eunuch is used to protect the harem. I used an image from Robert Mapplethorpe's *Robert Love*—interesting name. I disrobed him, draping his robe over the chair on which he sits, and I took the liberty of having "restored" him, so that he is very clearly no longer a eunuch. I felt that by exposing the figure in this manner, it brought to mind both the racism and sexism that is an integral part of the original painting (ill. 46).

FN: Two major issues collide, as they did when Mapplethorpe's photographs were shown in his retrospective at the Whitney in 1988. Conservative critics not only objected to the graphic quality of the images, but they were offended at the vision of frontal male nudity, whereas they surely would not have taken offense at the sight of a nude female figure, in photographs or otherwise. With Mapplethorpe, they also had to deal not only with the issue of sexuality, but more specifically, with the subject of homosexuality.

KG: I had an exhibition at the Kohler Museum [John Michael Kohler Art Center], and they asked me for one more painting. I said that I did have a painting that I had just completed, the *Odalisque with Slave, Restored*, so I sent them an image. They said they loved the painting but could not show it. They even considered showing the painting in a separate room.[9]

FN: It's interesting that issues of censorship seem to be more prevalent now than ever. It is permitted to show a nude woman, since this has been done since classical times, but men in all their glory is something that people aren't accustomed to seeing and find instinctively offensive.

KG: Also, the male nude often represents power and the female nude always represents vulnerability.

FN: But Ingres in particular could not himself have overlooked the fact that these women are depicted in abundantly sensual poses.

KG: Courbet really picked up on that one.

FN: Your other painting after Ingres brings to mind Man Ray's *Le Violon d'Ingres*, a bather with musical clefs on her back (see Cat. 24).

KG: *Le Violon d'Ingres* is taken from the famous Man Ray photograph of his model's back. I saw my "restoration" as something that went full circle. The clefs are now returned to Ingres's original, *The Valpinçon Bather*. What's so interesting about this, too, is that Ingres actually played the violin.

FN: In French, the term *le violon d'Ingres* is an idiomatic expression that means a hobby, because Ingres's hobby was playing the violin. He was very proud of his ability to play the violin, and the violin itself remains on display in his museum to this day. When Man Ray made his photograph, he was intentionally evoking a parody with Ingres because he put the turban on the head of his model Kiki de Montparnasse, who was his hobby, so to speak, at the time. As a result of the renown of Man Ray's photograph, many young women have had their backs tattooed with clefs in this fashion. Tattoos appear again in your Leonardo variation, *Lady with an Ermine, Restored* (1997; see Cat. 8).

KG: The original has to be one of the most beautiful paintings ever made. Of course, anyone like me who adores animals can't help but feel a tenderness for them. Although, I know there are a lot of issues regarding sexuality—the ermine's claws purposefully touch the slit in the sitter's sleeve, the slit representing the vagina and the touch symbolizing the consummated relationship [of the young mistress Cecilia Gallerani and Lodovico Sforza, Duke of Milan]—but he's still such a beautiful creature. So in a sense it became my way of making a comment about animals. The tattoo says, "Animals are not ours to eat, experiment on, or wear."

FN: In many of your paintings, the message is not so clearly spelled out, as in your Bronzino, *Allegory of Venus, Restored* (1998; see Cat. 11).

KG: The original Bronzino is in the National Gallery in London. It's a very complicated painting and nobody really understands the subject. It, too, was a victim of conservation. At one point they put a bouquet over Cupid's butt, and they removed the nipple and took out the tongue, trying to make the painting more acceptable. It's got Jealousy, the Beauty of Love, reaching in with a honeycomb in one hand and a claw held behind her back with the other, and all these meanings hidden with the faun. It's filled with information. Venus and her mature-looking son Cupid are in a rather intense embrace. They kiss as he fondles her nipple. This was totally Freudian, especially when you consider his theory of the Oedipus complex. I inserted a portrait of Freud as Father Time with his arms extended across the picture. In his left hand he fondles a cigar in the same manner that Cupid fondles his mother's nipple.

FN: On the left there's a woman who appears horrified at the sight of it all.

KG: She has been identified as representing Jealousy. There are so many things in this picture. I still don't know anybody who understands it all, and maybe it's not meant to be understood.

