

PEOPLE, PLACES AND THINGS

People, Places and Things to Know: Feminist Art That's Also Furniture, Patterned Bags and More

T's cultural compendium of what's new.

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Nicola L., "Femme Commode (Orange)" 1968. Image courtesy of the artist and Arsenal Contemporary

Functional Art With a Feminine Soul

There was a "Saturday Night Live" [sketch](#) not too long ago in which Kate McKinnon pretended to be Brigitte Bardot responding to the #MeToo movement. "Why does woman have breast? It's for a man to grab and pull!" she said, taking a drag on her prop cigarette. "A drawer has a knob. A woman has two knobs!" Forty years ago, the French artist [Nicola L.](#) made the same joke — albeit a little more wryly — with her sculptural furniture. "La Femme Commode," which she first produced in 1969 and continued to make in various colors (sunflower yellow, coral red) until 2014, is a lacquered wood cabinet shaped like a woman, with eyes, mouth, breasts, bellybutton and even clitoris all serving as tiny knobs to different-size drawers. Next month, it will go on view at Manhattan's [Arsenal Contemporary](#), along with several other pieces by Nicola L. — now 81 and retired in Los Angeles — as well as a selection of contemporary works by artists including [Chloe Wise](#), [Nadia Belerique](#) and [Ambera Wellmann](#), all created to be in conversation with Nicola L.'s oeuvre.

Born in Morocco, Nicola L. arrived in New York City in 1966, taking a room at the Chelsea Hotel, where Andy Warhol was filming "Chelsea Girl" with Nico. Though less famous than her neighbors, she nonetheless carved a path for herself as a genre-crossing talent with something to say. In addition to her anthropomorphic sculptures, she's known for outlandish performance pieces such as "[Red Coat](#)" (1973), an egalitarian jacket for 11 people to wear at once, creating the experience of sharing the same skin. Gallery goers can look forward to a vinyl sofa shaped like an oversize foot, canvas flags with holes for a wearer's extremities and a long oak plank of a coffee table outlined in feminine curves. All reveal the way Nicola L. investigated the body, movement and the objectification of women, especially within the domestic space. In her case, the underlying message seems to be a lighthearted warning: Don't push too many of our buttons.

— THESSALY LA FORCE