

BARBARA NESSIM



STARGIRL

Barbara Nessim 2020

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On View April 20, 2021 - June 19, 2021
Malin Gallery
515 W 29TH ST • NYC

THE WO/MEN IN MY LIFE • 2019 - 2020

Large-scale 6' x 4' oil on canvas portraits based on Nessim's sketchbook drawings from the 1970's decade

WHO WE WILL BE | GENETIC SYNTHESIS • 1976 - 1978

A global vision of future generations imagined by the artist five decades ago, through pastel portraits of people of mixed racial and ethnic origins

SOULS / SOLES • 2019 - 2021

Life-size ceramic sculptures of shoes

Barbara Nessim is an artist whose daring and prolific work, spanning six decades, defies narrow categorization. Her artistic production has straddled fine art and illustration, pushing against and reshaping the boundaries of the often rigid separation between the two fields. With her artworks on paper informing her commercial illustrations, Nessim always begins with line or color, independent of medium, context or application. Her vibrant colorful imagery is figurative, conceptual and deeply intuitive. Its power and enduring relevance lies in its fusion of skillful technique, social engagement and pop culture resonance. A Bronx native, Nessim's artworks, as her biography, are the story of the evolving gender equity and shifting cultural landscapes of New York City. Her works have been exhibited and collected internationally, including London's Victoria & Albert Museum and New York's Bard Graduate Center Gallery. Nessim received a Lifetime Achievement Award from Pratt Institute in 2015 and was inducted into the Society of Illustrators Hall of Fame in 2020.

Supported early on by prominent illustrators and designers including Robert Weaver, Milton Glaser, Seymour Chwast, Henry Wolf, and Robert Benton, Nessim graduated from Pratt in 1960 where she studied Graphic Art and Illustration. At a time in which students were encouraged to emulate Abstract Expressionism, Nessim made intimate paintings with narrative emphasis. One of her first series, *Man and Machine* (1960), represents the artist's unique visual vocabulary, in which stylistic echoes of German Expressionism combine with distinctly New York subject matter. Her non-traditional use of watercolor, monotype etching and lithography as well as embedded text in image, became signature features of both Nessim's fine art and commercial illustration work. Dozens of sketchbooks, shelved chronologically in her studio, reflect the creative traffic between her different modes of production.

Resourceful and determined, Nessim's career as an illustrator broke conventions of all sorts. Her first major illustration job was a Doubleday book jacket, which she got by hand printing personalized linoleum cuts to art directors at publishing houses. The lengthy and impressive list of publications in which her illustrations have appeared include, *New York Magazine*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Time*, *Glamour*, *Essence Magazine*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Rolling Stone*, and *Ms. Magazine*. Many of her initial jobs in the 1960s were for self-styled "girlie" magazines such as *Swank* and *Nugget*, akin to *Playboy*, which offered Nessim

surprising freedom and early exposure. Nessim's figurative drawings frequently fuse human form with geometric shapes, composing strange and beautiful juxtapositions. Prominent themes in her work relate to social expectations of women and often challenge mainstream, binary definitions of gender. Her iconic use of color and engagement with cultural conceptions of female identity and beauty are evidenced in her *WomanGirl* series (1971 – 1974) of lanky nudes with no pubic hair wearing high-laced ballet pointe shoes.

Alongside her artistic practice, Nessim's academic career began at the School of Visual Arts in 1967, where she taught until leaving to chair the Illustration Department at Parsons School of Design in 1991. Her pioneering impulse propelled her to the forefront of computer-generated graphic art in the early 1980s by way of an art residency at TIME Inc. and later through an affiliation with IBM. In the 1990s, her expansive *Random Access Memories* series, which treats issues of population growth, immigration and diversity, positioned her among the first artists to drive illustrated book design into the digital sphere. Further evolving her use of digital media, two bodies of work – *The Model Project* (2008 – 2009) and *Chronicles of Beauty* (2009 – 2010) – combine analogue collage and digital printing techniques, using contemporary fashion imagery to address the thorny history of ideals of femininity and masculinity.

