

GREY ART NYU GALLERY

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FIRST AMERICAN MUSEUM RETROSPECTIVE OF ARTIST AND CRITIC LIL PICARD DEBUTS AT GREY ART GALLERY

On view at NYU from April 20 to July 10, 2010

**Known as “muse of the American avant-garde,” Picard was a fixture of the
Downtown New York art scene of 1950s, ’60s, and ’70s**

New York City, January 29, 2010—Debuting at **New York University’s Grey Art Gallery** on April 20, *Lil Picard and Counterculture New York* comprises over 70 works by a pioneering feminist artist who played varied and vital—but under-acknowledged—roles in the New York art world during the 1950s, ’60s, and ’70s. This first comprehensive American museum exhibition presents paintings, sculptures, drawings, collages, and several landmark installations and performances. Also included are photographs, writings, and films. All the works are drawn from the collections of the **University of Iowa Museum of Art (UIMA)**, which organized the show, and from the **University of Iowa Libraries**, which houses the artist’s extensive papers. *Lil Picard and Counterculture New York* remains on view at the Grey Art Gallery through July 10.

The life of this self-described “primitive sophisticated artist” is as intriguing as her art. Born Lilli Elisabeth Benedick in Landau, Germany, in 1899, the multitalented Picard worked as a cabaret actress, accessories designer, and writer in the heady, avant-garde scene of Berlin between the wars. In the 1930s, she focused on writing and criticism, working as a cultural reporter for *Berliner Tageblatt*, and as a fashion editor for *Zeitschrift für Deutsche Konfektion*. Best known there as a journalist and critic, she emigrated to the U.S. in 1937, following the rise of Nazi Germany and the revocation of her press credentials due to her Jewish heritage. In New York, she opened a custom millinery shop on Madison Avenue, selling her designs to Lord & Taylor, Macy’s, and Bloomingdale’s. After studying at the Art Students League and with Hans

Hofmann in Provincetown, she began painting in earnest in 1939; less than a decade later, she was exhibiting in Greenwich Village's Tenth Street galleries.

"A very early practitioner of socio-political Happenings and installations," notes **Kathleen A. Edwards**, UIMA's chief curator, who organized the show, "Picard was several generations older than groundbreaking female performance artists such as Carolee Schneemann and Hannah Wilke. The Estate of Lil Picard, which came to the University of Iowa in 1999, is a remarkable treasure trove of the artist's work as well as a resource for scholars and students working on New York's underground art scene in the 1950s, '60s, and '70s."

Studying and making art in New York in the 1940s, Picard met artists such as Franz Kline, Mark Rothko, and Jackson Pollock. Later she frequented Andy Warhol's Factory and participated in the nascent performance scene with colleagues like Schneemann, Claes Oldenburg, and Yoko Ono. Her personal photographs and letters document her love affairs with artists Al Jensen and Ad Reinhardt. By the 1950s, she had resumed her journalistic career to support her art, most notably as the New York art correspondent for *Die Welt*, a prominent German daily. Through these writings, she was instrumental in shaping German perceptions of American art, especially Pop art, which she championed vigorously. She also contributed articles to *Kunstforum International*, *Das Kunstwerk*, *Arts Magazine*, *East Village Other*, and *Interview*.

Throughout her career, Picard referenced her own life in her art. Her autobiographical observations and experiences—recorded in personal journals, snapshots, and notes—as well as drafts, published articles, and images of her past work, all provided fodder for her visual and performance art. Beginning with her early work *Crossing*, 1947, with its vigorous, expressive brushstrokes, the exhibition follows Picard's move toward the dynamic and brightly colored collaged canvases of the 1950s. Layered with the detritus of her everyday existence—theater tickets, wine bottles, cigarette labels, and scraps of clothing—paintings such as the four-paneled *Love*, 1958–59, and the complex *Collage in Blue*, 1957, with their active, highly tactile surfaces, reflect the artist's simultaneous engagement with both past and present.

With the advent of the 1960s, Picard first concentrated on sculpture and assemblage, and later moved toward Happenings and installations. Her playful yet haunted *Hide and Seek House*, 1960, is featured, along with a series of mixed-media assemblages dating from 1962 to 1964. Both socially and politically aware, Picard demonstrated her feminist concerns in *Lady Woolworth*, 1963, a work that functions as an early critique of mass media's manipulation of women. A participant in the NO! art movement who embraced its strategy of melding artistic

production with socio-cultural action, Picard explored the trauma of war. She soon preferred performances and installations as vehicles for the expression of her views on the Vietnam War and social oppression, as seen in *Construction-Destruction-Construction*. This 1967 installation and performance piece incorporated collaged paintings, maimed mannequins, vibrantly painted costumes, spray-painted Associated Press photographs, and an altered American flag quilt, and will be represented in the exhibition by original props and a slide show.

