

# "Cut-Up: Contemporary Collage and Cut-Up Histories Through a Feminist Lens" at Franklin Street Works

BY NOAH DILLON, MODERN PAINTERS | MARCH 06, 2016

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An installation view of the exhibit "Cut-Up" at Franklin Street Works in Stamford, Connecticut.  
(Courtesy Franklin Street Works )

Stamford, CT

**“Cut-Up: Contemporary Collage and Cut-Up Histories Through a Feminist Lens”**

*Franklin Street Works*, (<http://www.franklinstreetworks.org/>) January 16–April 3

Collage has many parents, but the cut-up method is often associated with (/artists/32129-william-burroughs)William Burroughs (/artists/32129-william-burroughs) and (/artists/77952-brion-gysin)Brion Gysin (/artists/77952-brion-gysin). They used the technique in writing as a semantic tool, comparing it to stream-of-consciousness juxtaposition and cinematic montage, speculating that in its reordering of language it revealed hidden truths. The artists featured in “Cut-Up” splice together all manner of media, expanding on and rediscovering some of the forebears and inheritors of Burroughs’s method. But what was in Burroughs’s (arguably bourgeois and chauvinistic) hands a formal methodology is here reworked into acts of creative destruction with a feminist bent. The show’s inclusions, curated by artist Katie Vida, are all made by women, span almost 50 years, and are varied in medium, including video-documented performance, Internet-based art, sound, and textiles.

The use of text is recurrent, however, as in Dodie Bellamy’s queered re-renderings of canonical poetry in *Cunt Norton*, 2013; Lorraine O’Grady’s poetic extracts from the *New York Times*, 1977/2010; and Alexis Knowlton’s website <http://leadpipe.us> (<http://leadpipe.us>), 2012–ongoing, shown here on an iPad as a logorrheic, vaguely diaristic stream of compiled text. Knowlton’s own words—from e-mails, notes, text messages, diaries—are muddled, both manually and mechanically. The didactic for her work alludes to Lee Lozano’s *Dropout Piece*, begun ca. 1970, and Edward Snowden; a more apt comparison might be

to Kenneth Goldsmith’s appropriative conceptual poetry, which he boasts is “unreadable.”

Other materials become tellingly illegible in the hands of sculptors and sound artists. Phyllis Baldino’s video *The Unknown Series*, 1994–96, shows the artist manically combining thrift-store goods to make ad hoc assemblages reminiscent of Erwin Wurm. Those sculptural “things,” displayed in another room, act as callbacks—familiar from the video but titillatingly mysterious or absurd. In addition to a sculpture by (/artists/6347-nancy-shaver)Nancy Shaver (/artists/6347-nancy-shaver), Vida has included a rocking chair from the artist’s studio, in which viewers can sit and listen to Jennie C. Jones’s 2004 remix *You Make Me Feel Like 100 Billie Holiday Songs* while checking out Lourdes Correa-Carlo’s floor-based sculpture, *Between the Two*, 2008. Jones’s sound work layers clips from 100 songs by Holiday in four minutes, teasing a disturbing effect from the chanteuse’s crooning.

A few pieces site the cut-up directly at the female subject, with figurative imagery given primacy, particularly Carolee Schneemann’s canonical *Body Collage*, 1967, the earliest work on view. Carrie Moyer and Sheila Pepe show Xerox prints of imaginary commemorative feminist stamps with images of artists and activists. *scum Manifesto* author Valerie Solanas appears in one, a ghost of cutting humor and cutting up patriarchy. Nearby is Cauleen Smith’s *Chronicles of a Lying Spirit (by Kelly Gabron)*, 1992, a video fable of a young black woman reappearing through time, from her death in 1773 in the Middle Passage to a road trip in 1983. The revisioning of history found in those latter artworks compresses generations and heroines, making struggles and accomplishments palpable.

The show is big, and it surveys a lot of ground; it could easily narrow its focus to cut-up within a single medium. The theme of feminism, too, emerges in various degrees of explicitness (compare, for example, Bellamy’s assertiveness to Knowlton’s more passive accumulation). Nonetheless, the correspondences among media—and the slippages between the textual, formal, and aural—yield a rich take on collage. Breaking the cut-up expansively away from the legacy of Burroughs can only benefit the process and its practitioners.

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