HERESIES

A Feminist Publication on Art & Politics

#4

Women's Traditional Arts
The Politics of Aesthetics



v.1
#4

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HERESIES 4
OPEN MEETING

The Editorial Group of Heresies 4 will hold an open meeting on Wednesday, April 26, 8 P.M., at the Women's Coffee House, 54 7th Avenue South, New York City.

HERESIES is an idea-oriented journal devoted to the examination of art and politics from a feminist perspective. We believe that what is commonly called art can have a political impact, and that in the making of art and of all cultural artifacts our identities as women play a distinct role. We hope that **HERESIES** will stimulate dialogue around radical political and aesthetic theory, encourage the writing of the history of *femina sapiens*, and generate new creative energies among women. It will be a place where diversity can be articulated. We are committed to the broadening of the definition and function of art.

HERESIES is structured as a collective of feminists, some of whom are also socialists, marxists, lesbian feminists or anarchists; our fields include painting, sculpture, writing, anthropology, literature, performance, art history, architecture and filmmaking. While the themes of the individual issues will be determined by the collective, each issue will have a different editorial staff made up of women who want to work on that issue as well as members of the collective. Proposals for issues may be conceived and presented to the **HERESIES** Collective by groups of women not associated with the collective. Each issue will take a different visual form, chosen by the group responsible. **HERESIES** will try to be accountable to and in touch with the international feminist community. An open evaluation meeting will be held after the appearance of each issue. Topics for issues will be announced well in advance in order to collect material from many sources. Possibly satellite pamphlets and broadsides will be produced continuing the discussion of each central theme. In addition **HERESIES** provides training for people who work editorially, in design and in production, both on-the-job and through workshops. As part of its commitment to the public, **HERESIES** houses and maintains the Women Artists' Slide Registry.

As women, we are aware that historically the connections between our lives, our arts and our ideas have been suppressed. Once these connections are clarified they can function as a means to dissolve the alienation between artist and audience, and to understand the relationship between art and politics, work and workers. As a step toward a demystification of art, we reject the standard relationship of criticism to art within the present system, which has often become the relationship of advertiser to product. We will not advertise a new set of genius-products just because they are made by women. We are not committed to any particular style of aesthetic, nor to the competitive mentality that pervades the art world. Our view of feminism is one of process and change, and we feel that in the process of this dialogue we can foster a change in the meaning of art.

THE COLLECTIVE: Ida Applebroog, Patsy Beckert, Joan Braderman, Mary Beth Edelson, Su Friedrich, Janet Froelich, Harmony Hammond, Sue Heinemann, Elizabeth Hess, Joyce Kozloff, Arlene Ladden, Lucy Lippard, Marty Pottenger, Miriam Schapiro, Amy Sillman, Joan Snyder, Elke Solomon, Pat Steir, May Stevens, Elizabeth Weatherford, Sally Webster.

The Women's Slide Registry, located in the HERESIES office, includes women artists from all over the U.S. Send 3 slides, name, address and other information plus $5 to Women's Slide Registry, Box 539, Canal Street Station, NY, NY 10013.

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This woman is making pottery in Chiapas, Mexico. The techniques for coiling and shaping a single lump of clay predate the Spanish Conquest of the sixteenth century; the wares of women of Chiapas and of the state of Oaxaca to the north are famous throughout Mexico for their utility and distinctive style.

Assertive and confident, articulate and skilled, the traditional potters in Oaxaca and Chiapas bear little resemblance to the Mediterranean idea of women widely held in Mexico—as passive and acquiescent. The potters pass on manufacturing and decorating techniques to younger women who are apprenticed at about six or seven years.

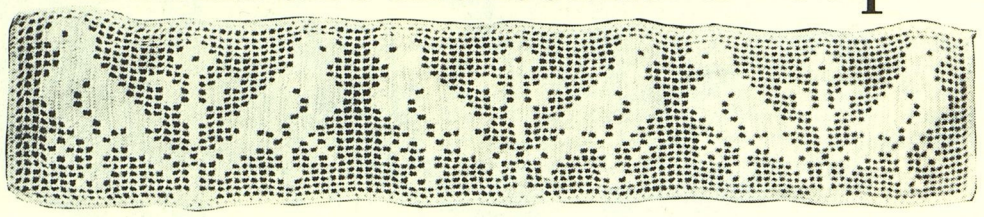
Recent studies of Mayan art and numerous Aztec figurines and stone sculptures (including the monumental and monstrous Coatlicue, Mother of the Gods, now in the Mexican National Museum) show that women occupied a prominent place in Indian society and thought, not only as wives and mothers but as goddesses, politicians and priestesses. A degradation of the role of women was one consequence of the Spanish Conquest. Traditional potters in Mexico reflect this past prominence: they demonstrate their skill and authority over the clay that has made their pottery famous, though they themselves remain anonymous.

Flora Kaplan

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From the Editorial Group



Women's Traditional Arts? Initially we met anticipating discussions of quilts, pottery and weaving rugs. But discussions of quillwork, poetry and weaving narratives came up too. It became clear that basic to our concerns was the politics of aesthetics. And in these discussions we couldn't examine either the artifacts or their politics without a constant awareness that our process was collective. We found that collectivity and deadlines make strange bedpersons. Like any revolution, any revelation, collectivity was the best of times, it was the worst of times.

As a self-selected group of women we all shared a commitment to our topic and a commitment to the Heresies Collective, the 21 women who are the magazine's originators and publishers. Nearly half the editorial group which produced this issue are Heresies Collective members too. The others of us responded to the Heresies invitation which offers feminists the space and the means to explore and analyze women's issues in depth. Our editorial responsibility ranged from discussing issues, soliciting articles, reading and responding to submissions and working editorially with writers, to the technical production of the magazine. This lengthy process required willingness to put aside learned notions of efficiency. Criticism and self-criticism were the feedback structures that allowed us continually to re-examine our process and our ideas. We had to respond to different levels of experience and tried to avoid their expression in conscious or unconscious hierarchies.

Our concern about structure had its emotional edge. We began as eleven. We are now nine. Our fledgling process was as full of pain and anxiety as it was of intelligence and optimism. We needed to weigh the comparative values of professional writing versus amateur investigation and set our own standards which emphasized the communication of issues rather than just cherished notions of good writing. Each editor had a sense of an insider/outsider tension. On the one hand, there was an unspoken set of assumptions shared by some members of the group, vocabulary and gestures which grew out of a common history, a common consciousness. On the other, there was a fear that this set of assumptions implied a clique.

What kind of process did we create? We felt we were constantly tripping over ourselves. We were frustrated and embarrassed at all the doubling back and overlap in our discussions, especially when we were met with questions like, "If she's a pain in the ass, why don't you kick her out?" "Why do you waste so much time with democracy?" "Hierarchies are inevitable. Why don't you face it?" "Isn't a collective a camel designed by a committee?" What we created was awkward, was exhilarating. As involved as we all were with making the magazine beautiful, exciting, intellectually stimulating, this became secondary to the problem of how we could possibly accommodate ourselves to each other's needs as creative women.

How could we collectively make a magazine that represented us all? How comfortable were we with each other's voices, with each other's images, with each other's ideas? We did not want this issue to be an organ for self-promotion. But fired by our discussions and prompted by questions raised in submitted articles, many members of the editorial group submitted articles for publication. Analogies were made to archeological digs and contemporary anthropology, and the more excited we were by the information of our contributors, the more immediately we wanted to participate ourselves.

The Women's Movement is in a new phase. Consciousness-raising continues to be basic to any feminist enterprise. We are shifting the arena of our political activity from the private to the public. In projects like Heresies this shift takes the concrete form of a magazine, the creation of a forum, the extension of ideas and images into places where they can be discussed and critiqued. This development requires a scrutiny which at times seems inimical to the support and solidarity that are the goals of consciousness-raising. But to resort pessimistically to the conclusion that deadlines demand bureaucracies is to overlook that we are still developing the sort of consciousness and fantasy that can project alternatives.

A dialectic of content and process evolved in the production of this issue. Every positive aspect had its negative underbelly, and vice versa. Our understanding of women's traditional arts expanded in response to the material submitted to us, and there were recurring motifs: time, efficiency and domesticity. Recognizing that *time* was a common denominator all women shared—time for one woman might mean cooking, for another weaving, for us, producing this issue—we began to realize the positive aspect of our flexibility in handling time (we were certainly not behaving "efficiently"), but we were simultaneously aware that the model for this attitude to time came from the family where the woman's work is never done and always done and where the endlessness of tasks is depleting and domesticating. From her house flows much of the art that this issue considers.

In order to understand women's traditional arts and our responses to it we had to deconstruct and reconstruct to be able to see clearly the interrelationships between art objects and the conditions in which they are produced. This cycle of dismantling and re-creating characterized our own creative process too. The boundaries women have worked within and challenged were familiar to us. Traditionally, women's working spaces have been defined by their tent, hut or home, their psychological spaces by the rhythm of domestic demands. We often become attached to our working and psychological spaces to the extent that our process disintegrated when we moved from place to place and phase to phase.

Confronted with women's traditional arts, our loyalties were torn; we wanted at the same time to celebrate and lament. Trying to reconstruct a part of the history of women's artmaking obliged us to tolerate these contradictions, to negate, affirm and transcend simultaneously what has characterized women's work. In this way, re-evaluation of the past and how it impinges on the present does not necessitate a fresh start, but a self-reflective critical appropriation of a past which, though created by the "anonymous toil" of unknown women, belongs to all of us.

Language conveys attitudes and feelings and at the same time reflects and constructs consciousness. We were sensitive to the need for scrutinizing our words when we spoke together, for questioning clichés. Elements of a new vocabulary emerged in our discussions, a vocabulary which helped us view women's traditional arts in the ways we have.

"Filters" are the biases we bring to our projects. By acknowledging them, we wanted to challenge the myth of objectivity, to let our various feminist partisanships show. "Femmage" is the practice of collecting, recycling, reshaping and juxtaposing the artifacts of everyday life, a mode echoed in our production of this magazine. "Anonymous toil" is the labor that invisibly supports the honored products of culture. "Matronizing" attitudes are characterized by a smug feminism that knows the answers and ceases to be self-critical. Because we were dealing anthropologically with other cultures and editorially with other writers, we found ourselves fighting against falling into this stance.

The entire process—from initial meetings to eventual publication—took nine months. Obviously a full-term pregnancy. The toughest part was to achieve the fine balance between the sentimental and the intellectual.

Initially, our aim was to investigate women's traditional arts. This led us to another question: what will women of the future make and what will their contexts be? We are at a peculiar and exciting edge: one foot in the socially stratified past, the other in our utopian fantasy of the future.

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THE AESTHETICS OF OPPRESSION



Traditional Arts of Women in Mexico

Judith Friedlander

What do we mean by the traditional arts of women? All too often we are talking about activities that are not considered art either by the women who perform the tasks or by the societies in which they live. Some peoples do not conceptualize transforming mere cultural[1] activities into the domain of art. When the category does exist, women rarely emerge as the great artists. Coming from a society where art is recognized, valued and produced almost entirely by men, it is not surprising that American feminists are interested in looking at the relationship women have to art in other cultures, to see if the comparison sheds additional light on the American condition. Before entering into such a discussion with material from Mexico, however, we should provide a more specific context for the cross-cultural analysis by reviewing some issues concerning art in the United States.

Our society has a hierarchical view of art, making rigorous distinctions be-

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tween the so-called fine arts and the traditional or folk. The nature of fine arts is individualistic, that of the folk, collective. The fine arts represent the work of specialists, recognized personalities who dedicate themselves almost exclusively to their art. Even when they supplement their incomes with additional jobs, the culture sees them as artists first. The folk arts, on the contrary, are the work of nonspecialists, unknown people who are, perhaps, farmers, fishermen, miners, individuals who make modest livings in "old-fashioned" ways and happen to produce folk art on the side. What is more, according to cultural definitions, folk artists do not create so much as carry on timeless traditions. They are living vestiges of the past and the more obscure they are, the more authentic they appear.

In a culture where progress, specialization and rugged individualism are valued, why have we created and maintained such a static category as the traditional arts? We could argue that the anonymity and timelessness imposed on folk art permit those who practice the fine arts to borrow freely from traditional motifs. Who would accuse a Bartók of plagiarism just because he used Hungarian peasant melodies? Less cynically, but troubling all the same, we might suggest that the alienation of our lives in modern America has awakened in many a yearning for simpler times and forms. Yet in order to have the "folk," a group of people must preserve for us the ways of the past—in the hills of Appalachia, in the African bush or in mud huts in Mexico.

Feminists today are well acquainted with the cultural strategy that keeps folk artists in the obscurity of their grass-roots authenticity, for women have been erased in similar ways. Like the folk artist, woman is *by definition* a nonspecialist and a carrier of traditions. She is first and foremost a wife-mother whose social and economic duties prevent her from having the time to specialize. Then, even if class privilege gives her the option to refuse her sex's destiny, she still has to fight the culture's traditional view that her creative powers are limited by her biology.

Our culture has so successfully confined the arts to the male sphere that it has developed sex-specific vocabularies to distinguish work done by men (specialized) from that done by women (generalized). Thus, although tasks traditionally assigned to women usually fall outside the arts entirely, a number of skills become lesser arts when performed by male specialists. Women, for example, do sewing and cooking. Men are couturiérs or chefs. Careful to mark the status relationships, we borrow terms from the lofty French to describe the specialized work of a man, leaving the lower-class Anglo-Saxon to identify the chores that fragment a woman's day. Of course there are female couturiéres and chefs, and the numbers are undoubtedly growing as women today succeed in becoming professionals in these and other fields. Yet recent changes do not negate the long cultural history of the sexes in American society in which men (at least of certain classes) have been encouraged to specialize, while women (despite their class) have almost always been less rigorously trained, at best educated to dabble in a few areas, but by and large inadequately prepared for anything other than, perhaps, wifing and mothering.

While feminist artists continue their struggle to change cultural definitions and thereby gain entry into the male-dominated world of the fine arts, some are also trying to open the Academy to work usually associated with the "inferior" crafts or simply with the domain of women's work. In the process, they have been collecting the nearly forgotten traditions of women in rural America and abroad, creating a specifically female folk culture by bringing to light previously unrecognized skills of unknown women who never had the chance to specialize. Given feminist consciousness, we can hope that those who produce the recently recognized art will emerge from obscurity as individuals, instead of being reduced to the collective anonymity so characteristically the fate of traditional artists. Still, lingering questions must be raised, for it is not entirely clear that we see what our interest in folk art may mean for those women who happen to be carrying on our timeless, authentic female culture.

Other political movements have heralded the art of the folk while fighting to end their oppression—i.e., the Narodniks in czarist Russia, intellectuals in the Mexican and Irish revolutions, leaders of Black and Native American Power movements—and it might be useful to analyze their histories carefully. As a start, let us look at postrevolutionary Mexico, where we shall see how the enthusiasm expressed by urban political leaders for traditional culture has been a mixed blessing, particularly for those who have been living the impoverished reality which seems to preserve folk art the best. Specifically we shall see how Indian women from Hueyapan, a highland village in the state of Morelos, have been encouraged to maintain their so-called Indian culture—in essence their lower socioeconomic status—by a nation whose "revolutionary" ideals call for the preservation of Mexico's indigenous heritage.

A Mexican Indian Example

Looking at the traditional culture of Hueyapan is like looking into a reservoir of oppression. It is a mixture of cultural hand-me-downs from the ruling class, combined with a few vestiges from pre-Hispanic times that have managed to survive over 400 years of Spanish/Hispanic occupation. We find, for example, under the rubric of indigenous culture, sixteenth-century Spanish colonial dress, medieval miracle plays, and renaissance double-reeded instruments played only to celebrate Catholic fiesta days. As for those customs which are truly of pre-Hispanic origin, they have been transformed almost beyond recognition to conform to the dictates of Hispanic cultural rules. What is more, these modified indigenous forms frequently exist only because they have become part of the dominant culture as well.

After the Revolution of 1910–1920, the Mexican government began actively to preserve and reinforce so-called indigenous customs. For ideological purposes, political leaders wanted to glorify the country's unique heritage, partly Spanish, partly Indian. Artists painted, choreographed and wrote about Indians, while philosophers philosophized about them. Archeologists, sculptors and architects labored to restore and celebrate pre-Hispanic culture. Folk arts began to flourish. So successful was this cultural renaissance that by the 1950s tourists were flocking to Mexico to visit museums and pre-Hispanic ruins, to purchase inexpensive traditional art objects and to travel into the interior to see how the Indians lived in their natural habitats.

In the eyes of many Hueyapeños, this glorification of Mexico's "roots" can do little more than reinforce their oppression. Living in a community where the socioeconomic realities of their traditional culture prohibit them from enjoying the conveniences of modern Mexico, they claim that the only viable future for the villagers lies in losing their Indian identity. Many of the young people, particularly women, are not waiting for changes to take place in Hueyapan and have migrated instead to Mexico City and Cuerna-

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vaca. As far as they are concerned, it is better to work long hours as maids in comfortable homes, or live in the urban slums, than to remain in Hueyapan and continue their tedious—albeit "folkloric"—Indian existence.

That more women than men want to leave Hueyapan is directly related to the distribution of so-called traditional culture in the village. In a society where to be traditional or indigenous still brings both low social status and hard work, the world of Hueyapan women is decidedly more Indian than that of its men. What is true here simply supports what anthropologists writing about modernization have found elsewhere: almost always men assimilate more quickly in Third World countries, for capitalist and socialist systems integrate them more rapidly into urban and rural work forces. Women who do not become maids in the cities are often isolated at home where they provide unpaid labor by taking care of their husbands and reproducing new workers, remaining, as a result, more "conservative" culturally. Even in places where men no longer practice traditional customs, women often continue to do so, speaking the local language among themselves, dressing in the old way and continuing to work with little help from labor-saving technology.[2] As any Hueyapan woman will explain, women who stay in the village are the last to change.

The Mexican government has further contributed to the division between the modernizing man and the traditional woman by its interest in promoting indigenous culture. On the one hand, it has provided more training and technology to change the nature of men's work than women's. On the other hand, it has encouraged women more than men to develop their traditional skills. In Hueyapan, for instance, where weaving still exists, government programs have tried to interest local women in making shawls, ponchos and scarves for the tourist trade. What is more, when government representatives come to the village on official visits—an event that happens several times a year—they appreciate it if the Hueyapeños welcome them with an ethnic reception. Thus, in the name of paying homage to Mexico's indigenous heritage, young girls are dressed up in the so-called Indian costume[3] native to the area and receive the honored guests with flowers and little speeches in Nahuatl.[4] Furthermore, women prepare a *mole* meal, the traditional fiesta dish, for these government representatives.

To move to a more specific analysis, we could look at almost any one of the so-called indigenous traditions found in Hueyapan today to illustrate in concrete terms how the villagers' culture reflects their long history of being dominated by a non-Indian society. Although industrialization has hardly brought liberation, it is still a fact that the poorest rural communities throughout Mexico are generally the most "Indian." What is more, as these villages begin to change, traditional culture holds on the longest among the most oppressed inhabitants, particularly the women, who for social, economic and cultural reasons remain more isolated from the influences of modernization. Given that Mexico is interested in both industrializing the country and preserving its so-called indigenous heritage, we could suggest that one resolution of the problem has been to "develop" one sex and sustain the past with the other. Drawing on traditional Hispanic definitions of sex roles and status differentiations between men and women, the choice was easily made. For purposes of this discussion, then, let us turn to traditional cooking to see what the preservation of this "folk art" has meant in the daily lives of Hueyapan women.

The Art of Cooking

In a recent article entitled "The Magic of Mexican Food North of the Border," Craig Claiborne whimsically begins:

For some confounding reason known only to a few Aztec gods, the authentic flavors of the Mexican kitchen, like certain fine wines and some exotic plants, do not travel well. They transport poorly through some curious dilution of tastes, some diminution of savor, some evanescence of essences [New York *Times*, September 21, 1977].

Could Claiborne have written this if he had tasted Mexican food prepared in an indigenous peasant village? His calling forth of mystery, humor and romance inadequately describes what one experiences in today's closest equivalent to an Aztec kitchen. There, it is true, the ingredients are very fresh and the food has that special aroma of the open hearth, but it also has been ground first, for tedious hours, on special volcanic stones (*metates*) that are generations old, and cooked in earthenware pots seasoned by years of use. There is no secret why Mexican food does not travel; it cannot even be re-created properly in Mexico City, much less New York. What we lack are the necessary "rustic" working conditions and equipment.

While members of the privileged classes, particularly from abroad, have come to appreciate Mexican cooking as one of the world's great cuisines, for Hueyapeños it remains one of the endless chores that women must attend to in the course of a day's work. As far as many villagers are concerned, the food they eat and the process involved in its preparation are merely additional indications of their inferior status. If they had the means, therefore, they would stop eating like Indians and would eat as they think the rich do, buying food in tin cans and cellophane packages which they—or preferably a maid—would heat quickly over a gas stove. Although most Hueyapeños recognize that certain foods, tortillas for example, taste better when prepared at home, the labor entailed is enormous, encouraging the women, more than the men, to seek ways of simplifying the work.

