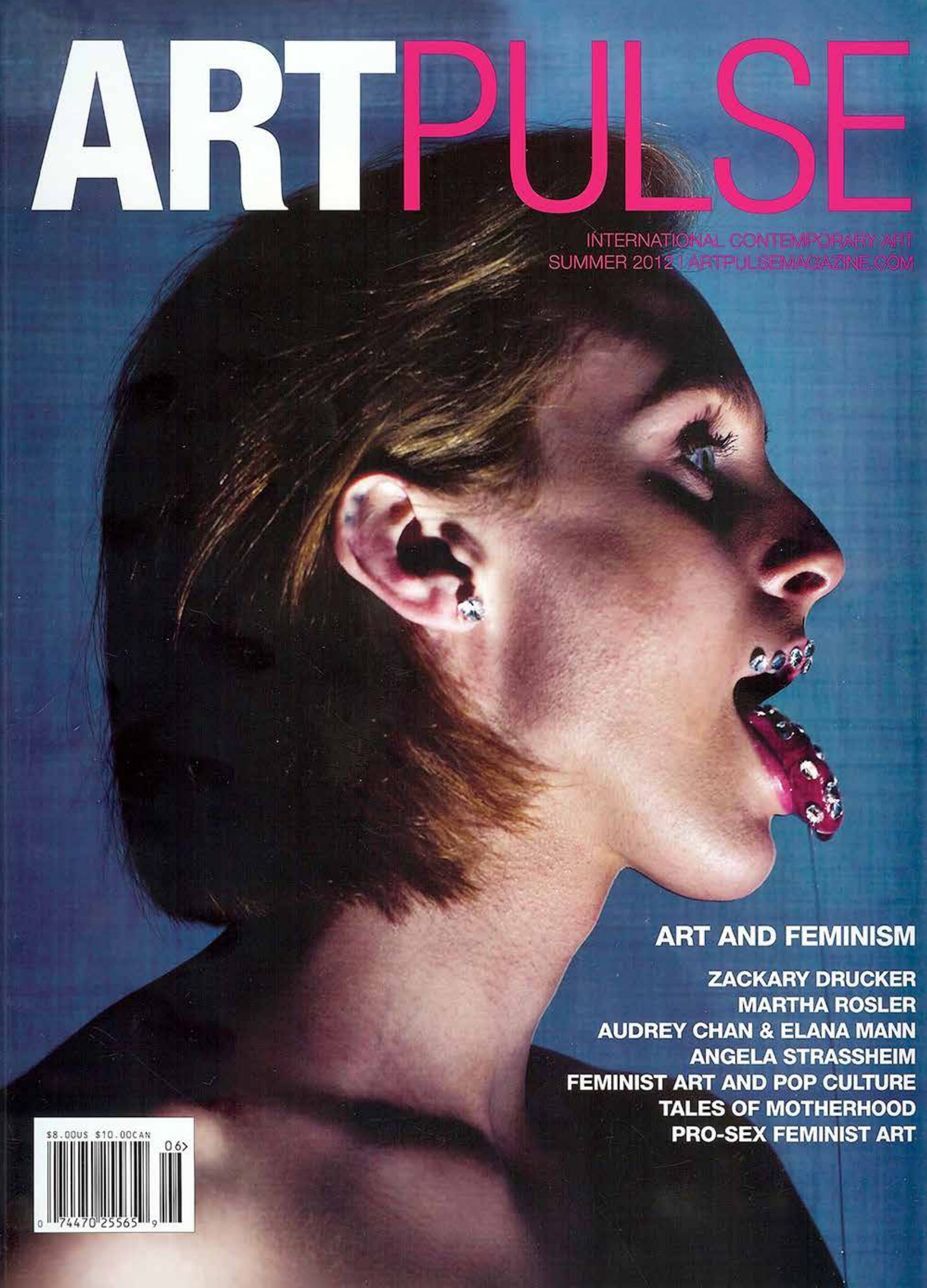


ARTPULSE

INTERNATIONAL CONTEMPORARY ART
SUMMER 2012 | ARTPULSEMAGAZINE.COM



ART AND FEMINISM

ZACKARY DRUCKER

MARTHA ROSLER

AUDREY CHAN & ELANA MANN

ANGELA STRASSHEIM

FEMINIST ART AND POP CULTURE

TALES OF MOTHERHOOD

PRO-SEX FEMINIST ART

\$8.00US \$10.00CAN



0 74470 25565 9

NINA DOTTI: PMS (PRINCESS, MOTHER, SUPERWOMAN)

13 Jeannette Mariani - Paris

By Irina Leyva-Pérez

The prominent feminist movement of the 1960s created a stir that disrespected the core of the established societal structure. One of the most important achievements of that group was the creation of a public conscience towards women's role in society, especially to the general notion that they were expected to neglect their professional ambitions because of what were perceived as their domestic obligations. The guilt trip often used to keep women confined in the reins of domesticity became a source of inspiration, a springboard to get to a better place.

But that became a problem in the 1960s, as once these doors opened women often found themselves in limbo, trapped between the workloads of their jobs and their domestic responsibilities. This frequently included being single parents as well. Many were in an impossible situation, in which the expectation to succeed and the pressure to achieve created constant stress. The "superwoman" who had to be great at everything became the new image for women all over the world. The fallacy of their so-called equality soon became evident, and women, instead of completely rejecting the idea of having a husband-like figure, began looking for a companion who was willing to share the tasks of home and career equally.

