

Henry

VIEWPOINTS: *Her Story* by Elizabeth Murray and Anne Waldman
May 5, 2018 – November 4, 2018

Viewpoints is a rotating series that highlights works from the Henry's collection, paired with commentary and insights from University of Washington faculty. By offering diverse perspectives across academic fields, the series encourages open inquiry and presents diverse ways of seeing and interpreting the art on view. This iteration of the series features [*Her Story*](#) (1988-1990), a collaborative work that combines images by Elizabeth Murray with poetry by Anne Waldman.



This iteration of *Viewpoints* is organized in collaboration with graduate curatorial assistant Laura Stowell, a PhD student in art history at the University of Washington.



Elizabeth Murray (U.S., 1940–2007) and Anne Waldman (U.S., born 1945); Published by Universal Limited Art Editions, Inc., West Islip, New York, *Her Story*, 1988-1990, published 1990. Offset photolithograph and etching on Torinoko paper collé on tout cas paper. Henry Art Gallery, gift of Greg Kucera and Larry Yocom, 97.314.1-13. Installation views of *Her Story* by Elizabeth Murray and Anne Waldman, 2018, Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, Seattle, Photo: Mark Woods.

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Published by Universal Limited Art Editions, Inc., West Islip, New York

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Henry Art Gallery, gift of Greg Kucera and Larry Yocom, 97.314.1-13

Her Story is a collaborative work by Elizabeth Murray and Anne Waldman that began with a conversation in Murray's New York studio and took shape through a back and forth exchange of drawings, prints, and drafts of poems over several years. The resulting thirteen sheets, on view around the perimeter of this gallery, place Murray's imagery and Waldman's poetry in intimate dialogue.

Murray is primarily known as a painter who defied convention, developing a distinctive visual language of figurative abstraction with symbols and shapes evocative of bodily forms and everyday objects. Murray practiced printmaking at various points in her career, and the highly detailed color prints in *Her Story* mark her transition into blending the techniques of lithography and etching. Of the same generation as Murray, Waldman is an acclaimed and influential poet, performer, and scholar whose work fuses an experimental, unconventional spirit with firm grounding in feminist activism. She frequently collaborates with artists in other disciplines to explore the energetic and political potential of language. The poems in *Her Story* subtly shift between first, second, and third person point of view, suggesting without overly determining a narrative. Together, the imagery and poetry of *Her Story* probe questions of interiority and exteriority, public and private being, freedom and entrapment, and the complexity and (im)possibility of embodying the feminine.

The opening page of *Her Story* features two lines from Frank O'Hara's 1956 poem "In Memory of My Feelings" which he dedicated to fellow New York School artist, painter Grace Hartigan. The semi-autobiographical poem explores the multitude of selves that emerge, recede, and coexist within one person. *Her Story* thus begins with a question, asking the viewer to consider their own fluidity: "When you turn your head / can you feel your heels, undulating?"

FACULTY CONTRIBUTIONS

What does it mean to be a body?

micha cárdenas

Assistant Professor, Interactive Media Design and Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences, UW Bothell

What does it mean to be a body? What does it feel like? What does the feeling look like? What words give the feeling of living in a body?

Murray's body, or the body portrayed in Murray's imagery, is unwieldy, unruly, full of desires, expectations, impositions, collapses, soft rubbery bends. It refuses to sit in a chair. It kisses in a wild scribble, loves in waves of movement. It tries to leave the building and collapses. It expels a baby, and then births a book. The body's hands are too big, arms too long and flexible, holes both receiving and reaching out.

What is within us, "about to be birthed, but already felt," as Audre Lorde writes in "Poetry is not a Luxury," that is released through drawing and poetry?

In Murray's imagery, I see the struggle of living, of sitting in a chair, of sex and birth and desire and being trapped inside and being under attack outside, of grief and depression and winter and summer. I see, as Waldman states, "a dark space for returning / things," a space of reflection, of phenomenological engagement with one's own embodiment and one's intimate surroundings, all that is lost, and all that is hoped for.

Affected and Affecting Bodies

Eva Cherniavsky

Andrew R. Hilen Professor of American Literature and Culture, Department of English

Among other things, this portfolio is about being female, being pregnant, being "in a kind of humorous, hormonal situation vis-à-vis the world," notes Waldman, in an interview. And Murray's initial image, vividly evocative of fallopian tubes, confirms the motif. Yet *Her Story* seems to move well beyond Waldman's minimalist description: in both the verse and the prints, the distinction between people and place, between subjects and things, between the body and its surround dissolves. Visually and narratively, a woman's body erupts into the world and absorbs the world into its conical and tubular protrusions.

Much has been written in the last decade on the topic of affect, or feeling. Unlike emotions, which are relatively scripted, affect is more diffuse: it is about the ways in which we are moved, bodily and psychically. There are forces, a "power" or "vise" that "keeps us in shape," writes Waldman, not to mention a "love" that harnesses and transfixes, but in *Her Story*, that shape never holds. The female protagonist is affected and affecting: her body dilates and contracts; the world bends her out of shape and she slyly dislocates the world, in turn. *Her*

Story brilliantly suggests how affect is forged on our skin – at the myriad points of contact with the world. Here feeling is a matter of surfaces at least as much as of depths.

Open Book

Sasha Su-Ling Welland

Associate Professor, Department of Gender, Women & Sexuality Studies

The 1970s neologism of “herstory” served as a rebuke to the absurdity of “history” produced from a dominant perspective. This feminist wordplay challenged the authority of representation (of who gets to represent) and embraced the potential of representation to overturn and reconfigure. *Her Story* explores this double-edged quality of sign systems through the juxtaposition of poems and prints. While Anne Waldman once called the drawings of Elizabeth Murray “cartoons gone awry,” her description expresses the energy the two artists generate together in this thirteen-sheet collaboration. Murray’s plastic forms push against the edge of each frame, of interior dramas that constrain. One figure-glyph—a bold X, waist cinched to disappearing, head/torso balanced atop a conical skirt—repeats. Waldman puns alongside on the power of word and image as signs that shape and norm. X is a wrench, a chafing harness, “a vise [that] keeps us in shape.” When the narrator is caught in another’s cartoon, “He sees inside me / like an x-ray.” Each sheet yearns to unbind the correspondence of word, image, and meaning, with “upstreperous” mispronunciation, with gesticulating fallopian tube, transport tunnel, rubber band arms. For X also holds up and harbors the shape of an open book, radiating color, etched dark at its edge.