In almost every home in Hueyapan, the basic daily diet consists of tortillas and boiled beans served with *chile* peppers, sometimes in a sauce, sometimes just off the vine.[5] At every meal, even among the poorest, one is sure to have these staple foods and then, depending on the family's income, the productivity of the barnyard, fields and orchards, other dishes may be added. At breakfast and supper—the latter being a very light meal with perhaps only one tortilla wrapped around a few beans—weak and highly sweetened coffee or herbal tea is served, substituted on rare occasions by hot chocolate. Coffee, like chocolate, is expensive and must be purchased, while most of the teas are grown locally. Sweet rolls (*pan dulce*) baked in the village and bought at nearby stores are also frequently served at breakfast or dinner, particularly to children.

If the family can afford it, women usually prepare additional dishes for the main meal at midday. Lunch specialties may be nothing more elaborate than one of several kinds of *chile* sauces, beans prepared with the flavorful *ayocote* flower or fried in a bit of lard. But on market day, a piece of beef or pork may also be added (one kilo for about 14 people), boiled with seasonings and served in its broth. Beef may be cooked in a beef *mole* soup instead. When meat is unavailable or too expensive, noodle soup, prepared with pork fat, or pork rind fried in a soupy, green *chile* sauce provide substitutes. Although chickens and turkeys are fiesta foods only, eggs fried in pork fat and a *chile* sauce may also appear, perhaps once a week, in the diet of families

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who raise laying hens or have enough money to purchase eggs at the store (four or five eggs would serve 14 people). Another popular dish, when they are in season, is stewed prickly pear cactus shoots (*nopalitos*). Finally, after fiestas, the leftover *mole* sauce (see below) is used to make *enchiladas* and *chilaquiles*.

Women prepare the most elaborate meals on fiesta days. Traditionally Hueyapeños celebrate at least ten village-wide Catholic fiestas as well as the individual saint days of members of the family. Since the Mexican Revolution, about five national holidays have been added. All celebrations, be they religious or secular, village-wide or family, are feted by serving a traditional menu. Although Hueyapeños share responsibilities by sponsoring one fiesta or another in a given year, at which time they have open house, most families who can manage to—and most sacrifice so that they can—still celebrate at home as well, at least for the most important fiestas. Relatives, *compadres* and *comadres* (individuals with whom the family has a formal ritual relationship blessed by the Church), and political friends, visit one another at these times, eating the same traditional dishes at each home.

For birthdays and other family-based holidays, there is a special breakfast of *atole* and meat *tamales* as well as the elaborate midday meal. Meat *tamales* take hours to prepare and must be made the night before by a team of women—usually the mother-in-law, the wife, perhaps a teenage daughter still living at home and a *comadre* or two (in particular widows with no family left in the village who have time to help on such occasions). Since the work goes on late into the night, only to begin again before dawn the next day, the invited assistants do not bother to go home, but wrap themselves up in blankets they bring along with them and curl up on straw mats placed on the dirt floor in the kitchen. Thus, by the time the male family members and a few guests—mostly men as well—are enjoying a *tamale-atole* breakfast, the women have long been at work, some looking after the hot *atole* corn meal drink and others attending to the main meal of the day, butchering turkeys or chickens, cooking the soup, the rice, the *mole colorado*,[6] the bean and plain *tamales*, the boiled beans and the countless tortillas.

Fiestas, it is true, give women the chance to cook, eat and drink together, certainly providing some relief from their normal routines. Still, the work is exhausting and may go on for several days, rarely letting up enough for women to have a chance to leave the kitchen and enjoy the dancing or other party activities. What is more, once the holiday is over, women, particularly mothers with young children, are faced once again with their strenuous daily schedules.

Mexican cooking is difficult and time-consuming under traditional conditions mainly because almost every ingredient must be ground finely by hand—from the corn used in tortillas *tamales* and *atole*, to every spice and vegetable added to a *mole* or *chile* sauce. The work is back-breaking, even for women used to it, and must be performed kneeling before the large grinding stone (*metate*), a kitchen utensil known pre-Hispanically throughout America.

Since the 1950s Hueyapan has actually had a number of corn mills, eliminating the need to grind corn by hand. According to the women, however, many men initially objected to the mills. Not only did they complain about the cost (two cents a bucket), but they did not like the texture of mill-ground tortillas. Corn ground on the *metates* simply tasted better. Another innovation which met with a mixed reaction was the tortilla press, used to shape tortillas that traditionally are fashioned between a woman's hands into paper-thin disks.

Despite the new improvements, the work of "throwing" tortillas remains endless, for a family of 14 eats well over 50 at one meal and expects them fresh and hot off the griddle at least twice a day. What women really need to simplify their work is a tortilla factory, where hot tortillas can be purchased before each meal. While many non-Indian communities surrounding the village have such *tortillerías*, there is no talk as yet of introducing one into Hueyapan.

Given the argument developed so far we can now conclude with a few recipes, letting the descriptions of the preparations and the ingredients speak for themselves. No attempt will be made here to help the reader reproduce these dishes in a modern kitchen, nor will proportions be systematically provided. Traditional Mexican cooking, at least in Hueyapan, has been a matter of availability of resources: what has been harvested, what the family can afford to buy, how many people must be fed with a small fixed budget. One chicken, for example, can easily serve 20 people. When the soup gets low, one just adds more water and another leaf of peppermint. There are no exact amounts of this's and that's and it would therefore be an arbitrary exercise to suggest that there were.

What can be discussed is the labor involved in preparing a particular dish and whether the ingredients are grown locally or must be purchased. Furthermore we can note the origins of the ingredients at the time of conquest to aid us in identifying the influences Hispanic tastes have had on so-called indigenous food.

It will become immediately evident that fiesta food, more than the basic staples, shows considerable Iberian/Old World influence. This is hardly surprising when we remember that all aspects of the Indians' ritual life became the solemn responsibility of the Catholic missionaries who settled in indigenous towns during the early colonial period, converting the people and transforming their culture. Hueyapan was conquered in 1524, only three years after the Aztec Empire fell. By the 1530s Augustinian missionaries had come to the area and by 1561 the Dominicans had already built a church, monastery and several chapels in the pueblo (Martinez-Marin, 1968, p. 64ff).

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RECIPES

Tortillas

Ingredient	Availability to Villagers	Origin of Ingredient At Time of Conquest
Corn	*Grown locally*	*Indigenous*
Lime ($CaCo_2$)	*Must be purchased*	*Indigenous*
Salt	*Must be purchased*	*Indigenous w/European equiv.*

After the corn has been harvested and dried, women remove the kernels from the cob and store them in enormous sacks, weighing about 100 pounds each. Daily about ten liter measures of dry corn (for a family of 14) have to be boiled with a fistful of lime and a bit of salt. Originally the corn was boiled in large earthenware jars (*ollas*) but today it is more frequently boiled in tin cans. It takes several hours for the corn to soften to the right texture.

The corn cools, and then a standard-size bucket of kernels is ground for the breakfast tortillas. Before "throwing" tortillas, however, the corn meal must be kneaded to the proper consistency. Often water is added. Little round balls of the moist meal (*masa*) are shaped into thin round tortillas and toasted over the hearth on a clay disc that has been washed down with lime. Successful tortillas are thin and inflate just a bit while cooking. They should be served hot off the fire and are preferably prepared throughout the meal by a female member of the family who eats later. The tortilla is not only a food, but is also used as an eating utensil, a scoop for beans and other food.

Boiled Beans (Frijoles de Olla)

Kidney beans or	*Grown locally*	*Indigenous*
Avocote (large brown beans)	*Grown locally*	*Indigenous*
Onion	*Grown locally*	*Indigenous w/European equiv.*
Salt	*Must be purchased*	*Indigenous w/European equiv.*
Epazote	*Grown locally*	*Indigenous*
Garlic	*Must be purchased*	*European*

The dried kidney or *ayocote* beans are boiled with the above ingredients for several hours until tender. The garlic clove is left whole and the onion is sliced. *Epazote* leaves are added to season the water further as are, occasionally, the flowers of the *ayocote*.

The beans are boiled in an *olla*.

Fried Beans

Lard	*Usually purchased*	*European*

Other ingredients the same as for boiled beans.

A small portion of the boiled beans are fried in pork fat[7] in an earthenware casserole and then mixed together with the beans in the *olla*.

It should be noted that although the wealthier Aztecs ate wild boar (peccary) (Soustelle, 1961, p. 151), the pork eaten in the village seems to come out of Spanish culinary practices.

Green Chile Sauce

Green chile (ancho)	*Grown locally*	*Indigenous*
Green tomato or	*Grown locally*	*Indigenous*
Red tomato	*Must be purchased*	*South American*
Onion	*Grown locally*	*Indigenous w/European equiv.*
Fresh coriander	*Grown locally*	*East Indian*
Salt	*Must be purchased*	*Indigenous w/European equiv.*
Water		

The *chile* pepper is briefly roasted over the coals and peeled. The tomato is also peeled after it has been dipped into boiling water. All the ingredients are then ground together either on the *metate* or in a volcanic stone mortar and pestle.

Beef, Pork, Chicken or Turkey Soup

Turkey or	*Raised locally*	*Indigenous*
Chicken or	*Raised locally*	*European*
Beef or	*Usually purchased*	*European*
Pork	*Usually purchased*	*European*
Peppermint	*Grown locally*	*European*
Onion	*Grown locally*	*Indigenous w/European equiv.*
Garlic	*Must be purchased*	*European*

Any one of the above meats is boiled with the other ingredients in an *olla*. The soup is served with a small piece of meat and then the following ingredients are added to taste by the person eating.

Lime juice	*Must be purchased*	*Mediterranean fruit*
Green delgado chile (chopped)	*Grown locally*	*Indigenous*
Onion (chopped)	*Grown Locally*	*Indigenous w/European equiv.*
Salt	*Must be purchased*	*Indigenous w/European equiv.*

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Beef Mole Soup

Beef	*Usually purchased*	*European*
Peppermint	*Grown locally*	*European*
Fresh coriander	*Grown locally*	*East Indian*
Green tomato	*Grown locally*	*Indigenous*
Onion	*Grown locally*	*Indigenous w/European equiv.*
Salt	*Must be purchased*	*Indigenous w/European equiv.*
Water		
Green chile (ancho)	*Grown locally*	*Indigenous*
Cloves	*Must be purchased*	*Moluccan*
Black pepper	*Must be purchased*	*East Indian*

The *chile* pepper and green onion are peeled and ground together with the cloves and black pepper. All the ingredients are then boiled in an *olla*. Each person is served a small piece of meat with the broth.

Enchiladas

Fresh tortillas	*See above*	*See above*
Mole colorado sauce	*See below*	*See below*
Fresh cream or white crumbly cheese	*Must be purchased*	*European*
Lard	*Usually purchased*	*European*

Fresh tortillas are fried in lard and rolled into tubular shapes. *Mole colorado* sauce is then poured over them and the mixture is heated in an earthenware casserole. If it is available, the *enchiladas* can be served with fresh cream or white crumbly cheese. Mexican restaurants serve *enchiladas* with chicken or some other meat, but this is not the case in homes in Hueyapan.

Chilaquiles

The same as above only made with stale tortillas that have been torn into pieces.

Tacos

Tacos are fresh tortillas filled with meat, rice or hard-boiled eggs. They are always served with *chiles*.

Nopalitos

Prickly pear shoots	*Grown locally*	*Indigenous w/Mediterranean equiv.*
Onion	*Grown locally*	*Indigenous w/European equiv.*
Red tomatoes	*Must be purchased*	*South American*
Chile ancho	*Grown locally*	*Indigenous*
Lard	*Usually purchased*	*European*
Salt	*Must be purchased*	*Indigenous w/European equiv.*

The prickly pear shoots are scraped clean of their spines and cut into small cubes. The onion, peeled tomatoes and *chiles* are ground together and seasoned with salt. All ingredients are fried in lard in an earthenware casserole.

Fiesta Food

Atole

Corn meal	*See above*	*See above*
Powdered milk (optional)	*Must be purchased*	*European*
Cane sugar	*Must be purchased*	*Middle Eastern and Oriental*
Chocolate or	*Must be purchased*	*Indigenous*
Cinnamon or	*Must be purchased*	*Sinhalese and Chinese*
Green corn kernels	*Grown locally*	*Indigenous*
Water		

Corn meal is stirred into heating water and milk, making a thick but drinkable porridge. This mixture is flavored with ground chocolate, cinnamon or the whole kernels of corn and then heavily sweetened. It is cooked in an *olla* and served hot.

It should be noted that although chocolate is indigenous to Mexico, it comes from the tropical lowlands and was probably not used by the highland Morelos Indians pre-Hispanically.

Meat Tamales

Corn meal	*See above*	*See above*
Pork	*Usually purchased*	*European*
Lard	*Usually purchased*	*European*
Guajillo chile	*Must be purchased*	*Indigenous*
Corn husks	*Grown locally*	*Indigenous*
Totomoscle leaves	*Grown locally*	*Indigenous*
Water		

The pork is cubed and fried with the red *guajillo chile* which has been softened in boiling water and ground on the *metate*. Before making the *tamales*, the corn meal is kneaded to the proper consistency. Then, taking a bit of corn meal the size of a meatball and stuffing it with the meat and *chile* mixture, the *tamale* is wrapped carefully in a corn husk, assuming the shape of a small corn cob. Finally it is placed in a huge *olla* where perhaps 200 similar *tamales* are huddled together and steamed for a couple of hours. The *olla* must be sealed closed with *totomoscle* bush leaves—huge, flat and highly absorbent.

Bean Tamales

Corn meal	*See above*	*See above*
Ayocote beans	*Grown locally*	*Indigenous*
Salt	*Must be purchased*	*Indigenous w/European equiv.*
Water		
Corn husks	*Grown locally*	*Indigenous*
Totomoscle leaves	*Grown locally*	*Indigenous*

The corn meal is kneaded to the proper consistency. Salt and water are added. The boiled *ayocote* beans (see above) must be ground on the *metate*. Some of the corn meal is then spread over the surface of the *metate* which in turn is covered by a layer of ground beans and another layer of corn meal. The "marble" corn is fashioned into *tamales*, again in the shape of small corn cobs, wrapped in corn husks and steamed in a huge *olla* that has been covered with *totomoscle* leaves.

A plain *tamale*, made only of corn meal, is prepared in the same way. It is flat, however, not round, and serves as a scoop for food much like a tortilla.

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Rice (Sopa de Arroz)

Rice	*Must be purchased*	*Old World*
Red tomatoes	*Must be purchased*	*South American*
Green peas	*Grown locally*	*European*
Onions	*Grown locally*	*Indigenous w/European equiv.*
Lard	*Usually purchased*	*European*
Salt	*Must be purchased*	*Indigenous w/European equiv.*
Water		

The raw rice is sautéed with peeled tomatoes which have been ground with onions and seasoned with salt. Water and green peas are then added and the mixture simmers until done. The rice is cooked in an earthenware casserole and is usually served as the first course of a fiesta dinner.

Squash-Seed Mole

Ancho chiles	*Grown locally*	*Indigenous*
Green tomatoes	*Grown locally*	*Indigenous*
Chicken or pork soup	*See above*	*See above*
Squash seeds	*Grown locally*	*Indigenous*
Epazote	*Grown locally*	*Indigenous*
Lard	*Usually purchased*	*European*
Salt	*Must be purchased*	*Indigenous w/European equiv.*

The *chiles* and green tomatoes are peeled and ground on the *metate*. The squash seeds are very finely ground. These three ingredients, seasoned with salt, are fried in lard. Soup and *epazote* leaves are added and the mixture simmers for about an hour.

The sauce is served over chicken or pork. Although it should be reasonably thick and have a nutty taste, the sauce should also have a fine texture. *Tamales* (bean and plain) are served with the *mole* as are *tortillas*. Boiled beans (see above) follow as the last course.

Mole Colorado (Mole Poblano)

Pasilla chile	*Must be purchased*	*Indigenous*
Sesame seeds	*Must be purchased*	*E. Indian*
Chocolate (bitter)	*Must be purchased*	*Indigenous*
Peanuts	*Must be purchased*	*Indigenous*
Cloves	*Must be purchased*	*Moluccan*
Cumin	*Must be purchased*	*Hindustani*
Black pepper	*Must be purchased*	*E. Indian*
Cinnamon	*Must be purchased*	*Sinhalese and Chinese*
Almonds	*Must be purchased*	*Moroccan*
Anise	*Must be purchased*	*N. African*
Raisins	*Must be purchased*	*European*
Garlic	*Must be purchased*	*European*
Onions	*Grown locally*	*Indigenous w/European equiv.*
Salt bread (stale)	*Must be purchased*	*European*
Tortilla (stale)	*See above*	*See above*
Chicken or Turkey soup	*See above*	*See above*
Lard	*Usually purchased*	*European*

To make enough *mole* to serve with one hen (to feed about 20 people), Hueyapan women usually use ¼ kilo of *pasilla chile*, ¼ kilo sesame seeds and as much as they care to or can afford of the other ingredients—usually small quantities.

All the spices, including the onions, bread and *tortillas*, have to be ground very finely. The *pasilla chile* (a dark red, flat pepper) is purchased dry and soaked first in boiling water. The ground ingredients are then sautéed in lard and finally the soup is added. The mixture simmers for about an hour and is then served over chicken or turkey. Bean and plain *tamales* as well as fresh *tortillas* are served along with it. Boiled beans follow as the last course.

Mole colorado is the most important fiesta food in the village. Keeping in mind what we have already said about the way Spanish priests probably influenced fiesta cooking, it is particularly interesting to see what happened to the pre-Hispanic *mole*.

According to Soustelle, in *The Daily Life of the Aztecs*, this dish originally was nothing more than a *chile* stew (Soustelle, 1962, p. 27). After the conquest, however, *mole* came to resemble an East Indian curry. Thus not only did Spaniards call the inhabitants of Mexico Indian, but they also altered one of the most common Aztec recipes to support this error of ethnic identity.

A standard curry has the following ingredients: coriander, cumin, turmeric, nutmeg, cloves, red pepper, onions, raisins, almonds, walnuts, cashew nuts, coconut, white poppy seeds and yogurt.

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1 When I talk about culture and cultural activities, I am using the terms in the anthropological sense. I am not referring to CULTURE as it has been developed in Western society. Following T. Parsons, C. Geertz, and D. Schneider, by culture I mean a system of symbols shared by a group of people (D. Schneider, 1968, p. 1).

2 This argument has been particularly well developed by Ester Boserup, 1970.

3 The clothing traditionally worn by the women conforms to the dictates of Carlos V, who during the early part of the colonial period sent formal orders to Mexico that Indians had to dress according to Spanish styles and an Iberian sense of decency. (Foster, 1960, pp. 101-102).

4 Nahuatl was the language of the Aztecs and is still spoken in Hueyapan—in a form strongly influenced by the Spanish—by the old, particularly the women. To this day, the villagers believe what they were told in colonial times, that Nahuatl is not a language, but only a dialect, which has no grammar or literature.

5 Descriptions of the ingredients and preparation of most of the dishes mentioned can be found in the recipe section at the end of this article. My information comes from experiences cooking with women in Hueyapan during fiestas in 1969-70 and on subsequent visits in 1971, 1973, 1974, 1975, 1976 as well as daily exposure during the same time in the home of Doña Zeferina Barreto, where she and her daughter-in-law cooked for 14 people.

6 For less formal affairs, the preferred *mole colorado* may be substituted by one of the less complicated green *moles*, like the pumpkin seed *mole* listed in the recipe section.

7 Pigs, like steer, are slaughtered in the village by the Hueyapan butcher. With the exception of chickens and turkeys, few families butcher their own animals, but sell them alive and purchase back a small quantity of meat.

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Is There a Feminine Aesthetic?

Silvia Bovenschen

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Old and new appraisals of women's artistic production

The time has come for a campaign against all the weeping and wailing. Even the media have got the hang of it—with their usual inconsequence. Women are oppressed, exploited, degraded. . . . Although this state of affairs has hardly changed since it was first articulated, to continue to proclaim it now in the artistic realm seems almost pointless. But this need not necessarily be the case. As can be seen on closer examination, it is the tone of the lament that makes it seem inadequate. The form the lament takes still acknowledges its addressee. Traditionally it was women—professional mourners—who rendered grief public, be it in regard to death, to suffering or to the victims of massacres; this was one of their rare opportunities to assume a public function. But precisely for this reason it was not at all startling, indeed, no one particularly noticed, when women began publicizing and decrying their own lot, that of their sisters, their female ancestors and, should women's fate not improve, the lot of future women. Clearly, Cassandra was not a false prophet. She was simply not heard. No one paid attention to her.

For this reason I thought it tedious to enumerate once again the entire battery of obstacles constructed to frighten off and exclude women from the artistic realm. Yet the handicaps and the absences are also part of women's history, and perhaps even the greater part, since women did not clomp through history in combat boots, and their traces are fleeting and obscured. To be sure, we do not complain as much today because we have a movement making demands that will change the future. Nevertheless, in respect to the question of a "feminine aesthetic," we need to reexamine its traditional assessments once again, if only for the reason that we lack a viable conceptual basis to work from.

