



SEDUCTION
OF THE CYBORG

MARIANNE BRANDT
REGINA CASSOLO BRACCHI
GIANNINA CENSI
ANNA COLEMAN LADD
ALEXANDRA EXTER
ELSA VON FREYTAG-LORINGHOVEN
KARLA GROSCH
FLORENCE HENRI
HANNAH HÖCH
REBECCA HORN
KIKI KOGELNIK
LILIANE LIJN
LOUISE NEVELSON
ANU PÖDER
LAVINIA SCHULZ AND WALTER HOLDT
SOPHIE TAEUBER-ARP
MARIE VASSILIEFF

Though the concept has existed since the dawn of the mechanical age, the term “cyborg” – a portmanteau that combines “cybernetic” and “organism” – was first used by scientists Manfred E. Clynes and Nathan S. Kline in 1960. Unlike the robot or the android, the cyborg is a human that has become integrated with an artificial technology, bestowing it with enhanced functions or abilities. Writing in 1985, Donna Haraway repurposed the term to describe how the boundaries between human, animal, and machine had been irreversibly breached. Identifying the female body as the site where those boundaries are most vulnerable, Haraway sees the cyborg as an avatar of hybrid identity that signals the beginning of a new, posthumanist, and postgender future. This presentation takes up Haraway’s framework to consider the included artists as cyborgs: hybrid bodies whose work engages concepts of the self that are extended, relational, or prosthetic – including, but also beyond, the idea of an engineered prosthesis. Working within and on the periphery of the celebrated 20th-century avant-gardes – particularly Dada’s fascination with mechanical hybridity and the theatrical and photographic experiments of the Bauhaus –, each of these artists envisions the cyborg body as the key to a truly new, modern subjectivity. The artists in this display also appropriate sexist stereotypes, such as the woman-machine, the vamp, or the “Future Eve” in order to reclaim agency from the objects of masculine fantasies.

Some of these artists create images that acknowledge the self’s mediation through technological or otherwise material apparatuses, as in Marianne Brandt’s mirror-refracted self-portraits, Florence Henri’s semi-abstract photomontages, Rebecca Horn’s image of affective intimacy forged in steel and gears, or Anna Coleman Ladd’s finely crafted prosthetic masks for war veterans – the only true prosthetics included here. Louise Nevelson’s intricate sculptural installation evokes the inner workings of early machines, while in Kiki Kogelnik’s paintings, bodies and their interrelationships are treated as formal and chromatic devices to construct exploded, robotic selves. In other cases, human-like images or forms are deployed to depict the self as constructed through or integrated with outside materials, as evident in Hannah Höch’s photomontages, wherein bodily forms are pieced together from found images. Regina Cassolo Bracchi’s surprisingly vivacious joined aluminium figures, Anu Pöder’s mannequin-like sculptures and busts, and Liliane Lijn’s totems likewise play in the space between human and anthropomorphic object. Bodily adornments, meanwhile, are used to create exuberant and valiantly modern identities in Karla Grosch and Lavinia Schulz’s theatrical costumes and masks.

The display is overseen by four “sentinels” – Giannina Censi, Alexandra Exter, Marie Vassilieff, and Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven –, each of whom represents a different paradigm of the cyborg through radical, relational, and holistic self-expression.