

“Cosey has appeared in 40 magazines now as a deliberate policy. All of these framed form the core of this exhibition. Different ways of seeing and using Cosey with her consent, produced by people unaware of her reasons, as a woman and an artist, for participating.” *Prostitution* Exhibition Flier, Institute of Contemporary Art, London, UK, 1976

Cosey Fanni Tutti
Magazine Actions
May 1 - June 28, 2025

Maxwell Graham is honored to exhibit Cosey Fanni Tutti’s *Magazine Actions* from May 1 - June 28, 2025. This is Cosey Fanni Tutti’s first one person exhibition in America.

Cosey Fanni Tutti has worked as an artist and musician for over 50 years. Fanni Tutti is a co-founder of the industrial music pioneers Throbbing Gristle.

Magazine Actions are a body of work made between 1972 - 1980, for which Cosey Fanni Tutti worked as a pornographic model. These *Magazine Actions* infiltrated both the sex and art industries. Cosey Fanni Tutti conceived of the project as a progression from her use of existing pornography in collages and mail art:

“... the idea of cutting around my own body and collaging myself as a nude model from a sex magazine struck me as having an honesty and potency that I felt could be the embodiment of a consummate artwork. I would have created the very image that I then used to create a work of art.” Cosey Fanni Tutti, *Art Sex Music*, Faber, 2017, p.116

A few weeks after each shoot, Fanni Tutti would seek out the magazine titles, from newsstands and sex shops, acquiring at least two copies of each to account for the recto and verso of each page, producing an inventory of the project.

“But I was no ‘victim’ of exploitation. I was exploiting the sex industry for my own purposes, to subvert and use it to create my own art. It was my choice. I wanted to get to know the sex industry from within, to speak from first-hand experience. I wanted a purity in my work, to push against existing expectations and my own inhibitions, and to understand all the complex nuances and trials it imposed on everyone in that business, including the target market. I was transgressing rules - feminist ones included.” *ibid.* p.172

The *Magazine Actions* premiered in 1976 at the landmark Institute of Contemporary Art, London exhibition *Prostitution*. This exhibition is widely cited as one of the most controversial exhibitions in histories of the ICA, British Art and the 1970s. The exhibition presented the work of COUM Transmissions, of which Cosey Fanni Tutti was a co-founder and core member, and included various performances and projects, including the *Magazine Actions*.

“I extracted all the images of myself and the associated text from each one - those pages were my ‘action’, to be framed as my work, thereby subverting the ‘male gaze’. The title of the exhibition was ‘Prostitution’, not only as a direct reference to my first appearance in a sex magazine, as well as my subsequent sex-magazine works, but it also represented our thoughts about the art world - talent being touted and sold for a price, the relationship between high art and money.” *ibid.* p.172

The *Prostitution* exhibition prompted over 100 reviews, widespread attention and critique; enough to cultivate responses from the British Parliament. In an era defining quote, Conservative MP Nicolas Fairbairn referred to the artists as “wreckers of civilization.” He also called for weaponizing the withholding of federal funds:

“I am writing immediately to the appropriate Government departments to stop all grants of taxpayers’ money to the British Council. We’re only just getting a look at the maggots in the nest. It is clear these people have been using the excuse and pretence of art to swan around the world undermining values.” Conservative MP Nicolas Fairbairn, *Daily Mail*, October 19, 1976

“The problem for Tutti lay in how she could investigate pornographic imagery and present her findings without merely reproducing that culture's prejudices and values. In the context of the initial publication of the magazines themselves Tutti could not escape being 'reduced' to the role of an interchangeable fetishised object of private male sexual fantasy. But where Tutti's roles were multiplied, as in the public exhibition, to become both subject and object, artist and model, viewer and viewed, the work became difficult to consume as pornography. It was this difficulty, for the male gaze especially, in 'fixing' Tutti, when she

presented herself so openly to the gaze, that de-eroticised the imagery. The power conventionally located in the male gaze was undermined by the way in which Tutti combined artistic display with the sheer excess of pornographic spectacle. Tutti's works for magazines began to operate explicitly as critique when they were re-presented away from their 'original' context, and read according to the terms of another discourse. Tutti's aim was to provide a critique of pornography and by extension the wider tradition of the aestheticised female nude and its power to define a feminine 'ideal'. Whilst artistic nudes and erotic photography were sanctioned because of their associations with a patriarchal high art tradition, pornography was demonized because of its association with a debased and illicit mass culture. One of the many taboos broken by Tutti and COUM in *Prostitution* was to exhibit mass cultural 'ephemera' as high art artefacts. The pages from the magazines were signed and framed behind glass and the selling price of each piece was suitably inflated to reflect their status as artworks." Simon Ford, *Wreckers of Civilisation: The Story of COUM Transmissions & Throbbing Gristle*, Black Dog, 1999, pp. 6.25-6.26

Cosey Fanni Tutti's *Magazine Actions* must be seen as an overlooked yet crucial expansion and complication in histories of performance art of the era by Yoko Ono, Joan Jonas, Carolee Schneemann, Marina Abramović, Vito Acconci, Valie Export and others. The *Magazine Actions* must also be seen as an overlooked yet crucial expansion and complication in histories of Conceptual Art and media intervention of the era such as Dan Graham's *Works For Magazines*, Joseph Kosuth's *Second Investigation*, Robert Heinecken's *Periodicals* and Adrian Piper's *The Mythic Being*; most of which were placed in non art general audience periodicals.

Cosey Fanni Tutti's work has been the focus of institutional exhibitions at Frac Île-de-France, Romainville, France curated by Gallien Déjean in 2018 and at the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, Netherlands in 2005. Fanni Tutti represented Britain at the IXth Biennale de Paris, France in 1975. An event centered on her work, *Cosey Complex*, was organized by Maria Fusco and took place at the ICA London in 2010; a publication for the event was edited by Fusco and Richard Birkett and published by Koenig Books. Her work has been included in institutional group exhibitions such as *Women in Revolt! Art and Activism in the UK 1970-1990* curated by Linsey Young at Tate Britain, London, UK in 2023 which toured to National Galleries Scotland, Modern, Edinburgh, UK and Whitworth Gallery, University of Manchester, UK in 2025; *Black Sheep Feminism: The Art of Sexual Politics* curated by Alison Gingeras at Dallas Contemporary Art Museum, Dallas, Texas in 2016; *Pop Life: Art in a Material World* curated by Jack Bankowsky, Alison Gingeras and Catherine Wood at Tate Modern, London, UK in 2009 which toured to Hamburger Kunsthalle, Germany; National Gallery of Canada, Ontario, Canada in 2010; and *WACK!: Art and the Feminist Revolution* curated by Connie Butler at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles in 2007 which toured to the National Museum of Women in the Arts and MoMA PS1 Contemporary Art Center in 2008. Cosey Fanni Tutti's work has been closely involved with Cabinet Gallery, London since 1996. Cosey Fanni Tutti has written two books; *Re-sisters: The Lives And Recordings Of Delia Derbyshire, Margery Kempe and Cosey Fanni Tutti* published by Faber in 2022; and the best selling autobiography *Art Sex Music*, also published by Faber in 2017 and since translated into Japanese and French. Her newest solo album *2t2* is out June 13, 2025 via Conspiracy International. www.coseyfannitutti.com