Repeatedly and rightfully women have bemoaned the "deformations of even their own cultural taste": "I would . . . far sooner have been caught dead with Hemingway than with Virginia Woolf in my hands,"[1] says Shulamith Firestone about her development. The pursuit of art, often based on the search for a realm of sensitivity in hopes of thereby escaping the confines of the home, may become a trap for women just as easily as other pursuits. When discussing that which we associate with patriarchal structures in the cultural realm, we immediately take note of a scandalous situation which, along with many others, was uncovered long ago but still prevails. Just to refresh our memory, Simone de Beauvoir established long ago that men mistake their descriptive perspective for absolute truth. The scandalous situation, then, is: the equation of truth with the masculine perspective, that is, with everything observed, examined and portrayed from a male point of view, which we were made to adopt very early in life. This false equation not only predominated in the production and reception of art. It also guaranteed that, despite our fervent endeavor, this sphere remained external, foreign and remote. This was but one reason for our exclusion among the many overt and lucid strategies employed by men to repress us when they found that our perceptive powers had not been sufficiently blunted.

George Sand, *Histoire de ma Vie:*[2]
Mr. de Keraty followed me into the anteroom in order to debate with me, at yet greater length, his theory concerning the intellectual inferiority of women. It would be impossible for even the most intelligent woman to write a good work. And as I wanted to leave then, he ended his speech with a Napoleonic stroke, which was to shatter me. "Believe me," he said in a weighty tone, as I was about to open the last door of his sanctuary, "bring children into the world instead of books!" "My dear," I answered, thinking I would choke on my laughter and slamming the door shut in his face, "follow your advice yourself, as well as you can!"

The classic notions about women's artistic competence are all too familiar. Though she is the great theme of art, woman as empirical being is acceptable only by virtue of her supposed inspirational powers. "In an Amazon society there could be neither culture nor history nor art, since art is not essential to woman."[3] We know today, though only because we bothered to look into the matter ourselves, that it is not difficult to prove that such statements are historically incorrect. They show (and help justify) that the masculine realm of artistic production, and often the artistic products themselves, are not only inaccessible to women, but are also fundamentally foreign to us.

Critics have always regarded the female producers of literature, art and music, few and far between as they are, as exotic aberrations. From a purely quantitative point of view, this indeed was and still is the case, although we have yet to rediscover the many women artists who were consciously forgotten.

To be sure, women's representation in the arts is a rarity. And even this rarity is always measured in terms of production norms within the established framework defining the division of artistic labor, a framework which does not encompass forms of social creativity. And when a few works do manage to find their way to the public despite all obstacles placed in their path, they tend to be viewed in the following manner: Though women may have accomplished some rather nice and enjoyable things now and then, all the major innovative achievements have nonetheless remained the exclusive territory of the great *masters* of the pen, the brush or the keyboard. (Thus any mounting anxiety can be quickly and easily quelled.)

But now there is a threat from the other front: the theoretician of equality. Today the line of argument emphasizing equality belongs to the repertoire of the man who moves in "progressive" circles. He says that since they can no longer be kept completely ignorant, women should at least turn out to be what men already are. One need only open the floodgates, and women will stream into the spheres dominated by men. But what if we no longer view the difference as deficiency, loss, self-effacement and deprivation, but rather as opportunity? Around the turn of the century, the statement "We women can do just as much as men" served as a beckoning light. Today it is no longer so terribly impressive. Of course we could do just as much. The question is, do we want to do just as much as men, or the same thing as men? Here we have come full circle. So it would seem.

Chantal Akerman, Interview in *Frauen und Film (Women and Film):*[4]
If women imitate men's battles they will become weaker and weaker. They must find new forms of struggle. This became evident in Hendave where women demonstrated against the death sentence in Spain. Some women shouted and clenched their fists, while others just hummed. They went "mmmmmmm" with their lips pressed together, and moved forward in a row. That is a new way of demonstrating which can be a hundred times stronger than fists. We have had a virtual inflation of shouting with raised fists, and I, for one, simply walk by when I hear it. In film and in the arts we must also find a language which is appropriate to us, one which is neither black nor white.

Art has been primarily produced by men. Men have dominated the neatly segregated public sector that controls it, and men have defined the normative standards for evaluation. Moreover, insofar as they came into contact with this sector at all, women have for the most part acquiesced to its value system. These realizations led Firestone to the conclusion that "It would take a denial of all cultural tradition for women to produce even a true 'female' art."[5] Such a statement is easily made. Indeed, aesthetic norms and cultural standards have meaning only in their sublation. But those standards and those norms were not even our own. What is the ground that we are working? From where does a "feminine" art get its identity? Or does it not need to do that? Is art, then, still art

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in the traditional sense, no matter how far it has gone to the dogs? Is "feminine" a criterion of substance, an ontological entity?

Let us then radically negate all the masculine cultural achievements and begin anew at the point where we once left off, tilling the soil as our female ancestors did before the great male putsch. That is not very funny, even as a powder room joke. Perhaps we would enjoy that—linking ourselves directly to bygone power, but we should be wary of construing a direct connection where none exists. Making such a connection can raise false hopes of finding help.

Call as often as we might to the old mother goddesses—Aphrodite, Demeter, Diana and all the rest of those Amazons of long lost female empires—their power cannot reach this far, for their empires have been extinguished. Only the important consciousness that things were once different eases our burden a bit. To be sure, it is very important that we reappropriate moments of female potential from past cultures which have been silenced in organized fashion by male history. And the work to be done in this area is immense. (I emphasize this to avoid any misunderstanding.) But any attempt to link them directly to our experiences in the twentieth century will be unsuccessful. And if we nonetheless force a direct connection, the results will be downright pitiful. We will be left with parsley as a method of inducing abortion, and here and there a herbal home remedy.

The desire to tailor a positive (female) counterpart to the world that was constructed and interpreted by men is not satisfied in this manner. Let us rather quote the women of the past as we wish, without being pressured into retroactively fabricating continuity. On the other hand, though, a historical archeology in search of women past and forgotten, their obscured activities, living conditions and forms of resistance, is not just nostalgia. The hidden story of women, which reveals itself to us as primarily one of suffering and subjugation (now *here* is continuity!), is the dark side of cultural history—or better: the dark side of its idealized version.

Women artists waft through history as mere shadows, separated from each other. Since their deeds remained for the most part without effect and their creations were, with rare exception, absorbed into the masculine tradition, it is not possible to retrospectively construct an independent countertradition. Only female martyrs are not in short supply. All of this would certainly seem to be grounds enough for avoiding even the most trifling involvement with the problems of art and cultural history.

But the Great Refusal is not the solution either. To believe that feminine spontaneity need be creative in every case is to fail to recognize the powerful effect that cultural and historical deformation also had on the subjectivity of women, as mentioned by Firestone. Can women just "be women," reduced to some elemental Being? We are in a terrible bind. How do we speak? In what categories do we think? Is even logic a bit of virile trickery? Or to put it even more heretically, how do we feel? Are our desires and notions of happiness so far removed from cultural traditions and models? Feminism cannot ultimately imply that we are to stop thinking, feeling, longing. No one ever claimed that. On the contrary, we are consciously just beginning to do these things. No doubt, we have always done these things differently than men. (We are dealing with a sort of double exposure here.) But the means of expression most readily available to us for communicating our perceptions, our thought processes—language, forms, images—are for the most part not originally our own, not of our own choosing. Here we are still at the beginning. Sensitivity to the patriarchal structures common to language usage[6] is certainly a step in this direction.

Lucy Lippard: "Why a separate women's art?"[7]
What seems to be most important in this whole matter is that we focus our eyes and our feelings upon the flashes of insight which our feminine sensitivity affords us.

Frieda Grafe, in *Filmkritik*:[8]
Language, the medium of my work, is for me already so generalized and mute that I cannot strive for even further generalities. Instead, I direct all my energies toward making the wall of generalities so thin that something will be able to break through the barrier, something can come from within my body and enter the overarticulated linguistic sphere. I want to show the generative base of language before it atrophies in communicable form.

We ought to rid ourselves of the notion of a historically ever-present female counterculture. And yet, on the other hand, the very different way in which women experience things, their very different experiences themselves, enable us to anticipate different imaginations and means of expression.

No matter which tack I take, I am left with the frustrations and difficulties inherent in positive definitions.

The pre-aesthetic realms

Even in the past, I contend, the exclusion of women from the artistic realm could not extinguish all their aesthetic needs. These creative impulses, however, were shunted off into the "pre-aesthetic" realms, where they evaporated under the strain of women's daily routine. Women furnished the living quarters, set the tables, arranged, decorated and adorned their clothing and above all themselves.

That was allowed, as long as it was being done to please the man. These activities quickly corrupted women. They set the table for the man, they dressed and adorned themselves for the man—not for themselves or for each other, but rather in competition with each other. They busied themselves weaving and knitting, but such functional artworks, handicrafts and decorations have always been considered inferior, commonplace. This verdict is of course not entirely unfair, especially in those cases where even these most timid efforts were channeled into subservient obsequiousness and excessive affection-seeking.

Sylvia Plath, in *The Bell Jar*:[9]
Once when I visited Buddy I found Mrs. Willard braiding a rug out of strips of wool from Mr. Willard's old suits. She'd spent a week on that rug, and I had admired the tweedy browns and greens and blues patterning the braid, but after Mrs. Willard was through, instead of hanging the rug on the wall the way I would have done, she put it down in place of her kitchen mat, and in a few days it was soiled and dull and indistinguishable from any mat you could buy for under a dollar in the Five and Ten.

Here the ambivalence once again: on the one hand we see aesthetic activity deformed, atrophied, but on the other we find, even within this restricted scope, socially creative impulses which, however, have no outlet for aesthetic development, no opportunities for growth.

It is true that these activities never had to become static, unchanging artistic norms. They never became obsolete products; they remained bound to everyday life, feeble attempts to make this sphere more aesthetically pleasing. But the price for this was narrowmindedness. The object could never leave the realm in which it came into being, it remained tied to the household, it could never break loose and initiate communication.

But what would happen if someday we cleared out this realm and opened it only to ourselves and other women? What if we alternated painting our faces with painting on canvas? What if we turned recipes into poetry? What if all these activities were to shed their utilitarian rationale of male approval?

Ann Anders: "On Unravelling and Reknitting a Sweater":
The old one was the first self-made
Grown too large.
The wound up time of urgent experience
Still fills it out.
Weeks of work and sensuality
Not divided into days and nights
Alone or entwined with many others.
The increase and decrease of tension
Attests to density in memory.

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Fetched forth again the largeness appears,
tucks bear witness: from the beginning.
Grown thinner, experience more fragmented
The smooth stitches turn into difficult cable,
Growing upward, lending strength.
Though I knitted narrow strips of blue into the grey,
There was hardly enough wool.
[3/9/76]

Perhaps that is all too simple, too superficial. Attempting to knit the gap between the artistic realm and social reality is problematic in that this gap is not simply the result of foolish blunder, but is rather the result of particular preconditions.

Women succeeded in entering the artistic realm when they gained access to it via the adjoining "pre-aesthetic" realms. In the eighteenth century women were able to enter the realm of literature by means of letters (the epistolary novel), since this was an age in which letters and novels were gaining dignity and the dissolution of rigid formal rules allowed greater flexibility. Experience could be gained in writing private letters. Since letters and diaries have no clearly defined literary niche, it was all right for women to practice on them. Only the Romantics considered conversation—another feminine domain in literature—to be aesthetic activity. Men were amazed by the new tenor, the new tone, the irreverence and more sensual descriptions unique to women's letters, and on occasion they even showed open admiration. It did not take long for this medium to be included in the literary canon.

But it is difficult to merely reach back and link up to these "feminine" media—letters, weaving. It is, in fact, almost more difficult to do this than to work with the "unfeminine" technical media such as film, since these need not contend with being traditionally relegated to the domain of the housewife. We should not foster the false assumptions that our sewing teachers indeed pointed us in the right direction. There is no direct path from the decorative potholder to the tapestries of Abakanovicz. Besides, I am still horrified by the whole ruffles-and-sewing basket business we were subjected to as young girls.

I believe that feminine artistic production takes place by means of a complicated process involving conquering and reclaiming, appropriating and formulating, as well as forgetting and subverting. In the works of those female artists who are concerned with the women's movement, one finds artistic tradition as well as the break with it. It is good—in two respects—that no formal criteria for "feminist art" can be definitively laid down. It enables us to reject categorically the notion of artistic norms, and it prevents renewal of the calcified aesthetics debate, this time under the guise of the feminist "approach."

If, however, women have different assumptions with regard to their sensory approach, their relationship to matter and material, their perception, their experience, their means of processing tactile, visual and acoustic stimuli, their spatial orientation and temporal rhythm—and all these things are what aesthetics meant at one time, according to its original definition as a theory of sensory perception—then one could logically expect to find these things expressed in special forms of mimetic transformation. Put emphatically, this would mean that within the framework of a female cosmology there would be a changed relationship between the subjective artistic appropriation of reality on the one hand, and formal suggestiveness and receptive perception on the other. But it will be nearly impossible to find categorical evidence for this changed relationship: reality is not that logical, and there is no female cosmology either.

There is no proof of a different (female) relationship to detail and generality, to motionlessness and movement, to rhythm and demeanor. I find the only sensible approach to be the search for evidence within individual, concrete texts (pictures, films, etc.), as Virginia Woolf once attempted with Dorothy Richardson's writing.

Virginia Woolf on the language of Dorothy Richardson:[10]
She has invented, or, if she has not invented, developed and applied to her own uses, a sentence which we might call the psychological sentence of the feminine gender. It is of a more elastic fibre than the old, capable of stretching to the extreme, of suspending the frailest particles, of enveloping the vaguest shapes. Other writers of the opposite sex have used sentences of this description and stretched them to the extreme. But there is a difference. Miss Richardson has fashioned her sentence consciously, in order that it may descend to the depths and investigate the crannies of Miriam Henderson's consciousness. It is a woman's sentence, but only in the sense that it is used to describe a woman's mind by a writer who is neither proud nor afraid of anything that she may discover in the psychology of her sex.

Dorothy Richardson on the masculine manner of writing:[11]
The self-satisfied, complacent, know-all condescendingness of their handling of their material. . . . The torment of* all *novels is what is left out. The moment you are aware of it there is torment in them. Bang, bang, bang, on they go, these men's books, like an L.L.C. tram, yet unable to make you forget them, the authors, for a moment.

The exclusion of women from vast areas of production and the public sphere and the fact that most women have been responsible for the biological and social reproduction of the species, as well as the economic, if they are working, has directed women's imagination along other lines. Moreover, the much touted "ahistoricity" of women kept the polarity between intellectual labor and manual labor from becoming too traumatic. The disparate development of the sexes, though origin of so much of women's suffering, fortunately has not yet allowed women's behavior and needs to become reified to the degree found in advanced capitalism. But generations of women paid for this with their banishment into the marital ghetto.

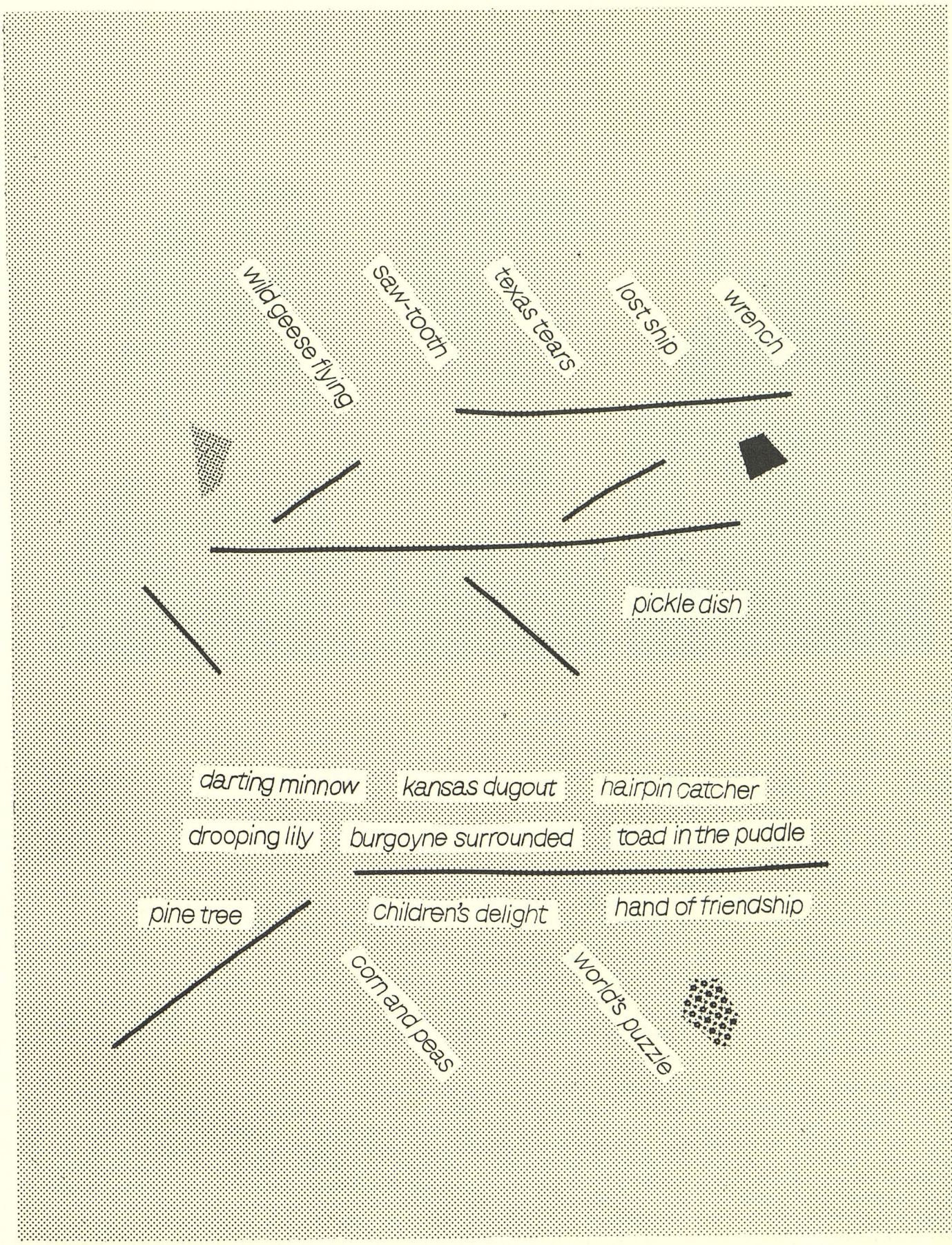
Is there a feminine aesthetic? Certainly there is, if one is talking about *aesthetic awareness* and *modes of sensory perception*. Certainly not, if one is talking about an unusual variant of artistic production or about a painstakingly constructed theory of art. Women's break with the formal, intrinsic laws of a given medium, the release of their imagination—these are unpredictable for an art with feminist intentions. There is, thank heavens, no premeditated strategy which can predict what happens when female sensuality is freed. Because it is a process and historically tentative, we cannot verbally anticipate this freeing of feminine sensuality either at its traditional erotic center (even though there's a lot going on there every month) or in the context of individual choice. We can do it only on the basis of a movement by women for women.

The important thing is that women artists will not let themselves be kept back anymore. They work on canvas, they make films and videotapes, they write and sculpt, they work with metal and with fabric, they are on stage. So let us take a look at what they are doing.

1. Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex* (New York, 1970), p. 161.
2. George Sand, *Meine Lebensbeichte* (Berlin-Leipzig, no date), p. 98.
3. Karl Scheffler, *Die Frau und die Kunst* (Berlin, 1908), p. 29.
4. Chantal Akerman, interview with Claudia Aleman in *Frauen und Film*, 7 (March, 1976).
5. Firestone, *Dialectic of Sex*, p. 159.
6. Verena Stefan, *Hautungen* (1975), English translation under the title *Shedding* (translation by Johanna Moore and Beth Weckmueller) to be published in Spring, 1978 by Daughters, Inc., New York.
7. Lucy Lippard, "Warum separierte Frauenkunst?" in *Feminismus: Kunst und Kreativitat*.
8. Frieda Grafe, "Ein anderer Eindruck vom Begriff meines Korpers," in *Filmkritik* (March, 1976).
9. Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar* (London, 1963), p. 88.
10. Virginia Woolf, "Romance and the Heart" in *Contemporary Writers*, p. 124f.
11. Dorothy Richardson, *Dawn's Left Hand*, p. 202f.

Silvia Bovenschen is finishing her dissertation at the University of Frankfurt on a related subject; it will be published by Suhrkamp. She is the only woman on the editorial staff of Aesthetik Und Kommunikation, *an independent left journal and was editor for their feminist issue.*

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Elizabeth Riley is a painter living in New York.

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Women Talking, Women Thinking*

Joanna Russ



What did we talk about?

