—Perhaps truth is a woman who has reasons for not letting us see her reasons? Perhaps her name is – to speak Greek – Baubo?
—Nietzsche, The Gay Science

Balice Hertling & Lewis is pleased to present Burn in Hell, Mary Beth Edelson's first exhibition with the gallery.

Burn in Hell describes a mythological universe of Edelson's invention. The collages build upon the artist's legacy as an activist and her four decade long deployment of archetypes and primal patterns and symbols.

The lower regions—the underworld—are populated by plastic rats and a row (a chorus) of black birds. In the past, a specific Egyptian bird goddess featured prominently in Edleson's cosmology. These birds (which look almost like knives) are, however, generic: they are a conglomeration of many birds; a repetition of pure bird-ness, and a decorative device marking a transition between symbolic zones.

The heavens are dominated by the face of Botticelli's Venus. Here the birds are colored, curling, and bright, and the initial impression is that of ethereal loveliness. But just as there is humor and intelligence in the underworld, so too there is psychosis and demonic suggestion, and even horror, up above: the face of Venus sometimes dissolves in a glowering grey whirlpool, or splits in two, her eyes robotic, her face a riven chalky mask.

In between these two regions sport all manners of creatures: ravens, serpents, Grace Jones, Louise Bourgeois, the mythical Baubo (whose laughter cheered the mourning Demeter), the Irish trickster Sheela-na-gig, Jenette Goldstein (famous as the bandana-wearing, machine-gun wielding marine in Aliens), and so forth.

The deployment of these many myths, in collages of great humor and dexterity, recapitulates the artist's search for powerful representations of women while also incorporating a learned skepticism about any actual pre-historical realm of maternal plenitude, instead valorizing such a history as fuel for action in the present.

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