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514 West 25<sup>th</sup> Street, New York, NY 10001 Tel. 212 941 0012 Fax. 212 929 3265  
info@lennonweinberg.com www.lennonweinberg.com

## Cindy Workman

### The Women

June 18-August 14, 2009

Gallery hours: through June 27 Tuesday-Saturday, 10-6; after June 30 Tuesday-Friday 10-6

For additional information, contact Mary Benyo at 212 941 0012, mary@lennonweinberg.com

Press contact: Julia Pacetti 917 584 7846

This is the first retrospective exhibition to survey what has emerged as the central theme of Cindy Workman's art: women. She combines pictures of women with contrasting imagery to construct an inquiry about sexuality, body image and social identity. Workman writes: *These composite images invite the viewer to perceive many roles at once. While addressing the complexity of today's female self they invite the observer to process and examine this new model, continuing art's long tradition of shifting universal perceptions and prevailing standards.*

Working in New York in the early 1990s during an era when the bravado of neo-expressionist painting was giving way to social critique and introspection, Workman began to focus on images of women, derived initially from art historical sources, comic books and from her own family photographs. She made direct, physical collages with printed images, colored plexiglass, wood and prominent hardware. In the mid 90s, she incorporated less mediated pictures of real women, posed and photographed as objects of desire - a type of soft-core amateur porn that she collected along with other source material at flea markets.

*Daisy Nude* and *Yellow Nude*, both 1995, are the earliest works in the exhibition and present an interesting contrast. In the first work, the figure is demure, her head bowed and her form overlaid with a delicate botanical illustration resulting in an artful image. In the second, the woman's forthright gaze and swiveled torso project sexuality and the overlaid target mirrors the roundness of her female attributes. Sexy as she is without her clothes, though, she's still the girl next door with fluffy pigtails, a pretty necklace and a ring. *Sexy and safe.*

*Special Occasion Flower 4*, 1996, isn't so safe. It consists of a red vinyl-upholstered disc encircled by eight smaller discs with images of bondage and cartoon pistols, suggesting the potential for violence between the sexes. *Concrete Blonde*, 2000, shows a classic Pop Art-style comic strip heroine overlaid with a pinkish diagram of a well-marbled cut of meat. The four stacked panels of *Exquisite Corpse 1*, 2000, imply the revelation of a hidden identity as what begins with a girl's face at the top ends with a penis at the bottom.

The idealization inherent in illustration also interests Cindy Workman, as do the mechanics of printed reproductions. *No. 42*, 2000, gives us a wide-eyed little girl seemingly responding to a corseted figure drawn in bold black lines. *Figure 35-92*, also 2000, shows a perfect blond child and an alluring blond woman - one drawn, the other photographed - gazing away from each other as though one is imagining, one is remembering. By this time, the artist had begun to realize her work in a fully digital realm that allowed her to layer images and structures with greater control than before.

Indeed, in *Pebbles*, 2003, she skillfully combined three sources - a large-breasted woman posing with spread legs and cupped hands, a child's crayon drawing of Pebbles Flintstone and a connect-the-dots diagram of a skating girl. Three faces overlap in a cascade of eyes and smiles and hair and the overall image creates a chord of mixed dominance as the viewer's focus shifts from one figure to another. In the recent series *Large Woman*, Workman's figures achieve a fully blended identity. She has digitally manipulated the transparency of nude photographs and pretty girl pictures and merged them into a single figure in which neither layer can be seen completely independent of the other.