



feral feminisms

The General Issue

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## Donne e Spazio (Women and Space)

Mary Beth Looney



**Year:** 2019 **Dimensions:** 6x8 inches **Materials:** paper, ink

*Donne e Spazio* is a map-fold book comprised of collaged elements from a randomly selected, single page of an Italian newspaper, a mid-century botany booklet, and photocopy transfers. Conceived in the winter months of 2019 while I resided and worked in Rome, Italy, the work is influenced primarily by current events in the United States—and most particularly, legislative attempts to control women’s bodies and a fraught relationship with science as a body of thought. A record number of women now hold Congressional offices, yet the backlash regarding women’s self-reported experiences with sexual violence and self-determination of their own biological destinies shapes proposed laws. There seems to be a paradoxical simultaneity of fear and confrontation with—or negation of—climate change. This is often seen in public dialogue that posits the growing chronicle of deniers’ policy rollbacks against alarmist cries that a crisis point for any hope of reversal is now.

Inspired by Dada artists such as Hannah Höch—who enlisted cut paper in her collages and photomontage to interweave text and image to effect cultural commentary—*Donne e Spazio* asserts more conscious decisions than typical, Dada-era chance. Höch’s interests in

undermining popular perceptions of the “New Woman” of the 1920s receive new treatment here, so to speak, as if the “New Woman” of a former era has arrived, only to find herself reimagined in the confining shapewear of the mid-century. “Locker room talk” of today turns back the “New Woman” into a flightless “bird” of UK slang—a “chick” in American slang—with no choice other than being scrutinized for her sexual availability, reproductive capabilities, and fledgling freedoms.

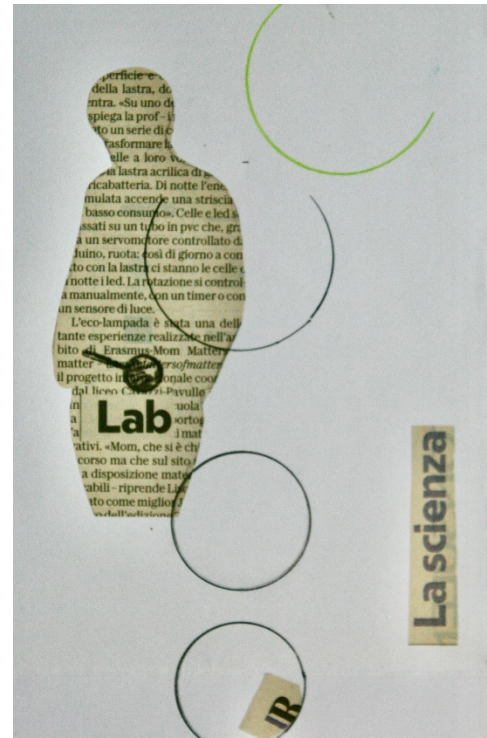
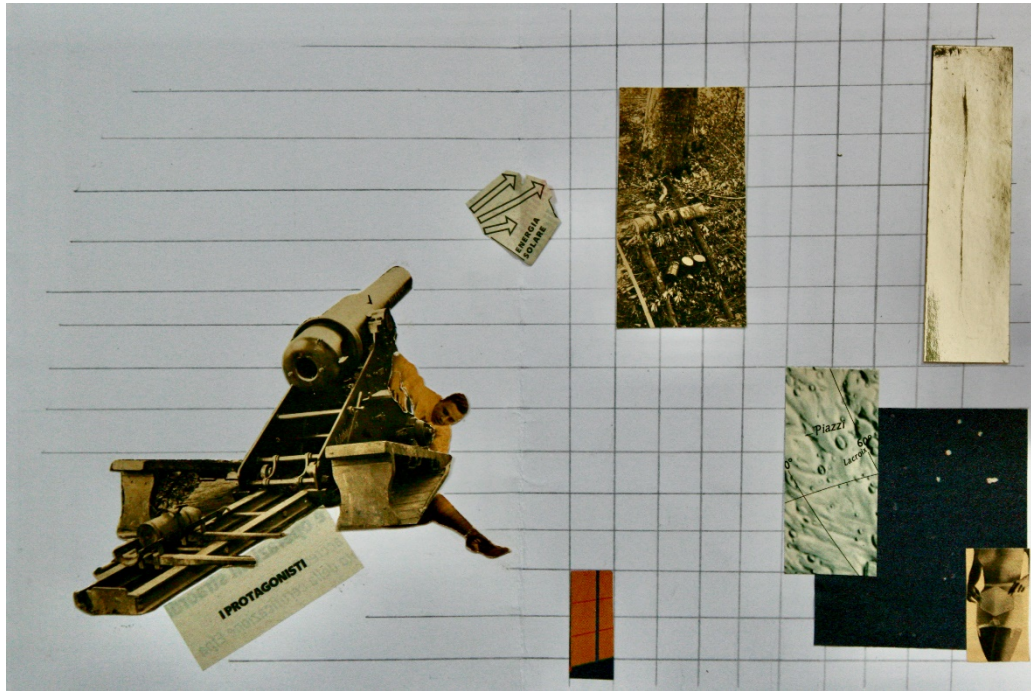
While many view Italy as a country of religiously driven tradition in gender roles, it is important to acknowledge that women there are engaged in similar dialogues and conflicts about those issues to those in the US and UK. Of particular concern to many feminists in Italy is the continued prevalence of domestic violence. Women are honored in this book, even if they are veiled in selected clips from a newspaper article about developments in space exploration and education.