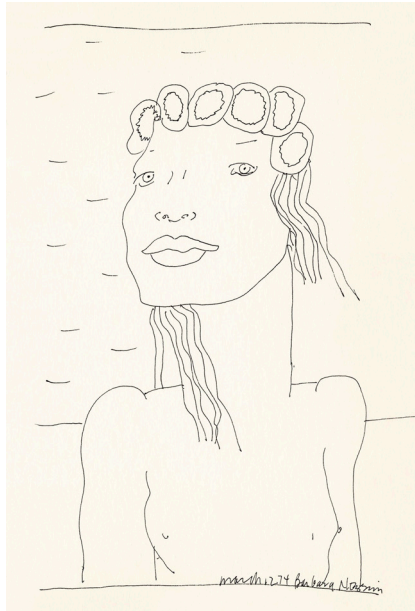
In her newest series, *The Wo/men in My Life* (2019 – 2020), Nessim returns to her trove of sketchbooks. As much as these works in oil on canvas are based on sketches produced over forty years ago, they are in no way looking backwards. Nessim astonishes with her ability to translate the economy and intuition of a single gesture at 6" x 9", into a 6' x 4' painting with remarkable depth. These impressively scaled canvases are portraits of non-binary individuals in wild and vivid colors, painted to a sensuous velvety texture and peppered with recognizable imagery from six decades of work – ribbons, swirls, geometric shapes that anthropomorphize, impossible hair and silhouetted nipples. Suggestive body parts patterned to near abstraction, such as a grid of tongues in the painting *The Gift of Tongues*, peaking down from above, are edgy and exciting. While *The Wo/men in My Life* are not based on actual people, they embody a specificity to Nessim's artistic universe that renders them unmistakably as characters in her life.

Jessica Eisenthal, 2021

THE WO/MEN IN MY LIFE

Oil on Canvas • 2019 - 2020

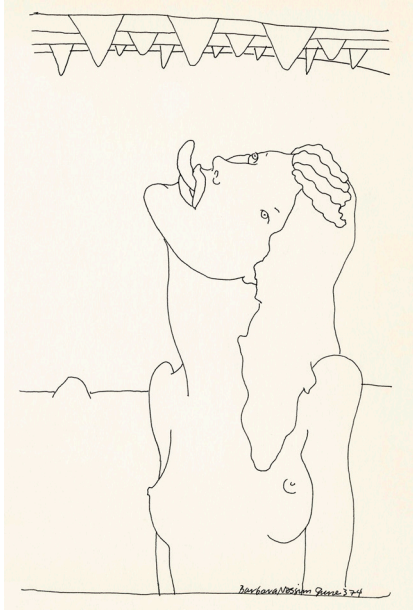
“Boundaries between men and women are increasingly blurred. Gender is more fluid. The distinctions between male and female roles are evaporating. Sexual identities are being questioned. I use the spelling ‘wo/men’ as opposed to ‘women’ for inclusion.”



"No judgment—I don't make judgments while I work. I try to give each piece a life of its own. I let the work be whatever it wants to be. Many times, when a piece is done, I look upon it with awe, and wonder who created it. I know I did the work, but the process amazes me."

First Born (2019)
Oil on canvas
6' x 4'

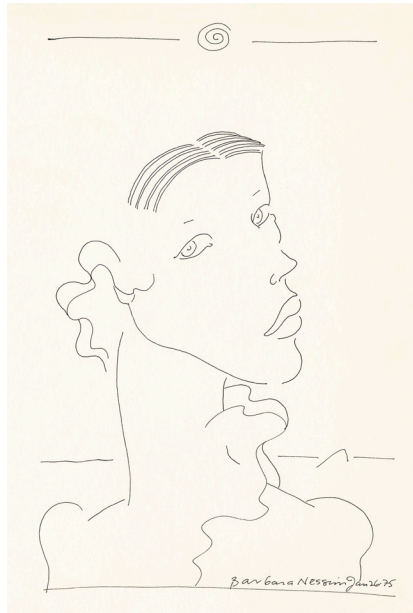




“One of my greatest joys is looking at color. There are only 3 primary colors and 3 tertiary colors plus black and white. The fact that those few colors can produce endless variations holds my interest. Color can evoke feelings. I love looking at them all at once in a paint box. I always imagine what I can do with them.”