I don't remember. We talked so hard and sat so still that I got cramps in my knees. We had too many cups of tea and then didn't want to leave the table to go to the bathroom because we didn't want to stop talking. You will think we talked of revolution but we didn't. Nor did we talk of our own souls. Nor of sewing. Nor of babies. Nor of departmental intrigue. It was politics if by politics you mean the laboratory talk that characters in bad movies are perpetually trying to convey (unsuccessfully) when they Wrinkle Their Wee Brows and say (valiantly—dutifully—after all, *they* didn't write it) "But, Doctor, doesn't that violate Finagle's Constant?" I staggered to the bathroom, released floods of tea, and returned to the kitchen to talk. It was professional talk. It left me grey-faced and with such concentration that I began to develop a headache. We talked about Mary Ann Evans's loss of faith, about Emily Brontë's isolation, about Charlotte Brontë's blinding cloud, about the split in Virginia Woolf's head and the split in her economic situation. We talked about Lady Murasaki, who wrote in a form that no respectable man would touch, Hroswit, a little name whose plays "may perhaps amuse myself," Miss Austen who had no more expression in society than a firescreen or a poker. They did not all write letters, write memoirs, or go on the stage. Sappho—only an ambiguous, somewhat disagreeable name. Corinna? The teacher of Pindar. Olive Schreiner, growing up on the veldt, wrote one book, married happily, and never wrote another. Kate Chopin wrote a scandalous book and never wrote another. (Jean has written nothing.) There was M-ry Sh-ll-y who wrote you know what and Ch-rl-tt- P-rk-ns G-lm-n, who wrote one superb horror story and lots of sludge (was it sludge?), and Ph-ll-s Wh--tl-y who was black and wrote eighteenth-century odes (but it was the eighteenth century) and Mrs. -nn R-dcl-ff- who wrote silly novels and M-rg-r-t C-v-nd-sh and Mrs. -d-n S--thw-rth and Mrs. G--rg--Sh-ld-n and (Miss?) G--rg-tt- H-y-r and B-rb-r- C-rtl-nd and the legion of those who, writing, write not, like the dead Miss B--l-y of the poem who was seduced into bad practices (fudging her endings) and hanged herself in her garter. The sun was going down. I was blind and stiff.

* * *

Twenty years ago I went to college and began to recognize the roof; having dressed for a date (dates were absolutely crucial then) in my low heels, my nylons, my garter belt, my horsehair petticoat, my cotton petticoat, my taffeta skirt, my knit jersey blouse, my circle pin, my gold earrings, my charm bracelet, my waist-cincher, my lipstick, my little bit of eye shadow, my heavy faille coat, my nail polish, my mohair scarf, and my gloves, I went into the dormitory garden to wait. The garden was full of late spring flowers. I had already admired myself in the full-length mirror on the back of my closet door, but standing between the stone walls on the stone-flagged walk, watching the flowers grow ever lighter and more disembodied in the blue twilight—and sitting on the stone bench under the Gothic arches and all that ivy—and we were supposed to get A's and use the library—we were supposed to write papers—we were supposed to be *scholars*—I felt invisible. I felt awful, I wanted to take off all my clothes and step out of my underwear. And then take off my hair and fingernails and my face and my flesh and finally my very bones. Just to step out of it. All the way out of it.

My date said, "There you are!"

*Various excerpts from the forthcoming novel, *On Strike Against God*, to be published in the spring of 1978 by Out and Out Books.

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I've spent a lot of my time in the library here, picking out obscure references to memoirs written by bad ladies two hundred years ago and novels by worse ladies who, although personally blameless, wrote wicked books: *A Romance of the Pyrenees. Marianna or The Puritan's Daughter.* Weird, ghastly stuff. Five romances under the pseudonym *By a Lady.* Domestic sentiment. Gothic castles. Purity. If only I can reduce this pulp to pulp and spread it out into some kind of shape. Dead voices, haunting and terrible: *I want, I need, I hope, I believe.* What sort of homes did they have? Did they do their own cooking? Did they expect to get pregnant every year? (See Mrs. Defoe's journal.) The awful constriction, the huge skirts. Mrs. Pepys' dress allowance ("the poor wretch," her husband called her). "How are we fall'n, fall'n by mistaken rules!" "Women live like Bats or Owls, labour like Beasts, and die like Worms." "Anyone may blame me who likes." "How good it must be to be a man when you want to travel." "John laughs at me, but one expects that in marriage." "It had all been a therapeutic lie. The mind was powerless to save her. Only a man . . ." "I / Revolve in my / Sheath of impossibles—"

Scholars don't usually sit gasping and sobbing in corners of the library stacks.

But they should. They should.

* * *

Conversations with the Tooth Fairy:

When I was five she stood at the foot of my bed in a dream, wearing an airy, blue, nylon-net gown and glittering rhinestone jewelry, with a little rhinestone coronet on her head. Her magic wand was star-topped and she looked just like a Tooth Fairy should.

She was going to give me three wishes.

But I woke up.

And much later:

Last night she came again and sat down on the end of my bed, looking very benevolent, spreading out her blue nylon-net skirts, and recalling to me (even though I was asleep) where I had seen her before—she was somebody I saw in a live stage show when I was four and I'd swear it was the Ice Follies because I remember her in ice skates.

The Tooth Fairy: Good evening, dear child. I am here to help you.

Me: Look here, I'm almost forty. This is ridiculous.

The Fairy: Never mind. To me you will always be a child. Tell me what you want and I shall get it for you.

Me: Thanks but no thanks ha ha. (My standards of wit are pretty lousy in dreams.)

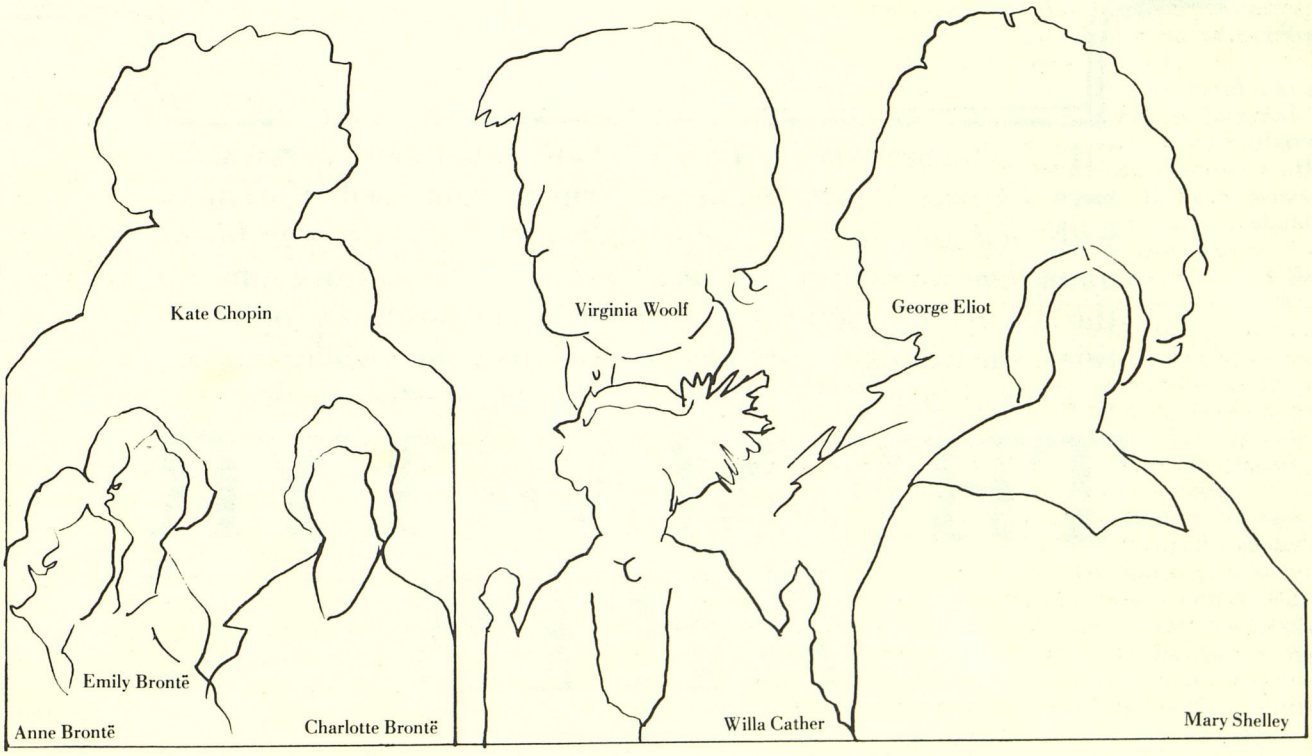
The Fairy: Shall I restore to you your lost heterosexuality so that you may once again on the Late Late Show have strange and brilliant adventures in foreign climes with handsome actors such as Buster Crabbe, Dirk Bogarde, James Mason, and Christopher Lee?—leaving it to you to determine what common characteristics (if any) unites this rather peculiar list because, my dear (to be perfectly frank), you have the damnedest tastes I ever saw.

Me: (sitting bolt upright in terror): No, no, no, no, no, no!

The Fairy (crossing one leg over another, thus revealing she is indeed wearing ice skates, great big clumpy white ones): Well, what *do* you want, for goodness' sakes! Don't be so difficult. (She then mutters under her breath, "What do women want? Dear God, what do they want?")

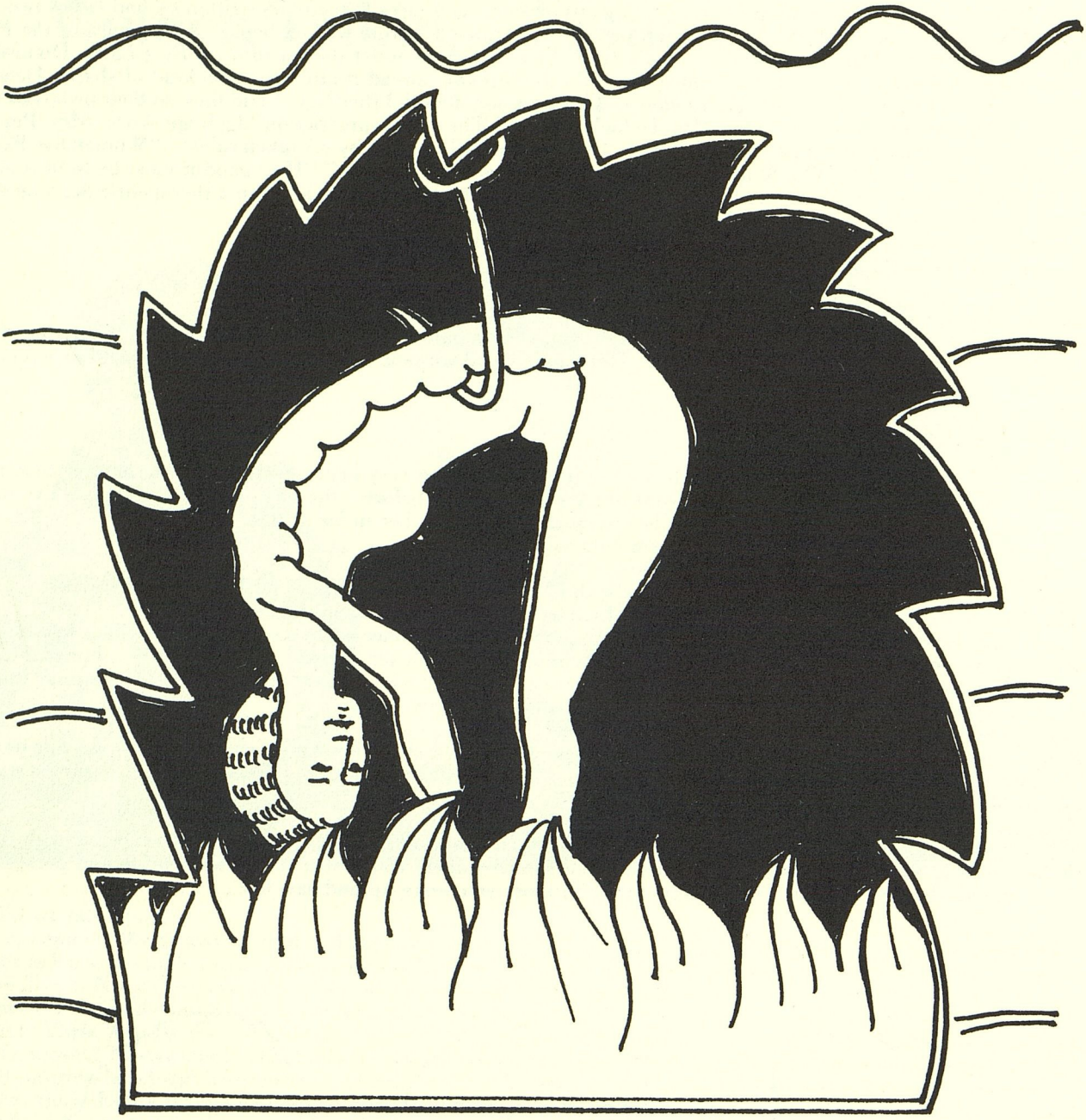
Me: That lousy imitation of Freud—

But here I must break off. The Tooth Fairy cometh not. *Messias ist nicht gekommen.* It's all ours to get, with Mrs. Anne Radcliffe in one hand and a jackhammer (or jennyhammer) in the other, with books and bricks, pride and perseverance, et cetera. Here endeth the first sermon. (Are ninety-nine.) Suppose you woke up and saw her . . . .



Joanna Russ is the author of a novel published by Dell Books, We Who Are About To, *and of the science fiction novel,* The Two of Them, *to be published by Putnam's. This spring Daughters, Inc. will present her fantasy novel,* Kit's Story: A Tale of Magic. *She lives in Bellevue, Washington.*

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"If . . . you are asked to do a lot of giving without . . . reward," says *Fascinating Womanhood*, which ranks self-effacement with God and the flag, "remember, *when you cast your bread upon the waters, it comes back buttered.*" The phrase sums up the martyred woman today: passive and awed by powerful tides, she willingly surrenders everything to fate while standing in a sea of grease. There–isolated, unabated–she practices . . .

THE MARTYR ARTS

Arlene Ladden

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A look at early Christian history shows that woman's lot was anything but a lot. Man's marriage to woman was grudgingly conceded as a necessary evil.[1] She was a "foe to friendship, an inevitable penance . . . a domestic peril."[2] It was officially questioned whether woman had a soul (in 585, the Council of Macon decided that she did, but only by a single vote).[3] Repeatedly admonished to "be in subjection to [her] own husband,"[4] she was, at best, "a natural temptation, a coveted calamity."[5] A weak vessel for man's seed, she was a plaque on which he could mount his sexual organ.

For the religious woman, who naturally *believed* her life worthless, there were few alternatives. She could dumbly worship the saints or, if ambitious enough, she could emulate them: St. Simon Stylites ate very little; St. John of the Cross licked the sores of lepers.[6] And while some women performed no less austerely (St. Rose ate nothing but sheep's gall, ashes and bitter herbs, and she drank the blood of a sick patient), many—martyred through constant devotion and sacrifice—displayed a peculiar brand of sensuality.

Veronica Guliani—who went to bed with, and kissed, and suckled a lamb, the lamb being a symbol of Christ—is perhaps atypical. But not Mechthilde of Madgeburg, who preferred to see Jesus as "charming," affectionate and 18 years old. Nor Margaretha of Ypern, who thought herself "engaged" to Jesus. Nor Christine Ebner, who imagined she carried Jesus' child. The church deliberately inspired such sensuous imaginings. "Ever let the Bridegroom sport with you within [your chamber]," St. Jerome wrote to a virgin. "When sleep falls on you, He will come beside the wall and will put his hand through the hole in the door and will touch your belly . . ."[7] With nuns "marrying" Christ in a formal ceremony—their "I love Christ into whose bed I have entered" being roughly equivalent to the modern "I do"—it is not surprising that, while most martyrs sought to transcend the body, female martyrdom at times unveiled a complexion entirely its own. Pocked with the scars of lacerations and burnings, flushed with desire for a polygamous, heterosexual Jesus, it encouraged a centuries-long tradition of woman's self-sacrifice and suffering for man. For only by cleaving to a seeming savior or holy man could a woman hope to rise even a fraction as much as she had fallen.

Take the example of Margaret-Mary Alacoque, a particularly fervent practitioner. She shafted a novice for rivaling her holiness, lest she rival her also in the Savior's affections. And while her frequent convulsions were probably due to austerity—she drank mostly dirty wash-water, and drank nothing at all from Thursday to Sunday (though she occasionally licked up vomit with her tongue)—she was hotly feverish with love of Jesus, even tattooing his name on her chest with a small knife. (When the scars healed, she burned in the insignia with a candle.) Such actions were proof of a beautiful soul.

Suffering has long been a value in the west. An attribute of saints and a must for martyrs, it has also lately been required of the artist, who, as Susan Sontag aptly notes, now replaces the saint as exemplary sufferer.[8] And Sontag's tenet, I think, can be reversed: the saint, or martyr, was a kind of artist in earlier times. Aestheticians like Jacques Maritain would seem to agree, seeing art as "mak[ing] a form shine on the matter," form being "the profound splendor of the soul shining through . . . the principle . . . of pain and passion." Living in true perfection, he says, "may be metaphorically described as an art . . . an art which only the saints master fully."[9]

Now, that Margaret-Mary wasn't perfect is not important; it's enough that the church assures us she was. What is important is that she was an exemplary sufferer if there ever was one. She suffered; she suffered wholly and completely—and this gave her a decided advantage. For, notes Sontag, quoting from the diary of a suffering artist, only through such total surrender can we "disarm the power of suffering, make it our own creation, our own choice,"[10] By giving in to suffering, we mold it, reshape it. We sublimate suffering into art.

That life and art can be one and the same is an old idea. John Dewey[11] upheld it, defining art as any activity reshaping experience more meaningfully, coherently and vividly than ordinary life allows. "Emotion," he says, "is . . . the cementing force." By selecting and coloring, it unifies the disparate events of experience, transforming them into *an* experience. "The enemies of the aesthetic," says Dewey," are neither the practical or the intellectual. They are the hum-drum."

However repugnant Margaret-Mary's actions may seem, by male aesthetic criteria Margaret-Mary was an artist and her martyrdom was art. It dictated her every action, and her every action was contrived to reflect a beautiful soul. Martyrdom provided her with a form for her life, and through it she assumed control over the fragmented matter of her existence. She indulged in suffering; it engrossed her, diverted her, and thoroughly absorbed her. Pain became objectified. Life became a passionate performance (indeed, her breast resembled a theater marquee), soulful, dramatic, cohesive, consistent and meaningful. By classical definitions of art, her life, in assuming a magnitude and order, fulfilled the conditions of the beautiful. In fact, martyrdom for Jesus, and later secularized martyrdom for man, has been one of woman's most pervasive and enduring traditional art forms.

For Margaret-Mary was not alone in indulging in suffering; other women matched her passion. Christine Ebner etched out a cross on the skin of her chest and tore it off. Mary Magdalene dei Pazzi had herself cut, trampled, whipped and burned. Christine of St. Trond had herself bound, hung, racked, buried and baked. Surely, Christianity's chapter on the martyrs and mystics is one of the most astounding chapters in history. Less astounding, perhaps, are the women who, like Felicula or Saints Agnes and Agatha, opted for tortures over marriage. These women were saving themselves for Christ and wouldn't succumb. But there were also martyrs among those who did, like Therese, a nineteenth century madwoman and would-be mystic whose longing for Christ drove her insane until finally, distracted, demoralized and institutionalized, she wrote: "Now I only believe in God and suffering. I feel it is necessary to get married."[12] Therese was deranged, but her resignation reflected a sordid truth: for many who lived in later centuries, marriage itself had become yet another form of martyrdom, supplying an aesthetic where none existed.

The altruistic female sacrificing for a husband was an old ideal. The twelfth-century Marie de France featured her in *Eliduc* where a wife graciously surrenders her husband to a woman he loves. Years later, she welcomes the new wife into her convent where, sisters in Christ, the two women are bound again by love for a single man, the husband and Christ being, metaphorically, one and the same.

By the fourteenth century, with Chaucer's and Boccaccio's patient Griselda, the emphasis had changed.[13] A female Job, Griselda stands obediently by while her husband humiliates her, repudiates her—even when she believes he murdered her children; her only concern is to meet his wants, however cruel they seem to her. Now the love of one woman for another is strongly de-emphasized—relief can only come from man—and man's worth is wholly unquestioned, woman's soul seeming all the greater for his cruelty.

It was this ideal which began to flourish in the eighteenth century. Because Protestantism had changed woman's role, transposing mystical values to the domestic sphere, later centuries saw the revival of the martyrdom aesthetic in a new light. Aestheticians since Fichte had taught that beauty was subjective—a manifestation of the beautiful soul—many believing, with Muller, that the highest art was the art of life.[14] Now, soulful woman could approach the sublime without ev-

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er leaving her immediate neighborhood, not to mention foregoing a trip to heaven. Just as, classically, art was a lofty reflection of nature, the good wife was a lofty reflection of man, so lofty in fact, that she ceased to have substance altogether (a Dorsetshire wedding ceremony likened her to "a Mirrour which hath no image of its own").[15] A young girl (*pupilla*) was said to exist in the pupil of every man's eye,[16] and while this classically meant man's perceptions were soulful, now it stood for another tenet: that woman should only exist in the glazed eyes of man. She was wife only—merely a part of her husband's family, *famulus* meaning servant or slave. As Fichte had also taught: "[Woman's] own dignity requires that she should give herself up entirely as she is . . . and should utterly lose herself in [her husband]."[17]

Now Christ was absent. As with Jane Eyre in the Bronte novel, woman was to persist dutifully in soulful devotion to a cynical master and, eventually, his contemplation of her—distanced and mystical in her suffering goodness—might touch his soul and effect his overt transformation. Just as Jane restored the blinded Rochester's vision, so could woman, like the highest art, elevate a husband's vision, turning cynic into believer, teaching and delighting. A classical representation of beauty, she incited compassion and pity, if not fear.