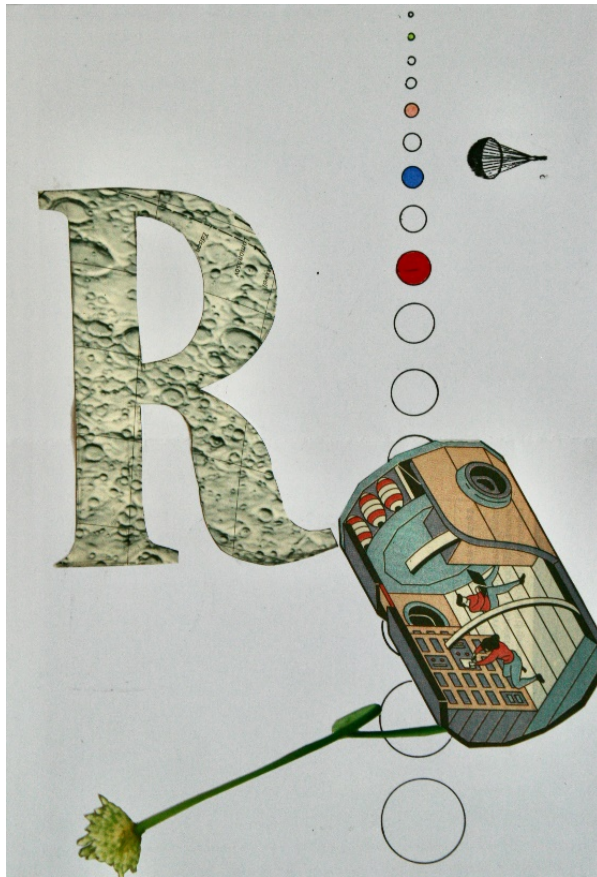
Historically, women seeking refuge from confining communities and cultures have taken risks to relocate. But when the numbers of—and relative access to—safe havens dries up, what places are safe for them? Can space be the last frontier? What map can they use to chart their direction? This book does not unfold in a completely predictable way. It may take more than one try to fully open or close.

Art historically, women have long been associated with the so-called wildness of nature. In scores of portrayals ranging from Leonardo’s *Mona Lisa* to Gainesborough’s *Mrs. Thomas Hibbert*, they are featured outdoors, against or literally in environments teeming with unrestricted growth, and therefore equivocated with unpredictability. Even now, with a surge in occupation of roles in representative government, can we, or will we, actually be tamed?











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