Picard was keenly aware of the intellectual and aesthetic currents of her time. For example, the title of her series of drawings from the mid-1970s known as “dematerializations” was inspired by Lucy Lippard’s book *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Object*, published in 1973. Picard’s Napkinian Portraits series also demonstrates the depth of her involvement in New York’s art and literary world, and works such as *Socialite Napkin*, 1975, with its collaged photograph and mirrored drawings, hint at the artist’s interest in the notion of celebrity.

By the time of her death in 1994, Picard had had 15 solo exhibitions in the U.S. and Germany, and her work had been included in more than 40 group shows. Her first solo show was at the David Anderson Gallery in 1960. In 1976, she enjoyed simultaneous exhibitions at New York’s Goethe House, Ronald Feldman Gallery, and Holly Solomon Gallery. Her last major show was a 1978 retrospective at the Neue Berliner Kunstverein in Berlin. “The Grey Art Gallery is thrilled to host this important and overdue exhibition,” notes **Lynn Gumpert**, the Grey’s director. “It reinforces the Grey’s mission to focus on Lower Manhattan’s amazing history of avant-garde art and culture, where artists from a surprisingly broad range of backgrounds converged in a rich and fertile mix. University museums are uniquely equipped to present such scholarly reassessments, and we are pleased to work with Kathy Edwards and the UIMA to reintroduce Lil Picard to New York audiences.” The show will also include two films about Picard by New York filmmaker Silviana Goldsmith: *Art is a Party, the New Party is Art* and *Lil Picard*.

Lil Picard and Counterculture New York will be accompanied by a state-of-the-art interactive web site, which will include hundreds of photographs of both Picard’s artworks and the artist with art-world friends. It will also present selected critical writings by Picard, pages from her diaries, some of her recorded interviews with artists, and film clips. Following its debut at the Grey, the exhibition will be on view at the Black Box Theater at the Iowa Memorial Union in Iowa City in Spring 2011.

Picard pursued a remarkable career devoted to art, writing, performance, and fashion that spanned a century. Living in Berlin in the 1920s, she studied art, literature, ballet, and voice. Associated with the Berlin Dada group—which included George Grosz, Hugo Ball, and Richard Huelsenbeck—and influenced by Brecht’s “epic theater” and use of critical satire, she performed in prominent cabarets as well as film. Celebrated as a muse to the postwar New York art world, she became a member of Andy Warhol’s inner circle and counted among her friends numerous art-world luminaries. Drawn entirely from the artist’s estate and its extensive archives at the University of Iowa, *Lil Picard and Counterculture New York* sheds welcome light on the life and work of an important German-born American artist and critic.

Sponsorship:

Lil Picard is organized by the University of Iowa Museum of Art with major support from Doug and Linda Paul, the Members’ Special Exhibition Fund, and Lil’s List. The presentation at the Grey Art Gallery is made possible in part by the Grey’s Director’s Circle, Inter/National Council, and Friends, and the Abby Weed Grey Trust.

About the Grey Art Gallery:

The Grey Art Gallery is New York University’s fine-arts museum, located on historic Washington Square Park in New York City’s Greenwich Village. It offers the NYU community and the general public a dynamic roster of engaging and thought-provoking exhibitions, all of them enriched by public programs. With its emphasis on experimentation and interpretation, and its focus on exploring art in its historical, cultural, and social contexts, the Grey serves as a museum-laboratory for the exploration of art’s environments.

Exhibitions organized by the Grey have encompassed all the visual arts: painting, sculpture, drawing and printmaking, photography, architecture and decorative arts, video, film, and performance. In addition to producing its own exhibitions, which often travel to other venues in the United States and abroad, the Gallery hosts traveling shows that might otherwise not be seen in New York and produces scholarly publications that are distributed worldwide.

General Information

Grey Art Gallery, New York University, 100 Washington Square East, New York, NY 10003

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Web site: <http://www.nyu.edu/greyart>

Hours:

Tuesday, Thursday, Friday: 11am–6 pm

OPEN LATE Wednesday: 11 am–8 pm

Saturday: 11 am–5 pm

Sunday, Monday and major holidays: Closed

Admission: Suggested donation: \$3; NYU students, faculty, and staff: free of charge