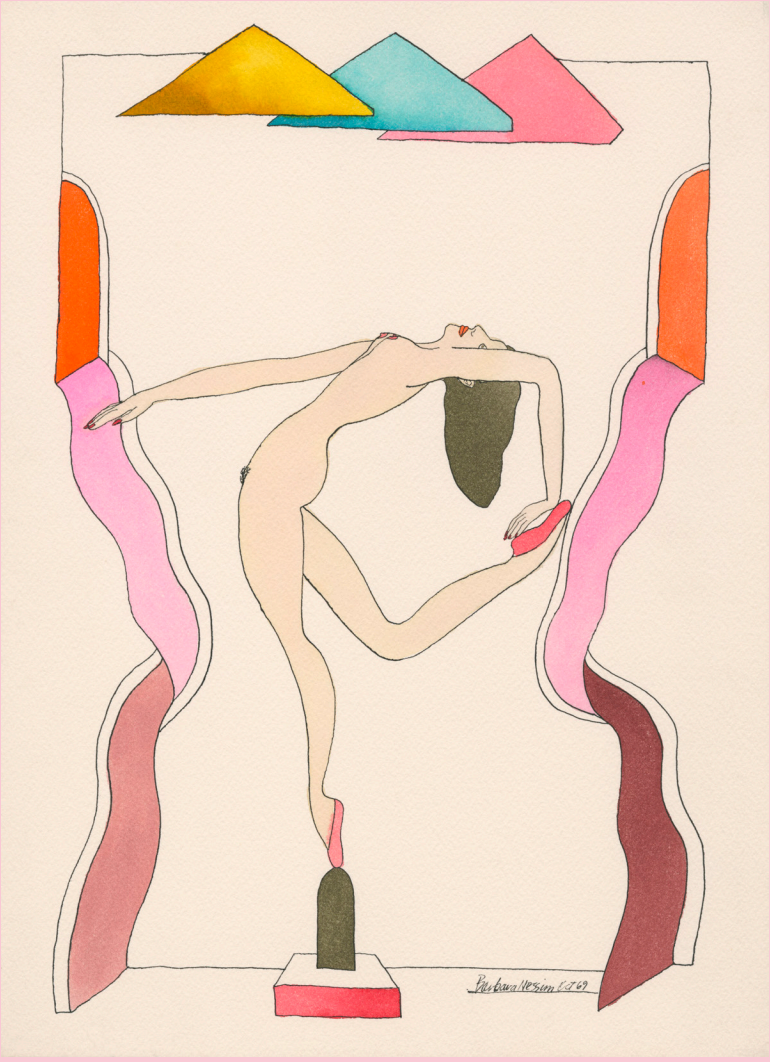
BALANCING ACT

Drawings 1969 - 1974



BARBARA NESSIM

NEW YORK 2023

BALANCING ACT

Drawings 1969 - 1974

ON VIEW NOVEMBER 16 – DECEMBER 23, 2023

DEREK ELLER GALLERY

300 BROOME ST · NEW YORK

BARBARA NESSIM

Barbara Nessim has exhibited at numerous institutions worldwide, including the Louvre, The Whitney Museum, The Cooper Hewitt Museum, The Smithsonian Institute and The Norman Rockwell Museum.

She has been included in recent group exhibitions at galleries such as Galerie Rodolphe Janssen, Brussels, Belgium, and Karma, New York, NY. Her work has appeared on the covers of Time, Rolling Stone, and The New York Times Magazine among others. Honors include the Pratt Lifetime Achievement Award (2015) and induction into the Society of Illustrators Hall of Fame (2020). Notable solo exhibitions include London's Victoria & Albert Museum (2013) and Bard Graduate Center Gallery (2015). Additionally, LA County Museum of Art (LACMA) is to acquire two of Nessim's early digital artworks for their permanent collection and will be exhibited in Retrospective of Female Digital Art Pioneers in December 2024.

Life is about balance -- your day, your relationships, your work, it is endless. I discovered this over the years. When creating this body of work at the end of the 60's to the middle 70's, I supported my fine art by creating work for popular culture. My fine art informed and melded with my commercial work, they are both original in all ways. I relied solely on my intuition and imagination.

My work springs from an internal place. Sometimes, the work 'tugs' me for suggestions as I'm creating, and I gladly respond. I enjoy looking at my work and being a part of the process at the same time. I am dancing with the paper, the lines, the color, and the emotion. This is where the idea of balance comes in to play; the outside world and the interior self join together in realizing a creation that will eventually have a life.

The balance is also in the color, shapes, and lines that embrace the paper. It's a linear process, I do the work from start to finish, and I feel at one with the work.

I subconsciously absorb my surroundings. Everything I see or feel will find its way into my work, but with subtlety. I look at art of all types and over many periods of time, and I marvel when it speaks to me. I love reading about other people's thoughts and perceptions. I'm curious about inventions of all kinds. Curiosity is in my nature and makes me feel alive.

I've learned to be present in the moment and let the years take care of themselves. Many layers of meaning evolve as the world's focus continuously shifts. This body of work was created at the dawn of the Women's Movement. Roles of men and women were questioned as well as gender. At some point, during this period, a man asked me, "why do you always draw women?" I answered, "I do?" And then I looked around my studio apartment and he was right! I had to think about this realization. Looking back, I see I was giving women a voice; a right to exist on their own. The balance between men and women has developed differently over the millennia. I seek harmony in my life and that has brought me closer to myself, my work, and others.