The Gift of Tongues (2019)
Oil on canvas
6' x 4'

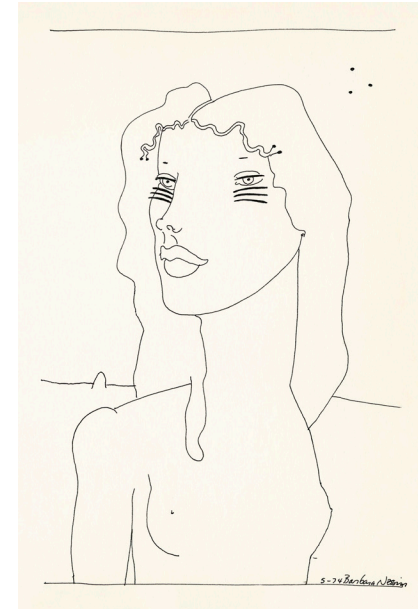




“Line has the power to allow your imagination to soar. Whether the line is connected or broken, it has the ability to create an imaginary continuum. The more spaces or gaps—the more your eye works to finish the line, forming a powerful connection with the active brain.”

Blue Ribbon (2019)
Oil on canvas
6' x 4'

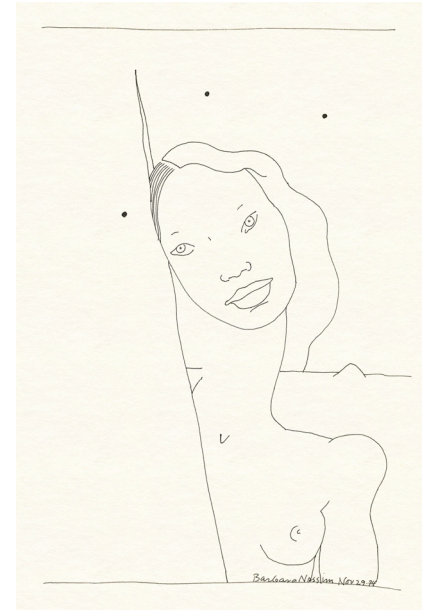




“Form and shape are solid structures that can hold your attention, and fill spaces with movement. They can be molded into anything that you imagine they can be. Form and shape are pliable and elastic and can stretch miles into a space.”

Primary Moons (2019)
Oil on canvas
6' x 4'

Barbara Nessim 2019

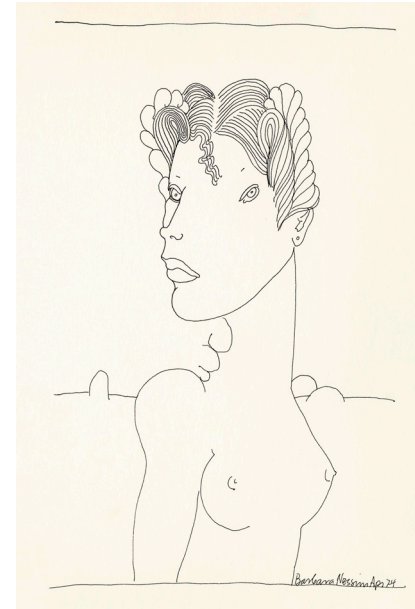


“Space can feel vast and endless or confined and small. It is infinite in both directions. The earth can be a dot in the universe or the vast and unknown planet we live on. As humans we move through space. Space allows our bodies the freedom of expressive movement.”

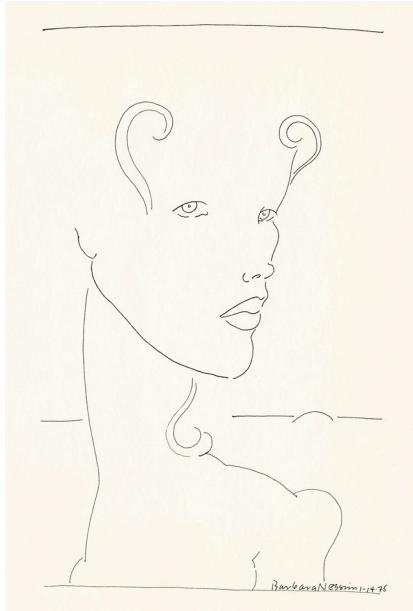
Returning From The Universe (2019)
Oil on canvas
6' x 4'



Jolene (2019)
Oil on canvas
6' x 4'



