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ART REVIEWS; Artist's Mondrian Intimations

By Helen A. Harrison

'Smirk'

Firehouse Gallery, Nassau Community College, One Education Drive, East Garden City.
Through April 26. (516) 572-7165.

To refute the contention -- lampooned on a cover of Ms. magazine -- that feminists have no sense of humor, this exhibition illustrates the lighter side of the women's movement. The show, "Smirk: Women, Art and Humor," organized by a guest curator, Debra Wacks, proves that treating serious issues in a lighthearted way can often be more effective than strident sloganeering, especially where art is concerned.

"Smirk" is an apt title for the show, since all the humor is tinged with irony, ridicule, satire or some other complicating factor that prevents it from being purely entertaining.

One of the show's most provocative inclusions is Eleanor Antin's takeoff of a vanity memoir, loosely modeled on Isadora Duncan's. The artist casts herself as a fictional Ballet Russes danseuse, whose theatrical poses mirror the artist's own role-playing and reflect both the opportunities and limitations of self-transformation. Another is Annu Palakunnathu Matthew's manipulations of Indian movie posters, which change commercial stereotypes into indictments of oppression and violence against women.

The show is rampant with subversive naughtiness, designed to counter male dominance with a slapstick rather than a sledgehammer.

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