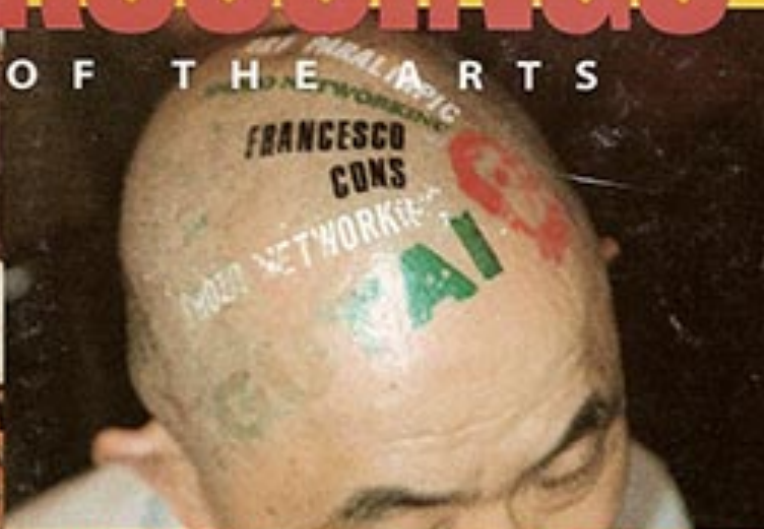


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Performance Art

CHRISTINA KIROUAC: "Sex and violence go hand-in-hand in so many ways in our culture," says Christina Kirouac, in explaining her ongoing fascination with boxing, "that I decided to look into it." Her investigations into the sport of rings has led her to spend three years training as a boxer in gyms from Winnipeg to Paris and to create a body of work (in the fields of drawing, painting and performance) which features a collection of actively physical women characters. They include a heroine in the comicbook mould named Crissy Virtue, a large painting 9 feet by 13 1/2 feet of women boxers in the manner of George Bellows and a billboard photo-image that makes crystal-clear the connection between the erotic and the pugilistic. "I started dealing with the transformation of my own body because, quite honestly, I have an obsession with it," she says with characteristic candour. "As much as I'm an intelligent, educated woman, I still find myself wanting to be the pin-up girl with muscle. It's like my rational mind is working on a certain level but there's this other part that wishes I could have implants and create the perfect body."

That other part of her mind has been the designer of Kirouac's pin-up boxer for the Billboard Project sponsored by Plug In Gallery. Working with Winnipeg photographer Larry Glowson and borrowing a pose from *Amazonian Action*, a journal "devoted exclusively to the female fighting scene," she has presented herself as a femme fatale. The image is a hoot, the



message—"My girlfriend can't wrestle, but you should see her box"—is a rude, muscular pun for the feinthearted. In another sequence of photos from the same "Boxer Portrait" series, she sports white lingerie, complete with a garter belt and matching stockings, and wears bright red boxing gloves. It's an ensemble that would appeal to a range of fight aficionados from Ernest Hemingway to Candice Bergen. Kirouac likes the idea that her figures cut across gender lines and has exploited that drift in her large drawings of *Crissy and the Wrestler*. "The woman's body looks like a very attractive man, so there may be a homoerotic element," she says in describing *Crissy's* body type, but there's little doubt about the nature of the physical act going on. "It's not about reducing the size of the man so that the woman can overpower him and render him submissive. It's play, it's fun. He's into it."