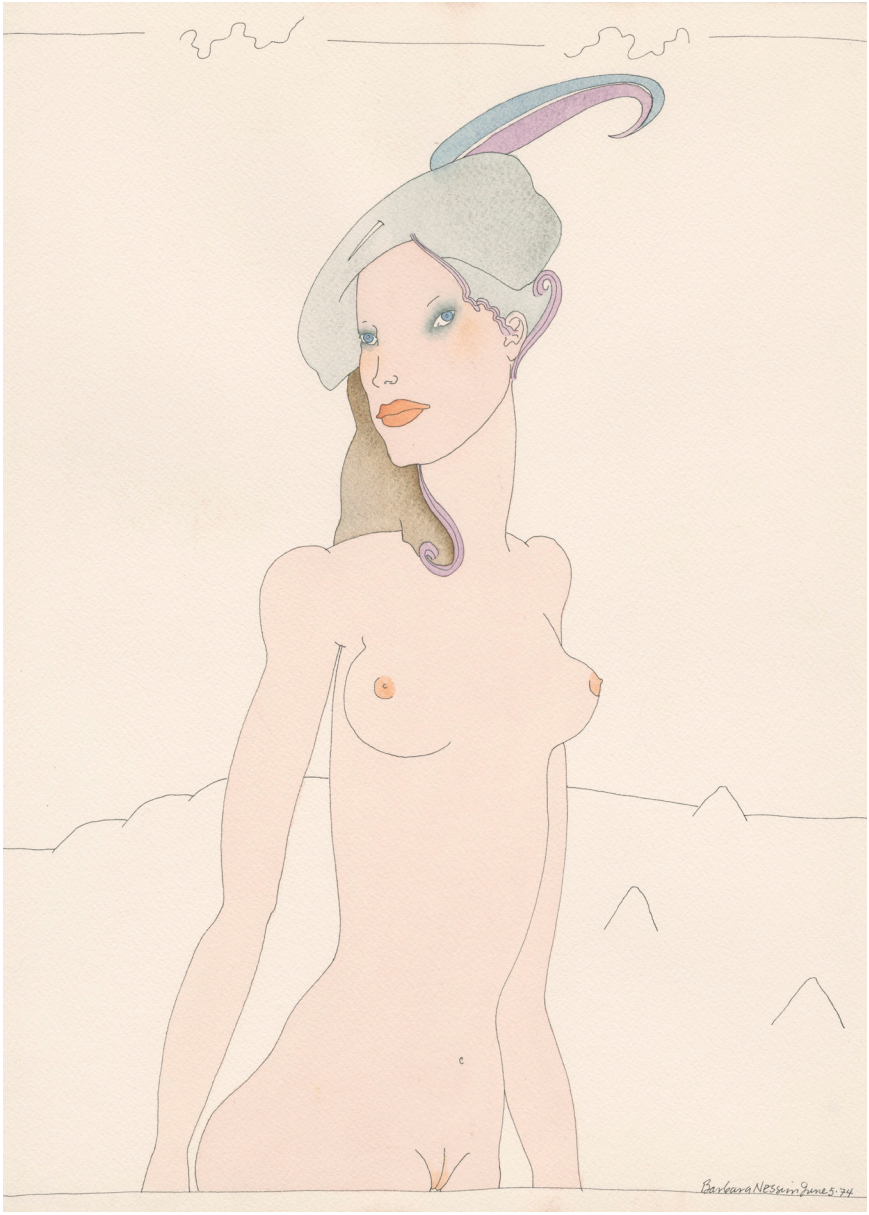
Barbara Nessim, 2023

ABOUT WOMEN

Ink and watercolor on archival paper, 1969 - 1974

Innocent, sexy, and unapologetic, Nessim's portraits, made between 1969-1974, were depictions of enigmatic female archetypes which reflected the zeitgeist of a pivotal moment in women's history. Nessim's nearly naked women are objects of the gaze, presented in a theatrical setting, often with flowing ribbon-like props and the hint of a stage. They are adorned with bejeweled belts and hip jewelry, which calls attention to their often exposed, hairless genitalia. Some of them have separated hands from arms, accentuating their defenselessness and lack of control. At the same time, they balance on brightly colored, laced up toe shoes, perhaps a reference to how women can make difficult day-to-day tasks seem easy. They are simultaneously virtuous and capable of danger. Their heads are upright, expression unashamed, gazing back.

PLUME, 1974
Ink & watercolor on paper
16" x 12"


Barbara Nessim June 5 74

REFLECTION, 1974
Ink & watercolor on paper
20" x 14"


Barbara Nessim Oct 4 74

PURE, 1974
Ink & watercolor on paper
20" x 14"


Barbara Nessim Oct 1974

TILTING FLOW, 1974
Ink & watercolor on paper
20" x 14"


Barbara Nessim NOVII 74

MARILYN HOLTZ PATTI

Photographer, Studio Manager at Tom Patti Design

Q: What do you think about when you do your work?

A: When I do work for a publication, I think about everything -- the story, the editor, the art director, and my audience. It is intentional and thought out. When I create art for myself, I only think about me and what I am working on -- I don't want to think about anything else. I let the world go. I see my life as a balance, and this is part of my balance.

Q: Do you rework things?

A: When I do commission or commercial work, I produce many sketches and the process takes time. For example, if I was talking to an art director on the telephone about a project, they would send me a manuscript, and I would read the manuscript before making more sketches. The art director would then send back revisions or comments, and I would do the finished drawing and hand the work in.

