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## Evelyne Axell

'Axell's Paradise: Last Works  
(1971-72) Before She  
Vanished'

*Broadway 1602  
1182 Broadway, at 28th Street,  
Through Nov. 21*

No longer content to be objects of the lubricious male gaze, a few brave women took the representation of sexuality into their own hands in the 1960s. One was Dorothy Iannone, whose explicit, autobiographical paintings were recently exhibited at the New Museum. The Belgian painter Evelyne Axell (1935-1972) was another, and this small show of erotic, Pop-psychedelic works that she produced in the two years before her death in a car accident makes a compelling case for a more extensive presentation of her brief career.

Beautiful and wealthy, Axell gave up a successful acting career and took up painting in the early 1960s with encouragement from René Magritte, a friend of her husband's, the documentary filmmaker Jean Antoine. Made in glossy enamel paints on plexiglass and Formica panels, her vividly colorful paintings revolve mainly around images of sexy women.

Her late works convey a kind of pastoral sexual utopianism. In "The Mad Forest," Axell portrayed herself nude and recumbent in the foreground with a wild blue forest under a yellow sky beyond. It is as if the world were transformed by pure sensual energy. In "The Bird of Paradise," a hummingbird hovers like a little pantheistic angel near the orange pubic hair of a voluptuous, otherwise all-blue woman.

The proliferation of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases would put an end to the dream of unbridled sexual freedom for all, but Axell's paintings vividly capture the mood of a time when hedonism and cultural revolution went hand in hand.

KEN JOHNSON