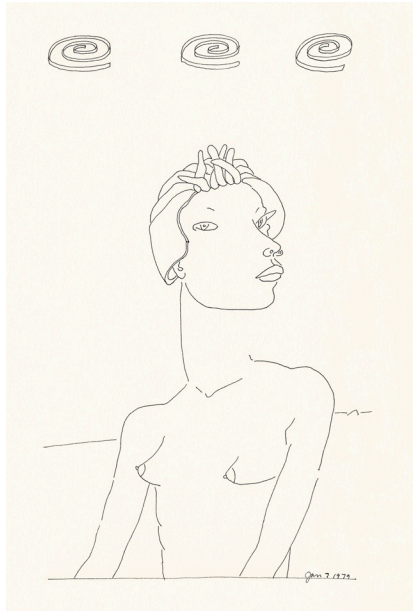
"Balance and equilibrium are the yin and yang of my life. Balance creates harmony and keeps me centered. Balance governs the shapes, colors, and line in my work. You cannot explain balance; it is a state of being."



"Tension could be described as the opposite of balance. Tension is what makes balance work in the composition. It is the rude interrupter that makes the work feel real."

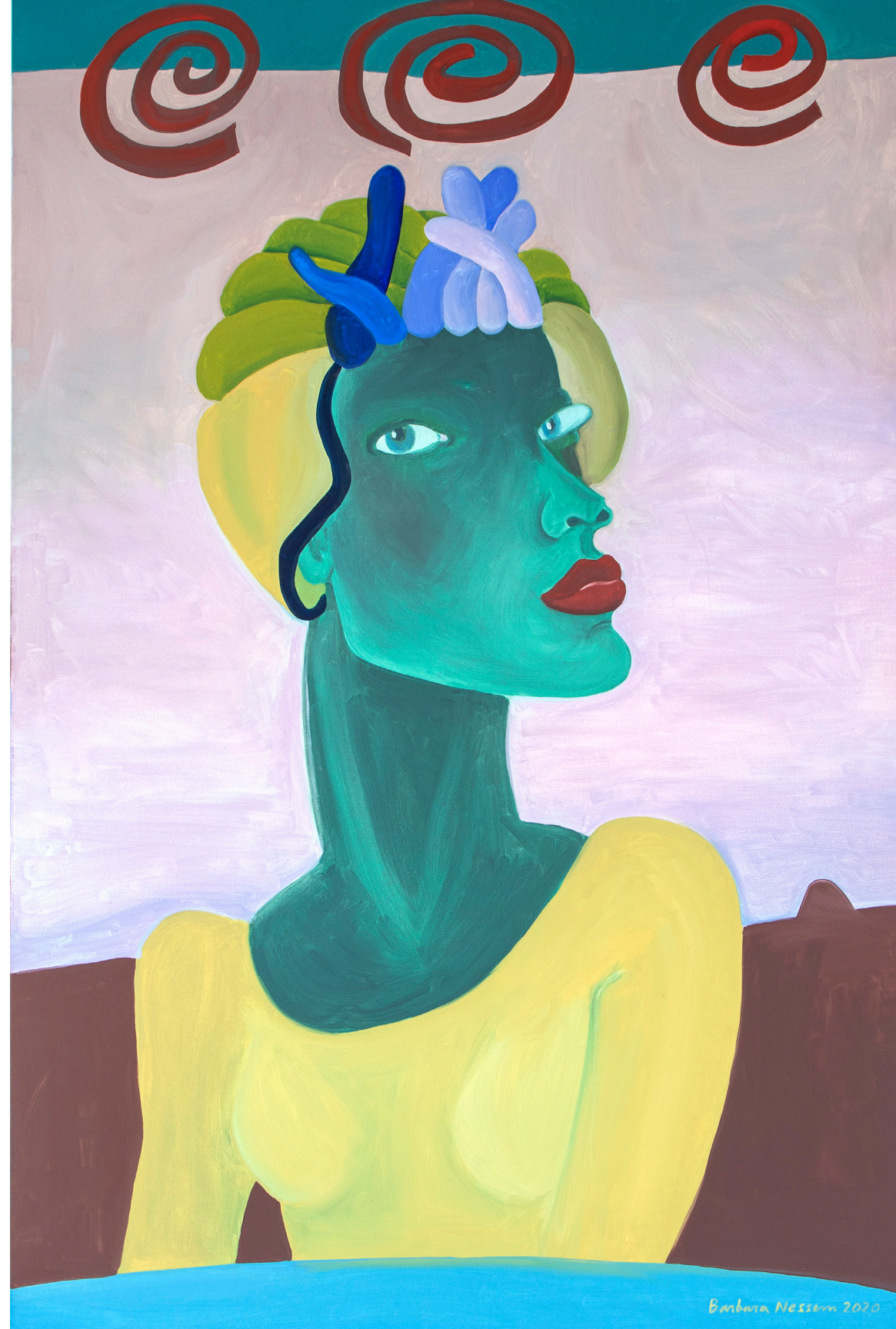
In The Pink (2019)
Oil on canvas
6' x 4'

