

# Martha Edelheit b. 1931 New York

## Summary -

Martha Edelheit was born New York City in 1931, where she lived until moving to Sweden in 1993. She currently lives outside of Stockholm. She is known as a pioneering feminist artist whose work of the 1960s addresses female desire, the body, and skin as a double “canvas” for tattoo imagery.

Edelheit studied at the University of Chicago, New York University and Columbia University in the 1950s. Important teachers included artist Michael Loew and art historian Meyer Schapiro. She established herself in the center of the downtown avant-garde, becoming a member of the Tenth Street artist-run space, the Reuben Gallery, where her first solo show was held in 1960. She, like other members Jim Dine, Allan Kaprow, Claes Oldenberg, and Robert Whitman, were pushing at the boundaries and definitions of sculpture, painting, and art-making through Happenings and experimental objects. Edelheit exhibited her “extension” paintings which break the frame of the work and utilize utilitarian objects. Her second solo show, in 1961, was held at another significant nucleus of experimental art, the Judson Gallery.

By 1962, Edelheit began to explore the subject of tattooing in her work. She related to the writings of Claude Levi-Strauss. In his 1955 memoir, *Tristes Tropiques*, Levi-Strauss speculates that tattooing was the first art, before cave art, and that the human body was the first canvas. The flesh of the figures Edelheit depicts become places where the dreams and fantasies of the models emerge. Edelheit’s paintings of tattooed figures led to her depictions of circus performers, which have a frank sexuality; the contorted bodies and body parts, along with their costumed appearance, suggest sadomasochistic play.

Edelheit’s erotic works on paper, and her series of monumental “Flesh Wall” paintings were exhibited at the Byron Gallery in the mid-1960s. This work prompted Allan Kaprow to write an article for the *Village Voice* addressing the significance of women’s contemporary erotic art. Edelheit became an essential voice whose work implicitly challenged social expectations of women as well as formalist paradigms and traditional notions of figurative painting and the nude.

## Education -

1956

B.S., Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, NY

School of General Studies, Columbia University, New York, NY

Michael Loew (Studio classes)

1954

New York University, New York, NY



1951

University of Chicago, Chicago, IL

## Solo Exhibitions -

2018

*Flesh Walls: Tales from the 60s*, Eric Firestone Gallery, New York, NY

2014

Artifact Gallery, New York, NY

2009

Piteå Konsthall, Piteå, Sweden

2008

SOHO20 Chelsea Gallery, New York, NY

2007

Galleria BE'19, Helsinki, Finland

SARKA Museum, Loimaa, Finland

Villa Landes, Kimito, Finland

2004

Galleri Cupido, Stockholm, Sweden

Galleria BE'19, Helsinki, Finland

2003

Konstpaus, Ekerö, Sweden

2002

Galleri Strömbom, Uppsala, Sweden



2001

Wetterling Gallery, Stockholm, Sweden

2000

Medborgarhuset, Smedstorp, Sweden

1999

Galleri Hovet, Gamla Ishovet, Stockholm, Sweden

Galleria BE'19, Helsinki, Finland

1998

Wetterling Gallery, Stockholm, Sweden

1996

Galleria BE'19, Helsinki, Finland

1992

Galleria BE'19, Helsinki, Finland

1991

Galleria BE'19, Helsinki, Finland

SOHO20 Gallery, New York, NY

1988

SOHO20 Gallery, New York, NY

1987

Galerie Carinthia, Klagenfurt, Austria

Atelier 2000, Vienna, Austria



1986

SOHO20 Gallery, New York, NY

1984

A.I.R. Gallery, New York, NY

Women's Interart Center, New York, NY

1982

Rutgers University, Douglass Library, NJ

1975

Wilson College, Chambersburg, PA

1974

Evanston Art Center, Evanston, IL

1973

Artists Space, New York, NY

1966

Byron Gallery, New York, NY

1964

OK Harris, Provincetown, MA

1961

Judson Gallery, New York, NY

1960

Reuben Gallery, New York, NY



## Group Exhibitions -

2018

*Currents: Abortion*, A.I.R. Gallery, New York, NY

2017

*Inventing Downtown: Artist-Run Galleries in New York City, 1952–1965*, Grey Gallery, New York University, New York, NY