But such idealizations were fiction, pure fairy tale. Bronte's Jane was, in real life, de Sade's Justine. A perpetual victim, she often suffered for men who were unrelenting, unrepenting.

With religious executions a thing of the past and passionate martyrdom for Christ wholly repugnant to the Protestant ethic, the clergy, who now found marriage desirable, transferred the imagery of Jesus onto the husband with new, if pedestrian, significance. The female martyr was now plunked down in the family cottage where, virtuous and sexless, she suffered for her family. There, mystical and beautiful, she persevered. Determined and powerless, she persevered. John Ruskin's directive was typical: "[Woman must be] instinctively, infallibly wise—wise, not for self-development, but for self-renunciation."[18]

In fact, she hadn't much choice. The rise of capitalism had, by the eighteenth century, aggravated woman's economic dependence while it banished traditional duties from the home. Domestic spinning, weaving, brewing and baking had once been essential and, however tedious, had used up time. Now, with moral prohibitions still further diminishing woman's activities, idleness exposed the void. By romantically and utterly surrendering to suffering, woman might become absorbed; life's form might assume a grandiose beauty, masking the pettiness of its content. As before, if woman could exalt her suffering, she could shape it, perfect it; she could languish in contemplation of her own sorrow. Formalized and ritualized, it aesthetically formed and informed her life. And the aesthetic became an anaesthetic. For no matter how sentient martyrdom's manifestations, it numbed woman to her own insignificance, protecting her from the more genuine pain of small emotions. The niggling void became flushed with feeling, feeling believed to soften and deepen the soul. Or so believed Madame de Stael, whose exposition on suffering also credited the virtues of habitual submisiveness. Her tract was written to justify suicide. No wonder.[19]

Martyrdom was still an art: no longer for Jesus, no longer even for a powerful man whose cruelty masked a beautiful soul. It was now martyrdom for any man, be he a stern patriarch or a sodden drunk, or a stern patriarch *and* a sodden drunk. As Tolstoy saw it: Wives should be loving, unobtrusive and unassuming—"comforters of the drunken, the weak, and the dissolute."[20] Or in Fichte's words: The wife of a degenerate husband "is held all the more in esteem the gen-

. . . she bears it," though still, she must appear to be "lost in the man of her choice."[21] Wet nurses to alcoholics, wives soaked their men with spirit, and disappeared.

In 1920, in a perverse tribute to pained sensibility, Margaret-Mary Alacoque was canonized. Her emblem was the Sacred Heart. It was increasingly presented more and more bloodily—grotesque, fiery, disembodied, now an isolate lump of throbbing muscle—the pulsing symbol of a female aesthetic and the badge of hundreds of Catholic schools.

The good woman, it thumps, is all heart.

But its beat is getting ever weaker. Like the allure of habitual sacrifice itself. Like the utter devotion (submission) for which it stands—one passion, indivisible, with guilt and oppression for all. Woman's fluid acquiescence has leaked its glamour, and women are letting women know it.

Sacrifice is self-abuse. Death to martyrdom.

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1. Since woman was considered a temptress irresistible to the weak, St. Paul preferred marriage when adultery seemed inevitable, conceding: "It is better to marry than to burn." (I Corinthians 7:9).

2. Salimbene, in *From St. Francis to Dante: Translations from the Chronicle of the Franciscan Salimbene (1221–1288)*, 2nd ed., ed. and trans. G. G. Coulton (London: David Nutt, 1907), p. 97. Salimbene falsely attributes these epithets to St. Chrysostom, whose own expression was equally appalling, if less succinct.

3. Bernard Murstein, *Love, Sex and Marriage Through the Ages* (New York: Springer Publishing Co., 1974), p. 94.

4. I Peter 3:1. These sentiments, with virtually identical wording, are expressed also in Ephesians 5:22, Collosians 3:18 and, later, in the first enduring systematization of church law, Gratian's *Decretum* (c. 1140), quoted in *Not in God's Image*, ed. Julia O'Faolain and Lauro Martines (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), p. 130.

5. Salimbene, p. 97.

6. For factual information relating to the saints, martyrs and mystics, I have primarily referred to Henry Osborn Taylor, "Mystic Visions of Ascetic Women," in *The Medieval Mind* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959), vol. I, pp. 458–486; Rev. S. Baring-Gould, *The Lives of the Saints*, rev. ed., 16 vols. (Edinburgh: John Grant, 1914); Donald Attwater's *The Penguin Dictionary of Saints* (New York: Penguin Books, 1965); and, for the more gruesome cases, Gordon Rattray Taylor, *Sex in History* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), pp. 31–50 and *passim* as well as Havelock Ellis, "The Auto-Erotic Factor in Religion," in *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (New York: Random House, 1936), vol. I, pp. 310–325.

7. Epistle 22 in *Select Letters of St. Jerome*, trans. F. A. Wright (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 109. The translator has rendered "belly" (*ventrem*) as "flesh"; perhaps he has censored the saint in the interest of delicacy.

8. "The Artist as Exemplary Sufferer," in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Dell, 1961), p. 42.

9. *Art et Scholastique* (Paris: Louis Rouart et Fils, 1927), pp. 20–21, 44, 46. My translations.

10. Sontag, quoting Caesar Pavese, p. 43.

11. "Having an Experience," in *Art as Experience* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1934), pp. 35–37.

12. Therese's case is treated by Ellis, pp. 316–319.

13. See Chaucer's "Clerk's Tale" and the tenth tale of the tenth day in Boccaccio's *Decameron*.

14. For a summary discussion of aesthetic theory from Baumgarten to Knight, see Leo Tolstoy's *What is Art? and Essays on Art*, trans. Alymer Maude (London: Oxford University Press, 1930), pp. 92–110.

15. Quoted by Gwendolyn Bridges and Robert Utter in *Pamela's Daughters* (1963; rpt. New York: Russell and Russell, 1972), p. 25.

16. For a description of this etymology—so cloyingly written as to belie its true meaning—see Iwan Bloch, *The Sexual Life of Our Time*, 6th ed., trans. M. Eden Paul (London: Rebman Ltd., 1908), p. 78.

17. "Fundamental Principles of the Rights of Family," in *The Science of Rights*, trans. A.E. Kroger (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1869), p. 402.

18. "Of Queens' Gardens," in *Sesame and Lilies: Three Lectures*, rev. and enl. (New York: Metropolitan, 1871), p. 152.

19. "Reflexions sur le suicide," in *Ouvres de Madame la Baronne de Stael-Holstein* (Paris: Chez Lefevre, 1858), vol. III, pp. 711–752.

20. Tolstoy, p. 326.

21. Fichte, pp. 424 and 441. Fichte remarks (p. 441): "She has the *power* to withdraw her freedom, if she could have the *will* to do so; but that is the very point: she cannot rationally will to be free." In other words, any woman who chooses freedom is necessarily irrational; thus, she cannot sensibly assess her motives or use her freedom. It is curiously circular reasoning.

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Korin: *Murasaki Shikibu* (c. 1700)

THE STRAITS OF LITERATURE AND HISTORY

Carrie Rickey

With whom does history empathize? For Walter Benjamin, "The answer is inevitable: with the victor."[1] The reciprocity between historian and ruler is tacit: the historian makes official the ruler's authority and the ruler's authority gives the historian's work validity. This is not to suggest that no histories exist that subvert this premise. Literature is a "history" which in most cases serves the prevailing order because its very existence confirms that order's cultural richness. But literature is privileged because it can employ language's nuance and allusiveness and from the inside gently or joltingly criticize that order. Because literature is by implication a cultural artifact of a ruling order, subversive or not, it is a historical spoil owing as much to the anonymous toil that gave the writer time to pursue an idea as to the original mind that conceived it.

The connection between a ruling order and its cultural artifacts is like a strait separating two bodies of water intimately linked in time and geography. The straits of literature and history are evidenced in Japanese writing of the Heian period (794–1185 A.D.) which commands interest because of its richness of description, its pioneering of new forms, and the fact that its leading practitioners were women. Many social and cultural conditions set the stage for this unprecedented predominance of literary women. According to Ivan Morris, "Though they [peasants, fishermen, forestmen and other laborers] contributed to the vast majority of the [Heian period's] population and were the only economically productive class in the country, we virtually have no authentic information about their lives."[2] What we today know of Heian life has been garnered from the literature of that period—especially from Murasaki Shikibu's *The Tale of Genji* and Sei Shonagon's *The Pillow Book*—but these literary milestones detailing Heian court life treat a population of only about one-tenth of one percent of the five million population in Japan at that time.[3]

Murasaki's and Sei's originality of form and observation is unparalleled in the history of literature. These two women were contemporaries; both were brought to court from the provinces because of their talent and intelligence. Due to the complications of Japan's clan politics, there was a "court" with many satellite courts, and it is not known whether these two women ever lived in the same palace, although they were aware of each other's writings. Their social position was substantially different from that of the women outside the court who "toiled arduously, were subject to harsh treatment by their men, bred young, and died early."[4]

Murasaki and Sei are figures of incalculable significance because they were pioneers, because they produced work in a period which had articulated for itself a distinct masculine and feminine aesthetic, and because they wrote in Japanese at a time when the language for official and theological affairs was Chinese (cf. the European use of Latin as an "official" language). Not only did they establish traditions of the psychological novel and the diary, but their writings preserved the Japanese language for subsequent generations. In their day women were restricted to the use of Japanese while men exchanged ideas and conversation in Chinese. Even today the distinction between native syllabary and the Chinese characters incorporated into the language reflects this gender dichotomy. The native characters are called *onnade*, or "woman's hand," while Chinese characters are known as *otokomoji*, "man's letters."[5] Sei's writings are still studied today for the purity of her Japanese diction; she avoided Chinese-isms—an accomplishment comparable to writing in English without using any Latinate words.

In the time of Murasaki and Sei there were no narrative literary traditions to maintain. Japanese literature before their time had been poetry of a calculatedly oblique nature; a long prologomena was necessary to explain the poem's meaning. What a remarkable achievement to conceive a psychological novel—as Murasaki did—where a poem appears as an organic expression within the context of a narrative and requires no annotation to be understood. Murasaki fused the traditional poetic form with her narrative innovation, the intimate epic. Sei's *Pillow Book* was so called because she suggested to the empress that notebooks of historical documents could be recycled by making them into a pillow (a word that referred to a diary as well as a head rest); Sei filled her notebook with lists, odd facts and observations from the present, thereby annotating the leaves of official history with her lively opinions.[6] For both these women, objectivity was the domain of the historian and untenable because it neutralized differing positions. Objects and people, in the writings of Murasaki and Sei, have innumerable facets. They intimated the spirit of an object or a person by bombarding the reader with dense description: lists, textures, physical and natural detail. Collectively their historical truth is compelling because they replace "objectivity" with opinionation.

But these two contemporaries reflected different attitudes about their culture. Sei begins a chapter of her book with: "When I make myself imagine what it is like to be one of those women who live at home, faithfully serving their husbands—women who have not a single exciting prospect in life yet believe they are perfectly happy—I am filled with scorn."[7] In a passage where Murasaki describes Genji's (and by implication her own) view of the novel, Genji observes, "Without it what should we know of how people lived in the past from the age of the Gods down to the present day? For history books . . . show us only one corner of life; whereas these diaries and romances which I see piled around you contain, I am sure, the most minute information about people's private affairs."[8] Sei and Murasaki charted divergent routes in their writing: Sei was an empiricist recording impressions of contemporary Heian manners; she lacked the self-consciousness of Murasaki, who fashioned a world in the indeterminate past in order to best intuitively comment on life in her immediate present. Sei's literary concerns were the refined tastes of the nobility and the freshness of nature. Murasaki was less impressionistic and more analytic in her evaluation of Heian society. She continuously tells us that it was best to be born a man of

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imperial blood and live at the court. But she was keenly aware of the hierarchies within the aristocracy and observed the tension between provincials and the court clique, as well as sensitively articulating the social restrictions limiting the mobility of the lower ranks within the court.

A number of factors informed the attitudes Sei and Murasaki expressed. The birth of a woman was a happy event because in the marriage politics of Heian society a woman might grow up to marry the emperor. It was much easier in their day for a woman of "inferior" birth to marry a man of noble rank than vice versa. The professions which brought a lower-rank man to the capital—scholar or priest, say—would not automatically give him ingress to the imperial circle, while it seems likely that Sei and Murasaki were brought to the court because of their reputations as women of wit and sensibility. In Heian Japan a woman was allowed both to inherit and own property. The civil codes expressly forbade wife-beating, although the punishment for this was two degrees less than assaulting "other people."[9] But these facts don't pinpoint the complex and inbred quality of Heian life, which is best described by the Chinese proverb: "The people are as far from the Emperor as from heaven." Japanese appropriation of China's governmental centralization produced a bureaucracy so awkward in this land of decentralized clans that the delegation of authority was carried to extreme lengths; the source of authority was, accordingly, far removed from the functionary who directly wielded it. Because the real power was exercised by ministers and other imperial subalterns, the emperor was left with two functions: to encourage new art forms and fashion rituals of piety from the religious hybrid of Shinto and Buddhist beliefs. Women were excluded from public affairs, but they played a tremendous role in the Heian court. A well-born woman had leisure and imperial encouragement for creation and contemplation denied to male counterparts busy with official duties and polygamous pursuits (the man at the Heian court was expected to have a wife and a few mistresses).

If Murasaki's and Sei's writings are an index to female sexual options during the Heian period, aristocratic women enjoyed a multiplicity of partners as well. Later ages would revile Sei and Murasaki for their "foully licentious"[10] descriptions, but promiscuity was a vital element of their culture The largely endogamous Heian court was energized by the covert alliances of provincials with sovereigns and their subalterns. The ruling clan of the Heian period—the Fujiwaras—never commanded significant military strength but established power by marrying their daughters to sovereigns. The famous Fujiwara Michinaga was father-in-law of two emperors, grandfather of a third, grandfather and greatgrandfather of a fourth, grandfather and father-in-law of a fifth.[11] This kind of inbreeding was the substructure of the court clique. The nominal source of power, this clique was attractive because it nurtured the creation of art. But it needed the vitality of provincials like Sei and Murasaki to regenerate its incestuous ranks.

Once at court, Sei and Murasaki became insiders who made observations on the social arts at a time when manners were politics and politics culture. Murasaki wrote of a picture competition designed by Genji to rechannel court enmities to less destructive ends: "It was indeed a moment in the history of our country when the whole energy of the nation seemed to be concentrated upon the search for the prettiest method of mounting paper scrolls."[12]

Murasaki's and Sei's importance is that while they operated in a culture that regarded women as inferior to men, they never believed that of themselves. Although in her diary Murasaki repeatedly alluded to her father's regret that because of her great intelligence she had not been born male, she characterized the richness of both male and female experiences in *Genji*. Although it is clear in *Genji* that men have more options available to them, women are equal in wit, intelligence and style. Sei, perhaps because of her position as the empress' favorite, is much more interested in the doings of imperial ladies than those of gentlemen. Murasaki's and Sei's writing was expressly power-identified at a time when power was not so much a link with male dominance as it was one expression in a complex social milieu in which women participated. Murasaki and Sei dealt with emotions that are universally intelligible and exist cross-culturally—unlike the objective specificities of the official histories and philosophies in which the men of their day engaged. Educated women were able to act and write less conventionally than were men of comparable status.

Could a Heian man have created work like Murasaki and Sei? The self-conscious Heian court was totally aware of the sexual division of speech and the exclusion of women from the public sphere. Only at court could women "circulate" and not be expected to hide behind fans and screens, the way propriety demanded women do outside the court. The "masculine" style, identified by scholars of Japanese literature as well as by Murasaki and Sei in various appreciations of male qualities, was "the directness of utterance and concern with society."[13] The "feminine" preference was taken to be the interest in suggestion and intuition—which was the style imitated by men when they wrote to women or expressed themselves in affairs of the heart. A man could have written in the style of Murasaki and Sei, and, indeed, some men assumed the feminine voice and pretended to be women authors. But the incisiveness and sensibility of these female impersonators is inferior to the work of Murasaki and Sei. The inference that women sensed nuance in affairs of state while men were consigned blindly to conduct these affairs leads to a simplistic "women feel/men think" conclusion that fails to cut through psychology or historicism. Men couldn't create work like Murasaki and Sei, even though they tried. These women were successful in capturing the range of experience and feeling of both sexes.

Why were they successful? They glorified a shining nobility. They catalogued and ordered a courtly etiquette rich in gestural nuance, which inspired contemporary court



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behavior. They articulated a feminine position to which men could respond. Both provincials, they described a life outside the court that seemed raw and exotic to the inbred Heian court. Murasaki characterized the province/capital dichotomy when she wrote about Genji's scrolls made during his exile on the Suma coast: "Amid intense excitement . . . [they] produced a roll containing Genji's sketches at Suma . . . so masterly a hand working at complete leisure and far from the distracting influences which beset an artist in town. They saw so vividly presented both the stern manner of his life there and in some sort the feelings which this rustic life had aroused in everyone used to every luxury and indulgence."[14] Soon after *The Tale of Genji* appeared at court, Genji was adopted as a Shinto deity.[15]

Sei's open competition with men—even with those of a higher rank—gave the Heian court a model of an openly combative woman who refused to acquiesce to the prevailing notions of female propriety. She writes with glee how she embarrassed the minister Nobutsune (who was Murasaki's cousin): "One day when Nobutsune was serving as Intendant in the Office of Palace Works he sent a sketch to one of the craftsmen explaining how a certain piece of work should be done. 'Kindly execute in this fashion,' he added in Chinese characters. I happened to notice the piece of paper and it was the most preposterous writing I had ever seen. Next to his message I wrote, 'If you do the work in this style, it will certainly turn out strangely.' The document found its way to the imperial apartment, and everyone who saw it was greatly amused—except, of course, Nobutsune, who was furious and after this held a grudge against me."[16] Murasaki acidly noted in her diary, "Someone [Sei] who makes such an effort to be different from others is bound to fall in people's esteem and I can only think her future will be a hard one. She is a gifted woman, to be sure . . . how can things turn out well for such a woman?"[17]

Sei and Murasaki challenged the religious as well as social assumptions of their society. They shaped as well as recorded their civilization; there are few other instances of such literary power and evocativeness. History regards Heian Japan as a golden age whose achievements rank with those of Byzantium, Athens, and Renaissance Italy. The work of these two women recorded that period with greater depth and insight than any other contemporary cultural products, so much so that virtually all that is known about the period has been learned from their writings.

Two questions remain: What is the deeper meaning of a "golden age"? What was Murasaki's and Sei's relationship to the golden age they so consummately characterized? An age is "golden" in contrast to the generations of dross preceding and succeeding it. An age is "golden" because cultural achievements complement political strength and together give the impression of an ideal social harmony. Cultural achievements in Heian were enjoyed, as is so often the case, by a few at the expense of many. Like two facing mirrors, the literature reflected the glory of the ruling class and vice versa. But there were some distortions. In reading these works—as literature or as historical documents—there is a striking double edge to each. Murasaki's choice to place her tale in the indeterminate past suggests two contradictory readings: Did the paucity of excitement and intelligence at the court encourage her to invent a perfect and brilliant hero, or was court life so thrilling she was inspired to glorify it? Whichever, there is throughout Murasaki's novel a wistfulness of "wouldn't it be nice if it were this way" which suggests dissatisfaction with the way it was, and the characters still alive at the close of the novel are so morally and intellectually inferior to Genji that her conclusion has a hopeless tone. Sei's devotion to the imperial family and her contempt for the lower orders (an attitude that prompted a Japanese scholar to call her a "spiritual cripple"[18]) reveals a mindset that for the Heian court was good breeding but for the modern reader is patronizing and blind. Sei's circumscribed vision and partisanship today says more about the exclusion of the lower classes from Heian society by omission than do the scanty histories from the period.

Sei's and Murasaki's historical reflections are powerful and moving, simultaneously evocative of Heian pageantry and of the sadness of a society where leisure and culture was reserved for a chosen few. No culture, no "golden age" wants to be tarnished by an enumeration of its prejudices and oppressions. Murasaki's and Sei's literature both criticized and apotheosized their era and, in doing so, exemplifies the straits of literature and history.

1. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969). From "Theses on the Philosophy of History," p. 256.
2. Ivan Morris, *The World of the Shining Prince* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1964), p. 83.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Morris, p. 199.
5. Morris, p. 195.
6. Sei Shonagon, *The Pillow Book of Sei Shonagon* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1967). Translated and edited by Ivan Morris.
7. Sei Shonagon, p. 39.
8. Marasaki Shikibu, *The Tale of Genji* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1977). Translated by Edward Seidensticker.
9. Morris, p. 90.
10. Quoted in Morris, p. 45.
11. Morris, p. 44.
12. Murasaki Shikibu.
13. Donald Keene, in *Half the World*, edited by Arnold Toynbee (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973), p. 255.
14. Murasaki Shikibu.
15. Parker Tyler, "Prince Genji: The Hero and His Culture," *Art News*, Nov., 1958, p. 180.
16. Sei Shonagon.
17. Murasaki quoted in introduction to Shonagon by Morris.
18. Morris, introduction to Shonagon.