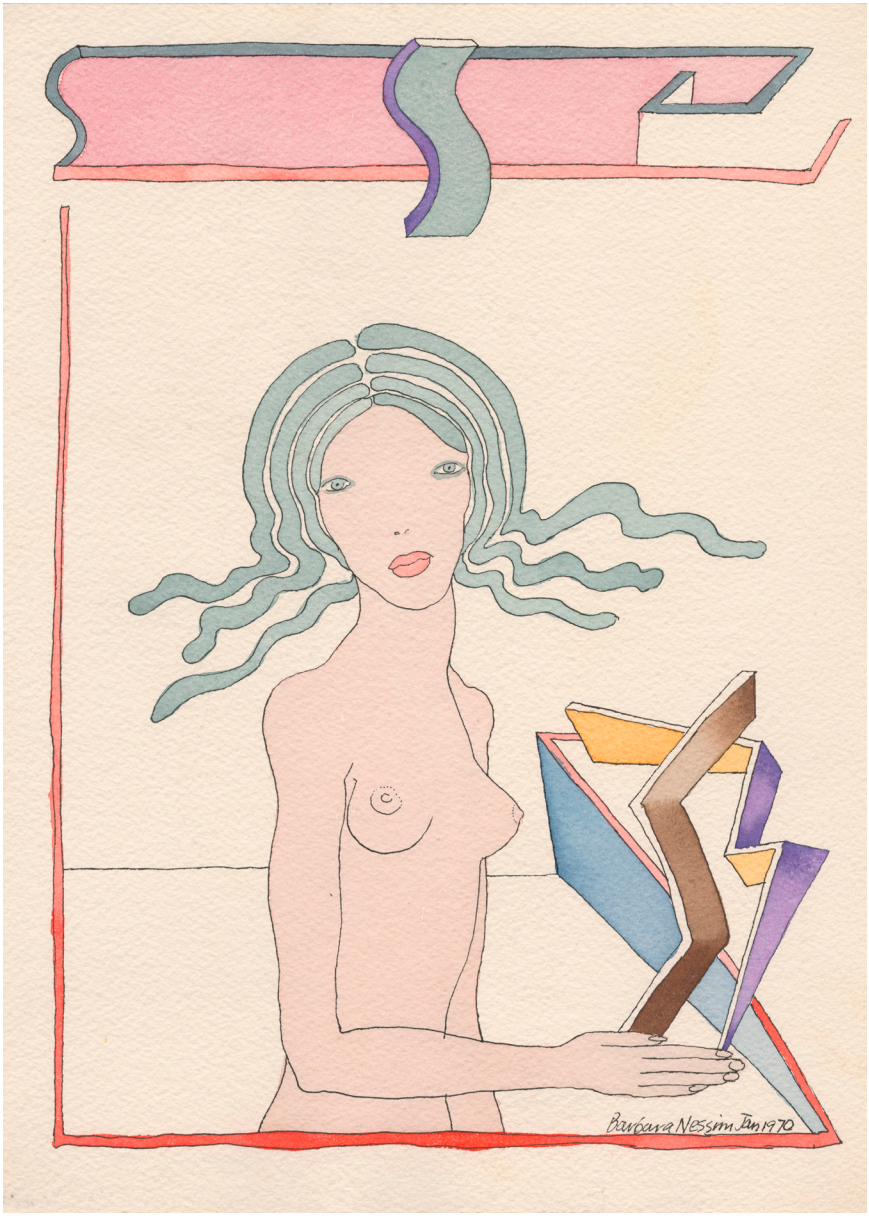
However, when I work for myself it's a linear process, I do not go back and rework my art.

THE MOMENT GLANCE, 1974
Ink & watercolor on paper
14" x 10"

A CROWN OF PURPLE SQUARES, 1969
Ink & watercolor on paper
14” x 10.25”


Barbara Nessim Oct. 69

A MAZE FROM ABOVE, 1970
Ink & watercolor on paper
14" x 10.25"


Barbara Nessim Jan 1970

THE GRACE OF GREY AND GRAY, 1971
Ink & watercolor on paper
14" x 10.25"


Barbara Nessim July 2011

DAN NADEL

Curator-at-Large, Lucas Museum of Narrative Art

Q: Who was your female artist canon when you made this work? Were you looking at your contemporaries, or further back to the past?

A: Nancy Grossman comes to mind. Her drawings and sculptures were always powerful, unique, and innovative. Nancy was in my department at Pratt in the late 1950's, and we had many of the same teachers. We always kept in touch -- our lives meshed, and our friendship galvanized. Her partner, art writer and journalist, Arlene Raven, championed women's work. By the early to middle 60's, Nancy was showing at Cordier and Ekstrom, one of the premier galleries on Madison Avenue.

She now shows at Michael Rosenfeld Gallery and is one of the few living legends in the gallery's roster. Her work continues to inspire me.

Louise Bourgeois is also interesting to me. I met her around 1973; we connected immediately and stayed in touch over the years.

Q: What is the influence, if any, of Richard Lindner on your work?

A: Richard Lindner was one of my professors at Pratt during my sophomore year. His mystical approach to teaching seemed impractical for me. I did try to follow his direction, but I did not understand him. It was not until the last few months, before I graduated college, that I began to grasp Lindner's teachings. He encouraged us to go into unfamiliar territory.

I did appreciate my department, Graphic Arts and Illustration. I learned a lot with all the classes offered, from printmaking, which included etching, woodcuts, and lithography, to painting and drawing, all of which were

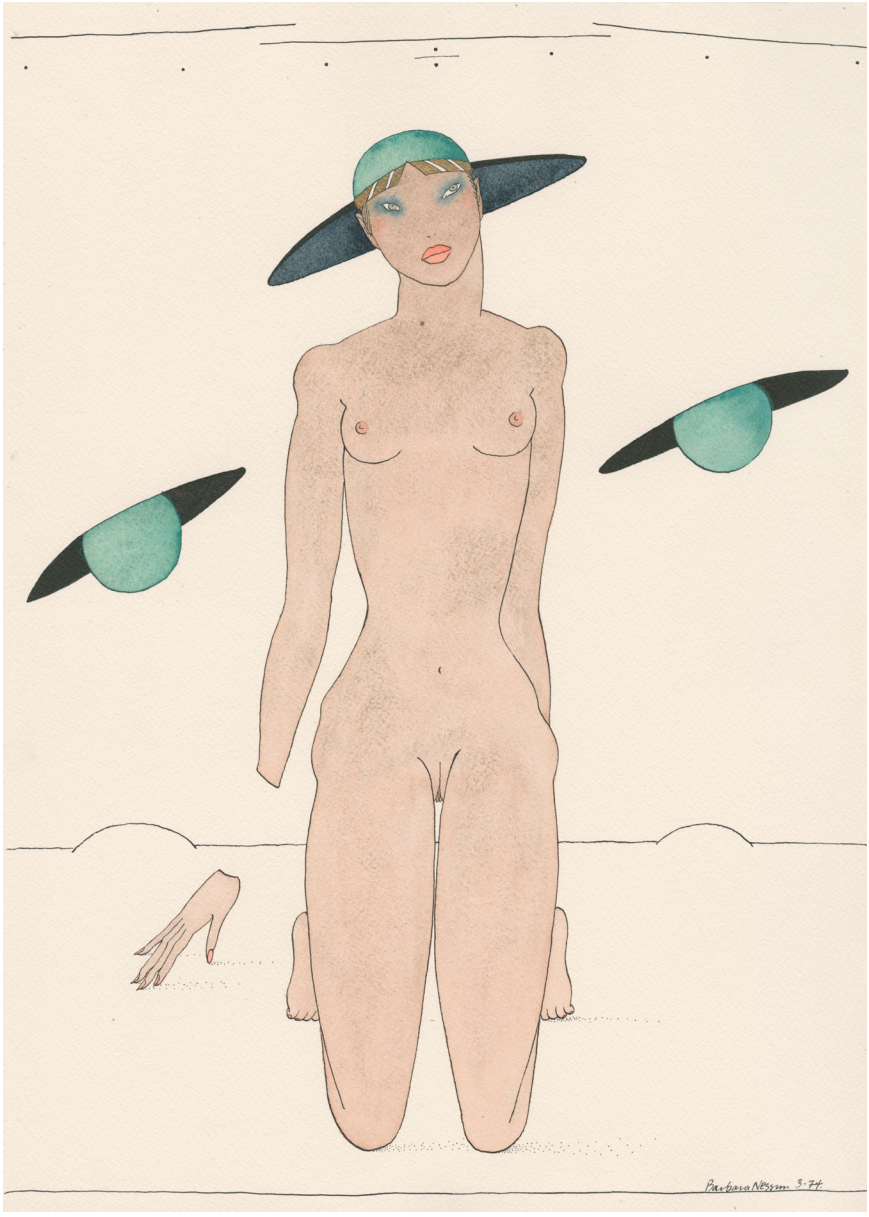
some of my favorite classes. By my senior year I had clearly become an "Artist." During this time, I made a series of monotype etchings titled, "Man and Machine", and after graduating, my illustration teacher, Robert Weaver, encouraged me to enter the series in the annual juried exhibition at the Society of Illustrators. To my surprise, I was selected to be in the show, and they even designed a "Special Mention" award for me because they did not know what category to place my work in. One of the seven "Man and Machine" artworks appeared on the cover of the newly published Communication Arts Magazine.

