

Roger

—I have an automobile fetish. I go to new-car lots, and if I can get my cock out before the salesman gets there, I come right away. I love the smell of new cars. I had my first blow-job in one when I was sixteen. My dad's brother brought his new Nash over to show our family, but no one was home but me. I hopped in, and he reached over and started playing with me and finally got my cock into his mouth. I closed my eyes and let myself enjoy it. I've never forgotten that new-car smell and that sensual feeling.

Mark

—I'm a businessman, and I have to be very discreet. The leather scene, especially motorcycles and men dressed in Hell's Angel's type gear, fascinates me. After seeing the film *Scorpio Rising* some years ago, I decided to buy a motorcycle. It sits in my garage, but it has never been used. At least, not for transportation. I use it all the time in another way. I go to the garage, take off my pants, kneel on the cold concrete floor, and stick my dick up the exhaust pipe and jerk off. Gallons of come must be up there by now.

Gene

—Who says gay guys don't use rubbers? Bullshit. I not only use them when I have sex with my lover (he likes to be fucked with French ticklers), but when I beat off. I love the prelubricated kind, all wet and mushy and feeling like a warm mouth. Sometimes I use the same rubber over and over, each time feeling my own cream covering the head of my cock. I get excited watching the head of one of those balloons fill with my cream. Sometimes my lover sucks the cream out of a rubber I've used when he gets home from work. I've even mailed rubbers full of my cream to guys I know who can dig it.

Rand

—I picture myself as being able to suck my own cock. I work at it until I succeed in making my spinal column so flexible that I can take almost the entire organ into my mouth. I lie on the couch or the bed, and as my organ approaches, I roll and writhe and gasp in my own pleasure, curled up like some animal, until I come in my own mouth, and then I suck myself dry. I feel like some kind of hero.

Terry

—I carve a hole into an unsliced loaf of bread. I stick my

MEN IN LOVE

Lutz Bacher at Mincher-Wilcox Gallery,

January 8 - February 2, 1991

Reviewed by Liz Kotz

I've often heard Lutz Bacher's work described as "difficult," but it's not about inaccessibility or highly obscure references. Instead, the difficulty Bacher's work poses to the viewer revolves around the intense familiarity and pervasiveness of the popular cultural materials she most frequently uses as subject matter. Her pieces strike close to home.

Throughout her career, Bacher has investigated the funky, mass-cultural representations of sexuality and desire found in pornographic books, pulp sociology, medical texts, and television, among other sources. Yet she does not do so in order to critique these decidedly warped documents from a position of presumed enlightenment and greater accuracy. Instead, Bacher's terse, often oddly humorous works explore our fascination with these twisted representations and popular fantasies, probing their strange conjunctures of "truth" and "desire"—especially in the quasi-pornographic, quasi-instructional masturbation manual *Men in Love*, from which her present installation is taken.

Men in Love, a collection of male masturbation techniques and fantasies, presents a virtual taxonomy of desires. Alternately funny and grotesque, the installation offers a mini-catalogue of perversions in which such familiar topics as exhibitionism, voyeurism and pedophilia are joined by far more obscure and unnamed practices. By assembling thirty-one texts onto twelve-inch mirrors, the piece draws attention to the baroque qualities of the first-person narratives, the incredible variation within the sameness—and the awkward self-consciousness they both display and provoke. The fantasies cited range from doctors' offices and dishwashers to freshly cut grass and a stack of 45's. Evidence of the incredible displacement and dispersion of desire, the stories

are so varied and eclectic that they question the assumption behind the concept of displacement—that there is some primary, "real" object of desire, some true path from which men stray.

What fascinates is the imagination and inventiveness of the men, and their capacity to put desires into words. Bacher's installation, alternating between gay, straight and completely identity-less fantasies, seems to question implicitly the line between hetero and homo male desire. What is important is less the object of the desires than their intense activity of articulation, their relentless generation of scenes and stories.