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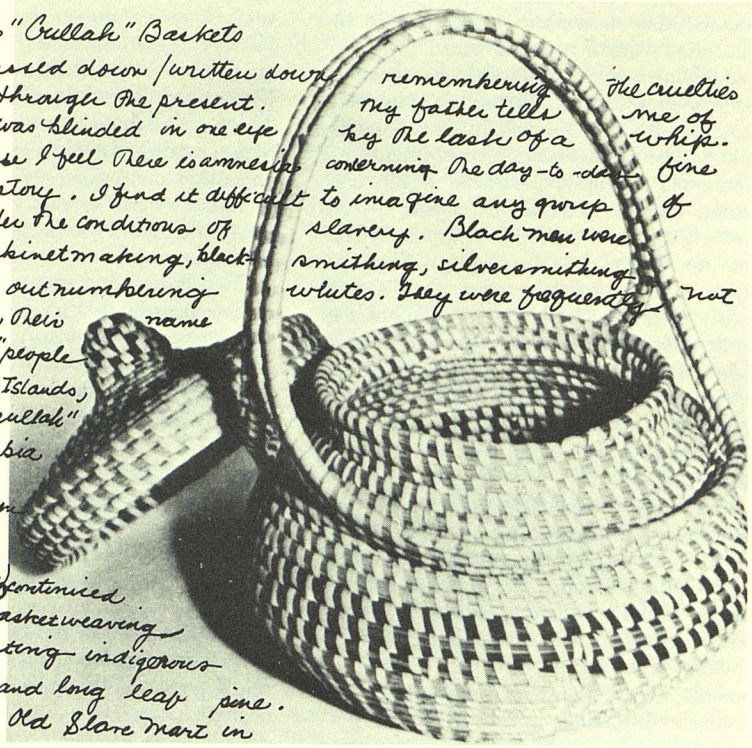
Anonymous: *The Picture Competition* (1554)

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Afro-Carolinian "Gullah" Baskets

Each black family has its oral history passed down (written down remembering the cruelties and atrocities under slavery, reconstruction, on through the present. my father tells me of by the lash of a whip. my great grandmother, a slave in Maryland who was blinded in one eye concerning the day-to-day I include the adjacent eye-witness accounts because I feel there is amnesia points of the more unpleasant aspects of American history. I find it difficult to imagine any group of people having the positive motivation to create under the conditions of slavery. Black men were apprenticed in male gender related crafts such as cabinetmaking, blacksmithing, silversmithing although laws were passed to prevent these from outnumbering whites. They were frequently not allowed to sign their work nor were written accounts in their name generally made of their transactions. The "Gullah" people lived in the 17 and 1800's between Mt. Pleasant, Sea Islands, and Sullivan's Island, South Carolina. (The word "gullah" is derived from Angola, Africa) People from the Senegambia region and the Congo-Angola region made up 70% of the area's population, shipped from Africa between 1752 and 1808. The women brought from the Senegambia region of Africa (Gambia to Sierra Leone) continued the traditionally female gender related craft of basketweaving using West African coiling techniques incorporating indigenous materials such as marshgrass, palmetto leaves, and long leaf pine. Replicas of these baskets are sold today at the Old Slave Mart in Charleston, South Carolina.

African traditional crafts were, unfortunately, lost in my family and replaced by Anglo-American crafts.... Aunts, my mother's sisters, crocheted and my father taught me how to knit.



"Rev. Dr. Staughton, formerly of Philadelphia, often stated, that when he lived at Georgetown, S. C. he could tell the doings of one of the slaveholders of the Baptist church there by his prayers at the prayer meeting. 'If,' said he, 'that man was upon good terms with his slaves, his words were cold and heartless as frost; if he had been whipping a man, he would pray with life; but if he had left a woman whom he had been flogging, tied to a post in his cellar, with a determination to go back and torture her again, O! how he would pray.' The Rev. Cyrus P. Grosvenor of Massachusetts can confirm the above statement by Dr. Staughton.

"Rev. Joseph Hough, a Baptist minister, formerly of Springfield, Mass. now of Plainfield, N. H. while traveling in the south, a few years ago, put up one night with a Methodist family, and spent the Sabbath with them. While there, one of the female slaves did something which displeased her mistress. She took a chisel and mallet, and very deliberately cut off one of her toes."

Eye-witness accounts from "Slavery as It Is," Arno reprint, New York Times (paperback), 1969.

"An honorable friend, who stands high in the state and in the nation," was *present at the* burial of a female slave in Mississippi, who *had been whipped to death* at the stake by her master, because she was gone longer of an errand to the neighboring town than her master thought necessary. Under the lash she protested that she was ill, and was obliged to rest in the fields. To complete the climax of horror, she was delivered of a dead infant while undergoing the punishment."

Mr. GIDDINGS, member of Congress from Ohio, in his speech in the House of Representatives, Feb. 13, 1839, made the following statement:

"On the beautiful avenue in front of the Capitol, members of Congress, during this session, have been compelled to turn aside from their path, to permit a coffle of slaves, males and females, *chained to each other by their necks*, to pass on their way to this *national slave market*."

Rev. JAMES NOURSE, a Presbyterian clergyman of Mifflin co. Penn., whose father is, we believe, a slaveholder in Washington City, says,—

"The Rev. Mr. M——, now of the Huntingdon Presbytery, after an absence of many months, was about visiting his old friends on what is commonly called the 'Eastern Shore.' Late in the afternoon, on his journey, he called at the house of Rev. A. C. of P——town, Md. With this brother he had been long acquainted. Just at that juncture Mr. C. was about proceeding to whip a colored female, who was his slave. She was firmly tied to a post in FRONT of his dwelling-house. The arrival of a clerical visitor at such a time, occasioned a temporary delay in the execution of Mr. C.'s purpose. But the delay was only temporary; for not even the presence of such a guest could destroy the bloody design. The guest interceded with all the mildness yet earnestness of a brother and new visitor. But all in vain, 'the woman had been SAUCY and must be punished.' The cowhide was accordingly produced, and the *Rev. Mr. C*, a large and very stout man, applied it 'manfully' on 'woman's' bare and 'shrinking flesh.' I say *bare*, because you know that the slave women generally have but three or four inches of the arm near the shoulder covered, and the neck is left entirely exposed. As the cowhide moved back and forward, striking right and left, on the head, neck and arms, at every few strokes the sympathizing guest would exclaim, 'O, brother C. desist.' But brother C. pursued his brutal work, till, after inflicting about *sixty* lashes, the woman was found to be suffused with blood on the hinder part of her neck, and under her frock between the shoulders. Yet this Rev. gentleman is well esteemed in the church—was, three or four years since, moderator of the synod of Philadelphia, and yet walks abroad, feeling himself unrebuked by law or gospel. Ah, sir

WITNESSES.	TESTIMONY.
Mr. Micajah Ricks, Nash County, North Carolina, in the Raleigh "Standard," July 18, 1838.	"Ranaway, a negro woman and two children; a few days before she went off, *I burnt her with a hot iron*, on the left side of her face, *I tried to make the letter M*."
Mr. Asa B. Metcalf, Kingston, Adams Co. Mi. in the "Natchez Courier," June 15, 1832.	"Ranaway Mary, a black woman, has a *scar* on her back and right arm near the shoulder, *caused by a rifle ball*."
Madame Burvant, corner of Chartres and Toulouse streets, New Orleans, in the "Bee," Dec. 21, 1838.	"Ranaway a negro woman named Rachel, has *lost all her toes* except the large one."

The following letter was sent by Capt. JACOB DUNHAM, of New York city, to a slaveholder in Georgetown, D. C. more than twenty years since:

"Georgetown, June 13, 1815.

"Dear sir—Passing your house yesterday, I beheld a scene of cruelty seldom witnessed; that was the brutal chastisement of your negro girl, *lashed to a ladder and beaten in an inhuman manner, too bad to describe*. My blood chills while I contemplate the subject. This has led me to investigate your character from your neighbors; who inform me that you have *caused the death* of one negro man, whom you struck with a sledge for some trivial fault—that you have beaten another black girl with such severity that the *splinters* remained in her back for some weeks after you sold her—and many other acts of barbarity, too lengthy to enumerate. And to my great surprise, I find you are a *professor of the Christian religion!*

"You will naturally inquire, why I meddle with your family affairs. My answer is, the cause of humanity and a sense of my duty requires it.—With these hasty remarks I leave you to reflect on the subject; but wish you to remember, that there is an all-seeing eye who knows all our faults and will reward us according to our deeds.

I remain, sir, yours, &c.
JACOB DUNHAM,
Master of the brig Cyrus, of N. Y."

The preceding are but a few of a large number of similar cases contained in the foregoing testimonies. The slaveholder mentioned by Mr. Ladd, p. 86, who knocked down a slave and afterwards piled brush upon his body, and consumed it, held the hand of a female slave in the fire till it was burned so as to be useless for life, and confessed to Mr. Ladd, that he had killed *four slaves*, had been a *member of the Senate of Georgia* and a *clergyman*.

"A non-professor of religion, in Campbell county, Ky. sold a female and two children to a Methodist professor, with the proviso that they should not leave that region of country. The slave-drivers came, and offered $50 more for the woman than he had given, and he sold her. She is now in the lower country, and *her orphan babes are in Kentucky*.

From the "Macon (Georgia) Messenger," Jan. 16, 1839.

"Ranaway from the subscriber, two negroes, Davis, a man about 45 years old; also Peggy, his wife, near the same age. Said negroes will probably make their way to Columbia county, as *they have children* living in that county. I will liberally reward any person who may deliver them to me. NEHEMIAH KING."

From the "Petersburg (Va.) Constellation," June 27, 1837.

"Ranaway, a negro man, named Peter. *He has a wife* at the plantation of Mr. C. Haws, near Suffolk, where it is supposed he is still lurking.
JOHN L. DUNN."

The two following facts are stated upon the authority of the Rev. JOSEPH G. WILSON, pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Salem, Washington co., Indiana.

"In Bath co., Kentucky, Mr. L., in the year '32 or '33, while intoxicated, in a fit of rage whipped a female slave until she fainted and fell on the floor. Then he whipped her to get up; then with red hot tongs he burned off her ears, and whipped her again! but all in vain. He then ordered his negro men to carry her to the cabin. There she was found dead next morning.

"I cannot," says the doctor, "forget my feelings on visiting a hospital belonging to the plantation of a gentleman *highly esteemed for his virtues*, and whose manners and conversation expressed much *benevolence* and *conscientiousness*. When I entered with him the hospital, the first object on which my eye fell was a young woman very ill, probably approaching death. She was stretched on the floor. Her head rested on something like a pillow, but her body and limbs were extended on the hard boards. The owner, I doubt not, had, at least, as much kindness as myself; but he was so used to see the slaves living without common comforts, that the idea of unkindness in the present instance did not enter his mind."

Howardena Pindell 1977, N.Y.

Howardena Pindell is an artist and a founding member of A.I.R. Gallery in New York City.

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The Left Hand of History

Teresa De Lauretis



Tatiana, Giulia and Eugenia Schucht

What is the place of textuality in feminist criticism? (I mean criticism both in the narrow sense of literary criticism and in the broad sense of sociocultural critique.) Since textual analysis has a fundamental place in any theory of culture, how should the feminist critic approach her work with texts? What should her purpose be? I am not sure that a theory of women's writing is useful or even desirable at this point. Because women have been a colonized population for so long, I fear that any critical category we may find applicable today is likely to be derived from or imbued with male ideologies. As writers, critics, teachers, we know this from our daily experiences. I am not suggesting that we ought to clean the slate of history and start anew because I am enough of a historical materialist and semiotician that I cannot conceive of a totally new world rising out of, and in no way connected with, the past or the present. I believe neither in utopias nor in the myth of Paradise Now, or ever. What I am suggesting is that theory is dialectically built on, checked against, modified by, transformed along with, practice—that is to say, with what women do, invent, perform, produce, concretely and not "for all time" but within specific historical and cultural conditions.

In the summer of 1975, I was in the small town of Sant' Arcangelo di Romagna (near Bologna, Italy) where an open-air theater festival sponsored performances by militant and experimental groups in the town square and courtyards of two medieval castles. One of these performances attracted my attention by its title, *Nonostante Gramsci (Despite Gramsci)*. It was performed by a militant feminist collective, La Maddalena, based in Rome. Antonio Gramsci was founder of the Italian Communist Party and one of the major European Marxist thinkers. He was the most important influence on the Italian left in general and on the politics of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) in particular. His historical analyses and theoretical foundations for Italian communism continue to be effective today.

Gramsci was imprisoned in 1926 by the newly consolidated Fascist dictatorship. He received a mock trial, was given a life sentence, and died in 1937 of illness and abuse suffered in one of Mussolini's prisons. The circumstances of his death and his extraordinary intellectual and moral stature have made him perhaps the greatest hero and martyr of the Italian resistance. This is why the play's title, *Despite* (or *Notwithstanding*) *Gramsci*, surprised and intrigued me, since I knew that Italian feminist groups consist almost exclusively of women with a record of militancy in the left. They couldn't be "against" Gramsci. Therefore, what did they mean by "despite"?

The background of the production reveals the group's ideological stance. Both the text of the theatrical production and the underlying research on original documents were published together the following year under the editorship of Adele Cambria, a feminist writer and one of the editors of the major Italian feminist monthly *EFFE*.[1] Cambria formulated and conducted the research, but the theatrical work was performed, directed and written collectively. The published volume, entitled *Amore come rivoluzione* (*Love as Revolution*) contains I believe not two texts—one creative/artistic and one historical/biographical—but rather a single text. It self-consciously attempts to be at once historical and artistic, and deliberately presents itself as tendentious and critical. It is a text with its ideology clearly stated and with a basis of original research behind its fiction. This text is posited as a set of questions dealing with love and revolution—a complex problem that emerged in the late 1960s, was pushed to the foreground of political consciousness by radical feminism, and is one of the major issues in revolutionary politics today.

During the last eleven years of his life, the imprisoned Gramsci wrote the bulk of his theoretical work now published as *Quaderni dal carcere* (*Prison Notebooks*).[2] In 1922 Gramsci spent several months in the Soviet Union as Italian envoy to the Executive Committee of the Communist International. While hospitalized in a sanatorium outside Moscow, he met Eugenia Schucht, also a patient in the hospital, and her sister Giulia. Giulia and Antonio fell in love. After Gramsci had returned to Western Europe, recalled by his political duties, their son Delio was born in 1924. The couple were together only once again, the following year, when Giulia, the baby and Eugenia spent a few months in Rome with Gramsci who by then had been elected to the Italian parliament. When she returned to the Soviet Union, Giulia was pregnant with their second son, Giuliano, whom Gramsci never saw. History records that during his long years in prison, the only link between Gramsci and his family was Giulia's other sister, Tatiana Schucht, who lived in Italy and followed Gramsci as he was sent from one jail to another. She supported him materially and spiritually, assisting him through his long agony. It is Tatiana who rescued Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* after his death. But, history being the history of men, only Gramsci's letters were deemed important historical documents.[3] The letters he received from Giulia and Tatiana were not published, although they existed, lying in a file at the Gramsci Institute in Rome. Official historiography scorned them. They were women's letters, dealing "only with children and marmalade," banal, insignificant. Little information could be found about these mute women, whose complex relationships to Gramsci and to one another constituted the most intense private aspect of Gramsci's life as a revolutionary. Biographers record that Giulia grew more and more alienated from her husband as a result of mental illness. In his letters he lamented and grieved over her silence. Tatiana acted as a sister of mercy, visiting Gramsci in jail, sending him socks and medicines, relaying letters bet-

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ween him, Giulia and the children. Here ends their official history. Yet, if we read Gramsci's letters many of the questions posed in them remain unanswered: What exactly was the nature of Giulia's "illness"? Why did Tatiana and not she stay in Italy to assist him in jail? What moved Tatiana to literally devote her life to him? What was Eugenia's role? There is no doubt that Gramsci's thoughts were directed to these private concerns as much as to political problems and theory—his letters prove it despite the self-restraint imposed by personal ethics and prison censorship. Some of his most beautiful letters to Giulia deal with the education of their children and with the problems posed by his responsibilities to the revolution and to their love relationship—he even suggested a formal separation that would allow Giulia to remarry, if that would restore her well-being.

Who were these women outside of the pale, pathetic hagiography constructed by Gramsci's biographers? This is what Adele Cambria set out to investigate. She carefully read all of the women's letters in conjunction with Gramsci's, interviewed people who had been close friends of the sisters, studied Eugenia's letters to a friend in Rome and the notebooks in which Giulia had practiced compositions as an adolescent. Cambria's purpose throughout was to reconstruct an "affective biography" of the Schuchts and to discover the sources and modes of that "emotional energy" Shulamith Firestone identifies as the essential female contribution to male thought.[4] Cambria's project was a political one: to rewrite history, inscribing in it the missing voices of women, and therefore to examine the relationships between the private and the public, love and revolution, personal/sexual/emotional needs and political militancy—relations which she sees as the moving forces of all revolutionary struggle. In restoring to Gramsci's epistolary monologue its real nature as dialogue, Cambria adds depth to the cultural image of a person whose complex humanity has been expediently stereotyped.

In a letter to Giulia in 1924, before his imprisonment and at the height of revolutionary activities Gramsci himself posed the problem. He wrote:

How many times have I asked myself whether it was possible to tie oneself to a mass without ever having loved anyone . . . whether one could love a collectivity if one hadn't deeply loved some single human beings . . . Wouldn't this have made barren my qualities as a revolutionary, wouldn't it have reduced them to a pure intellectual fact, a pure mathematical calculation? [5]

Gramsci's question unwinds the ideological thread that runs through Cambria's work and the collective theater production, both of which focus on the "private" aspect of Gramsci's life. Thus an understanding of the Schucht family is essential, in the context of the turn-of-the-century cultural values and of the changes brought by the October Revolution. Lenin, and later by Stalinism and Fascism.

Apollo Schucht, father of the three sisters, was an exile from czarist Russia who had settled in Rome in 1908. Born into the upper bourgeoisie, he had belonged to the Russian populist social reform movement (*narodvolcstvo*) in the mid-nineteenth century. Deported with Lenin to Siberia where his third daughter, Eugenia, was born, he asked his friend Lenin to be her "godfather." The family lived in Rome from 1908 to 1917. After the October Revolution, they all returned to the Soviet Union and worked in the CPSU except Tatiana who stayed at her teaching position in Rome. Significantly nothing much is known of Apollo's wife, Lula, except that she was an excellent cook and housewife. It was Apollo's strong influence that shaped the lives of his daughters. His world view, in matters of sex roles, was all but revolutionary. His daughters completed their higher education in Rome in the arts and natural sciences, areas that clearly trained women for the only careers suitable for them—marriage and teaching. The early writings of Giulia and Eugenia reveal how deeply they had absorbed their father's late-romantic humanitarian values: a sense of duty toward the poor and dispossessed; contact with nature as a source of happiness, goodness and personal fulfillment; the love of children idealized as a pure unspoiled manifestation of Good Nature; a sentimental attachment to Family as nest and shelter from the disorder and potential danger of the outside world. None of this prepared them for the violent realities in which they were to live. In the turmoil after the revolution there came into their lives the man who, like their father before him, was to magnetize their existence. Gramsci became, for all three women, the center of their emotional world, the unwitting protagonist of romantic mystification, the pivot of a patriarchal model they had deeply internalized. They all were in love with Antonio.

Eugenia met him first, but he fell in love with Giulia, the youngest, most beautiful and most "feminine" of them. Cambria documents, fairly convincingly, that Eugenia's espousal of the Communist cause—her "wedding" to the Party—came right after Antonio and Giulia met. The sisters' close mother-daughter relationship had made Giulia emotionally and intellectually dependent on her older sister. Eugenia later exploited this by making herself indispensable, supporting her financially, taking care of her children and living with her before and during Gramsci's imprisonment, thus reinforcing Giulia's feelings of personal inadequacy in the roles of mother and wife. In Cambria's interpretation, Eugenia was mainly responsible for keeping Giulia away from Gramsci. Her reasons were consistent with the prevailing values of the time: Giulia must stay in the Soviet Union to care for the children who would be in great danger in Fascist Italy; Giulia was "sickly and subject to depressions"; Giulia was a Soviet communist and the Party needed her. Eradicating from her life the possibility of a "private" relationship with any man, Eugenia played the male role as political activist and head of the household. While praising and mythicizing Gramsci as a revolutionary leader (she translated his writings for the Soviet workers), Eugenia increased the human distance between him and Giulia.

Tatiana met Antonio after his return to Rome, already "married" to Giulia (officially recorded after the first child was born). Tatiana's love for Gramsci, avowed as sisterly love, developed over the twelve years during which she performed for him the duties of the prisoner's wife. A close reading of their letters shows the ambivalence of their relationship which, considering their strong ethical sense and material and social constraints, was perhaps the most fulfilling, if deformed, love relationship of any of the Schucht sisters. In defining herself as Giulia's representative, she slowly made herself indispensable to the man she loved. She maintained contact with underground left leaders outside Italy in hopeless attempts to free Gramsci through prisoner exchanges. As the only correspondent authorized by jail officials, she copied and relayed his letters to Giulia and the children and theirs to him. By this "charitable sacrifice" and sisterly devotion, and by never allowing her own needs to surface (but they are there, between the lines of the letters), Tatiana gradually acquired a wife's right to husbandly gratitude, a wifely possessiveness and the subtle power gained by female self-denial.

