

ULRIKE MÜLLER'S HERSTORY INVENTORY: 100 FEMINIST DRAWINGS BY 100 ARTISTS BY THOM DONOVAN

Review by Thom Donovan
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There are numerous pleasures in encountering *Herstory Inventory*, a project initiated and organized by the artist Ulrike Müller, not least of which include a collection of 100 drawings by artists whom I love and admire.

An elegant procedure motivates the project, where Müller has taken existing descriptions of t-shirts from a queer-feminist archive in Brooklyn, the Lesbian Herstory Archives (1974–present), and prompted friends and acquaintances to reproduce imagery from the t-shirts without their having seen them, based solely on an archivist's descriptions.

Prompting participants in this way, Müller achieves a historical revision (or delay) whereby one can visualize changes in queer-feminist cultural representation. Separating language from image enables the group and the individual to project, thereby recreating an existing iconography within the present. In one drawing, a triangle breaks apart, as if to symbolize difference and dissent within community dynamics. In another, a hot pink Bart Simpson with a “silence = death” t-shirt and zone-out eyes gives the peace sign. Some images are more abstract and would seem to have little to do with queer-feminist representational practices: A rat sipping from a glass of champagne. A Sol LeWitt-like grid. A crescent moon over... is that a vagina or the ocean?

This book is fascinating, too, for the way it frames a process of community dialogue through the provision of Müller’s correspondence with participants between 2009–2013.

Through email (and face-to-face meetings) Müller negotiates the roles her interlocutors will play for each other: from the production of the drawings, to their exhibition in various galleries and museums, to their compilation in the book. One of the more poignant questions concerns authorship: To what extent may the project be considered Müller’s “work”? (It may strike one as curious that her name does not appear on the cover or spine of the book.)

Deliberately hashing-out the language of press releases and exhibition abstracts, Müller intends *Herstory Inventory* through a consensual process. What we get is a portrait of a particular community—of queer-feminists—as it is constituted through a network. What we also get is a vital document of care and mutual regard, friendship and affection.

Thom Donovan’s second book of poems, Withdrawn, will be out with Compline this fall.

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