Richard Lindner was one of the judges in this exhibition, and he somehow remembered my name. At the opening and the awards ceremony, we met again. Over the following years, we had interesting conversations about art and the world. Lindner was very encouraging and recommended that I show my paintings to a gallerist on Madison Avenue. I brought some paintings to the gallerist, he looked carefully at my work, and he concluded that I would inevitably get married, have children, and give up painting – his assumption of a woman working as an artist. He said, a gallery has to put years into promoting an artist and if she stops working because she married and has children, they have lost years of investment. I really had to think about that one. I knew I was not getting married anytime soon or maybe EVER! But I could see his concern. At that moment I decided, if I was going to make my living with art, I had better think of a way to support myself. Thus, my serious work illustrating for publications began while I still painted and drew on my own time. I recounted my experience to Richard, and since he was a hybrid illustrator as well, he could empathize.

LINES OF NOTE, 1969
Ink & watercolor on paper
20" x 14"


Barbara Nessim
August 1969

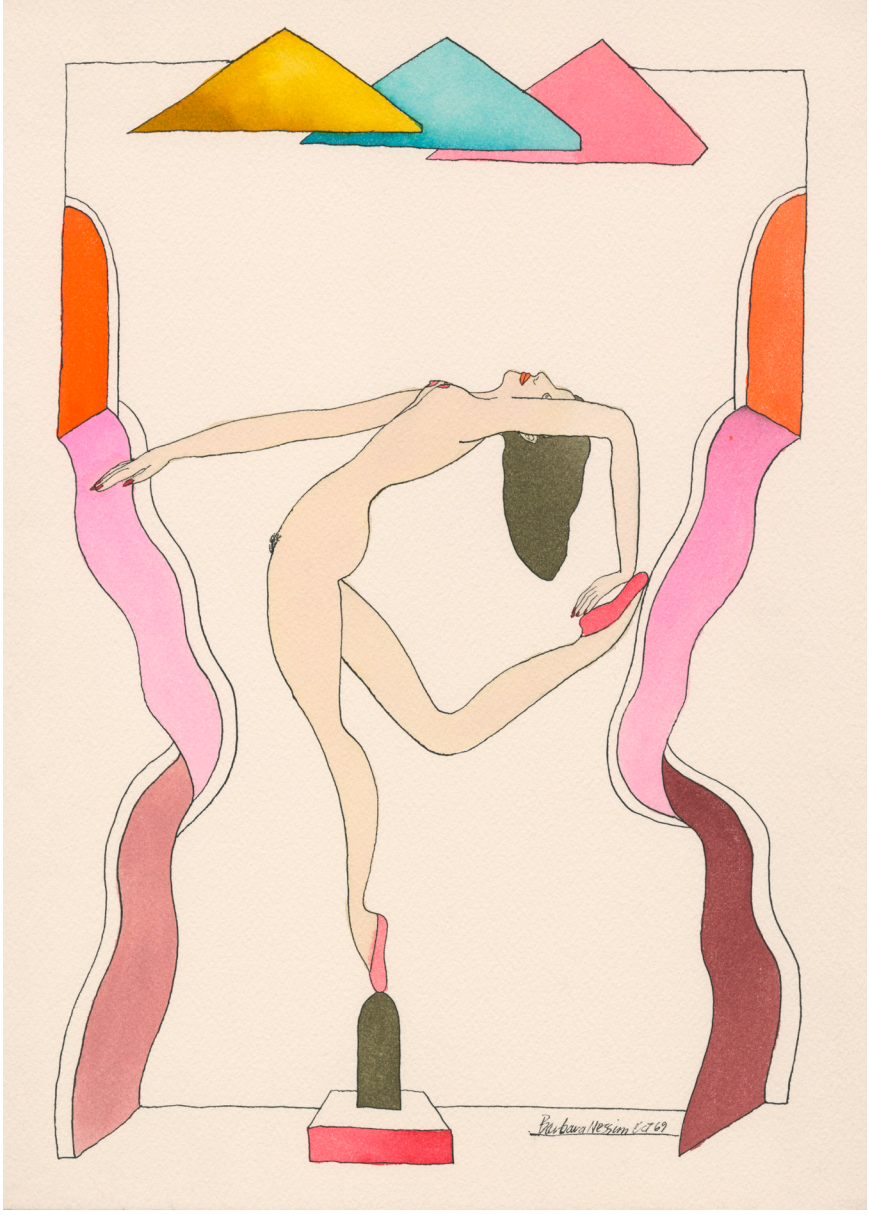
GREEN MOONS DISAPPEARING, 1974
Ink & watercolor on paper
16" x 12"


Barbara Nessim 3-74

LAS VEGAS HEADDRESS, 1971
Ink & watercolor on paper
16" x 12"


Barbara Nessim Mar 19

DANCING WITHIN TWO SCULPTURES, 1969
Ink & watercolor on paper
14" x 10.25"



ELLEN BERKENBLIT

Artist

Q: I think your work is so utterly confident and unapologetic and truthful - it emits power while simultaneously allowing softness and humor. It reminds me of my father's confidence and honesty - he was also from the Bronx. What are your thoughts on growing up in the Bronx?