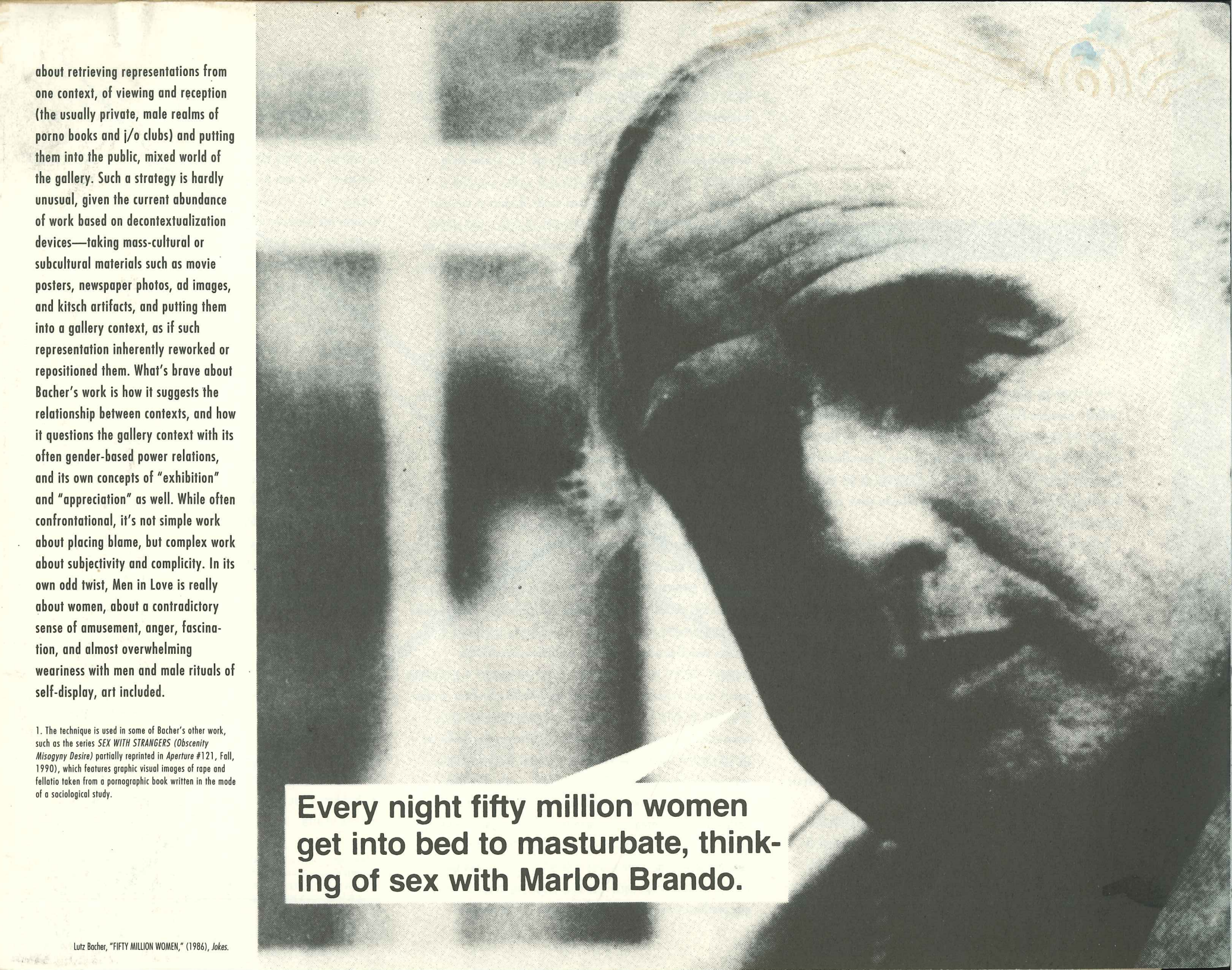
While Bacher's installations draw on contemporary theoretical work on representation, power, and sexuality, her strategy is to push her theories to, and often beyond, their limits, to the point where they cease to explain. *Men in Love* investigates a veritably Foucaultian taxonomy of bodies and pleasures, a compendium of "technologies of desire" in the most literal and most ridiculous sense. By seizing on the odd text or the extreme moment—where eroticism and sociological study come together in the form of the masturbation manual—Bacher analyzes how the desires are created and produced by the discursive system that records and circulates them. The self-help genre rests on its own uneasy line between confession, exhibition, and practical tips, recalling the paradigmatically twentieth century forms of knowledge and control grounded in modes of personal confession and self-revelation.

Working with explicit porno genres, Bacher's work raises the question of what it means for a female artist to take on the male voice so forcefully. One consequence is simply misunderstanding—ranging from those who cannot believe Bacher's work was made by a woman, to a local critic who claimed that the show offered little to female viewers—seeing it as reflecting, rather than questioning, the universal male subject of art reception. Yet these very issues of reception and consumption are emphasized by the mounting and installation of the texts. Printed on mirrors, the stories are hard to read because of the constant reflection. Hung horizontally along the gallery wall, they are positioned for women (at 5'0," I was at about the right height to read them without stooping). The gallery exhibition establishes a public context, with the consequent discomfort of being watched by others while you consume these private fantasies.¹

Bacher's work is clearly designed for a female viewer; it's all

about retrieving representations from one context, of viewing and reception (the usually private, male realms of porno books and j/o clubs) and putting them into the public, mixed world of the gallery. Such a strategy is hardly unusual, given the current abundance of work based on decontextualization devices—taking mass-cultural or subcultural materials such as movie posters, newspaper photos, ad images, and kitsch artifacts, and putting them into a gallery context, as if such representation inherently reworked or repositioned them. What's brave about Bacher's work is how it suggests the relationship between contexts, and how it questions the gallery context with its often gender-based power relations, and its own concepts of "exhibition" and "appreciation" as well. While often confrontational, it's not simple work about placing blame, but complex work about subjectivity and complicity. In its own odd twist, *Men in Love* is really about women, about a contradictory sense of amusement, anger, fascination, and almost overwhelming weariness with men and male rituals of self-display, art included.

1. The technique is used in some of Bacher's other work, such as the series *SEX WITH STRANGERS* (*Obscenity Misogyny Desire*) partially reprinted in *Aperture* #121, Fall, 1990), which features graphic visual images of rape and fellatio taken from a pornographic book written in the mode of a sociological study.



**Every night fifty million women
get into bed to masturbate, think-
ing of sex with Marlon Brando.**