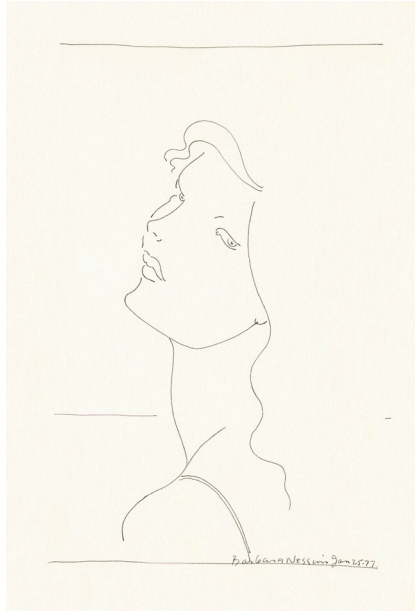




“The number 3—I like to see marks on paper in threes, I don’t know why. Perhaps it’s because I am one of three siblings. It just feels right.”

She Sees It All (2020)
Oil on canvas
6' x 4'





“Closed lips can set a mood—you have to read whether they are about to smile or smirk or convey anger. You don’t know where the mood is going. It is like the Mona Lisa.”

The Red Dress (2020)
Oil on canvas
6' x 4'



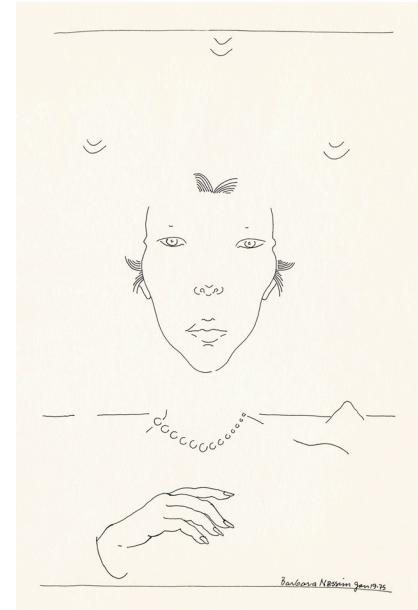


“My mother was ahead of her time. In the fifties, few women worked. She had a career. She was a glamorous designer of Woman’s blouses. She was a role model for me. She showed me that woman can pursue their creativity and successfully have their own career.”

Sweet Sue Dreaming (2020)
Oil on canvas
6' x 4'



Barbara Nossim 2020



“Women appear naturally in my work. I didn’t realize that I drew women almost exclusively until in 1965, a man asked me “Why do you always draw women?”. I do not remember the man but I remember the question. I was stunned by it. I just followed where my hand led me, as if my hand had a life of its own.”

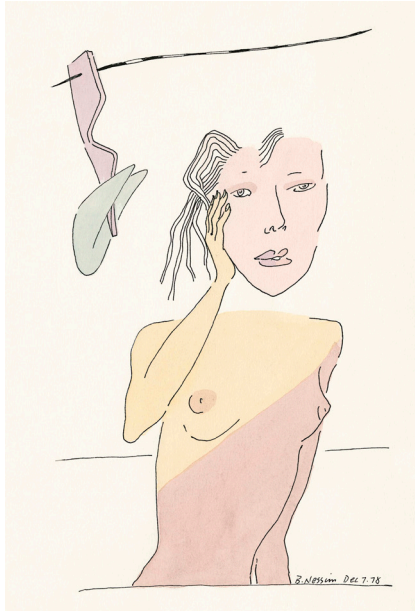
Zandra With The Pink Hair (2020)
Oil on canvas
6' x 4'



Beret of Tongues (2020)
Oil on canvas
6' x 4'