FN: For the whole time I've known this picture, it was called *Venus, Cupid, Folly and Time*. What it actually means, however, is something that seems to have eluded the passage of time. It's hard to imagine any artist in this period making a picture that was meant to be intentionally confusing. Still, if someone were looking at the picture and the artist happened to be standing right next to him, he would have had to explain certain elements that contained symbolic content. The visual information would have had to be fairly clear, since most people then—some 90% of the population—were illiterate.

KG: Also, I think the breast was approached in a very different way than it's approached today.

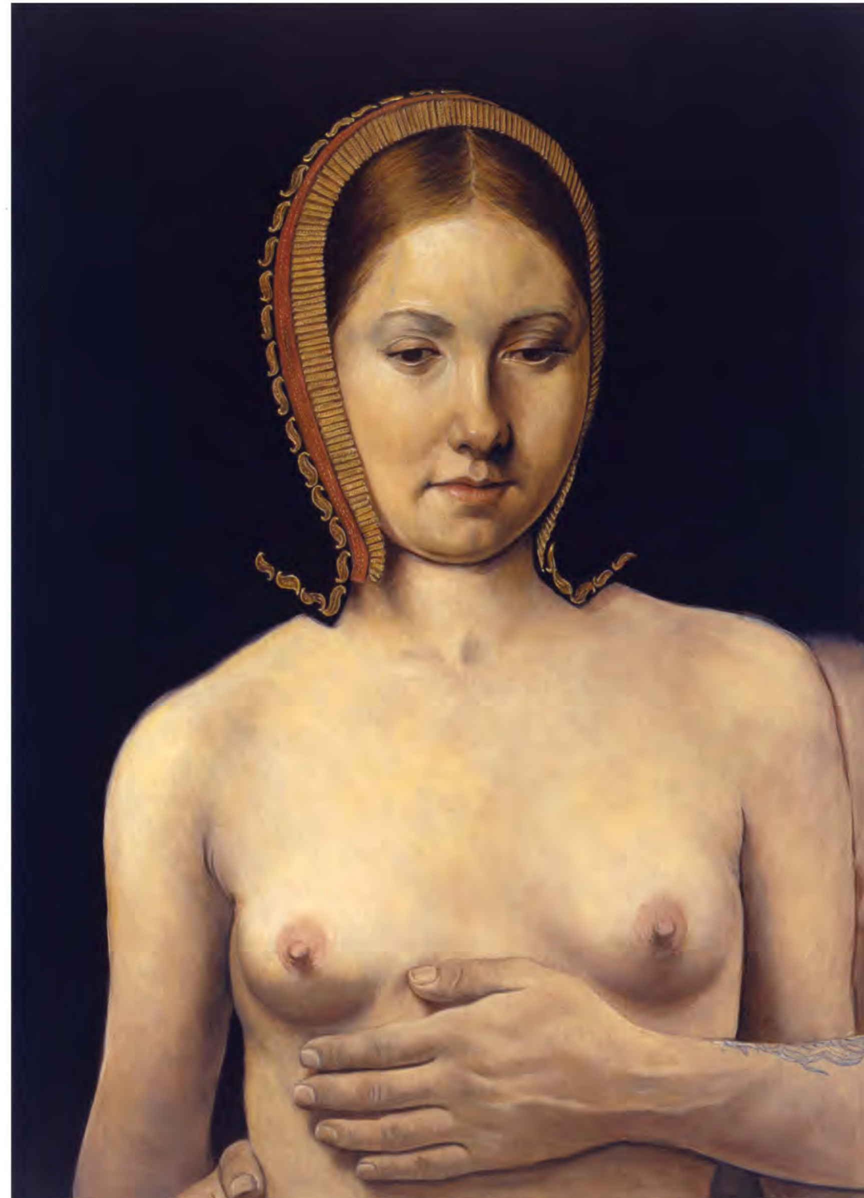
FN: How so?

KG: Well, first of all, the breasts are very stylized. You look at the paintings where a mother squeezes milk into her child's mouth—today this would be so much less acceptable in our society. You know that little one where the baby is peeing?[10] It's filled with symbolism.

FN: Since Freud came along, it's almost impossible for us to look at paintings like this without reading some meaning into them. It's impossible to look at a teenage boy fondling his mother's nipple and not think about what that must mean from a psychological standpoint.

KG: It could mean that this breast gave me life, or it nourished me. What about the strange Caravaggio where the daughter goes to the prison and puts her breast in her father's mouth to help him survive?