A: I appreciated growing up in the Bronx. In fact, at the tender age of 14 I went to my bedroom, shared with my younger twin brother and sister, got down on my knees in front of the window, clasped my hands under my chin, bowed my head and thanked God I was born in the Bronx and not in Kansas! I realized that it was special and that I had the opportunity here to be fully me. I have no idea why I came up with Kansas — I had not even seen the Wizard of Oz yet.

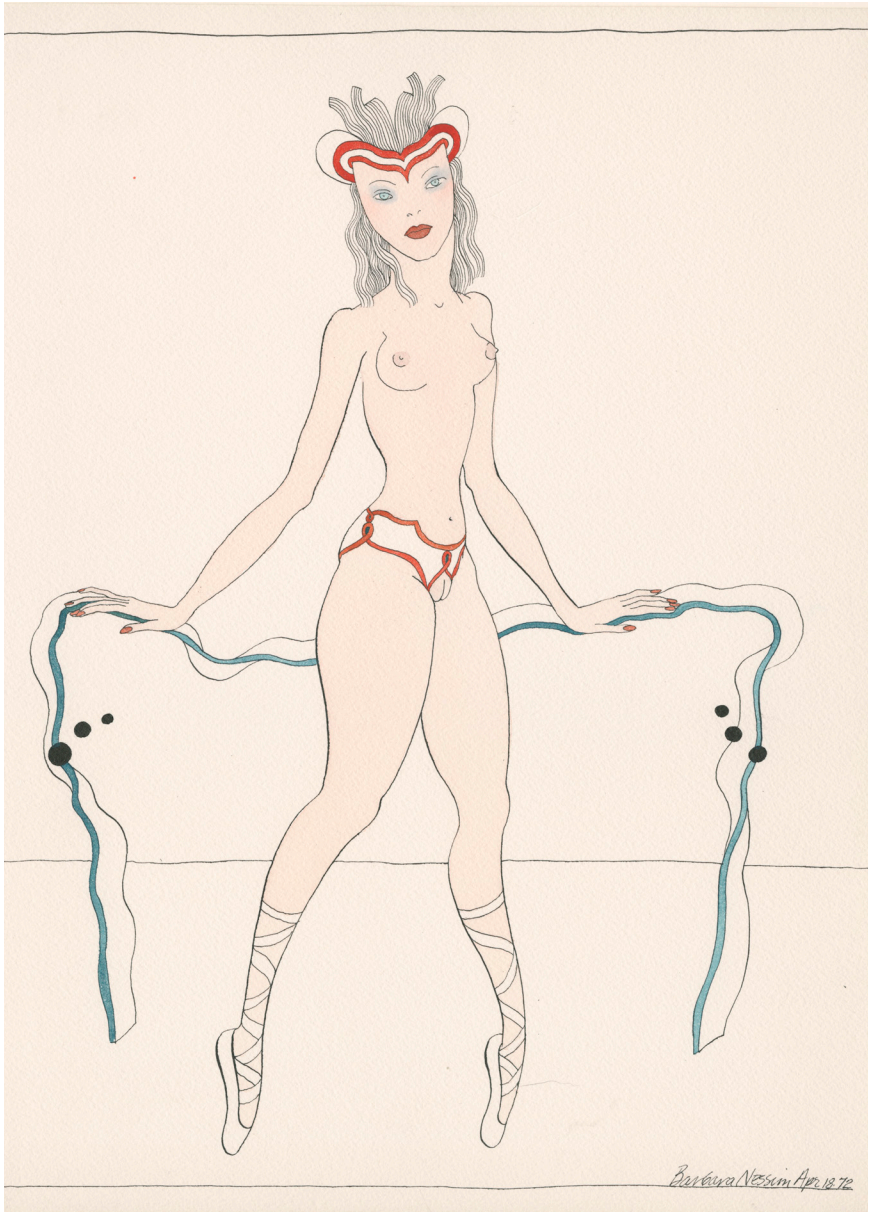
I had only been to downtown Manhattan a few times to go to restaurants with my family. The area of the Bronx I grew up in was unique. My grade school and Junior Highschool, PS 80, was special. Ralph Lauren, nee Lipshitz and Calvin Klein were in my younger sisters' class. Each weekday, at 8am, my best friend Vivian and I attended Mrs. Sulmonetti's gifted art class an hour before school officially began. We did this every day from 7th to 9th grade. Looking back, I think how generous she was to give us that hour every day!

Our apartment building in the Bronx was the last building on the Grand Concourse. It was located where Mosholu Parkway, Jerome Avenue, and the Grand Concourse intersect, and it was surrounded by parks and open spaces. I am lucky to still know my lifelong friend Vivian, who lived next

door. We referred to our building as '3235' and we still sign our emails with our apartment numbers, 6L and 6K. No one locked their doors, so we rarely rang each other's bell to enter the apartments, it was all fluid. In the basement/ballroom of the building, Margorie Marshall had a tap-dancing school. Most of the kids living in our building, as well as the surrounding areas, attended her school. Marjorie was a force to be reckoned with. She wore slacks and had a wonderful sense of humor with an edge of wisecrack. Women did not wear slacks in the 50's. Her kids went on to have illustrious careers in the TV and movie industry. Garry Marshall was a successful producer, director, and comedy writer and created iconic TV shows of the era. His younger sister, Penny Marshall, was a huge TV star with her own shows and later became a successful movie producer and director. If you are over 60 you are sure to know them.

My childhood felt secure, and I feel that gave me the ability to be free enough to become an artist. If I wasn't an artist, I do not know what else I would do. I always wanted to live my life as close to my heart as I could. I do not think I could live any other way.

