

# KATHLEEN WHITE AND NAN GOLDIN

By *Jane Ursula Harris*

In the mid-1970s, **Kathleen White** and **Nan Goldin** were part of an emerging art scene in Boston that revolved around a close circle of student friends, most of whom, like Goldin, were photographers. White was an exception, creating sculptural and performance-based work as well as paintings. That distinction would prohibit her inclusion in a seminal 1995 exhibition at Boston's Institute of Contemporary Art, titled "The Boston School," that both canonized the group and cemented its association with **photography**. Goldin's snapshot-style portraits of her drug-fueled, queer "families" in the 1970s and 1980s, first in Boston and then in New York, became the Boston School's defining aesthetic. Yet as the paired **Pioneer Works** exhibitions "Kathleen White: Spirits of Manhattan" and "Nan Goldin: Kathleen" conveyed, this post-punk tribe of **artists, lovers, and drag queens** not only included White but remained at the heart of her practice, as did the devastating impact of **AIDS** on its members. Both presentations were a tribute to White, who died of cancer in 2014.

The former exhibition showcased an installation of abject, fetishlike sculptures made from hair—real and synthetic—that White gathered from (and dedicated to) the living and the dead. Most of her samples came from the wigs of drag performer friends who had perished from AIDS, and from those who survived—including **Lady Bunny, Billy Erb, and Jojo Americo**. The series dates to the 1990s and debuted in a little-seen exhibition at Apex Art in 1996. At Pioneer Works, the pieces were suspended from the ceiling and displayed on the surrounding walls. Knotted, balled, teased, wrapped, twisted, pulled, braided, combed, starched, tangled, and otherwise manipulated by the artist with great formal aplomb, they alternately recall nests, ropes, hearts, and masks. These works were accompanied by a series of mixed-medium drawings of eyes and faces on old Manhattan phone-book pages, many with hair elements attached; an open suitcase, placed on the floor, containing a pile of blonde and red wigs in a variety of shades and curls; and a vitrine with related ephemera. The overall effect was of a ritualized collective portrait as theatrical as it was transcendent.

The same commemorative impulse underscoring these works, and indeed White's entire practice, was echoed in the six **large-scale color photographs** of White taken by Goldin that comprised the other exhibition, which was held on the first floor. The portraits, four of which were printed for the first time, reflect Goldin's now-legendary style, which is based in the **trust and rapport shared by friends**. All were shot between 1991 and 1995, when White created the works shown in "Spirits of Manhattan." We see White as ingenue, standing in a sparkling aqua blue bathing suit, cigarette in hand as she squints in sunlight; at work in her studio amid a group of the hair works; donning a Mona Lisa-esque smile; laughing at a party; slumped in thought at a bar; and lying on her bed, sad-faced with downcast eyes. That White's role as a muse served to introduce and frame her work is a reminder that those forgotten by art history are typically recovered only through their associations with the acclaimed. Given the vagaries of fame, one hopes that White's evocative and prodigious output, merely hinted at here and still relatively unknown, will garner the future presentations it warrants.

# MARTOS GALLERY

Lambery Audra, "Depending on Independent, the Keenly Curated Art Fair," *Arcade Project*, March 13, 2018



## Depending on Independent, the Keenly Curated Art Fair by Audra Lambert

There's something to be said for an art fair that takes care of its own. This came to mind while scrolling through my Instagram feed to find an image of red roses a friend posted that she received as a woman exhibitor on International Women's Day. The photo wasn't staged by Independent: To my knowledge there was no official announcement by the fair. Independent had exercised its best judgment in treating its exhibitors with care and compassion.

In 2018, Independent extends this good judgment and utopic vision to its bountiful offerings, reinforcing its consistent ability to exceed expectations with this year's precise rendition. Independent remains the final frontier for fans of art for art's sake: the carefully curated alternative to SPRING/BREAK's exuberant excess and the Armory Show's sleek, multi-million dollar works. Independent presents a fine-tuned selection of gallerists whose vision shines through their keen aptitude for presentation and passion for representing their artists; it helps, of course, that each gallery is encouraged to show as few artists as possible.

The galleries showing at Independent this year were mostly strong, with a few weaker points involving picnic table-style red check print and bland, reflective abstraction. Delving into the top 6 showings proved a tricky endeavor, but below are selected standouts at Independent 2018.



*Kathleen White*  
*Self Portrait, Spirit, 1995*  
watercolor, pencil, glue, hair on phone book page  
11 × 8 ½ inches (27.94 × 21.59 cm)  
15 ¼ × 12 ¼ inches (38.74 × 31.12 cm) (framed)  
Image courtesy of Martos Gallery

***Kathleen White, Martos Gallery***

White's interdisciplinary works feature abstract elements and blends of texture with direct reference to the body. Loaded with memory with a delicate and captive eye toward beauty, White's works appear as whispers on the pages of history: Made of soft, pliable material with miniscule details. Martos displays a range of works created by the artist, evoking a sensitive and perceptive artist with a deft eye toward composition and scale. Though White sadly passed from cancer in 2014, her works live on and continue to document an artist's vision of how to re-imagine those whose stories were re-written by a tragic epidemic.