FN: That's an old Roman legend.[11] You once told me that your *Portrait of a Carthusian, Restored* (1999) was a vanitas (see Cat. 4). How so?



Ill. 47
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
Catherine of Aragon, Restored, 2000
Oil on panel, 18 1/4 x 13 1/2 in.

KG: The original has a single little fly crawling along the bottom. It's about the vulnerability of humanity. So I brought in an invasion of the vanitas. Instead of a single reminder of vanity, the flies cover the monk's face, not only reminding viewers of their own mortality, but forcing them to confront it bluntly.

FN: Can your *Catherine of Aragon, Restored* (2000; ill. 47), also be considered a vanitas?

KG: This is based on Michael Sittow's *Catherine of Aragon* (c. 1502). This is my first effort to remove a person's clothing so as to arrive at a completely different identity. Here we also have the arm of a man embracing her.

FN: Is it the same motivation that inspired the Sargent series?

KG: Well, in retrospect, you could say that maybe it was. But it's always a process. I began doing this by leaving off bits and pieces of clothing. With Catherine of Aragon there was a certain sadness to her story, so in my fantasy, I had her embraced by another.

FN: In your *Hercules and Omphale, Restored* (2001), you've inserted a neon work by Bruce Nauman (see Cat. 21).

KG: Yes, the Nauman proclaims: "The true artist helps the world by revealing mystic truths." Because this is a love story and because Hercules comes under the control of Omphale, it's about the fact that love is a mystic truth.

FN: Is this larger than the painting by Boucher on which it is based?

KG: Everything is done to scale.

FN: And the Rembrandt, *Danaë, Restored* (2001), is that actual size as well?

KG: This painting is huge, 73 x 80 inches. In the story of Danaë her father was told she would give birth to a son, but that the son would kill him. Of course, that's exactly what happened. Jupiter is always depicted as a shower of gold impregnating her as she raises her arm to welcome him. In 1985, the original Rembrandt painting, which is in the collection of the Hermitage Museum, was destroyed by a man who threw sulfuric acid onto its surface and also used a knife to cut the painting, a slash that went right through the figure's vagina. When they attempted to restore the painting, they could not bring it back to its original state. Taking into consideration this act of violence, I decided to make a restoration of my own. I went to the roof of my building and threw water into the air and photographed it, so this white liquid above the figure of Danaë represents the thrown acid. In my mind, this splash of water represents two things: one, the acid that destroyed the painting caught in the moment of flight as Danaë extends her arm to protect herself, and the other could be semen, the semen of the god instead of the shower of gold. But this time the same gesture of her hand welcomes the god who impregnates her.

FN: You've used the works of other seventeenth-century Dutch and Flemish artists, such as Peter Paul Rubens.

KG: Yes, such as *Het Pelsken, Restored* (2001; see Cat. 15). This is a painting of Rubens's second wife, Helena Fourment. He was 53 and she was 16. It's a long and fascinating story. This is called *Het Pelsken* because he drapes the fur over her body.[12] In my mind the fur represents his fur, Rubens himself. In a way, it represents Beauty and the Beast, for the fur begins to grow hands and envelop her and hold her. Because she's very soft, very round, and has dimples of flesh, the hands sink into her fleshiness. So there's this play between Beauty and the Beast.

FN: You're probably aware that there's a lot of literature devoted to the fact that many of Rubens's women and children appear exceptionally well fed and, as a result, could be thought of today as being overweight.

KG: It certainly represented health and youth.

FN: It also represented the ability to bear many children. But for those who object to this, I remember that students used to say to Leo Steinberg that Rubens's women were too fat and Steinberg would always reply, "Too fat for what?"[13]

KG: Helena was intended to be portrayed very sensually, for if you notice, her arm goes around and one breast flips up and the other flips down. It is obviously a man's view of a very female body, one that is, in his mind, extremely alluring. It's not a functional breast—say for nursing—it's a visual breast, to be fondled.

FN: There is certainly a highly charged eroticism in your Courbet, *Woman with a Parrot, Restored* (2001; see ill. 38).

KG: This is a painting by Courbet that often brings up the concept of the male gaze. He paints this beautiful woman with her hand raised with a parrot perched on her fingertips. Because of my experience in conservation and methodologies of conservation, and knowing how to do a painting with lead white underneath that would X-ray, I decided to bring the male or the male gaze literally into the painting. Here there is a discussion of the bird stand and the phallic symbolism of the little perches.