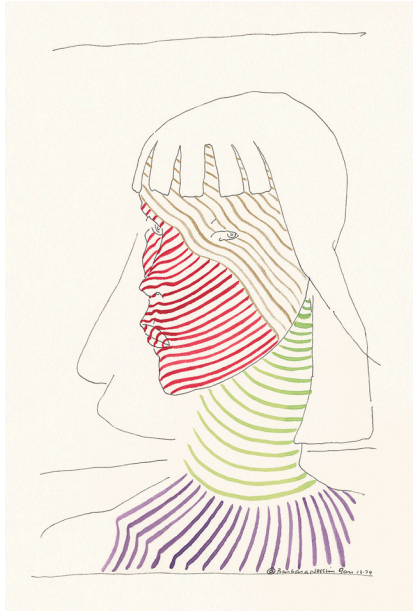
“Borders have always been an important element in the picture—they are the container that gives the shapes and forms a place to be. They have evolved over the years from a thin line that had to be placed on the page to an abstract language that accompanies the figures on their journey through space.”



"Eyes communicate directly with the viewer. Eyes tell a story. They speak silently. Sometimes the silence is so loud you have to look away. Eyes can pierce silence."

Which Way? (2020)
Oil on canvas
6' x 4'





“Simplicity and economy are two rules that I follow instinctually. As I am working, my hand stops and I know the artwork is finished. I know the less I put on the page the more power it has to communicate.”

Grey on Gray (2020)
Oil on canvas
6' x 4'



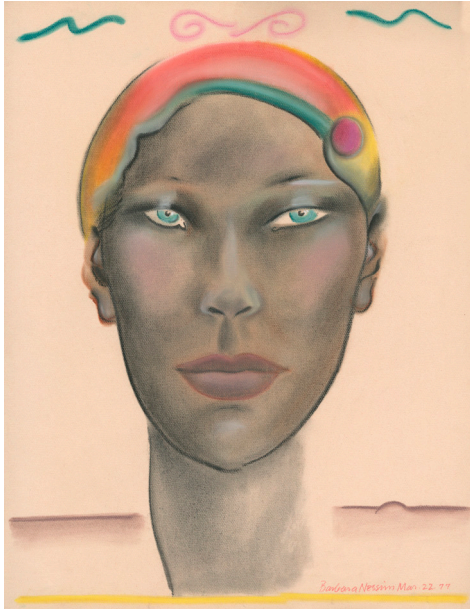


WHO WE WILL BE / GENETIC SYNTHESIS

Pastel on Paper • 1976 - 1978

"50 years ago I wondered... If every person in the world procreated with each other what would the offspring look like? A true mixing of the gene pool—that is what is happening today."

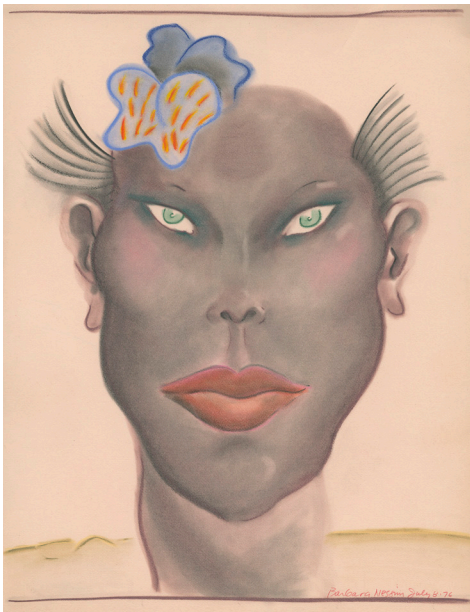
Untitled (1977)
Pastel on paper
26" x 19"



Untitled (1977). Pastel on paper. 26" x 19".



Untitled (1976). Pastel on paper. 26" x 19".



Untitled (1976). Pastel on paper. 26" x 19".



Untitled (1976). Pastel on paper. 26" x 19".

SOULS / SOLES

Ceramic Shoes • 2019 - 2021

“Every soul has a life—walk in each soul’s life for a year.”

