



Cathy Josefowitz, *Sans titre*, ca. 1988, oil on canvas, 4 3/8" x 37 3/4".

PARIS

Cathy Josefowitz

CENTRE CULTUREL SUISSE, PARIS

38, rue des Francs-Bourgeois

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Pregnant women, harlequins, and human-animal composites appear throughout “The Thinking Body,” the largest retrospective ever dedicated New York–born Swiss national Cathy Josefowitz (1956–2014). Around 1972, these characters first turn up as paper marionettes, which the artist made for her application to study stage design at the Théâtre National de Strasbourg. As representations of bodies in motion, these puppets call to mind Alexander Calder's *Circus*, 1926–1931, or Matisse's cutout dancers. Josefowitz's expressionistic acrobats, however, are more sideshow than big top or ballet—featuring nude and animal-costumed performers boxing, dancing, and playing instruments. Here and in subsequent works across various media (and on both sides of the Atlantic), Josefowitz consistently represented marginalized bodies: female, Black, queer, or hybrid.

Many works included in the exhibition depict some kind of metamorphosis, real or imagined. A graphic painting of a maternity ward (*Untitled*, 1974) shows a quartet of doctors hovering over a mother giving birth. One wields an enormous pair of scissors,

poised to separate the heretofore conjoined beings. In another untitled work from the same year, Josefowitz uses the same shade of chestnut to paint a woman and a dog, making it hard to say where one body ends and the other begins. Emotional bonds appear physical in these and other paintings on view.

Josefowitz's performance and choreographic work also engages with bonded bodies. In the 1980s, while studying at Dartington College of Arts, the artist practiced contact improvisation techniques with Judson Dance Theater cofounder Steve Paxton. In a video of a piece choreographed by Josefowitz, *Forever Young*, 1990, one dancer remains attached to a chair for most of the performance, moving as if it were part of her own body. Indeed, the concept of "one's own body" seems barely conceivable in Josefowitz's universe, where bodies are formed by and with others.

— Mara Hoberman