FN: Wasn't that Michael Fried who pointed that out?[14]

KG: Yes. In the under-painting, I placed the male who jumps in and participates in the magic world of the painting. I even try to line up the penis with one of the perches.

FN: But your male does not have a "projection" that I can see.

KG: He has a penis! I also find the bird very interesting, because of the way the woman lies down and holds the bird. The bird is very colorful, as male birds are more colorful than female birds. So the bird takes on meaning, too, that in my mind also represents the male.

FN: It's hard to imagine that art historians have never noticed that. The word "bird" in British slang means girl and, in Italian, one of many slang terms for penis is *uccello*, which, of course, means bird.

KG: And then, of course, you also have the word "cock"...

FN: Well, now that might be going too far. In another work after Rembrandt, *Portrait of Agatha Bas, Restored* (2003), you have again partially disrobed a figure.

Ill. 48
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
Adam and Eve after van Eyck, Restored, 2005
Oil on panel, Diptych: 65 x 13 7/8 in. (Adam), 65 x 13 3/8 in. (Eve)

KG: Here I'm fascinated by the individual emerging in the painting. Very often these individuals are portrayed in society by their style, their jewels, and their accessories. So I started to take away the clothing. But I'm not yet at the point I reach with the Sargents, which come later, where I remove everything. But because I want to leave a mark, here I leave the lace, the pearls, the jewelry and the fan. So we are starting to see underneath who this person really is, while the bits and pieces of clothing that are visible still invite a discussion about her place or status in society.

FN: And at the same time, you made her male equivalent?

KG: This is after [Anthony] van Dyck. It's called *Portrait of Sir Thomas Hanmer, Restored* (2004). This portrait is a little more playful, in that the collar and the gloves are absurd.

FN: I suppose that is because to today's audience—with the gloves in hand and lace collar, combined with a sensuous pose—he could be seen as a transvestite or cross-dresser of some type.

KG: But at the time, this was the garb of a nobleman. And then the glove, too, mimics the position of the phallus.

FN: The unworn glove is also flaccid and, in between the fingers, you could read the shape of a vagina, but maybe I'm now going too far. I suspect the symbolism in your *Adam and Eve, Restored* (2005), after the [Jan] van Eyck, is more direct (ill. 48).

KG: These are beautiful panels and I also did these to scale. They are 65 inches high, but they're very narrow and the idea here is about the fig leaf. In the van Eyck, they have fig leaves covering both figures. What I did was to have Eve—because historically she was the one who took the bite of the apple first—fulfill the role of the woman by being more aggressive, so in that respect, it probably has a slightly feminist undertone. Her leaf is dropping sooner than his. He's a little slower on the draw, so that is their awakening.

FN: You can think of it in the reverse order. They get those fig leaves, in effect, as punishment for having done something wrong in the Garden of Eden. But in dropping the fig leaves, they reject their punishment. She is then not only the first to sin, but also the first to reject the restrictions imposed on mankind by Christianity and Judaism.

KG: And her body, her breasts and her hips are such a symbol of childbirth and the future of the world.

FN: In your various portraits of artworld personalities, you seem to operate like an Old Master painter yourself, for they are inevitably imbued with symbolism, as in your large and imposing *Lowery Sims as Ingres's Napoleon with a Gun* (2006; see Cat. 35).

KG: When you asked Lowery what figure in art history she would most like to be, she replied, "Napoleon with a gun." This is a very frontal painting, a very large painting. Lowery is Napoleon, and when I added the shotgun, it took on the appearance of the famous picture of Huey P. Newton, one of the founding members of the Black Panthers. In the picture, he is portrayed in a very similar position. I was very relieved when Lowery was later interviewed and she explained that she loved the Black Panthers as well as Ingres.[15]

FN: And we later discovered that the chair originally made of straw used in Huey Newton's photo that is so similar to this one, was cast in bronze for an exhibition on the Black Panthers and is now on display at the Oakland Museum of Art.

KG: And then, I asked Linda Nochlin if she would like to be a Courbet, since she wrote so extensively on the artist. Surprisingly, she replied "No, I would rather be the barmaid in Manet's *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*" (see Cat. 31).

FN: What's interesting is the barmaid in Manet's painting is very subdued and looks as though she can be very easily subjugated to her environment, but Linda Nochlin looks very powerful and commanding.