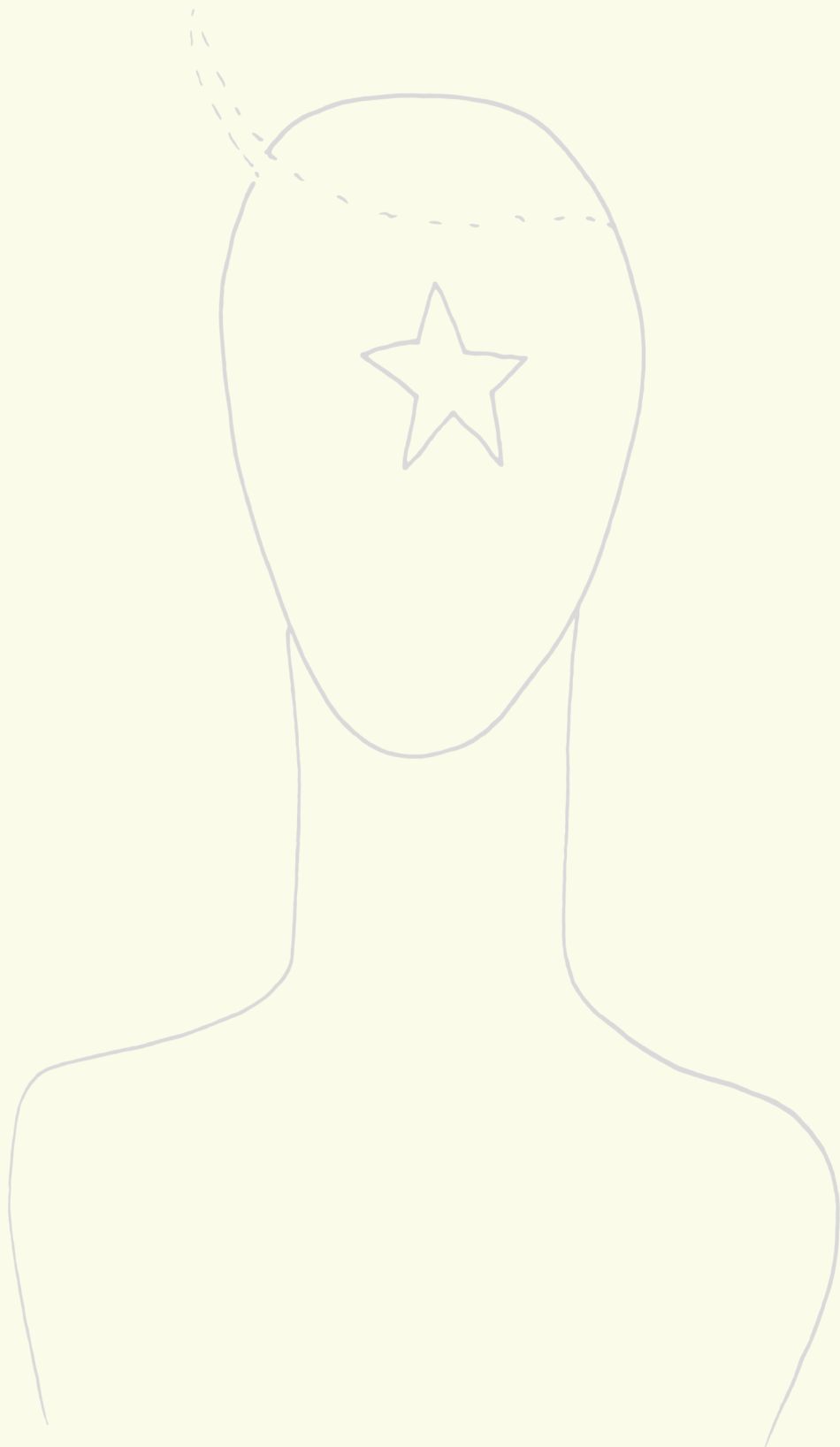


Sole Eye (2019)
Glazed ceramic
4" (h) x 10" (l) x 3" (d)



Top: Purple Peeping, 2019.
Bottom: Morse Code in Pink Flashing, 2019.

Left to right: Sole Eye, 2019; Black, White and Red All Over, 2019.
All shoes are glazed ceramic and approximately 4" (h) x 10" (l) x 3" (d).



Thank you: Anna Demchick (Design Director), Yulia Afonina and Charlotte Glauberman (Graphic Design), Gloria Steinem (Series Titles), Barry Malin (Gallerist), Lizanne Merrill (Inspiration), Jessica Eisenthal (Essay), David Smith (Photography) and Greenwich House Pottery.



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