What he seems to be into is her; the contact between the pair invariably ends up with his head clamped firmly between her legs in an act that is more carnal than athletic, more about licking than getting licked. The drawings make that condition manifest; *Crissy's* cartoon grimace describes that zone where pleasure and pain rub up against one another and the wrestler's sexual excitement is conspicuous in its presence. This is big attack art where the gymnastic and the orgiastic meet on the ropes and there isn't a

My Girlfriend Can't Wrest



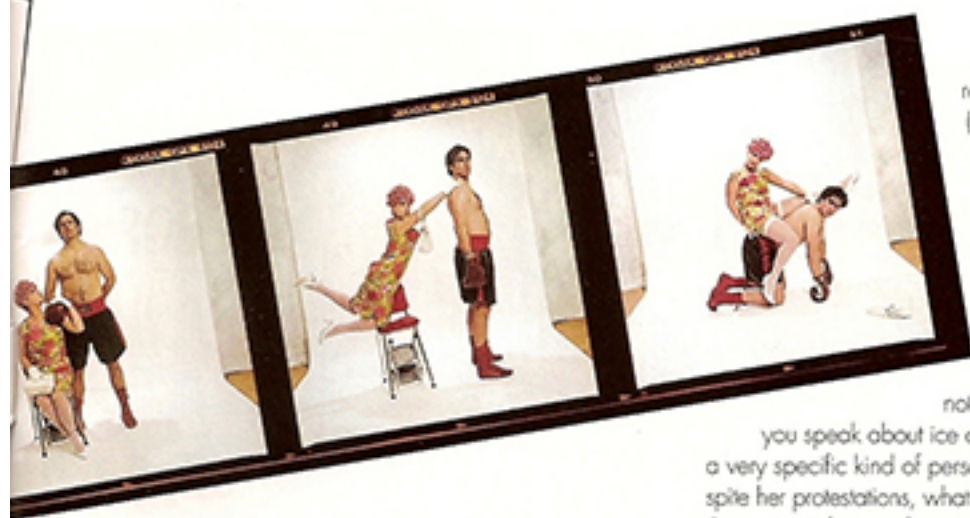
But You Should See Her Box

lower left: Christina Kirouac, *Boxer Portrait Series*, Christina Kirouac and Griffin the Boxer. Photographs: Larry Glowson, 1998.

top right: Billboard Project, Plug In Gallery, July/August 1998.

centre: *Crissy Virtue and the Wrestler*, 1996-1997, green ink on paper, 12 x 14".





Boxer Portrait Series, 1998, Christina Kirouac and Jarod Charzewski.
Hair: FIX, Make-up: Beverley Hamilton.

referee in sight. Kirouac appreciates the scale; (the drawings are green ink on paper and are 12 by 14 feet). "There's something really ridiculous about the size and that's what I like about them. They had to be gargantuan, I knew that right away."

What she's not sure about is how much longer she's going to put on the gloves for her art. "I'm climbing now and I want to do some art out of that activity. I enjoyed boxing but not in the same way that you use the word when you speak about ice cream or sex. I enjoy what it gives me but it takes a very specific kind of person—male or female—to get off on fighting." Despite her protestations, what viewers are getting off on in the work of this new Amazon, is the punch carried by its various slights-of-hand. RE



THE POETICS OF ALCHEMY: SEA CHANGES IN THE ART OF STEFAN GEC

Stefan Gec, the gifted British artist, is an alchemist. Not in the literal sense (although he has turned a base metal into a golden button) but in the broader poetic sense in which we have come to understand and accept the term. He makes things better in the process of making them different. In piece after piece he takes objects rotten with danger and transforms them into objects redolent with care, maybe even wonder. The amazing thing is that he effects this transubstantiation in a way so simple as to make viewers blink at its audacity. In 1989 he took note that eight Russian submarines had been bought as scrap and towed to the Blyth shipyards in the North of England. He was able to buy enough metal from the subs to cast eight bells that became the basis for a piece called *Trace Elements*. The bells were suspended from a bridge spanning the River Tyne—a tidal river—so that the incoming water activated the bell clappers and sent back out to sea the now friendly vibrations.



above left: Stefan Gec, *Natural History*, Osereok Gallery, Winnipeg, April 1998. Photograph: Jon Beasley © Locus+Archive, Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Courtesy: The Winnipeg Art Gallery.

above: Stefan Gec, *Buoy*, 1996-1999, Museum of Hartlepool.