

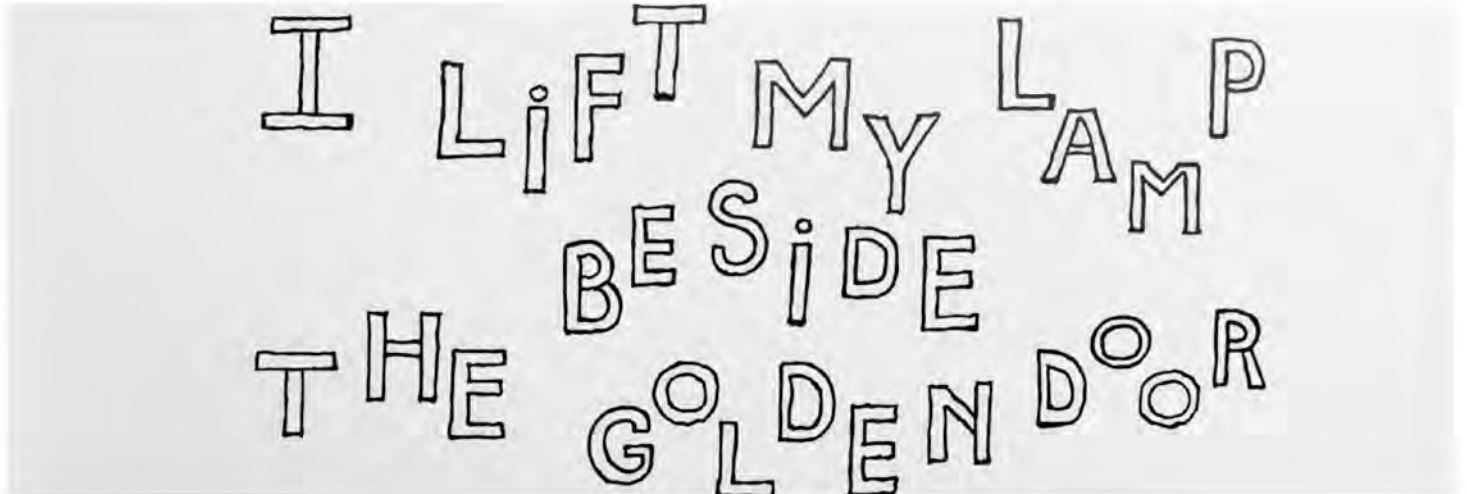
Reviews /

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BY CHLOE STEAD
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Dorothy Iannone's Statue of Sexual Liberty

An exhibition at Peres Projects, Berlin, shows how society's attitudes to sex have changed throughout the 86-year-old artist's career



Located on the ground floor of an imposing Soviet-era building, it's not necessary to physically enter Dorothy Iannone's solo exhibition at Peres Projects to experience it. Instead, the gallery's floor-to-ceiling windows mean that any pedestrians, cyclists or motorists travelling along Berlin's busy Karl-Marx-Allee are treated to an eyeful of Iannone's buxom creations. It just goes to show how much has changed throughout the course of the 86-year-old artist's career: where once her work was censored (most notably when it was removed from a group show at Kunsthalle Bern in 1969), now it's celebrated.

Titled 'Lady Liberty Meets Her Match', the exhibition comprises two sculptures, a sound piece and six wall paintings that continue the American-born, Berlin-based artist's decades-long interest in the Statue of Liberty as a symbol of freedom. The 'Lady Liberty' of the show's title refers to a wooden cut-out bearing the same name (all works 2019), which portrays a blonde Statue of Liberty wearing nothing but a shawl around her legs and a crown of red and yellow flowers and stars. Her 'match' comes in the form of *Lord Liberty*, who stands knee-deep in a choppy sea with his naked body spotted with red and blue stars. The implication here – that personal liberty can be reached through (heterosexual) romantic and sexual union – is typical of Iannone, whose life and work has been, in her own words, a journey in search of 'ecstatic unity'.



Dorothy Iannone, *The Statue of Liberty*, 2019, acrylic on wall, dimensions variable. Courtesy: the artist and Peres Projects, Berlin; photograph: Matthias Kolb

Elsewhere, in works such as *The Statue of Liberty*, Iannone depicts Libertas as a benevolent Amazon, her famous message of welcome and acceptance – ‘Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free ...’ – scrawled across her bare stomach. Although it’s a motif that the artist has been working with for years, it’s impossible not to think of the cultural resurgence Liberty has been enjoying of late. In the Trump era, the statue, which was itself given to the US by France, has been a gift for left-wing satirists who – in an attempt to point out the irony of, among other things, a country mostly made up of immigrants imposing travel bans on the sole basis of a person’s country of origin – are fond of portraying her wearing a blindfold or

being protested by nativists. Iannone resists such easy moralizing but, through her presentation of Liberty as a powerful sexual being, I couldn't help but think that she might be referencing some of the current challenges to the 1973 Roe v. Wade court ruling on women's abortion rights, a decision that is seen by pro-choice feminists (myself included) as the foundation of equality between the sexes.



Dorothy Iannone, 'Lady Liberty Meets her Match', 2019, exhibition view. Courtesy: the artist and Peres Projects, Berlin; photograph: Matthias Kolb

Even though the sexual content in this series is relatively tame in comparison to some of Iannone's previous works – there is abundant nudity here, for instance, but no intercourse – it's not difficult to see why her art has caused such unease over the years. Women's sexual autonomy has always been viewed as a threat to those in power. The strength of the exhibition, though, doesn't come through its ability to shock, which has dampened over the years, but through its refusal to see anything wrong with the premise of sexual liberation. For Iannone, sex isn't shameful: it's a way of reaching 'ultimate unity' with a 'beloved'. If her work was once transgressive, it's only because society's attitudes to sex – particularly when it came to women – were too limiting.

Dorothy Iannone, 'Lady Liberty Meets Her Match' runs at Peres Projects, Berlin, until 19 April 2019.

Main image: Dorothy Iannone, I Lift My Lamp Beside The Golden Door, 2019, acrylic on wall, dimensions variable. Courtesy: the artist and Peres Projects, Berlin; photograph: Matthias Kolb

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