Of the three stories, unrecorded by history, Giulia's is the most lonely. She is still alive, as far as we know, in some psychiatric hospital where she has spent most of her life, imprisoned in her "mental illness" as Antonio was in his cell.

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He burned in the hell of pain, captivity and death, but he won—he is a protagonist of history. Giulia is still burning, quietly, bothering no one, unnoticed, useless. One of Cambria's most significant contributions to feminist analysis is her effort to understand Giulia's personal world with love and generosity, outside of myth and without mystification. She sees Giulia as a sensitive, intelligent, gifted woman in whom the traditional female socialization, with its emphasis on dependence, frailty and childlike trust, found a most receptive terrain. Giulia did not relate intellectually to others or to her own experience. Women of her time were not supposed to. She needed direct sensuous contact with reality, her children, her man. She gave up her violin for her children and the Party. The distance between her and Antonio was caused not only by circumstances but also by decisions made for her by Eugenia, to which Gramsci acquiesced. Her response to the distance was expressed by a sense of personal inadequacy, increasing depression, surrendering her will to others and to the mechanical details of daily existence. The notion that absence makes the heart grow fonder did not work for her: she blamed herself for not being able to feel, for losing contact with Antonio who was becoming a mere abstraction—The Father of Her Children, The Revolutionary Hero—no longer her lover whom she could touch nor her friend whom she could see and hear and speak to. She felt guilty about this and when she finally dared to write to him about her illness he did not answer, could not accept the idea of *mental* illness, spoke harshly of psychoanalysis as a crutch, and like the rest of the family recommended iron, vitamins and will power. No one ever seriously considered the possibility that Giulia move to Italy to assist Antonio, and she herself believed that she could never do for him what Tatiana did. In short, Eugenia and Tatiana usurped her roles as mother, housekeeper and wife and effectively deprived her of meaningful emotional relationships and intensified her sense of powerlessness. At last, Cambria maintains, Giulia's inability to define herself conceptually or through any type of personal power, and the unreality of her existence that could not function within any socially accepted mode of female behavior, pushed Giulia to live her rebellion inwardly, in total passivity. This is precisely what is often diagnosed as madness in women.[6]

In a sense, the personalities and social roles assumed by the three Schucht sisters sketch almost to a T the only choices allowed women in most Western cultures: service functions within male structures, adherence to the feminine mystique of charity, sacrifice and self-denial, and madness.

The textual strategies of *Amore come rivoluzione* are the result of ideological choices. The materials being mainly letters, there were three obvious genre possibilities: (1) publishing the letters, with some editing (as was done with Gramsci's letters); (2) putting together a sort of three-way epistolary novel of Giulia's, Tatiana's and Gramsci's letters; or (3) giving the materials a narrative form, i.e., writing a biography of the Schucht sisters. Cambria discarded all three alternatives. Her decision to avoid a "novelistic" organization was a political as well as aesthetic choice: as recent critical theory in literature and film argues, narrative form is the primary aesthetic code developed to convey bourgeois and counter-revolutionary values.[7] Simply printing the letters without attempting to reproduce such "physical" qualities as handwriting, or the context in which they were written and discovered, would have erased altogether the function of the subject (Cambria herself), as both writer and narrator of her book and at the same time reader of the Schucht letters.

Cambria chose to print portions of the original documents in italics interspersed with passages from Gramsci's letters, quotations, statements by friends or others involved in the events, while her own comments link, interpret and contextualize each passage. The rigorous separation, by different typefaces, between the women's letters and her own commentary explicitly manifests the interpretive nature of the commentary, its tendentiousness, its having a viewpoint, its being "sectarian" rather than an innocent or "objective" explanation. In this manner, a twofold process is set in motion in the text: the release of affective energies contained in the firsthand documents, which were personal writings aimed at a real person (Gramsci), not a literary readership; and the release of a corresponding emotional response in the modern woman reading the letters and mediating them for us through her personal and ideological, affective and conceptual codes. In many passages Cambria shares her emotion at discovering the letters, looking at the faded colors of the paper, the elegant old-fashioned handwriting of Tatiana, the broken sentences and pencil scrawls of an already ill Giulia. Cambria also describes her feelings as she approached the Moscow house where Giulia lived and where Cambria interviewed her son Giuliano.[8]

Cambria conveys to readers how she absorbed Giulia, Tatiana and Eugenia as fragments of her own self, how their experiences can act as reactor to other women's understanding of themselves; she also conveys her elation in discovering and unearthing a writing which is the testimony of unknown women. She reaches into an immense reservoir of women's folklore, millions of letters in which women have spent their imagination and creativity writing to those they loved, all lost, but for the few who made literary history by loving a male protagonist.

The performance I saw was in an open courtyard and used the Brechtian concept of epic theater. In the theatrical text, the double function of the subject as writer and as reader is dramatized in the character of The Girl, epic narrator and didactic commentator, who circulates among the four characters (the three sisters and Gramsci), each of whom is confined to an assigned scenic space. The Girl has a double function: as narrator and commentator, she provides the historical background and the feminist interpretation of the performed action. As character, she voices the lyrical consciousness of the play, Woman-Orpheus. A contemporary woman, she is a barometer for the audience, reacting with pity and anger to the events enacted around her. The fact that she also acts *visibly* as a stage hand (she projects the slides, moves the structures, dresses the actors) is a brilliant theatrical idea for she is perceived by the audience as a performer, i.e., as a real person participating in the entire fictional creation and not simply acting out a memorized part in somebody else's play. Furthermore, since she models audience response, it is very important that she does not remain emotionally detached or objective in relation to the characters; at the same time her involvement must never become total. For, in the intentions of the epic theater, the audience and the performers must not identify totally with the characters, must not be drawn into the story forgetting that it is a fiction, must not experience catharsis at the conclusion of the play. Rather, they must remain conscious of the problems raised by the play and seek their solution outside, after the play, in the real world. One example: in "dressing" Giulia, revealing her to us, The Girl is a woman of today discovering her roots in a woman of the past and re-enacting herself in a fictional character. But when The Girl acts out the pain of pregnancy and childbirth, shouting her rejection of motherhood as a physical violence done to her body, as an emotionally traumatic infringement on her total person, at this moment The Girl *is* Giulia; she expresses the feeling that Giulia could

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never express, the repression of which was one of the forms of her "insanity."

Certain aspects of this production—the use of voices on tape, slides, lighting, the designed structures, objects of personal "ritual" created by the performers—are discussed in the direction notes and contributions by performers and designers printed in the appendix to the volume. These provide an integral, essential part of the text, outlining the difficult but rewarding practice of the performance, collective in every aspect from writing to staging to each performer's self-direction.

The historical text and the theatrical text were conceived interdependently. Although they are addressed to different, if overlapping, audiences and make different assumptions as textual mechanisms, they are not two distinct texts as would be, say, a biography and a play based on it. They are, rather, one set of raw materials examined with an identical ideological perspective and presented differently to achieve a double impact by juxtaposition; when we experience them together, the historical text has a distancing effect from the highly emotional impact of the dramatic text. The first is rational, documented, footnoted; the second is lyrical and intensely charged with emotion. The verbal material in the play is almost entirely from the original letters, with the addition of some contemporary poems and other quotations which serve as intertextual links to expand the historical resonance of the themes.

The characteristic features of Cambria's entire work point to a new practice and vision of the relation between subject and modes of textual production.[9] As for the *form of content:* historical, not mythical materials are chosen from a concrete situation and real events. These are not necessarily contemporary but always refer to the current concerns of the audience.[10] The historical events are examined in their sociocultural complexity from the ideological and emotional viewpoints of contemporary feminism. The human sources of these views—writers, performers *and* the specific audience addressed (this is a play for women)—are clearly identified to avoid mystification and mythologizing. As for the *form of expression:* the rejection of the novelistic as the single organizing principle of classical narrative forms like biography, romance or the "realist" novel must be seen in the light of current theories of the plurality of the text. This emphasizes the process of reading as a constitutive act of the subject. In this new textual form, where the rational historical inquiry is continually intersected by the lyrical and the personal, the subject is at once writer and reader, performer and audience. The resonance of the (documented) historical events in the subject is made possible by the "private" dimension and in turn makes possible the emergence of pathos as a creative critical process. The text is produced as and meant to be received as the intersecting of the personal and the social, a process articulated dialectically on subjective codes and on objective realities.

Working along these lines, we can perhaps develop a *feminist theory of textual production* which is neither a *theory of women's writing* nor just a theory of textuality. In other words, it is not a matter of finding common elements among the texts written or produced by women and defining them in terms of a presumed femaleness or femininity which, to my mind, is highly suspect of sexual metaphysics; rather, it is our task to envision a feminist theory of the process of textual production and consumption, which is of course inseparable from a theory of culture. In a recently translated article entitled "Is There a Feminine Aesthetic?", Silvia Bovenschen argues that there is no such thing as an ever-present female counterculture as such, or a "female nature" outside of historical development; and that to insist on such notions as irrational perception, cosmic powers or archetypal forms as categories for femaleness is at best playing men's games, and at worst indulging in reactionary ideologies.[11] Since it is the specifics of feminine experience and perception that determine the form the work takes, we must not accept a priori categories and should look for evidence of feminine sensitivity in concrete tests. It is good, Bovenschen claims, that no formal criteria for "feminine art" can be definitively laid down. This enables us to reject the notion of artistic norms and facile labeling, and prevents cooptation and further exploitation of women's creativity. So it is not a question of what or how women write, but of how women produce (as makers) and reproduce (as receivers) the aesthetic object, the text; in other words, we need a theory of culture with women as subjects—not commodities but social beings producing and reproducing cultural products, transmitting and transforming cultural values.[12]

In this sense, and so that we can take possession of our cultural (re)production, I think we should assert that women's work is never done.

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1. Adele Cambria, *Amore come rivoluzione* (Milano: Sugar Co., 1976): The volume includes the script and production notes for *Nonostante Gramsci.*
2. The complete Italian edition, in four volumes, is Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni dal carcere,* a cura di Valentino Gerratana (Torino: Einaudi, 1975). In English see *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci,* edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971).
3. Antonio Gramsci, *Lettere dal carcere,* a cura di S. Caprioglio e E. Fubini (Torino: Einaudi, 1973). In English see Antonio Gramsci, *Letters from Prison,* selected and translated by Lynne Lawner (New York: Harper and Row, 1973). See also Guiseppe Fiori, *Antonio Gramsci: Life of a Revolutionary* (New York: Schocken Books, 1973).
4. *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (New York: Bantam Books, 1970), pp. 126-127.
5. Quoted by Cambria, p. 9, from *Duemila pagine di Gramsci* (Milano: Il Saggiatore), Vol. II, p. 23, letter of June 9, 1924; my translation.
6. Cf. Phyllis Chesler, *Women and Madness* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1972).
7. From Umberto Eco, *Opera aperta* (Milano: Bompiani, 1967) to Stephen Heath, "Narrative Space," *Screen* (Autumn 1976), pp. 68-112.
8. On the conditions of women in the Soviet Union since the revolution, see Sheila Rowbotham, "If You Like Tobogganing" in her *Women, Resistance and Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), pp. 134-169. Also very important to this topic is the work of Alexandra Kollontai, *The Autobiography of a Sexually Emancipated Communist Woman* (New York: Schocken Books, 1975). *Women Workers Struggle for Their Rights* (Bristol: Falling Wall Press, 1971), and *Sexual Relations and the Class Struggle/Love and the New Morality* (Bristol: Falling Wall Press, 1972).
9. For the notion of modes of sign production see Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976) and Gianfranco Bettetini, *Produzione del senso e messa in scena* (Milano: Bompiani, 1975).
10. In the words of Dacia Maraini, who reviewed *Amore come rivoluzione,* "books like this should be written by the hundreds. There are hundreds of extraordinary women who have so much to teach us (even if often they only speak of failures and defeat), women still buried under the barren, impious ashes of patriarchal history." (*Tuttolibri,* 17 aprile 1976, p. 4; my translation). The terms *form of content* and *form of expression* come from Louis Hjelmslev, *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1961).
11. Silvia Bovenschen, "Is There a Feminine Aesthetic?", *New German Critique,* 10 (Winter 1977), pp. 111-137 and Heresies #4, pp. 10-12. Altman's recent film, *Three Women,* seems to me to come close to the latter group.
12. For a good analysis of women's position as objects of exchange in Lévi-Strauss and Freud/Lacan, see Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex," in Rayna R. Reiter, ed., *Toward an Anthropology of Women* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), pp. 157-210.

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w e a v i n g

Madeleine Burnside

No mistake. Works at the loom a profusion of thoughts and angrily beats the red into place upon the grey. Makes no haste but in a sustained resentment forces them. Places the yarn. The warps are the parallel paths of her choices that bear her in a single direction, the teeth of the comb fit them, for a moment the colors appear superfluous to the continuing texture. She twists and resents what is seen as beauty arising.

At another moment sets the red in blocks in such a way that emotion is confused with attention to the work, the beating of the comb an essential part. She says of her children, sometimes I work at the loom, sometimes they understand. The difference between my life and theirs is that my disgust is not unraveled.

To the rhythm of the shuttle she breaks the symmetry of the pattern by turning the fourth arrow inwards. In another year she tears her daughter and remakes the place differently so that scars cross. Her efforts are not to achieve but to continue. Rays of light from the window illuminate areas of the cloth, the sun marks her, shines and creases her face. In the increasing brightness she becomes unable to discriminate between the fabric and the land.

She wishes to include her children, those changing qualities in her life, but as she withholds herself from her disappointments so she comes no nearer to her desires.

She sits on the floor and for a moment they feel she is accessible to them, her craft gamelike and simple, they warm to her, they speak.

At times weaving is not a pleasant task but a wasteland of drudgery, an end to which is not promised. She is aware at these times that cutting a rug from the loom does not relieve the ongoing pressure. She fasts. She does not sleep. The time opens and closes before her movements. She continues filled with a specific calm spreading her hand on the surface of the loom as, beyond the window, the arms of trees are empty, precise, to catch on the curve of them lines of snow. She considers. It is in this spirit that she has named children, placing upon them yarn and dye in the hope that they will perform rites to announce all the phases of their passing.

And sitting inside the frame she will recast the work, another play of colors whose relations and individuals set in her mind the parting of the space. It is time to rewarp the loom; she has come very near to the end of the permitted period for she has played with the moment here as on other occasions she has forced the thread into place and had it shy away from her. She again pauses, lingers in the empty frame and smiles, having freed herself from the pulling of the hours she makes perfect indifferent gestures at the loom.

She perceives this stage as a part of a chain, the links placed in her life as an offering. She draws the edge in or, pulling the thread taut, settles herself within the rigid sides. She gathers her thoughts, they pass into the wool as, when it is spun, scenes from the landscape are twisted into it. She spaces the measures, this is one thread wrapped around the frame, rising and sinking always the same like herself and days.

The weavings are all of this thread that eases from her hand a troubled or a sweet excrescence into the world. This is her substance in which the moments are caught, their outline fingered and their matter consumed in such a way that they themselves become the fiber of the web.

* * *

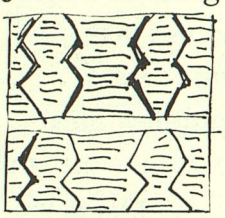
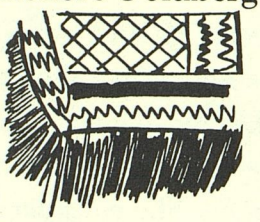
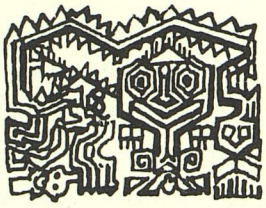
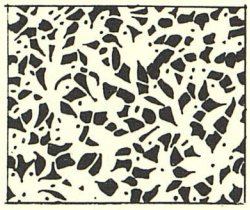
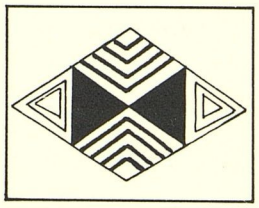
I am a writer, not a weaver. The text is a metaphor for my craft. The descriptions of weaving are based on observations of Navajo women's traditional skills in Ganado, Arizona, near Canyon de Chelly.

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Political Fabrications: Women's Textiles in 5 Cultures

We have been meeting collectively for many months, exploring the political dimensions of women's traditional artmaking. Our focus was on textiles and the women who made them from five cultures—Navajo, Northwest Coast Chilkat Indian, New Zealand Maori, pre-conquest Peruvian and Western European. We wanted to clarify relationships between the social/political position of women and the status of their textile making in these societies.

Jean Feinberg Lenore Goldberg Julie Gross Bella Lieberman Elizabeth Sacre

Our notion of collectivity began vaguely and was gradually clarified. We wanted to tolerate tensions and individual voices. Even though each of us has contributed individually to this effort, what we wrote was the outcome of collective debate. This form has had everything to do with our content. Women's history has been characterized by the systematic denial of access to analytic modes of exploring situations. We joined a long tradition of women who worked together offering each other support and intimacy. What we intensified was a critical and intellectual dimension which became, in time, indistinguishable from the emotional dimension.

The first part of this piece describes our filters—our articulation of the political dimensions of art and aesthetics and our reasons for exploring women's traditional arts. Our individual explications of women and textiles in five cultures follow. We conclude with several theoretical speculations prompted by our research and our collective process.

Toward a definition of the politics of art and aesthetics

Women's traditional art has been defined as craft or "low" art. This ascribed status of women's art is political. To understand why women's art has been considered in this way is a vital political act.

Aesthetics, theory making about art, has been given to us as though it were value-free, objective and not grounded in a particular historical moment. According to us, art and art theories are mediated by those groups who dominate the social sphere and have greater access to power. In general, when Western theorists have reported on traditional societies, their cultural and sexist biases have interfered. Thus, in order to understand what traditional art is, we are forced to state what it is not. It is not the work of a formative period of culture, not a late or stagnant phase of development, not the work of children, naives or mentally ill people. It is not technologically crude or inept. Traditional arts have been considered all of these.

The Western notion of "primitivism" should not be confused with the artistic expression of fully developed cultures of the pretechnological world. Within these cultures, although women's art is skillfully made and present in all aspects of life, it has largely been ignored by Western theorists. Its artistic qualities have not been recognized and its possible meanings have not been explored.

Through our research we discovered another bias to be explored. Males within traditional cultures have, because of their political and social power, tended to define what is valuable in art. By becoming aware of how biases shape the formulation of aesthetic theories, we can reveal the political nature of aesthetics.

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Personal sources for our exploration

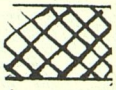
My interest in women's traditional arts originated in a need to connect personally and historically with women who had the desire to enrich utilitarian objects. Although relegated to forms of expression bounded by their homes and bodies, women engendered works informed by an analytic and intuitive but not a High Art sensibility. I wanted to understand why the creative expression of women was usually channeled into crafts. Because I felt so connected to these works of art, I questioned that designation altogether. In particular, I wanted to look behind the ephemeral appearance of lace to see what answers and paradoxes would be there.

 B.L.

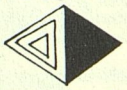
Because I am still struggling with the myth of male superiority in art, I was instinctively drawn to a women's art form which embodied a sensual, visual beauty. My incentive to investigate these textiles was generated by the barrenness which characterizes the dehumanized products of modern technology. I questioned the place assigned to these domestic, utilitarian objects by male-politicized aesthetics. If I could not find validation, I sought at least more factual information regarding their origins and the context in which they were made and seen. I came to feel it was necessary to find female antecedents in art and that the lack of a woman's history cuts us off from our own dreams and aspirations. Without a knowledge of our own history, whether in this culture or others, we are limited in the extent to which we may excel.

 J.F.

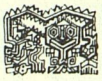
As an artist in this eclectic age, my interest in women's traditional arts is filtered through exotic, romantic notions of other cultures. I am interested in how cultural frameworks affect art and aesthetics. Primitive artists have been described as reflecting the style of their culture rather than having an individual style. I wanted to explore that idea with particular reference to women. I wondered how women's distance from the power centers of traditional cultures related to their styles of artmaking and choices of materials. I questioned whether women artists had as their purpose the expression of their culture's basic conservatism or if they sought to change it.

 L.G.

My earliest responses to the traditional art of women were contradictory. I wanted to celebrate women who, despite natural and man-made constraints, have been creative in the transformation of various media. I also wanted to understand the historical forces that have tried to colonize women's fantasies, limiting them in their choice of media, iconography and access to an audience, and how these limitations have related to restrictions in other spheres of their lives. A historical understanding of women and art is prerequisite to a meaningful encounter with the contemporary culture of women.

 E.S.

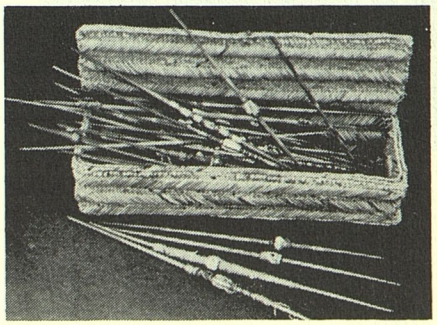
Studying women's artmaking in traditional societies, I had a sense that certain core needs were fulfilled by many kinds of activities, whether or not the product of these activities was called art or craft. Both categories seem to embody these needs—manual/tactile, conceptual, creative/transformative—in the making as well as the experiencing of these objects. "Icing" a canvas or icing a cake, shaping a bowl or painting flesh, weaving a blanket or looking to that blanket as inspiration, can all be seen as examples of these needs in practice.

