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Installation view, “Cut-Up: Contemporary Collage and Cut-Up Histories Through a Feminist Lens” at Franklin Street Works.

## **“CUT-UP: CONTEMPORARY COLLAGE AND CUT-UP HISTORIES THROUGH A FEMINIST LENS” AT FRANKLIN STREET WORKS STAMFORD CT**

by Noah Dillon

Collage has many parents, but the cut-up method is associated with William S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin. They used the writing technique as a semantic tool, comparing it to stream-of-consciousness juxtaposition and cinematic montage, speculating that in its reordering of language it revealed hidden truths. The artists featured in “Cut-Up” splice together all manner of media, expanding on and rediscovering some of the forebears and inheritors of Burroughs’s method. But what was in Burroughs’s (arguably bourgeois and chauvinistic) hands a formal methodology is here reworked into acts of creative destruction with a feminist bent. The show’s

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inclusions, curated by artist Katie Vida, are all made by women, span almost 50 years, and vary across media, including video-documented performance, digital art, sound, and textiles.

The use of text is recurrent, however, as in Dodie Bellamy's queered re-renderings of canonical poetry in *Cunt Norton*, 2013; Lorraine O'Grady's poetic extracts from the *New York Times*, 1977/2010; and Alexis Knowlton's website *leadpipe.us*, 2012–ongoing, shown here on an iPad as a logorrheic, vaguely diaristic stream of text in which the artist's own words—from e-mails, notes, text messages, diaries—are muddled, both manually and mechanically. Precedents for her work might include Lee Lozano's *Dropout Piece*, begun circa 1970, and Edward Snowden's data leaks; a more apt comparison might be to Kenneth Goldsmith's appropriative conceptual poetry, which he boasts is “unreadable.”

Other materials become tellingly illegible in the hands of sculptors and sound artists. Phyllis Baldino's video *The Unknown Series*, 1994–96, shows the artist manically combining thrift store goods to make ad hoc assemblages, which, displayed in another room, act as callbacks—familiar from the video but titillatingly mysterious or absurd. In addition to a sculpture by Nancy Shaver, Vida has included a rocking chair from the artist's studio, in which viewers can sit and listen to Jennie C. Jones's 2004 remix *You Make Me Feel Like 100 Billie Holiday Songs* while checking out Lourdes Correa-Carlo's floor-based sculpture, *Between the Two*, 2008. Jones's sound work layers clips from 100 songs by Holiday in four minutes, teasing a disturbing effect from a familiar voice.

A few pieces site the cut-up directly at the female subject, with figurative imagery given primacy, particularly Carolee Schneemann's canonical *Body Collage*, 1967, the earliest work on view. Carrie Moyer and Sheila Pepe show Xerox prints of imaginary commemorative feminist stamps adorned with images of artists and activists, including SCUM *Manifesto* author Valerie Solanas. Nearby is Cauleen Smith's *Chronicles of a Lying Spirit (by Kelly Gabron)*, 1992, a video fable of a young black woman's many lives, from her death in 1773 in the Middle Passage to a 1983 road trip. The re-visioning of history found in those latter artworks compresses generations and heroines, making

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struggles and accomplishments palpable.

The show is big, and it surveys a lot of ground; it could easily narrow its focus to cut-up techniques within a single medium. The theme of feminism, too, emerges in various degrees of explicitness (compare, for example, Bellamy's assertiveness to Knowlton's more passive accumulation). Nonetheless, the correspondences among media—and the slippages between the textual, formal, and aural—yield a rich take on this type of collage. Breaking the cut-up expansively away from the legacy of Burroughs and Gysin can only benefit the process and its practitioners.