KG: She does, but I think we also bring our knowledge of the person to bear in our reading of the picture, for Linda is a very powerful and commanding woman. She stands there in utter tranquility, yet her face portrays such strength.

FN: The series that followed "Curators, Critics and Connoisseurs" was "Sargent's Women."

KG: This series of paintings was inspired by Gerhard Richter's *48 Portraits,* which was done for the Venice Biennale in 1972. The Richters are portraits entirely of men. I decided to take Richter's concept but depict only women. Richter used a German encyclopedia, so I, too, decided to use a single source, which turned out to be portraits by John Singer Sargent. Sargent is known for his portraits of women in society and art, but these subjects are often dictated by fathers and husbands and often don't have as much to do with the sitters themselves as with the social circumstances that caused them to appear in the painting to begin with. I wanted to portray the women as individuals, and the most expedient way to do that was by removing their clothing. When I began reading about these women, so many were writers, poets—incredible individuals—hidden in plain sight because they were women subjugated to their social standing and roles in society. I wrote texts on each woman describing who they are, as with Sargent's sister Emily, who was a painter in her own right and who has works hanging in the Fogg Museum in Cambridge.[16]

FN: Is the general idea in disrobing them that nudity is the great equalizer? In effect, they become just like women today. It was their clothing that identified them in the roles they had in society, and which, so to speak, they are stuck in for all time.

KG: It does become the great equalizer. I find that you can see into their faces far better than you can when they are wearing clothes. They are individuals, yet without clothing, they all become the same. The process in doing these portraits was fascinating. I worked with the School of Visual Arts and I got models. As each model walked in, I could see the similarity or sense of body type that enabled me to pair them with a specific Sargent woman.

FN: People who look at these works can easily misunderstand them. If they are hardcore feminists, they might find it offensive that these women are disrobed, but there's far more to it. I think that one thing feminism has accomplished is to approach issues such as these from a more uniquely woman's perspective.

KG: And the fact that these were painted by a woman.

FN: Well yes, of course, there's that, too. If they were painted by a man, they couldn't be interpreted like this at all. But in fact by disrobing them, you make visible that part of a woman's body that men are usually interested in seeing. That is to say, by seeing so many breasts, what actually occurs is almost the opposite. It's the same idea as accepting the vagina as part of a woman's anatomy, something that should not be hidden, as it was for centuries. Rather, it can be an assertive part of her whole persona.

KG: You can look at a culture where a woman has to cover her face. If she exposes her face or a lock of her hair, she's seducing a man. But we are part of a culture where women walk around with their hair and faces uncovered. So it's really about what you get used to, if you don't bring all this baggage to it. These women are so beautiful when you look at them. And yes they are sexual. I'm not saying they're not, but they are a totality.

FN: In a portrait that you did recently, the subject wanted to be cast as the *Girl with a Pearl Earring* by Vermeer (see ill. 21).

KG: This is Melva Bucksbaum. She actually looks very much like the figure in the painting. She came to my studio and posed. She has a straighter nose than the figure but the same very beautiful high forehead. This was a pleasure to do and she was wonderful to work with.

FN: In a specific portrait where the sitter takes an interest in a particular artist, it's almost a given that it ends up being the subject. But there are times and occasions where the sitter is no longer with us, and that is the case with your portrait of Basquiat, where he takes on the role of Juan de Pareja in the [Diego] Velázquez portrait (see Cat. 13). I'm curious to know what inspired the making of this picture. Remember at the beginning of this interview I asked you which came first, the subject or the source painting?

KG: Sometimes I can't answer that question, because they're both there at the same time. I think what inspired me here is the fact that Juan de Pareja was a servant, and Velázquez was very fond of him and did this portrait. He was a slave of Moorish descent who was Velázquez's assistant. Velázquez later freed him and de Pareja became an artist on his own. The original is a beautiful painting, and I used to look at the work all the time in the Metropolitan Museum. Somehow the idea that Basquiat—an artist whose work I think is extraordinary—came to mind to use in this painting because he is black. There's a certain sensitivity in the face and the eyes that both share. And then we have the lace and the costume of the times, both of which provide a counterpoint to Basquiat's strange hair, which almost makes him look like a jester. His eyes are so sensitive, yet filled with pain.

FN: The reason I asked this question about what came first is in part because I don't believe we think chronologically. Once a decision is made, the order in which the thoughts come to you fuse in your memory. Having said that, I cannot imagine putting Basquiat's head on any other painting in history. Imagine for example, that head being on another Vermeer. It couldn't possibly work on a Frans Hals.

