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*Deitcher, in Context/in Conversation*

-Sarah Schmerler

I first encountered Gloria Deitcher in Red Hook, Brooklyn, in a tightly knit group of local artists who hone their figure-drawing skills by working from a live model once a week. While the other artists in the room worked fairly conventionally (in charcoal or graphite on blank drawing paper), Deitcher worked, rather unconventionally, drawing and painting on printouts of e-mail conversations, limning nude figures over what, at least from a distance, seemed like unrelated text. Later, I learned that these e-mail nudes would be blown up to three times their size, and that the texts in the e-mails were actually composed of dialogues—correspondences that Deitcher had been having with herself, and sending via e-mail. There would be a small, male figure skirting one margin here, for instance, or the luscious breast on a reclining female nude surmounting some text, there.

These internal dialectics (often about sexuality, or about fantasy, or just quotidian things in her day) would later, she explained, be blown up and exhibited—though she wasn't yet sure of what final form they would take. In the meantime, they hang in her studio, some framed, so not. It seemed to me that Deitcher was, in effect, having a conversation with herself and hanging it on the wall—all the better us to enter into it, and to help her see it afresh.

Subsequent talk revealed that this work was just the tip of the iceberg; Deitcher had long been playing with issues of image and text—first, from her days in her native Canada, where she was a printmaker/artist, and later at Rutgers University in New Jersey when it was a hotbed of radical works by the likes of FLUXUS progenitor Geoff Hendricks, painter Leon Golub, poet Michael Andre, legendary printer Bob Blackburn—all of whom had been her professors—not to mention critic and artist Jonathan Price with whom Deitcher collaborated extensively. Deitcher made feminist images with striations and angry tears through the image, which included anatomical diagrams of labia, her written fantasies about men, her newborn daughter resting on her own naked belly. Clearly, one can see a through-line from her work in the 1970s, during the foment of feminist art, and the present (as divorced from emotion as e-mails and Yahoo inboxes might, at first glance, seem to be). Deitcher likes to work efficiently, folding the real and fine-art aspects of her life, as well as her societal roles—of mother, spouse, now grandmother, and practicing artist—together into one. She tries to do it with an honesty that is unjaundiced, and she isn't afraid to look at herself.

At times, the work would be so cathartic that it would be hard to soak in during one sitting. Such is the case with "Coming Down the Home Stretch," a video the then-30-year-old Deitcher recorded with her mother, soon after her parent's divorce, and in the immediate wake of Deitcher's brother's suicide. The conversational tone is pleasant: the two swill martinis; tell jokes; they clearly enjoy each other's company. But the tone subtly shifts. Closeups on her face reveal that Deitcher is having little revelations about her past (that perhaps she'd rather not)—all the while her mom, a charming conversationalist, re-tells a few family stories with a sort of blinders-on hindsight that Deitcher finds neither honest nor clear. "I don't think that you're being honest," says Gloria, at one point. "I think you're bullshitting me; [that] you had frustrated ambitions."

"But they weren't very important to me," retorts her mother...Those were the happiest years of my life."

"People don't really change," Gloria's then 50-something mom later adds. "Circumstances change."

It's a telling, and sort-of-chilling, moment.

Today, with the "Home Page" series, Deitcher is still clearly engaged in a dialectic with herself, locked in a tough conversation—not only between her own past and present—but with the past of Feminist art and with what it truly means to be a feminist in the Electronic Age. It's going to be interesting to see where these e-mail exchanges take her as they develop. Affecting a communication that is honest, open—and vulnerable—is more important than ever in a world of (so called!) communication technologies. Deitcher is doing it without mawkishness or cynicism.

Though it was decades prior, Gloria's mother alludes to as much in that video.

"Being vulnerable is kind of nice, too," she says. "You're vulnerable to the nice things; you're *feeling*."