Annual Group Exhibition, SOHO20, Brooklyn, NY

2016

*The Sister Chapel: An Essential Feminist Collaboration*, Rowan University Art Gallery, Glassboro, NJ

Annual Group Exhibition: Part 2, SOHO20, Brooklyn, NY

2014

*From the Other Side*, SOHO20 Chelsea Gallery, New York, NY

2013

*Relational Ground: Defying the Status Quo*, SOHO20 Chelsea Gallery, New York, NY

2012

*Always/Never*, SOHO20 Chelsea Gallery, New York, NY

*Art in Boxes 2012*, AG Gallery, Brooklyn, NY

2011

*Groundbreaking: The Women of the Sylvia Sleigh Collection*, Rowan University Art Gallery, Glassboro, NJ

*Cluster—A Group Exhibition: Object and Space (Alexis Duque, Martha Nilsson Edelheit, Peter Janssen)*, AG Gallery, Brooklyn, NY

*Folles d’Hiver*, SOHO20 Chelsea Gallery, New York, NY



2010

*Between the Lines: Exhibition of SOHO20 Member Artists*, SOHO20 Chelsea Gallery, New York, NY

2009

*INPLACE: The Annual Exhibition of SOHO20 Artists*, SOHO20 Chelsea Gallery, New York, NY

2006

*Self Portraits, Ideas, Images, Structures*, SOHO20 Chelsea Gallery, New York, NY

2005

*Small Works*, SOHO20 Chelsea Gallery, New York, NY

*FallOut*, SOHO20 Chelsea Gallery, New York, NY

2004

*Member Artists Group Show*, SOHO20 Chelsea Gallery, New York, NY

*The Sister Chapel: An Essential Feminist Collaboration*, Rowan University Art Gallery, Glassboro, NJ

2003

Member Artists Group Show, SOHO20 Chelsea Gallery, New York, NY

2002

Member Artists Group Show, SOHO21 Chelsea Gallery, New York, NY

2001

Member Artists Group Show, SOHO22 Chelsea Gallery, New York, NY

2000

Member Artists Group Show, SOHO23 Chelsea Gallery, New York, NY



1999

Member Artists Group Show, SOHO24 Chelsea Gallery, New York, NY

1998

Member Artists Group Show, SOHO25 Chelsea Gallery, New York, NY

1997

*Konst Massan*, Galleri BE'19, Sollentuna, Sweden

1996

Helsinki Art Hall, Helsinki, Finland

1984

Artist Space, New York, NY

*BLAM!*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY

1979

*The Sister Chapel*, State University of New York at Stony Brook, Stony Brook, NY

1978

*The Sister Chapel*, P.S.1, Long Island City, New York

1975

*Works on Paper*, Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY

Campbell Gallery, University of Houston, TX

Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minneapolis, MN

*Three Centuries of the American Nude*, New York Cultural Center, New York, NY

*Sons and Others*, Queens Museum, Queens, NY

1973

*Erotic Garden*, Women's Interart Center, New York, NY



*Erotica Show*, New School Art Center, New York, NY

*Art in Boxes 2012*, AG Gallery, Brooklyn, NY

*Always/Never*, SOHO20 Chelsea Gallery, New York, NY

1972

*Humor, Satire, and Irony*, New School Art Center, New York, NY

1965

*11 from the Reuben*, Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY

*Box Show*, Byron Gallery, New York, NY

1964

*Figure Show*, Wadsworth Atheneum, CT

1961

*New Forms, New Media*, Martha Jackson Gallery, New York, NY

## Film Screening -

2017

"Hats, Bottles & Bones," *Inventing Downtown: Lives of Artists, Part 2*, Grey Art Gallery, New York University, New York, NY