KG: The Frans Hals subjects don't have the personality of Basquiat, who was always a tortured soul.

FN: It seems appropriate to put Jeffrey Deitch in the Pontormo, since the [Jacopo da] Pontormo painting now belongs to the Getty Museum in California, and Deitch moved to Los Angeles around the time you made this picture (Cat. 36).

Cat. 36
Kathleen Gilje (American, b. 1945)
Jeffrey Deitch as Jacopo da Pontormo's Portrait of a Halberdier, 2011
Oil on linen, 39 1/2 x 29 3/4
Collection of Melva Bucksbaum and Raymond Learsy
Photo: Brian Wilcox

Ill. 49
Pontormo (Italian, 1494–1557)
Portrait of a Halberdier (Francesco Guardi?), 1528–30
Oil on panel transferred to canvas, 36 1/4 x 28 3/8 in.
The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles

KG: That probably was one of the reasons for the choice, but as I said before, when I love a certain painting, I love the idea of being able to make that painting. I remember when I went to the Getty and saw their pictures, I walked in and saw this Pontormo (ill. 49) and it took my breath away. It was a great opportunity to work on a painting that I have often thought of.

FN: It's interesting that the painting hung in the Frick for twenty years before it went to California. Those years coincide with the years Deitch worked in New York as a dealer. The painting then moved to California, where Deitch himself moved to become the director of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles. Moreover, what is interesting about your selection of a Pontormo for Deitch is that in almost all of Pontormo's paintings, the figures have these circular forms around their eyes, and here we have Deitch wearing glasses.

KG: Yes, of course, that's a wonderful observation and perhaps that's why I became so obsessed with painting his circular glasses.

FN: Among the most interesting of the portraits you've done is that of Jennifer Stockman [*Portrait of Jennifer Blei Stockman after Gustav Klimt's The Dancer* (2012)]. It includes fragmentary visions of other works that are in her collection (see Cat. 34).

KG: I had been working with Jennifer Stockman for a while. We were trying to figure out what she would feel comfortable with in a portrait. And then I saw a video of her at the Bruce Museum's Icon Awards and I heard her say that in her next life, she would like to be born an artist. I thought she must really, really love art! Wouldn't it be interesting to depict her as being born—like the classic birth of Venus from a half-shell—out of her art? I had thought about the idea of using Gustav Klimt. I visited the Neue Galerie and saw Klimt's *The Dancer*. I then did something I almost never do, which is to buy a poster of the painting. I brought that poster back and it hit me: I could replace everything in the background with works from her collection. She liked the idea, so I went to her home and photographed the works in her collection. In the end, I used twenty-two different artists from her collection and created this world where she emerges—is born—from the works of art.

FN: The pattern on her dress—as in the original Klimt painting—fuses with the flowers on one side. And on the other side?

KG: These are Charles Rays. Then she has a painting from the Gelatin group and there's Marlene Dumas and Cindy Sherman and on the bottom right Ai Weiwei. At the very bottom Olafur Eliasson, then [Willem] de Kooning to the left Sigmar Polke, Juan Muñoz, [Gerhard] Richter, [John] Baldessari and on and on. It's just rich with artists in her collection.

FN: I see that at the same time as working on portraits of this type, you continue to investigate the subject of Old Master paintings, as in your *Bad Bets - Blind Hurdy-Gurdy Banker after Georges de La Tour's The Hurdy-Gurdy Player* (2012; see Cat. 18).

KG: This was my response to the banking crisis. I did a series of tic-tac-toe diagrams as graffiti on the wall to represent random gambling and created all this gold and coins stacked around. Historically, a hurdy-gurdy player was considered disreputable and, symbolically, the blind were always misleading, as in [Pieter] Bruegel [the Elder]'s parable of the *Blind Leading the Blind*. I thought it was a good comparison to what the bankers had done with our money.

FN: It seems as though he isn't ultimately the banker, because the bankers were not blind to what they were doing. It seems appropriate that we've left for last your two recent self-portraits, one after Artemisia Gentileschi and another after [William-Adolphe] Bouguereau.

