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JORDAN CASTEEL
"We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women, 1965–85" (Brooklyn Museum, New York) “We Wanted a Revolution” was a long-awaited and imperative account of the experiences of black women in opposition to the typically monolithic feminist stance. In the words of Alice Walker, “Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender.” This exhibition provided historical context and space for the voices of black women artists who were discounted from the movement’s white, largely middle-class mainstream. In their own diverse and distinct ways, each of the artists tackled the intersectionality of their experiences. It’s telling that this exhibition was the first of its kind in a museum context, and it signaled the need for a greater awareness and conversation within the art world.

THOMAS DEMAND
“Ettore Sottsass: The Glass” (Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice) This show had so many rules, you’d think there wouldn’t have been any oxygen left in the room. Works by one (dead) artist, all of the same material, of similar size (too large to be decoration, too small to be sculpture), with the same function (none, except maybe you could put flowers in some of them), and displayed in the same manner (side by side, in plain daylight). No biographical relevance, no politics, no theory. But what this approach allowed instead was a refreshingly clear recognition of how the understanding of a material (glass) and a lifetime of experience with it can exemplify what creation is all about. Showing the artist to be completely in control of the specificity of handblown glass, Sottsass’s imagination was all there, concentrated like syrup over two decades of beauty, invention, variation, and tacit humor. This modest show delivered evidence of what the Venice Biennale was trying so strenuously to claim: Art is an indescribably way of using your intellect.

MATIAS FAALDBAKKEN
What if there were an excellent Paula Modersohn-Becker show at the National Gallery here in Oslo?
HAO JINGBAN
“Salon, Salon: Fine Art Practices from 1972 to 1982 in Profile—A Beijing Perspective” (Inside-Out Art Museum, Beijing) There are two art worlds in China: the “official” art world and the “contemporary” art world. The former continues the tradition of socialist realism. The two don’t mess with each other, and neither do their written histories. “Salon, Salon” was an ambitious attempt to bring these spheres together by focusing on the moment when the split happened, as well as by placing people from both sides in the same exhibition and discussion spaces. The trigger for this division was more about an emerging tension between individual will and state will than it was about different artistic pursuits. Today, the tendency of these entities to merge is rather worrisome, as perhaps this reflects a reconciliation between the individual and the state.

KATHARINA WULFF
Sibylle Bergmann (Reinbeckhalle, Berlin) I think Sibylle Bergmann’s photos have something in common with the music of Catherine Ringer. They are so provocative, and they show that Romanticism can develop into something meaningful—an attitude of rebellion that clashes with a world of convention. It’s clear from many of Bergmann’s pictures how worn-out the former GDR was: The women look insubordinate, flouting social norms as a way of symbolically drawing attention to the injustice of their situation. I like the images’ raw atmosphere. Apparently Bergmann once photographed her black-clad models looking sullen and moody on the island of Rügen for a fashion magazine, and the Central Committee was so upset by their expressions that the comrades retouched the photo.

MARYAM HOSEINI
Hadi Fallahpisheh, “Everything Is True” (Kai Matsumiya, New York) Hadi Fallahpisheh’s works generate endless discoveries; open to the viewer’s projections, they both celebrate and avoid judgment. For this show, “Everything Is True,” through a colorless, photographic process in the darkness, Fallahpisheh created painterly works that depict not just characters (each represents a fictional Hadi) but narratives (emphasized in scratching letters and in the jokes that title each piece). Hadi, the term for a Muslim who has completed a pilgrimage to Mecca, is a homorphic address that has also become a derogatory term, used by Fallahpisheh to caricature Middle Eastern society. With so many Hajjis along the walls, the reflection of homosociality became humorously critical, hideously poetic, and truthfully scary. The work collapses the artist’s personal and cultural memories in its complex layering of languages. As I left the show I repeated to myself a favorite line of a Persian poem: “One who has seen the world tells many lies.”

PETER HALLEY
Ettore Sottsass (Met Breuer, New York) Ettore Sottsass finally arrived in New York, on the hundredth anniversary of his birth. For more than six decades, the richly sensuous and deeply rigorous objects he made chronicled the rapid-fire sequence of world-changing ideas flowing through the visual culture of his era. In the 1950s and 60s, he created ceramics influenced by Hinduism and Beat poetry, all the while designing computer office systems for Olivetti. The following decade, he briefly veered toward a Kubrick-esque, science-fiction aesthetic before retreating into high-hippie life in the Spanish desert. For his work with the Memphis Group, during the 80s, he turned to parody as a last refuge in a post-utopian age. Finally, during Sottsass’s last decades (well documented at the Met Breuer), he settled into a refined old-age style that involved limited editions, commissions for unique objects, and exquisite private houses. These late works are a freewheeling, kaleidoscopic synthesis of all that came before.