

TAMMY RAE CARLAND: "Alien She" at YBCA – Riot Grrrls Come of Age

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You don't need to have been in the mosh pit to appreciate "Alien She" at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts. This complex exhibition, one of the best this year, explores the Riot Grrrl feminist movement that grew out of the 1990s punk music scene, some of the key artists it spawned and the technological arc of 20-plus years of radical artworks. Xeroxed flyers, zines, mixtapes and anticipated present-day media consumption online, but with more raw evidence of handiwork, the use of handcraft gets to the core of punk's quick and dirty, impassioned do-it-yourself ethos. Curators Astria Suparak and Ceci Moss present a tightly organized exhibition that demonstrates how these ideas have grown up in the digital age.

"Alien She" examines the post-third-wave feminist movement through the work of seven artists spurred by garage bands, DIY craft and low-budget promotion. It also explores sharing and innovation at the literal dawn of the Internet: Swiss inventor Tim Berners-Lee released the first Web browser in 1991, the same year the Riot Grrrl movement began to unfold. Sexual identity politics, healthy rage and subtle humor meld together disarmingly in the works on view, like sweetly crocheted expletives. Vast quantities of self-published zines and hand-designed posters and flyers, as well as audio and other ephemera, anchor the display. This history lesson offers either a trip down memory lane or a crash course on end-of-millennia angst.

Brooklyn artist L.J. Roberts' sculpture "We Couldn't Get In, We Couldn't Get Out" (2006-07) presents a section of chain-link fence topped with barbed wire wrapped in hot pink yarn and a permeable barrier at the entrance of the show. Roberts' work engages craft to discover themes of exclusion, containment and feminist activism as a protege of the Riot Grrrl movement.

Tammy Rae Carland was a key member of the Riot Grrrl movement in the '90s; her photographs represent the queer activism of these early activities. "One Love Leads to Another" (2008) presents a visual catalog of mixtapes gifted from people close to her, the carefully written labels revealing their intimacy. It is a bittersweet image for anyone who ever had a shoebox filled with such tokens, just as it might be for anyone who didn't. Stephanie Syjuco's "Free Texts" (2011-13) is a digital echo to the flyers at the entrance. A wall is covered in a grid of tear-off tab flyers presenting the URLs to "unsanctioned" downloads of copyrighted texts on various topics related to the exhibition and Syjuco's larger political art practice. Whereas Xeroxes illicitly extended audiences before the Internet, digital copies present a much greater threat to the containment of information and, in their own way, present an extension to the antiestablishment ethos of zines.

Multimedia artist and filmmaker Miranda July's work raises interesting questions about how the spirit of a radical social network evolves as technologies transition. July's participatory website "Learning to Love You More," produced with artist Harrell Fletcher from 2002 to 2009, essentially presented assignments for the public to respond to, such as soliciting a photo of strangers holding hands; more than 8,000 people contributed. July's most recent project is an app released this year called Somebody — participants accept assignments to deliver messages to nearby strangers as a kind of performance-based text-messaging service. [Miu Miu](#), a high-end brand from Italian fashion house Prada, supports the project as part of a larger series of sponsored contemporary films begun in 2012 called "Miu Miu's Women's Tales."

Decision up to viewers

In recent years, the brand has been embroiled in controversy over sexual harassment and gender discrimination charges brought by a former employee, charges that were investigated and backed by the United Nations. This, of course, complicates perceptions of July's project with Miu Miu. "Alien She" presents Somebody within the canon of radical feminism created by the Riot Grrrl movement, while deftly avoiding commentary or judgment. In today's global digital age, viewers get to choose their own brand of radical feminism and, as the show demonstrates, there are a lot of versions to consider