KG: The first is my *Self-Portrait Slaying a Rooster after Artemisia Gentileschi's Judith Slaying Holofernes* (2012; see Cat. 17). As you know, Artemisia Gentileschi is an artist I have worked from before. She has an amazing story. When she is driven out of Rome after her trial and she goes to live in Florence, she immediately responds with another kind of painting very different from *Susanna and the Elders*, where the subject is a victim of sexual abuse. With *Judith Slaying Holofernes*, she adapts the Biblical story and she creates this powerful woman, a heroine, Judith, who saves her people from Holofernes, an Assyrian general who is threatening to destroy her people. According to the story, she volunteers to go into the camp and seduce Holofernes. There is no sexual encounter, however. Rather, Holofernes becomes drunk and falls asleep. As he slept, she cut off his head and took it back to her village in a basket.

For years, I have been fascinated by Artemisia's work. When I was at the Museum of Capodimonte, we had one of her *Judith Slaying Holofernes* pictures there, done, I believe, around 1612–13, with more blue in it. The painting I used was done around 1620 and is in the Uffizi. I chose this one because it seemed to have a grander scale, and had more space around. Here I have myself playing the role of Judith, but also being the powerfully built Artemisia Gentileschi. The bird was actually a capon, but it was supposed to represent a rooster, which I set up as a still life in my studio. It represents the rooster and the woman's place in the kitchen. Women slaughtered animals to cook the meal. It also represents Artemisia Gentileschi's role, because on one hand she was this wonderful artist who was confronted by all the prejudices against women and what women should be doing.

FN: Did her rape trial occur before 1620?

KG: Oh yes, that trial was about 1612.

FN: So both of the Judith and Holofernes images that she made were after her trial?

KG: Yes, and after experiencing the trial and leaving Rome, her whole world came crashing down around her, and maybe that allowed her to step outside the boundaries of where a woman was permitted to step. But what I'm getting at in these paintings are subjects that were the opposite of *Susanna and the Elders*. Susanna was beautiful and put upon. Now, suddenly, Artemisia makes this powerful woman, strong enough to strike down a giant. There's blood everywhere and it's a violent death. I had this capon and the feathers were beautiful and I

set it up on a little bed and put its leg up and opened its feathers, so that it would represent Holofernes in the original painting when he reaches up with his hand to push the maid away. I tried to have the feathers push her away to mimic the same gesture. I thought it would be horrible to have this dead creature set up, but instead it was very moving.

FN: Is there a reason you made the fowl so big?

KG: I made the bird so big because it would have looked ridiculous to have a little chicken lying there. It's compositional, and I think it has great strength. I love that leg going up, the tension of the leg pushing out. It had to be strong. And, I didn't want to choose a man. I thought about it and it's not my style …

FN: It certainly stands in sharp contrast to the Bouguereau.

KG: I decided here to avoid the intensity and violence of the Artemisia. I chose Bouguereau's *The Assault* (1898) and cast myself as the figure in the center of the painting (see Cat. 30). It's the total opposite in every way from the Artemisia, the feeling, the colors. In Bouguereau's painting, there are cupids everywhere. He did other paintings with this theme and, usually, the cupids are shooting arrows into a woman or man, and that target is then smitten by love. In this painting, I hold a paintbrush across my heart, which represents a cupid's arrow. Another cupid at the upper right bears a palette, which actually comes from a painting by [François] Boucher. So the idea behind my Assault is that I've been shot by paintbrushes that penetrate my heart and cause me to fall in love with painting. It's very playful. It's a painting you can't look at without smiling.

1 The story is one that was discovered in 1987 involving a New York lawyer, Joel Steinberg, who was monstrously abusive to his family, his wife Hedda Nussbaum and their six-year-old adopted daughter, Lisa Steinberg, who died as a result of injuries she sustained. It was one of the most horrific cases of child abuse ever exposed.

2 Mary D. Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi: The Image of the Female Hero in Italian Baroque Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

3 Robert Rosenblum, PhD (1927-2006) was a noted art historian and critic who taught at New York University. His range of expertise varied greatly, from 18th- and 19th-century French art to Picasso and dogs in art.

4 Mary Ellen Mark (b. 1940) is a well-known photographer, specializing in photojournalism, portraits and advertising photography. She later wrote an article on Gilje for *Bomb* Magazine, "Artists on Art: Mary Ellen Mark on Kathleen Gilje," *Bomb: Art and Culture Interviews* (Summer 2004), 36-37.

5 Christiansen, Keith, and Stefan Weppelmann, *The Renaissance Portrait from Donatello to Bellini*, exh. cat. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2011).