Andreina Fuentes, alias Nina Dotti, is one of these women, whose life is an endless string of tasks, who must wear different hats at the same time—as an artist, a gallerist and a mother. As an artist she uses an alter ego inspired by the name of Italian-Mexican photographer and political activist Tina Modotti. Dotti was born out of the need to establish a creative outlet that would differ from her work in the cultural field, first in museums and later as a gallerist. A new facet in her life, and consequently adding more responsibilities, would come once she married and became a mother. The pressure of having to balance all and the realization of such a process «gave birth» to her most recent work, the series *PMS (Princess, Mother, Superwoman)*, now on exhibition at 13 Jeannette Mariani in Paris. Dotti intentionally chose a similar set of letters that could be confused with the universal acronym for "Pre Menstrual Syndrome," a condition that only affects women. However, her *PMS* translates as *Princess, Mother and Superwoman*, which she sees as the three main stages in a woman's life: first a Princess to her parents, then a Mother to her child, and finally a Superwoman who has to juggle all the tasks and responsibilities in her life. Partially inspired by *The Supergirls*, a book by Mike Madrid¹, Dotti presents her central character, Supergirl, as a sort of Wonder Woman who grew out of girlhood status to become somebody who can achieve anything seemingly effortlessly. But she goes beyond that, tracing the genesis of this phenomenon to the indoctrination of expectations foisted upon girls when they are very young. Depending on social class, there are limitations with regard to who she can marry, expectations about bearing children, and requirements of establishing and maintaining a certain kind of house and home life.

In a way, Dotti objects to Madrid's characterizations of heroines' strength in comics, which always seem to be diminished in relation to their male counterparts (Madrid, v), as well as the typically overly sexualized images of heroines (Madrid, vi). Her Supergirl confronts Superman and defeats him, and yes, her heroine



Nina Dotti, *I love the real me IV*, 2012, Inkjet print on paper, 8" x 11." All images are courtesy of the artist and Galerie 13 Jeannette Mariani.

is sexy, even could be seen as fetishist, but in a way that confers on her more power.

While Dotti's images mimic those heroines of comics in a Lichtenstein way, even using bubbles to show a character's thoughts or speech, hers have a more irreverent attitude and are more realistic. For instance, Dotti's Supergirl smokes when she is stressed, regardless of the fact that it is no longer considered politically correct (or healthy) to show a woman, or anyone else, smoking.

Dotti also deals with the issue of identity. By choosing a disguise such as Supergirl, Dotti is concealing not only her real persona but also reflecting the pressure placed on women and girls to become something other or more than they are to societal and family expectations. This is her ironic and subtle way of rebelling—with a big smile. By presenting herself in what seems like a game with dolls she is questioning the role of contemporary women in society, including expectations placed on them by society as well as those that are self-imposed. After all, who wouldn't like to be a mighty Supergirl? These characters possess ideal



Nina Dotti, *Balance?* 2012, Inkjet print on paper, 23" x 45."

qualities for any woman—youth, beauty and power—and while men might look at them for their physical beauty, women might appreciate their strength and glamour.

The artist evaluates her life as a “superwoman” and ends up like the characters Sally (Silk Spectre I) and Laurie (Silk Spectre II) in *Watchmen* (2009)². While Laurie is still looking at life as if she can conquer it, Sally is disenchanted and defeated, not willing to fight anymore. Dotti sees herself as halfway between those two extremes, knowing, as Sally does, that she faces an almost impossible situation, but also being strong like Laurie and bravely accepting the challenge too.

Dotti questions the validity of expecting women to be that superwoman. The perfect woman (represented by the quintessential Barbie doll) is always ready, looking her best. Dotti’s Barbie is wearing a crown and an apron at the same time. Her character is somebody who, in Martha Stewart fashion, can whip up a fantastic dinner for 30, maintain a flawless appearance and be the best mother on earth. This is something we all know is not possible in real life, which is precisely why Dotti is caricaturing it. Her im-

ages look like surreal scenes where the dolls are the protagonists, simulating stills from an animated film.

In her series of installations *Balanzas (Scales)*, she examines the same concept. Her gold scales represent her concerns about how to establish a daily equilibrium in her life and a reflection on questions such as: What is more important, work or family? And is it possible to balance the scale perfectly?

There is deception and anguish behind Dotti’s images of perfect and happy Supergirls. Through these apparently perfect dolls she is ironically addressing the struggle that women face every day to achieve a sense of “wholeness.” While social stigmas with regard to gender have changed greatly since the 1960s, how women are perceived and what is expected of them are still part of our daily life, and the load is as heavy as ever. ■

NOTES

1. Madrid, Mike. *The Supergirls: Fashion, Feminism, Fantasy, and the History of Comic Book Heroines*. Exterminating Angel Press, 2010.
2. *Watchmen* (2009) is a movie directed by Zack Snyder based on comics by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, published by D.C. Comics between 1986 and 1987.



Nina Dotti, *Are You Mother Enough?* 2012, drawing, collage, 12" x 12."