

# Judith Bernstein

## Press Release

### Judith Bernstein – Blue Balls

07 June - 13 July 2019

Opening Thursday 06 June 2019

Karma International is pleased to present Judith Bernstein's most recent solo exhibition, *Blue Balls*, featuring new and historical works, and second with the gallery.

*Blue Balls* is the sensation that occurs when a male-bodied person has sustained an erection but does not cum, where the balls constrict painfully and adopt a slight blue hue. *Blue Balls* points out the weakness of the phallus while reminding us that the phrase is often used as a means to an end, and as an expression of male-entitlement. In a political climate where the legislative progress of the feminists is in jeopardy, the show is as playful as it is sinister.

The *Blue Balls* paintings feature curved cocks, dripping and strained with a vagina dentata emerging from colorful testicles. Bernstein's critique of power focuses on men, but does not exclude or exonerate women. Women have a voice. Women have teeth. Women have rage. This cuts both ways; absolute power corrupts. In larger paintings from the exhibition, cocks with screaming cunts float in a fantasy space with no tether, anthropomorphizing Bernstein's phalluses as totem-like figures. She pokes fun at the gender binary. These male/female combinations make an encouraging gesture to the new frontier of human sexuality. Her signature screw drawings, which she was infamously censored for in 1973, are also represented in the exhibition. In the two new "Horizontal" (2019) works on paper, charcoal has been replaced by acrylic paint. Bernstein makes the point that while we have come along away, we are still dealing with the issues that inspired her to make the original "Horizontal" (1973) drawing.

As double entendre permeates the space, Bernstein's word drawings, *Black Hole* (1993-2019), *Star* (1995-2019) and *Truth* (1995), encapsulate how words have always played a significant role in her work, especially in instances where words and phrases evoke multiple connotations. Bernstein allows herself to remix the world of her work's series and symbols. The exhibition *Blue Balls* maintains hope. Bernstein's revisit of her word drawing "Black Hole" and her "Birth of the Universe #2" painting also honor Katie Bouman, the woman who historically led the team that took the first photograph of a black hole in 2019. As long as the cunts keep screaming, they will be heard.

- Jillian McManemin

Over the past five decades, Judith Bernstein has developed a reputation as one of the most unwaveringly provocative artists of her generation. Steadfast in her cultural, political and social critique, Bernstein surged into art world prominence in the early 1970s as a seminal figure of the Feminist art movement with her monumental charcoal drawings of penis/screw hybrids.

She was one of the founding members of AIR Gallery and one of the historic Guerrilla Girls. Recent exhibitions include, "Artists Respond: American Art and the Vietnam War, 1965-75" at the Smithsonian American Art Museum and recent solo exhibitions include "Money Shot" at Kasmin Gallery (2018, NY), "Cabinet of Horrors" at The Drawing Center (2017, NY), and "Judith Bernstein: HARD" at The New Museum (2012, NY). Judith is a 2016 Guggenheim Fellowship Award recipient. She lives and works in New York City.

Judith Bernstein's work is in the public collection of MoMA, New York, US; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, US; The Brooklyn Museum, New York, US; The Jewish Museum, New York, US; The Yale Art Gallery, Hartford, US; The Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, US; The Sammlung Verbund, Austria; The Migros Museum of Contemporary Art, Zürich, CH; DESTE Foundation for Contemporary Art, Athens, GR; The Hall Foundation Schloss Derneburg Museum, DN; and Kunsthaus Zürich, CH, amongst others.