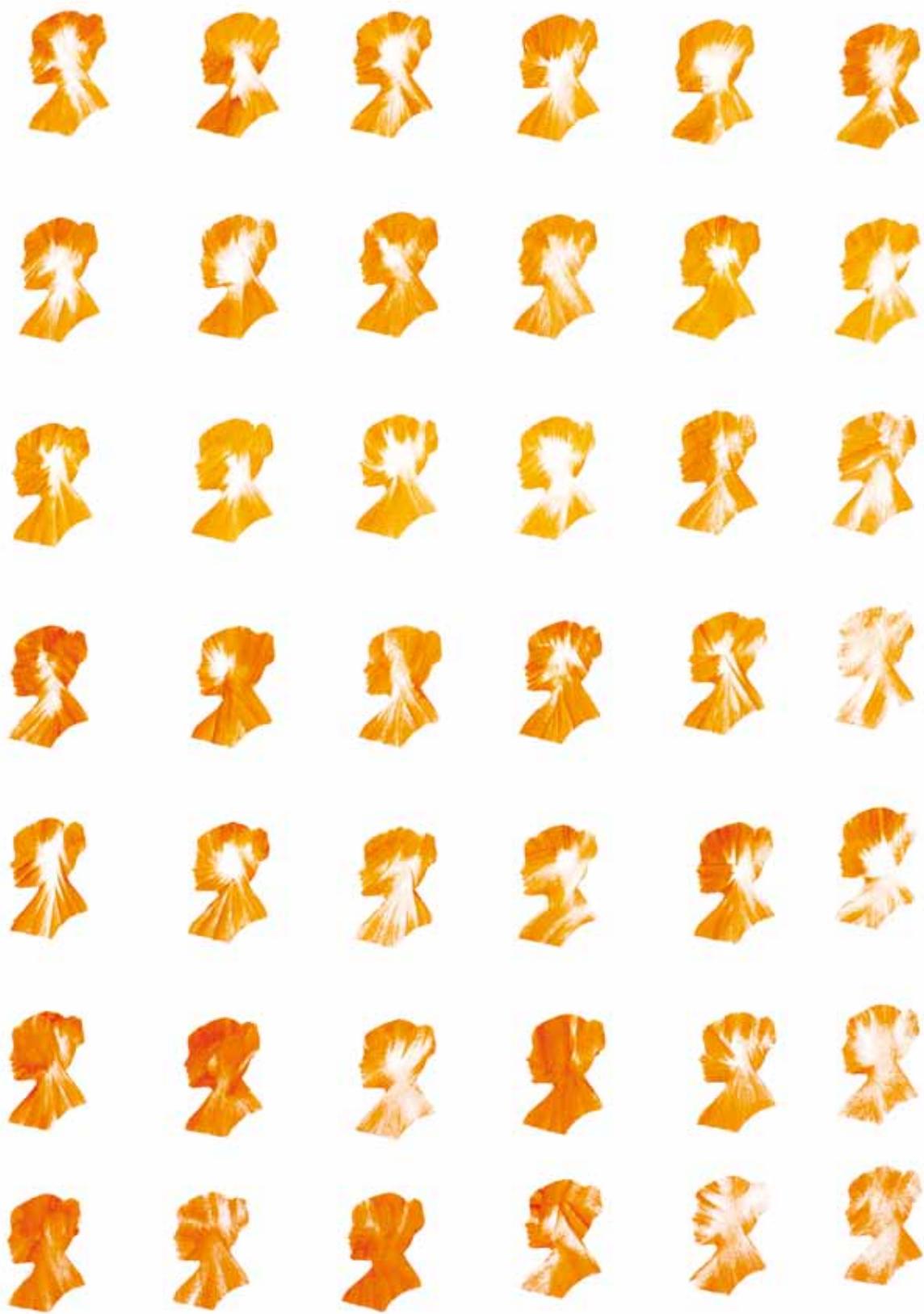


# Typology of Women

Bastienne Schmidt



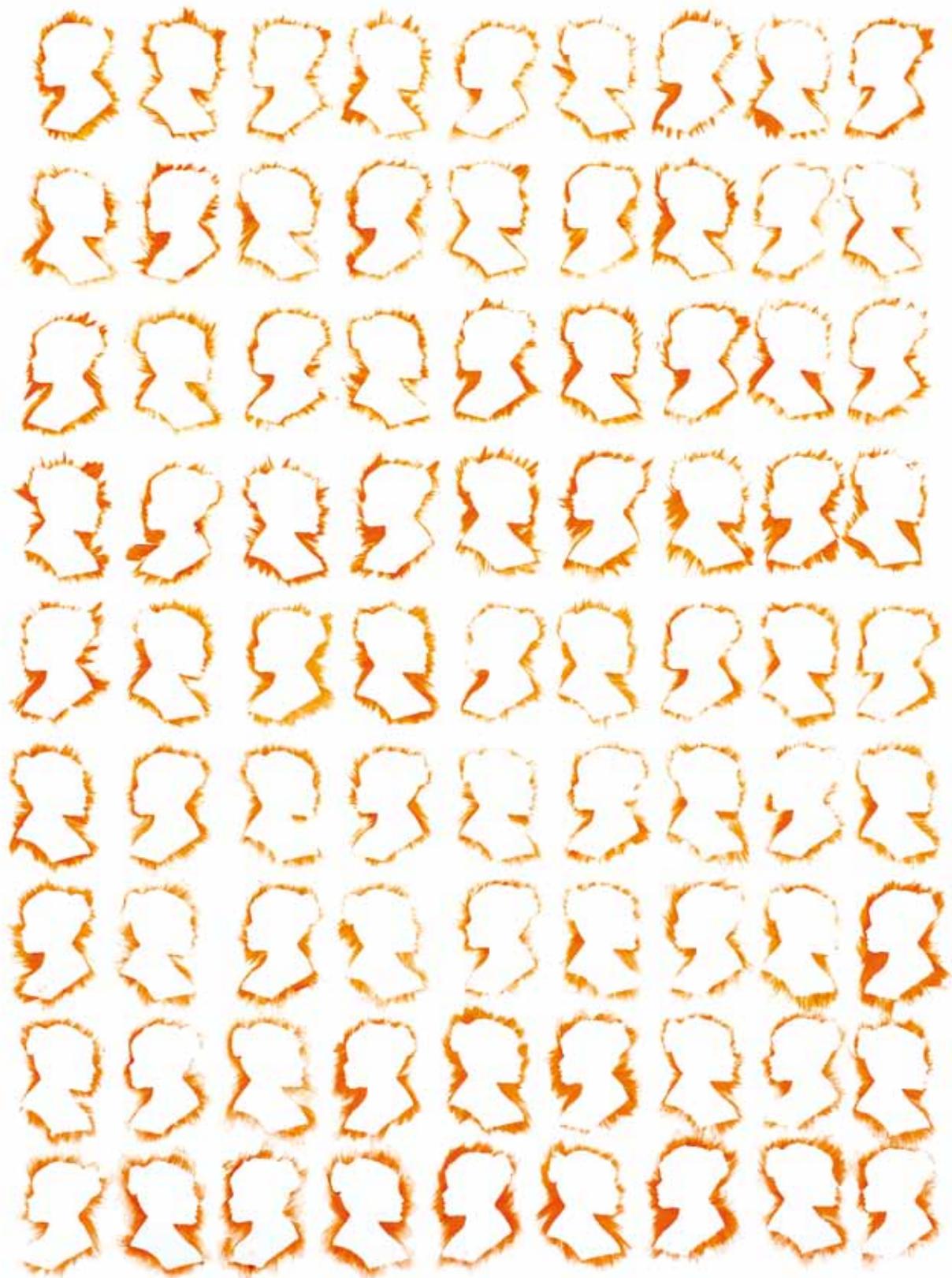
## The Subversive Silhouette

Mimi Thompson

At the start of her book *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir asks, “What is a woman?”<sup>1</sup> This question begins a wide-ranging discussion of the female sex, and, by illuminating how competing ideologies sometimes join the same team in order to deny women their rights, she reveals the tendency of our culture to exalt women when convenient yet dismiss them when it's not. De Beauvoir wrote this book in the late nineteen-forties, at a time when some baby nurseries tagged the bassinets of newborns with either “It's a Girl!” or “I'm a Boy!”<sup>2</sup> Objectifying one sex and subjectifying the other, our culture set separate paths for each gender. We are still examining what it means to be a member of either sex, or a combination of the two. The wide range of qualities given to and expected from the female sex indicates its complexity and range of power, as well as the fear it can engender.

At different times in her life, de Beauvoir has been criticized (by both feminists and their opponents) for intellectual stances and personal behavior. Her inability to follow any path but her own underlined the necessity of expanding the definition of woman to include myriad talents and desires, even socially unacceptable ones. In her own investigation of women, the artist Bastienne Schmidt understands that an examination of an entire gender requires an open approach, and uses the organizing principle of typology to reveal nuance rather than confirm identity. The silhouettes of female forms in her *Typology of Women* series recall familiar styles, occupations, and cultural identities in anthropological outline. For instance, one figure resembles a can-can dancer holding up her skirt and another calls to mind a fashion model from the nineteen-fifties. But small additional details within the painterly orange and yellow silhouettes, such as other figures and marks, complicate the identity suggested by each shape's perimeter. Schmidt calls these additional figures and forms “the running patterns of women's lives.”<sup>3</sup> Inspired by her archeologist father, who lay shards of ancient ceramics in long lines upon tables to view them and sometimes reconstruct them, Schmidt divides her subject into types and shapes that create a non-specific history. The artist plays with archetypal forms, but adds elements that transform the expected into the enigmatic. She suggests, but does not determine, the role a woman plays by her silhouette. Schmidt is classifying in order to interpret; her use of typology exists as a tool to articulate how identities are constructed, as well as a way to explore the sources that build these identities.