2016

"The Albino Queen and Sno White in Triplicate (1973, S8, 22')," Petzel Gallery, New York, NY

2015

"Hats, Bottles & Bones," RARE, New York, NY





1981

(~1991) "Hats, Bottles & Bones (1977, 16mm, 22')," distributed and screened in the AFA program (Shown regularly since its first screening in 1977 )

1980

International Festival, Denmark

1978

Anthology Film Archives

Albright Knox Gallery, Buffalo, NY

Museum of the City of New York, NY

1977

Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY

Brooklyn Museum, New York, NY International Culture Center, Vienna, Austria

1975

(~1976) University of California, San Diego, CA Portland Museum, OR

Rutgers University, NJ (solo show)

1974

Graz Museum, Graz, Austria

Museum of 20th Century, Vienna, Austria

## Grants & Awards -

1984

2nd Prize, Juried Invitational, Lehigh University, Bethlehem, PA

1978

(~1986) NYSCA Grant, The New York State Council on the Arts, New York, NY



1974

(~1976) NYSCA and NEA Matching Grants, The New York State Council on the Arts, New York NY and the National Endowment for the Arts, Washington, DC

## Collections -

New York Public Library, New York, NY

Piteå Commune, Piteå, Sweden

Rowan University Art Gallery, Glassboro, NJ

## Lecture -

1980

Montclair State College, Montclair, NJ (Guest Lecturer– Film)

1977

New School, New York, NY (Guest Lecturer–Film)

1976

Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL (Artist in Residence)

1975

University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, OH (Artist in Residence)

Wilson College, Chambersburg, PA (Artist in Residence)

1973

California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, CA (Visiting Artist)

## Publications -



2014

Exhibition Catalogue, *Martha Nilsson Edelheit: Erotic Circus*, Artifact Gallery, New York, NY (Essay: Rachel Middleman)

2009

Exhibition Catalogue, *Martha Nilsson Edelheit*, Konsthallen Piteå, Sweden (Essays: "Grannens flock med Gotlandsår" by Christian Chambert and "Martha Nilsson Edelheit in Sweden" by Andrew D. Hottle)

2007

Exhibition Catalogue, *Martha Nilsson Edelheit*, Galleria BE'19, Helsinki, Finland (Essay: "Martha Nilsson Edelheit's Vibrant Pastures" by Andrew D. Hottle)

2000

Exhibition Catalogue, *Martha Nilsson Edelheit*, Wetterling Gallery, Stockholm (Essay: Sara Lidman)

1999

Exhibition Catalogue, *Martha Nilsson Edelheit*, Galleria BE'19, Helsinki, Finland (Essay: Bengt af Klintberg)

1998

Exhibition Catalogue, *Martha Nilsson Edelheit: Erotic Circus*, Artifact Gallery, New York, NY (Essay: Rachel Middleman)

1996

Exhibition Catalogue, *Martha Nilsson Edelheit*, Galleria BE'19, Helsinki, Finland (Essay: "Between Heaven and Earth: About Weightlessness in Martha Edelheit's Pictorial World" by Ragnar von Holten )

Exhibition Catalogue, *Martha Ross Edelheit: String Masks and Paintings*, Galleria BE'19, Helsinki, Finland (Essay: "Masks of Beauty and Despair" by Leena-Maija Rossi)

Bibliography -



## 2017

Jennifer Krasinski, “Exploring New York’s Century Boom of Artist-Run Galleries,” *Village Voice*, February 28, 2017, <https://www.villagevoice.com/2017/02/28/exploring-new-yorks-midcentury-boom-of-artist-run-galleries/> MARTHA NI

Blake Gopnik, “Martha Edelheit, Another Postwar Talent Left Out of Art History’s Storyline,” Opinion, *Artnet News*, February 1, 2017, <https://news.artnet.com/opinion/martha-edelheitgrey-gallery-840995>

Ariella Budick, “When Artists Ruled: The Fearless Spirit of 1950s and 60s New York,” *Financial Times*, Visual Arts, January 13, 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/0de70c44-d750-11e6-944be7eb37a6aa8e>

Holland Cotter, “When Artists Ran the Show: ‘Inventing Downtown,’ at N.Y.U.,” *New York Times*, January 12, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/12/arts/design/when-artists-ranthe-show-inventing-downtown-at-nyu.html>

Melissa Rachleff, *Inventing Downtown: Artist-Run Galleries in New York City, 1952–1965* (New York: Grey Art Gallery, New York University, 2017).

