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# KALEIDOSCOPE



## METAHAVEN

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THE NINETIES  
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ROMAN ONDÁK



ART

# DOROTHY IANNONE

## BY BRIAN SHOLIS

Born in Boston in 1933, Dorothy Iannone has been exhibiting her artwork intermittently since the middle of the 1960s, yet the survey now on view at the New Museum in New York is her first exhibition in an American institution. Why the long delay? Firstly, her graphic, highly stylized depictions of genitals and sexual couplings were censored at the time they were made. Even when not beset by censors, her paintings were out of sync with the Conceptual, minimalist and post-minimalist forms of art then ascendant. Iannone painted, but the flatness of her frieze-like compositions, inspired by traditional figurative art she saw on trips to Europe and Asia, was far removed from the flatness of late modernist abstraction championed by Clement Greenberg. Put simply, it seems that the art world has needed two generations to catch up with her. Weaving her contributions into the art history of the era—she crystallized her signature style in the period between the mid-1960s and the mid-1970s—not only offsets the parched and disembodied qualities of the better-known artworks from that period. It also has the benefit of bringing art into closer alignment with accounts of the decade’s social and cultural upheavals, which were typified not only by leftist politics (then amply present in art) but also by the Summer of Love. *I Am Whoever You Want Me to Be* (1970), included in the small New Museum survey, is typical of the paintings

Iannone made at the time. It depicts a copulating couple, ostensibly the artist and her lover and muse, Dieter Roth, for whom she had left her husband in 1967. (An artist’s book included in the New Museum exhibition tells the story of her first encounter with Roth.) They stand before an unadorned white background populated only by two brightly colored heraldic designs, which look like hot-air balloons or dartboards, but in this context take on an erotic charge. Both figures are demarcated by inky black lines; the woman, armless, is bent over while the man penetrates her from behind. But a closer look reveals idiosyncrasies and formal riffs that undermine such a simple gloss. The woman’s pudenda look curiously like hairy testicles; the man has the exact same soft, oval, feminine face as the woman. The jewels of his necklace are rendered as a pattern of nested circles that formally echoes her large nipples. It’s as if their sexual union has created a literal commingling of bodies in which the identifying characteristics of gender no longer signify properly. In this blissful confusion, the specific moment from Iannone’s life that this scene represents falls away, as do conventional understandings of power. What remains is the eternal dynamism of primal contact, the physical manifestation of love. The (apparently) female figure, who has the artwork’s title tattooed in a sans-serif font along her side, indeed becomes whoever we want her to be.

ART



Dorothy Iannone  
*I Am Whoever You Want Me To Be*, 1970 - 71  
Courtesy: Air de Paris, Paris and  
Anton Kern Gallery, New York