RED, WHITE, AND BLUE ON HER TOES, 1972
Ink & watercolor on paper
16" x 12"

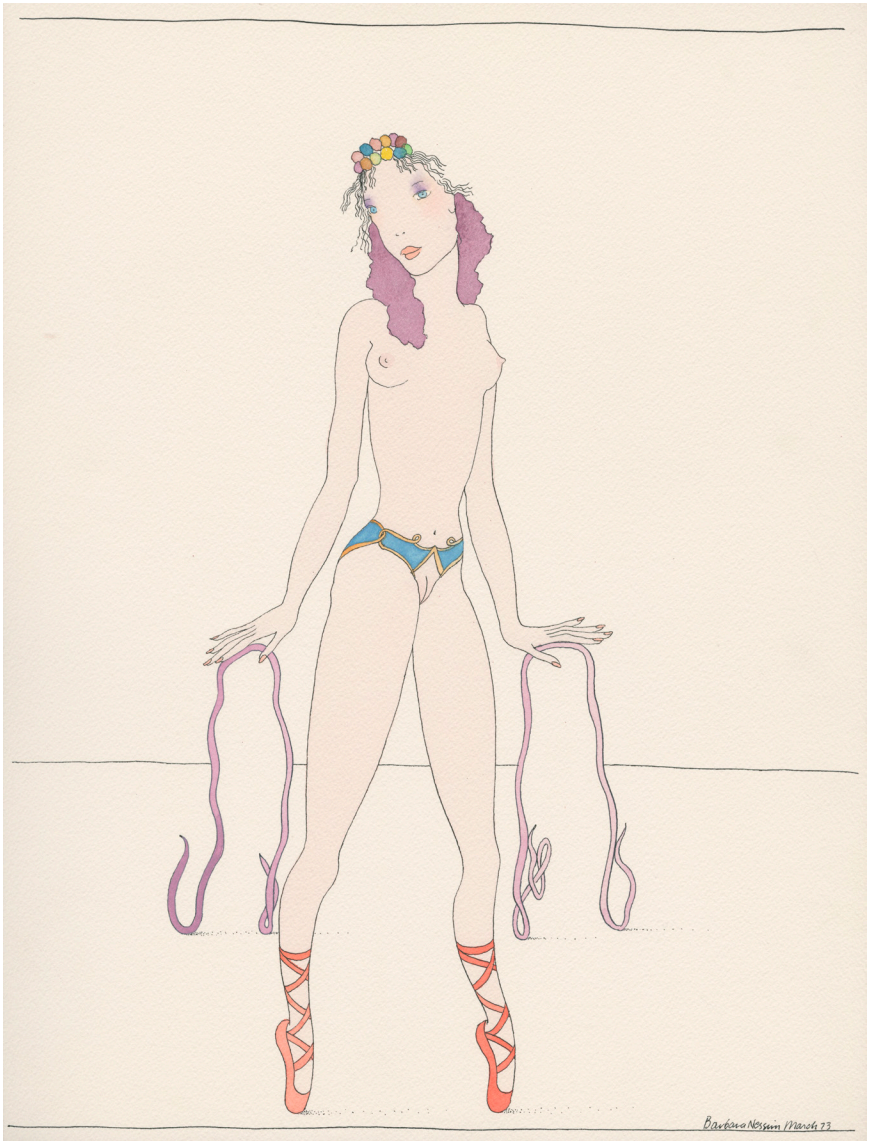

Barbara Nessim Apr. 1972

RED BALL ROLLING, 1971
Ink & watercolor on paper
14" x 10.25"

ELLEN WITH FLOATING HANDS, 1972
Ink & watercolor on paper
16" x 12"


Barbara Nessim Mar 22 72

BALANCING ON THE ROPES, 1973
Ink & watercolor on paper
16" x 12"


Barbara Nessim March 73

DOUGLAS DODDS

Independent Curator and Former Senior Curator at the Victoria & Albert Museum

Q: Most of the people in your artworks from this period are clearly women or girls, and usually quite feminine women too. Why was that?

A: Women are usually referred to as "girls" even well into their later years. My series of drawings titled, "WomanGirls," reflect society's reaction as to the aging female. My "WomanGirls" have no pubic hair rendering them as prepubescent girls, meanwhile they clearly have developed breasts and are feminine, like a woman. I created "WomanGirls" in the early 70's. Ms. Magazine was first published in 1972. This wave of the Women's Movement was at the beginning stages! These artworks were clearly reflecting the times we were living in 50+ years ago.

I was searching around the web for different definitions of "woman" and came across an article from the Harvard Crimson from 2013. I include it, verbatim, in this query because it had a particular take on the meaning of a woman in 2013. Author, Valeria M. Pelet wrote,

> "According to the Oxford English Dictionary, 'woman' is defined as an adult female human being. The counterpart of man.' ('Man,' on the other hand, is not defined as 'the counterpart of woman.' Figures.) 'Girl,' however, is usually meant to signify 'young woman.' Technically, those are correct. But to some, their usage in the wrong context can range from being inappropriate to just plain offensive."
>
> "At the most basic level, it's an age thing. Many refer to females as 'girls' until they are around college age, then switch to the term 'young women.' When females reach the dreaded age of thirty, they are referred to as, simply, 'women.'"
>
> (https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2013/2/21/girl-woman-around-language/)

It is interesting to me that, according to this author at The Harvard Crimson, when a woman reaches 30 it is "dreaded!" I was surprised that she gave the age of 30 a negative connotation. However, I do think in 2023, as opposed to 2013, men and women are more aware that with age comes maturity along with self-confidence in both sexes.

