

PUSH COMES TO SHOVE

New Images of Aggressive Women

Maud Lavin

In the past, more often than not, aggressive women have been rebuked, told to keep a lid on, turn the other cheek, get over it. Repression more than aggression was seen as woman's domain. But recently there's been a noticeable cultural shift. With growing frequency, women's aggression is now celebrated in contemporary culture — in movies and TV, online ventures, and art. In *Push Comes to Shove*, Maud Lavin examines these new images of aggressive women and how they affect women's lives.

Aggression, says Lavin, is necessary, large, messy, psychological, and physical. Aggression need not entail causing harm to another; we can think of it as the use of force to create change — fruitful, destructive, or both. And over the past twenty years, contemporary culture has shown women seizing this power. Lavin chooses provocative examples to explore the complexity of aggression: the surfer girls in *Blue Crush*; Helen Mirren as Jane Tennison in *Prime Suspect*; the homicidal women in *Kill Bill* and artist Marlene McCarty's mural-sized *Murder Girls*; the erotica of Zane and the art of Kara Walker; the group dynamics of artists (including the artists group Toxic Titties) and activists; and YouTube videos of a woman boxer training and fighting.

Women need aggression and need to use it consciously, Lavin writes. With *Push Comes to Shove*, she explores the crucial questions of how to manifest aggression, how to represent it, and how to keep open a cultural space for it.

Maud Lavin is Professor of Visual and Critical Studies and Art History, Theory, and Criticism at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She is the author of *Cut with the Kitchen Knife: The Weimar Photomontages of Hannah Höch* and *Clean New World: Culture, Politics, and Graphic Design* (MIT Press, 2001).

"In investigating the nuances of feminine aggression and its various forms of expression both historically and in contemporary culture, Maud Lavin also documents how we can understand it as a deeply productive and often necessary drive. Better yet, with her characteristic energy and invention, she imagines it as a force at once creative, comedic, erotic — which is to say, one that is not restricting, but rather, both enriching and exhilarating.

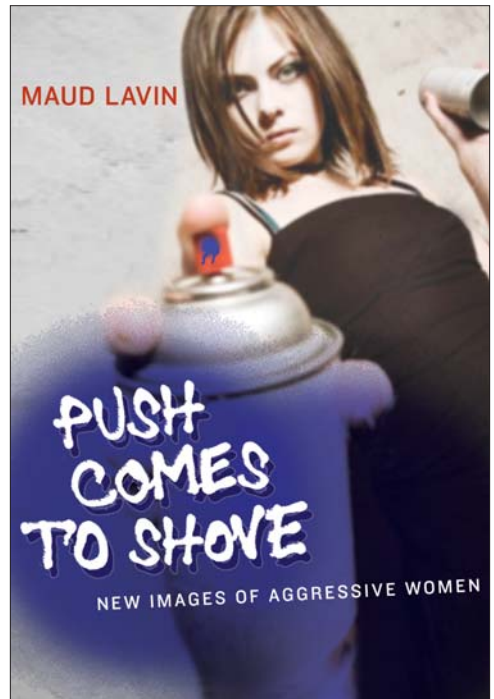
— Akiko Busch, author of *Nine Ways to Cross a River*

The new celebration of women's aggression in contemporary culture, from *Kill Bill* and *Prime Suspect* to the artists group Toxic Titties.

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