

Elena Sisto

GERMANS VAN
ECK

In the past Elena Sisto has used the popular cartoon character Nancy to represent herself as a little girl. In this show, Nancy appeared only once. Sisto continued her obliquely autobiographical explorations by using a group of less famous, though equally familiar-looking, cartoon images to suggest a young girl's amazement and bewilderment upon reaching puberty.

In these marvelously rich small works, done in tempera or casein, images from 1950s cartoons simultaneously emerge from, and disappear beneath, the sweet, appealing pastel colors. The females are mostly curvaceous, cheerful "bimbo" types, but there are other stereotypes of women, including the spinster and the battle-ax wife-mother. Males are present primarily as voyeurs—goofy young guys, physicians, or paunchy businessmen with glasses. In *Eeny Weeny Bit*, one can see a guy with martinis on a table, a woman being hit on the head and dragged away by a caveman, and a prisoner hanging. *Pink and Black* has at least three sets of doctors with glasses, each examining a huge-breasted woman. And in *What to Want*, the figure of a voluptuous woman opens up into a pleasant, decorative frame-like shape. Eyes are everywhere: men looking at women, woman comparing themselves with other women, and the implied sense of a teenager wondering who she is and what she will become.

Despite the variety of imagery, there is never a clear narrative or message. The scale of images shifts dramatically within a single work; and figures do not always follow the laws of anatomy. Surfaces are jazzed up by decorative shapes—balloon-like discs and bursts of color—that fracture space, hide forms, and undercut any quest for specific meaning. Yet each work is rich with humor and poignancy, social commentary and camouflaged personal revelation.

—Ruth Bass

Elena Sisto, *Eeny Weeny Bit*, 1992, tempera on linen, 29 by 17 inches. Germans Van Eck.



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