## 2014

Andrew D. Hottle, *The Art of the Sister Chapel: Exemplary Women, Visionary Creators, and Feminist Collaboration* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2014).

Rachel Middleman, “A Feminist Avant-Garde: Martha Edelheit’s ‘Erotic Art’ in the 1960s,” *Konsthistorisk tidskrift/Journal of Art History* (2014): 1–19.

Joyce Kozloff, “Maria Lassnig in New York, 1968–1980,” *Hyperallergic*, November 8, 2014.

## 2007

Gail Levin, “Censorship, Politics and Sexual Imagery in the Work of Jewish-American Feminist Artists,” *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women’s Studies & Gender Issues* 14 (Fall 2007): 63–96.

Richard Meyer, “Hard Targets: Male Bodies, Feminist Art, and the Force of Censorship in the 1970s,” in *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, ed. Lisa Gabrielle Mark (Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art, 2007), 362–383.

## 1987

Joan Arbeiter, “Chance and Change in the Art of Sari Dienes,” *Woman’s Art Journal* 7, no. 2 (Autumn 1986–Winter 1987): 27–31.



1986

Grace Glueck, "Artist and Model: Why a Rich Tradition Endures," *New York Times*, June 8.

1984

Barbara Haskell and John G. Hanhardt, *Blam! The Explosion of Pop, Minimalism, and Performance, 1958–1964* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1984).

1982

Eunice Golden and Kay Kenny, "Sexuality in Art: Two Decades from a Feminist Perspective," *Woman's Art Journal* 3, no. 1 (Spring–Summer 1982): 14–15.

1980

Joan Semmel and April Kingsley, "Sexual Imagery in Women's Art," *Woman's Art Journal* 1, no. 1 (Spring–Summer 1980): 1–6.

1979

Sandra L. Langer, "The Sister Chapel: Towards a Feminist Iconography, with Commentary by Ilise Greenstein," *Southern Quarterly* 17, no. 2 (Winter 1979): 28–41.

1978

Judith E. Stein, "Women Artists '78," *Art Journal* 37, no. 4 (Summer 1978): 332–333.

1977

Gloria Feman Orenstein, "The Sister Chapel: A Traveling Homage to Heroines," *Womanart* 1, no. 3 (Winter/Spring 1977): 12–21.

1976

Judith K. Brodsky, "Notes from the Women's Caucus for Art," *Art Journal* 35, no. 4 (Summer 1976): 396–398.

1975

Tiiu Lukk, "Profiles," *Super-8 Filmmaker* 3, no. 5 (October 1975): 46.



1974

Lynda Crawford, "Sitting on Botticelli's Face," *Bitch* 1, no. 2 (March 1974): 8–9, 23.

1973

Peter Frank, "On Art," *Soho Weekly News*, December 13, 1973.

Maryse Holder, "Another Cuntree: At Last, a Mainstream Female Art Movement," *Off Our Backs* 3, no. 10 (September 1973): 11–17.

Donald B. Kuspit, et al., "The 61st Annual Meeting of the College Art Association of America," *Art Journal* 32, no. 3 (Spring 1973): 271–283.

Rosemary Mayer, "Martha Edelheit," Reviews: New York, *Arts Magazine* 47, no. 6 (April 1973): 75.

1966

Jane Gollin, "Martha Edelheit," Reviews and Previews, *Art News* 65, no. 4 (April 1966): 15.

Colta Feller, "Martha Edelheit," In the Galleries, *Arts Magazines* 40, no. 10 (June 1966): 49.