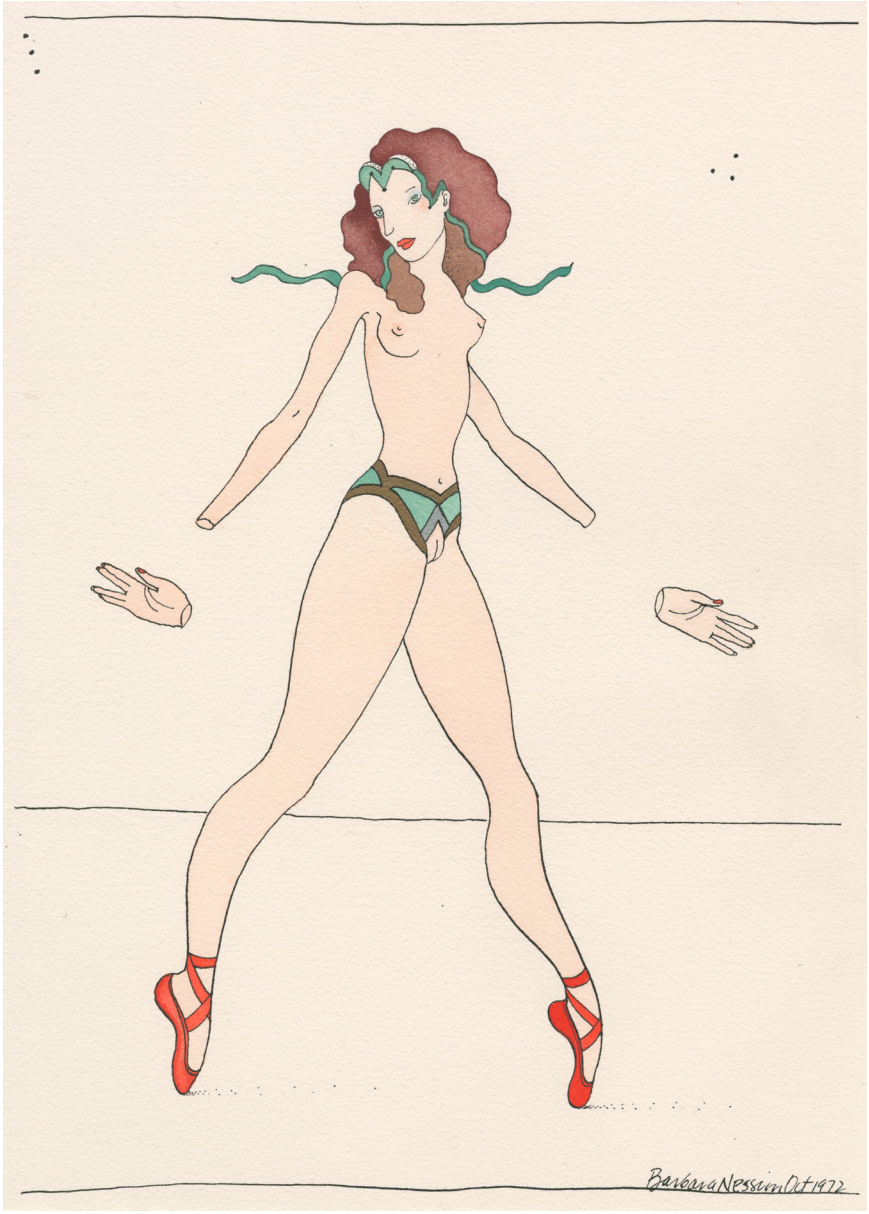
Q: And what changed later, when some of your figures became more androgynous, or less gendered perhaps?

A: I guess that I was subconsciously predicting the future. I do know I consciously drew many women without any hair. I did not want "style" to date the figure. The women in my drawings are of any and all times. Now gender and many other classifications of woman and man are being reevaluated and explored. Sexual orientation is being examined and people are rediscovering themselves as to their considered gender. There is more freedom to one's self-discovery. It's only the beginning and, as always, time will tell as self-expression of gender evolves.

PUSHING TWO, 1972
Ink & watercolor on paper
16" x 12"


Barbara Nessim Aug 1972

FINGER SIGNALS FROM AFAR, 1972
Ink & watercolor on paper
14” x 10“


Barbara Nessim Oct 1972

WOMEN WALKING

Ink and watercolor on archival paper, 1969 - 1974

Throughout the portfolio of Barbara Nessim, the shoe is a leitmotif that reflects the artist's conceptions of womanhood, identity, and exploration into the self. Shoes have danced their way onto her canvases, sketchbooks, and renderings for decades.

BROWN SOLE, HALF CYLINDERS AND DOTS, 1969
Ink & watercolor on paper
14" x 10.25"


Barbara Nessim 2-27-69

RAINBOW VAMP WITH BALANCING BLACK BALL, 1969
Ink & watercolor on paper
20" x 14"

SUSAN WEBER

Founder and Director of the Bard Graduate Center (BGC)
for Studies in the Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material culture

Q: Which women did you admire during the time period (1969-1974)?

A: Very few women were recognized and shown during the 60's and early 70's. Marisol, Niki de Saint Phalle, Corita Kent (who was a nun and did groundbreaking printmaking), and Louise Nevelson are artists who come to mind. These four women were prominent when I graduated from Pratt in the 1960's.

Later, there was the artist, Hannah Wilke, who was a friend; we met in the early 60's. Her studio was directly across the street from mine, our windows faced each other. Her work was sculptural, performance based, and included video. It was "pre-modern-day-feminist." Hannah created an array of vulva like sculptures made of pink chewing gum among other mediums and placed them on the floors and walls. She also used her body as a canvas in her scarification series, as well as other performance pieces. When she became ill with cancer, she made videos of herself in bed documenting her experience. Her work was more than brave. Hannah announced to me one evening in her loft, "we women artists need to stick together" -- I agreed! This was in 1965, just before the second wave of the Women's Movement began in earnest.

Another artist and friend, Anita Steckel, organized a 'cadre' of women artists against censorship in the early 70's, including Judith Bernstein, Louise Bourgeois, Joan Semmel, and myself. Its members were women who were showing work that might have been seen and considered as "pornographic" or indecent. One could easily be arrested for creating such work. In 1973, I had a show at the Corridor Gallery on Prince Street, of my

"WomanGirls." I did have the concern that I may be arrested.

Some of the women mentioned above were part of SoHo 20, a cooperative art gallery. I was considered and interviewed to join the gallery, but I was rejected because I did work for publications as well as painting. Doing commissioned artwork was considered "too commercial" and therefore not serious "art." Some even thought that if one did art commercially it was somehow akin to "prostitution." Just that comparison shows the chasm in belief at the time. There was a huge divide between the two worlds.