6 Donald Posner, "Caravaggio's Homo-Erotic Early Works," *Art Quarterly* 34 (1975), 301-24.

7 Speaking of Ingres's *The Turkish Bath*, Rosenblum writes: "The scene is specifically inspired by one of the letters of the learned and adventurous Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, who, at the time of her husband's appointment as ambassador to Constantinople, visited and vividly described the sequestered sensuality of a women's bath in that city (letter of April 1, 1717). There she saw some two hundred nude women, some of exquisite beauty and whiteness of skin, all engaged in the pleasures of indolence—bathing, gossiping, taking coffee and ices, spraying perfumes, combing their hair." Robert Rosenblum, *Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1967), 170.

8 Linda Nochlin, "The Imaginary Orient," *The Politics of Vision: Essays on Nineteenth-Century Art and Society* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 45. He is saying in effect, "Don't think that I or any other right-thinking Frenchman would ever be involved in this sort of thing. I am merely taking careful note of the fact that less enlightened races indulge in the trade of naked women—but isn't it arousing." (45). "This sense of erotic availability is spiced with still more forbidden overtones, for the conjunction of black and white, or dark and light female bodies, whether naked or in the guise of mistress and maidservant, has traditionally signified lesbianism." (49).

9 "In Memory of Pleasure: Contemporary Painting Exploring The Subversive Potential," curated by Andrea Inselmann, John Michael Kohler Arts Center, Sheboygen, WI, January 26–May 11, 1997.

10 Gilje is here referring to Guido Reni, *Drinking Bacchus*, c. 1623 (Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Dresden).

11 The legend is that of Cimon and Pero, and was often used in the Baroque period to illustrate the concept of Roman charity or filial piety. This subject is depicted by Caravaggio as part of his *Seven Acts of Mercy*, c. 1607, in the Church of Pio Monte della Misericordia, Naples.

12 *Het Pelsken* translates as "The Little Fur." The original Rubens painting is in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

13 Leo Steinberg, PhD (1920-2011) was a brilliant art historian who wrote extensively not only on modern and contemporary art, but also on the art of the Renaissance and Baroque periods. He taught for many years at Hunter College and at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, ending his teaching career as the Benjamin Franklin Professor of the History of Art at the University of Pennsylvania. In 2005, Kathleen Gilje painted his portrait after a painting by Peter Paul Rubens, his *Self-Portrait* of 1639 in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

14 "In particular against the convention that would have the woman coyly, straightforwardly, or indeed shamelessly display herself for the delectation of a male viewer located un-problematically at a distance from the painting that allows him easy command of the pictorial field and by so doing at once heightens and gratifies his desire for the visual, and by implication physical, possession of the image." "And that analogy strengthened by both the obvious painterliness and strident colorism of the vivid-hued parrot, a phallic creature whose outspread wings and tail in effect mirror the women's outward streaming hair, and by something else as well: the bedpost that rises vertically just to the left of and beyond the woman's upraised arm." He doesn't talk about the perches on the bird stand (obviously phallic to me) but refers to it "in its bareness and isolation seems like an intrusion from another, alien representational system. (A more Manet-like one?)." See Michael Fried, "Courbet's Feminity," in *Courbet Reconsidered*, ed. Sarah Faunce and Linda Nochlin (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Museum, 1988), 50.

15 As Lowery Sims noted: "Put these icons together [Ingres and Huey Newton] and it represents my interest in art history and being spawned in the age of the Black Panthers." Quoted in Anthony-Hayden Guest, "Judging Yourself," *Financial Times*, April 16, 2006.

16 Emily Sargent (1857–1929). The Fogg has a number of her copies after other artists: Fra Filippo Lippi, Tintoretto, Rubens, Delacroix, Bordone, etc.

Lenders

Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy,
Andover, Massachusetts
Bass Museum of Art, Miami Beach, Florida
Melva Bucksbaum and Raymond Learsy
Douglas S. Cramer
Robert Dance
Richard and Eileen Ekstract
Kathleen Gilje
RoseLee Goldberg and Dakota Jackson
Nicholas Gordon
Toby Devan Lewis
Jasmine Lobe
Francis Naumann Gallery
Linda Nochlin
Christina Polischuk
Private Collections
Ethel and Elie Romano
Bernie Toale and Joe Zina
Ulrich Museum of Art, Wichita State University, Wichita, Kansas
Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown, Massachusetts