By the eighteenth century, tracing a line around a human shadow to make a silhouette became a familiar method to create a portrait, and a way to



## A Room of One's Own

Virginia Woolf

### Chapter two

...Why are women, judging from this catalogue, so much more interesting to men than men are to women? A very curious fact it seemed, and my mind wandered to picture the lives of men who spend their time in writing books about women; whether they were old or young, married or unmarried, red-nosed or hump-backed—anyhow, it was flattering, vaguely, to feel oneself the object of such attention provided that it was not entirely bestowed by the crippled and the infirm—so I pondered until all such frivolous thoughts were ended by an avalanche of books sliding down on to the desk in front of me. Now the trouble began. The student who has been trained in research at Oxbridge has no doubt some method of shepherding his question past all distractions till it runs into his answer as a sheep runs into its pen. The student by my side, for instance, who was copying assiduously from a scientific manual, was, I felt sure, extracting pure nuggets of the essential ore every ten minutes or so. His little grunts of satisfaction indicated so much. But if, unfortunately, one has had no training in a university, the question far from being shepherded to its pen flies like a frightened flock hither and thither, helter-skelter, pursued by a whole pack of hounds. Professors, schoolmasters, sociologists, clergymen, novelists, essayists, journalists, men who had no qualification save that they were not women, chased my simple and single question—Why are some women poor?—until it became fifty questions; until the fifty questions leapt frantically into midstream and were carried away. Every page in my notebook was scribbled over with notes. To show the state of mind I was in, I will read you a few of them, explaining that the page was headed quite simply, *Women and Poverty*, in block letters; but what followed was something like this:

Condition in Middle Ages of,  
Habits in the Fiji Islands of,  
Worshipped as goddesses by,  
Weaker in moral sense than, Idealism of,  
Greater conscientiousness of,  
South Sea Islanders, age of puberty among,  
Attractiveness of,  
Offered as sacrifice to,  
Small size of brain of,































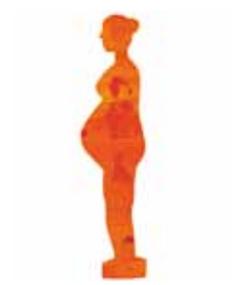












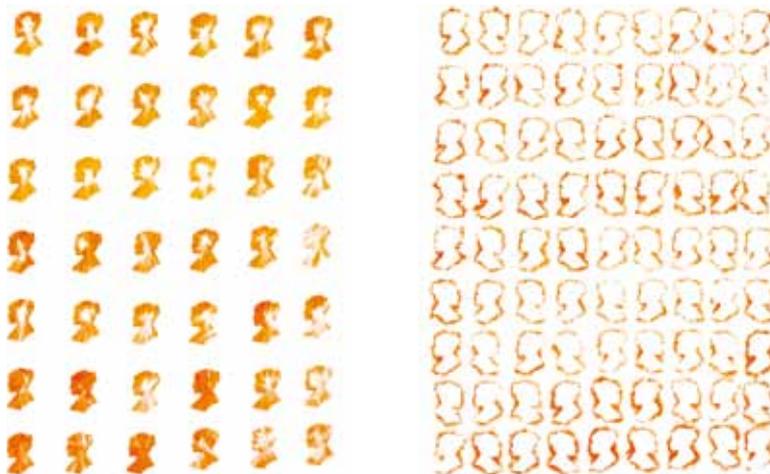
## 46 Silhouettes

Untitled, *Typology of Women*, 2012–2015

Cutouts and mixed media on paper

22 x 30 inches

55.88 x 76.2 cm



## Untitled, *Faces*, 2013

Polymer paint on paper, 2013

22 x 30 inches

55.88 x 76.2 cm



## Untitled, *Bottles*, 2013

Digital print

16 x 20 inches

40.64 x 50.8 cm

This book is dedicated to all the women in the world, especially to those whose voices have not been heard. There is still a lot of work to do.

**Bastienne Schmidt** is a German born and New York based multi media artist. She has lived and worked for many years in Greece and Italy.

Her art work is included in the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Brooklyn Museum, the International Center of Photography in New York, The Victoria and Albert Museum in London, The Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris among many others. She has previously published *Vivir la Muerte*, *American Dreams*, *ShadowHome*, *Home Stills* and *Topography of Quiet*. *Typology of Women* is her sixth book.

**Mimi Thompson**, a contributing editor at *Bomb Magazine*, is a freelance writer based in New York City and Miami. Recently she contributed an essay for an exhibition catalogue published in conjunction with a 2015 exhibition of Al Taylor's work, *Pet Stains, Puddles and Full Gospel Necklaces*, at the David Zwirner gallery. In 2013 she conducted the interviews for Taylor's Prints Catalogue Raisonné and wrote an essay "Doble mirada a Espana: las fotografías españolas de Josef Albers y Robert Rauschenberg" for an exhibition held at Adolfo Cayon Gallery in Madrid. She has written often about Robert Rauschenberg, including an essay for the Guggenheim Museum on his *Gluts* series.