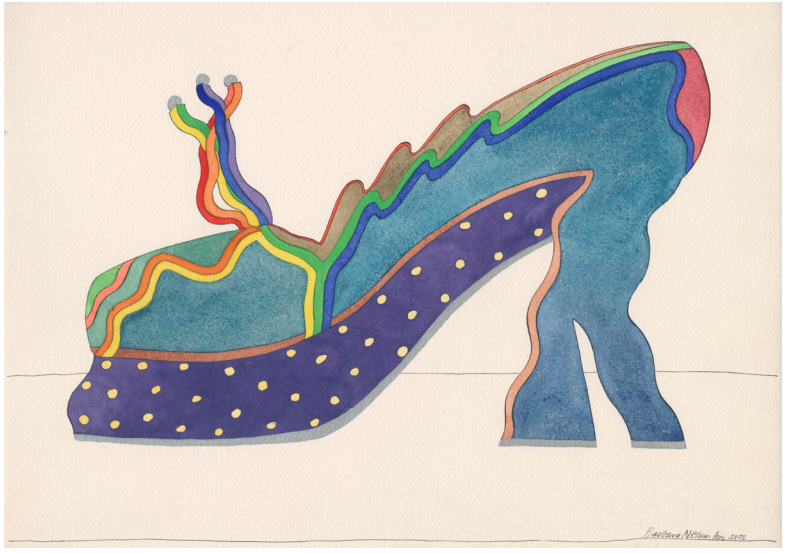
The art world is much more inclusive and very different today than it was 50 years ago. In other words, one had to be able to afford to be an artist then. This could make the profession elitist and open to very few.

SAW HEEL + 15, 1969
Ink & watercolor on paper
20" x 14"

DARK BLUE SOLE WITH RED HEEL, 1971
Ink & watercolor on paper
14” x 10.25”

PLAID PLATFORM, 1972
Ink & watercolor on paper
16" x 12"

SPLIT HEEL WITH YELLOW POLKA-DOT PLATFORM, 1972
Ink & watercolor on paperW
16” x 12”



GARY PANTER
Artist

Q: I have asked you this in person, but for the record — in about 1965 there was a transformation in your work from the dense prints you were making to the light line works that you became famous for. What happened that year, if I have the year right?

A: After graduating from Pratt in 1960, I earned a scholarship to the Pratt Graphic Workshop. I continued the dense etchings I was working on in my senior year. I loved the process as much as creating the work.

When the Pratt workshop closed sometime in the middle to late 60's, I began working with oil paint and a few years later I was introduced to a new plastic water-based paint, now called Liquitex. It was easy to use, dried quickly, and had a strong pigmentation. I found that I could use it to draw on the canvas as well as cover large flat surfaces.

Space was always an issue, which led me to start working with watercolors and ink on paper. This allowed me to do more work and visualize my subconscious thoughts. I started to "read" my work and create cryptic imagery that had personal meaning to my life but could also be understood more broadly by others. I was having fun while at the same time feeling emotionally satisfied. My friends were very encouraging as well.

Around 1967 I was introduced to and started working with the brightly colored Luma Dyes. The color was extremely intense. It was a joy looking

at them. I had and still have a strong sketchbook practice where I only used pen and ink, and it naturally expanded to include other media over time, such as the Luma Dyes. I loved looking at color palettes and choosing just the right colors for a drawing. For this, I found working with Arches watercolor paper on a block to be the perfect surface. The watercolor block allowed for the watercolor to lay flat on the paper without curling. Here I could expand on my drawings. I rarely used my sketchbooks for reference. Instead, I constantly created new works from the beginning. When I discovered that Luma Dyes were extremely fugitive, I switched to the more subdued watercolors in the pots.

When I started working on paper, as opposed to oil paint on canvas, I loved the air in the composition. It made the color "special." As I worked, I observed that my imagery was figurative and narrative. I followed where the brush took me.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A special thank you to
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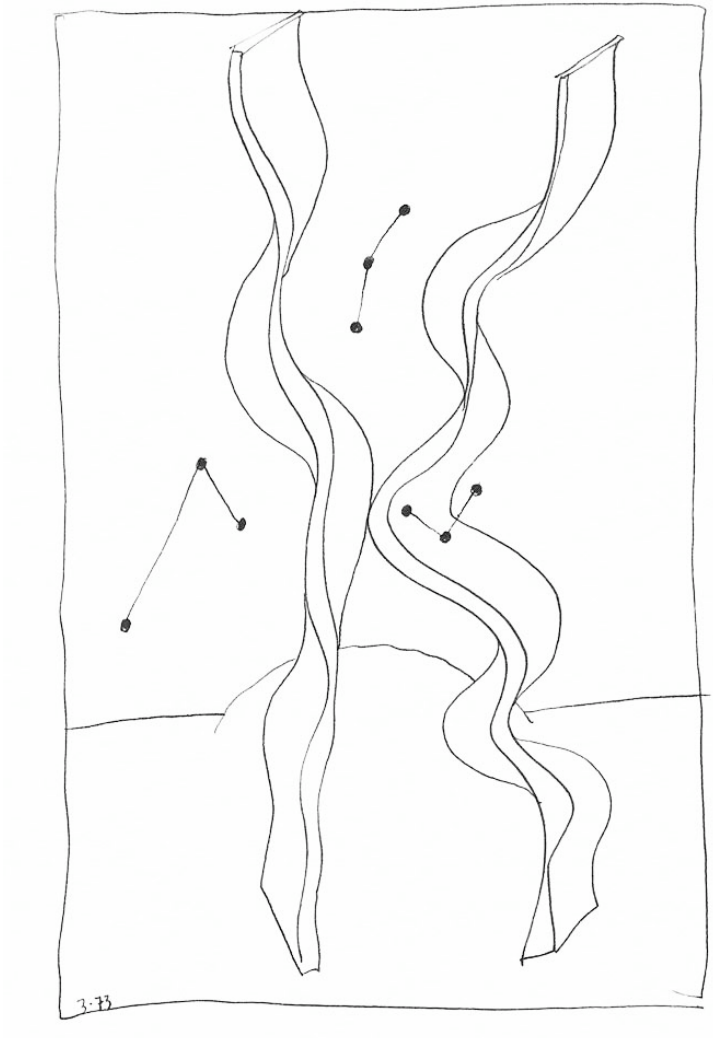
Anna Demchick for her 'last look' at the catalogue

If I've forgotten anyone, please forgive me.



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