 J.G.

Peru

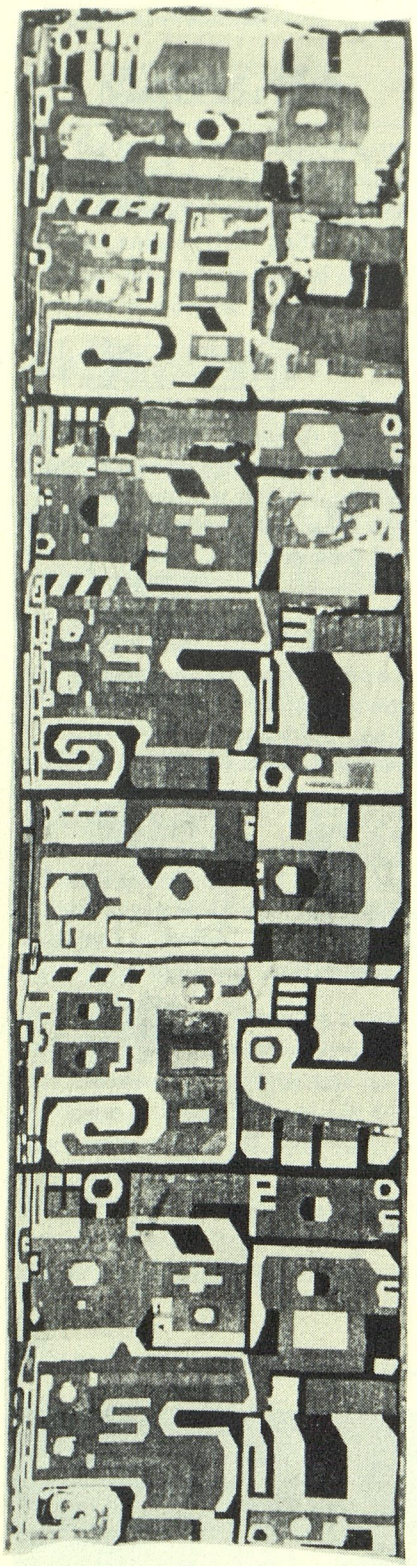
In Peru textiles were produced as early as 2500 B.C. They served as the major vehicle for abstract social and religious expression until the end of the Inca state in 1532 A.D. Textile styles developed throughout the successive Peruvian cultures of Paracas, Chavin, Nazca, Tiahuanaco-Wari, Chimu and Inca, and continue today. For almost 5,000 years, until the Spanish conquest, Peruvian textiles enjoyed an uninterrupted freedom from foreign influence. Thus a clear, strong indigenous style evolved.

Most accounts attribute this activity to women by implicit assumption, not stating it as actual fact, which suggests that to formally attribute to women a cultural legacy of such artistry and expertise is to go out on a limb and to risk being dismissed as biased and unscholarly. One prominent authority, in a classic essay on Peruvian textiles, indicates the weaver's sex only once by using the pronoun "she" to clarify a sentence at the end of the article's seventeen pages. However, reports and excavated artifacts exist



Weaver's work basket and spindles. Chancay Valley, circa 1400 A.D.

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Fragment of Tiahuanaco tapestry shirt.

which confirm that Peruvian spinning and weaving was predominantly a woman's art. Spindles, pottery and cloth dolls portraying women weavers (sometimes with a male overseer) have been found at gravesites. Early Spanish chronicles and contemporary accounts also describe women's prevalent role as weavers.

The sandy soil and dry climate of coastal Peru have preserved ancient textiles well. Despite extremely simple technology the level of manufacture was very high, with variations impossible to duplicate today on machine-powered looms. Peruvian spinners could produce yarn of great fineness and consistency, measuring 1/250th of an inch in diameter, thus enabling the weaver to produce a textile as tightly woven as 250 threads per inch. These women dealt with more than a simple grid structure. Technical ingenuity was shown in the variety of twined, embroidered and knitted threads creating rich surfaces and detailed motifs. Patterning began about 1800 B.C. with the techniques of brocade, tapestry, double-cloth and pattern weave being invented and often brilliantly combined. Subtle and varied color combinations from vegetable and mineral dyes existed from Paracas times onward.

Early cotton fabrics made by weft-twining were replaced when a loom with heddles was introduced which expanded an annual production to tens of thousands of square meters of textile and implemented the use of llama, alpaca and vicuna wool. Despite their basic rectilinear shape, weavings were put to uses as varied as ponchos, mantles, wall hangings and mummy wrappings. As much as 200 pounds of textiles, depending on the person's wealth, were accumulated for burials. In life as well as in death, possession of fine textiles symbolized status. Sex, age, marital status and occupation were also signified by wearing textiles of a certain color, size, material or motif.

Accounts after the Incan empire was conquered chronicled textiles' social significance. A wife's desirability was measured by the quality of her weaving. Wives of one household would compete as to who embroidered the best blanket. At Incan weddings husbands gave brides a fine cloth to indicate their joint control of the new household. Incan initiations required four clothing changes, to be woven in a single day by the initiate's mother and sisters.

A textile's sacred quality was heightened by the compression and "density" of energy in the garments being transferred to the wearer. Incan shrines of venerated female ancestors included their spindles, handfuls of cotton and unfinished webs of tapestry as offerings or for keeping fingers busy in the next world. These tools were protected in case of an eclipse, when it was thought a comet would destroy the moon, a female symbol. The spindles would then be in danger of turning into snakes, the looms into bears and jaguars.

Throughout Peru's history, the distinguished quality of tapestry tunics, mantles and diaphanous gauzes made part-time weaving unlikely for those engaged in multiple household duties. This indicates the existence of a class of specialist spinners, dyers and weavers. All peasants under the Incan empire were required to work and weave for state needs during two-thirds of the year. At first both men and women spun and wove to satisfy their obligation to the state. Houses were organized for specialized guilds called the *aklla*, weaving or "chosen" women. Aged or infirm men, exempted from *mitta*, labor services, made ropes, slings, nets or sacks.

Under Spanish colonialism any artisan manufacture competing with goods of the mother country was initially suppressed. The Spanish introduced a new weaving technology. Today men still use medieval Spanish looms, while Andean women hand spin and weave on indigenous looms and follow original patterns, although their weavings lack the earlier intricacy and subtlety. Factory-produced textiles are also manufactured. A strong textile workers' federation in the 1940s defended the rights of women, despite the fact that female suffrage was not legal until 1955. This union caused Peru to be the only country with a large textile industry to legally prohibit sex discrimination in wages.

The history of Peru documents a long tradition of superlative textile art made by women. These works emerged as the product of traditional cultural values. Peruvian weavers were ingenious and dexterous; they utilized natural materials sensitively in what now seems a simpler and temporally slower reality. Within a society with rigidly defined sex roles, women lacked many options. Weaving paradoxically served to focus their vision and allowed their inner resources to be realized. Complexity and beauty glow in the work, which resists grandiosity as false and alien. These works, in which women wrapped and shaped the history of Peru, are true to themselves.

J.G.

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New Zealand Maori*

In the beginning, Rangi-nui (sky father) and Papa-tua-nuku (earth mother) embraced. Their love produced 70 supernatural beings who, embodied in natural phenomena, were everyday deities. Tane, the oldest child, convinced his brothers and sisters to force their parents apart so that the earth could have light. In this way he became the god of light and took the form of the sun. Tane wanted to create a race of mortals for the earth, and he began a wide search for *uha*, the female element. In his wandering, he reached the twelfth heaven where he sought the aid of Io, supreme god. Io's attendants sent him to Kurawaka, the pubic region of his mother Papa. There he created a woman from mud and earth, breathing on the inanimate figure until she came to life.

Such myths simultaneously reflected and created the status and treatment of women in New Zealand Maori society. Man was considered the sacred provider of life-giving elements while woman was regarded as his profane, passive receptacle; men were associated with life and strength, women with death and destruction. Female reproductive organs were called the "house of misfortune and disaster." Distinctions between men and women colored every aspect of life in Maori society: the right side of the body was male and vital, the left female and degraded. These designations had tactical implications in battle and were used to explain good and bad fortune. Women were excluded from access to esoteric knowledge and ceremonial rituals because they were not *tapu* (sacred). Only highborn men could become *tohunga* (priests) and only *tohunga* knew Io. Women knew only Io's familiar manifestations. Nevertheless, women had their own rituals: they greeted the reappearance of certain constellations—Pleiades (Maori new year) and Canopus (first frost)—with song and dance. The moon, regarded by women as their true husband, was similarly welcomed.

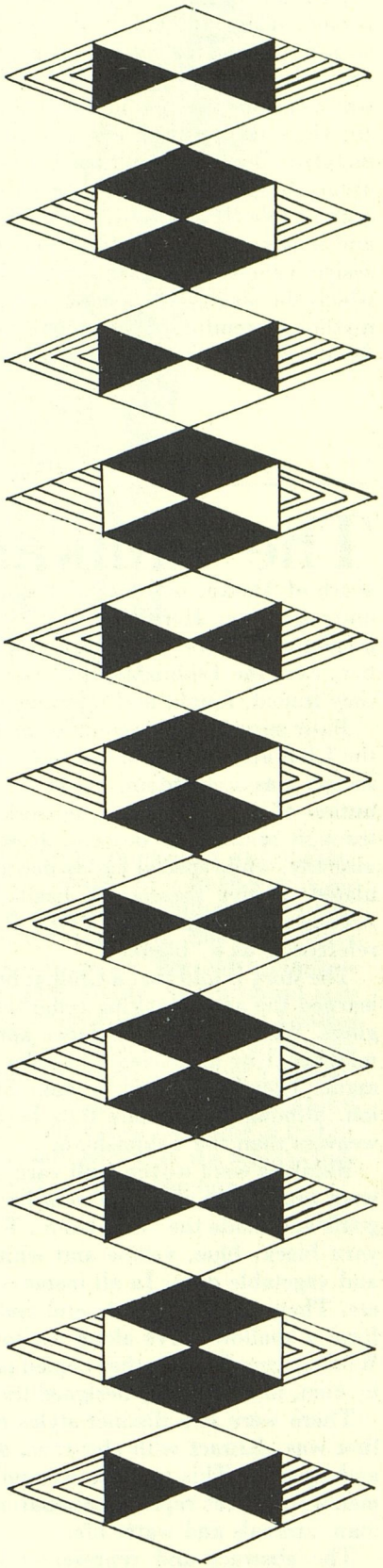
A distinct sexual division of labor began after birth when children were dedicated to masculine and feminine roles. When the sacredness of an activity might be destroyed by the presence of women, these tasks were done by men. When the sacredness of men might be degraded by doing certain tasks, these were done by women. In practice, this meant that men's tasks were physically dangerous and seen as challenging: hunting, open-sea fishing, tattooing and carving wood and greenstone. Women's tasks followed the rhythm of domesticity: collecting food, water and firewood, cultivating and preparing flax, weaving and offering hospitality through singing and dancing.

Women's decorative impulse found form in the *taniko* designed borders of the cloaks they wove. Weaving was the last stage in a complicated, arduous, even painful process which began with the cultivation of flax and continued through the scraping, plaiting, pounding and rolling of flax fibers into twine. Girl children learned early that they were destined to become weavers. As babies, their first thumb joint was bent outwards in anticipation of certain tasks. As children, they played to the accompaniment of ditties like: "The woman with nimble hands and feet, marry her; The woman who chatters, cast her out" and "Who will marry a woman too lazy to weave garments?"

By the age of nine or ten, girls began complex and ritualized training. They were made *tapu* through a ritual, sitting inactive while a male instructor recited a charm. They were then instructed to bite into the upper part of the right weaving stick which was *tapu* (masculine). Until their first sampler was finished, they were not allowed to communicate with anyone other than the priest or instructor. Eating sow thistle removed the *tapu*.

Flax was woven on primitive looms consisting of two sticks in the ground. *Taniko* elements included triangles, chevrons, diamonds and hourglass shapes; the predominant colors were red, black, white and yellow. Feathers were used decoratively in the weaving of garments, kiwi feathers being highly valued, parrot feathers adding bright color. Since they were inserted as the garment was woven, the overall pattern had to be kept in mind. Sometimes, hard strips of flax were curled into tubular forms and hung from a band. This produced a rattling sound during dancing, serving as the unique percussive instrument in Maori culture.

Carving was forbidden to women; weaving was open to men. Women used only the *taniko* patterns in their decoration. Men used the *taniko* patterns in carving a single wallboard (*heke tipi*) high above the house porch, but typical male iconography directly represented feared or revered aspects of their environment: stylized human figures, mythic long-tongued sea monsters, lizards and ancestors. Even the more abstract male patterns were related to such elements in their surroundings as sea waves, hammerhead sharks, ferns and sand flounder.



Elements of the Taniko design pattern used to decorate the borders of woven cloaks.

**14th to 19th century*

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Both male and female designs were subject to strict rules; although there were accepted evaluative criteria such as symmetry, rhythm and dramatic use of color, designs were not copied and within formal constraints originality was expected. Although choices of material and iconography were socially defined for both sexes, men enjoyed more latitude. If art is that which approximates the autonomous, then there was a curious freedom in the restricted iconography of women, since the abstract elements of *taniko* were not reality-dictated. But men could use *taniko* too. Since they also had access to schools of weaving, even if they rarely exercised the option, role flexibility was greater for them. Men's political and religious power enabled them to structure language and assign values in Maori society. The actual reciprocity on which the society was based was not acknowledged. Maori mythology reinforced the ideology of male superiority which devalued the tasks and art produced by women.

E.S.



Maori women weaving.

The Chilkat

North of Oregon, south of Alaska, is a coastal area abundant with game, fish and vegetation. Here in the late 18th and 19th centuries lived a subgroup of the Tlingit tribe—the Chilkats. Their neighbors were the Tshimshian, Kwakiutl and Haida, with whom they traded, fought and intermarried.

Basic survival needs could be met with relative ease among the Chilkats because of the lush environment. The Chilkat society was a chiefdom, based economically on the redistribution of goods within a network of family groups linked through matrilineal descent. Resources were owned communally, while special highly decorated objects were accumulated to give prestige to heads of the individual clans. Among these objects was a type of shawl or robe, popularly referred to as a "blanket."

The story is told that a Chilkat bride of a Tshimshian chief learned the art of making cedarbark dance aprons and leggings. When she died, a dance apron was sent home to her relatives, who unraveled it in order to understand how it was made. They began then to make blankets in the same fashion, although eventually they became far better-known as weavers than the Tshimshian.

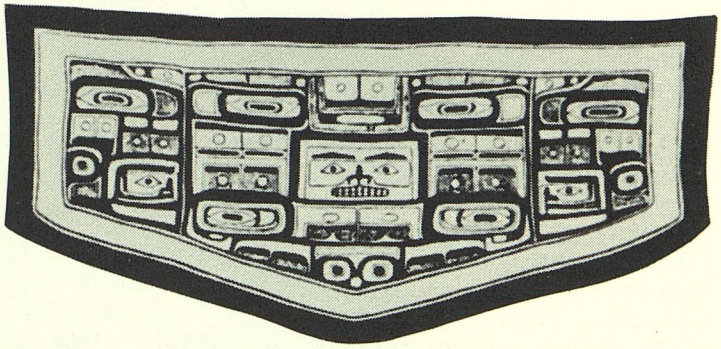
Blankets were woven with yarn spun from mountain-goat wool with a core of yellow cedarbark twine. Men hunted the goats and made the half-loom ; Women spun and dyed the yarn black, blue, yellow and white from hemlock, copper and vegetable dyes. In all instances women were the weavers. They set up the loom and tied off the warp bundles to form a shallow curve along the lower edge of the blanket. While in certain cases they copied patterns painted on boards by men, in others they designed their own weaving patterns.

There were two distinct styles of Chilkat blankets. The first was abstract with chevrons, stripes, enclosing borders and squares. This was the women's style. The second, the men's style, was representational using signs or symbols for man, animals and water life.

The abstract and representational styles shared many characteristics. In addition to the unique curved shape of the lower edge, the visual field in both is highly active and extremely dense, although the mode of expression looks dissimilar.

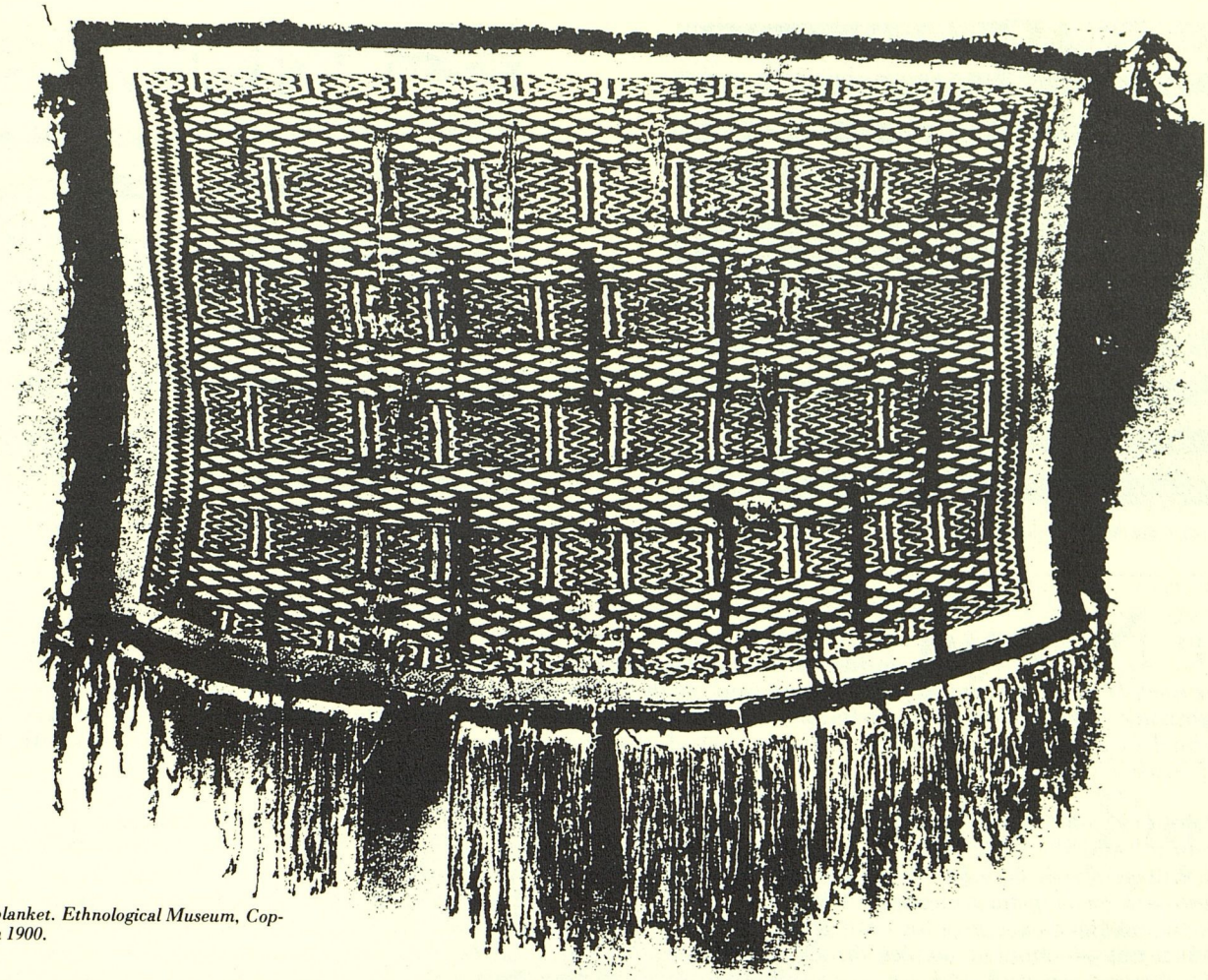
The male-style blankets reflected men's foraging activities through bilateral symmetry and x-ray and transparent portrayals of animal motifs. The blanket, organized by a central panel and two flanking sides, was itself like a flayed animal skin. Because of the Chilkat's desire for design density, the overlay of motifs sometimes made interpretation of the blankets difficult, if not impossible. The animal characteristics portrayed were often determined by a dream that the male artist or the patron had. As designers of the representational blankets, men brought their dreamlife into the waking world as a record of their encounters with the supernatural. We have no such record of the women's dreams.

Women were prohibited from creating designs involving life forms, so that while simultaneously producing men's blankets, women wove their own using a purely abstract design system. Variation of visual elements, contrast of yarn color and variety of texture created blankets with strong graphic and sensual impact. The geometric patterns with alternating areas of linear density created a rhythmic variation which broke the uniformity of the field. Design in the women's style was even denser than in the men's. By filling the space from edge to edge, the weavers virtually eliminated any illusion of shallow planar recession. Instead, they created an advancing plane by the addition of wool and bark fringes protruding from the body of the robes which emphasized the flatness and frontality of the surface conception. Instead of the dreamlike meditations implied in the men's blankets, the female style was at once more accessible and more reserved: accessible through the emphasis on the physicality of the textile, reserved because of the impenetrability



Male style blanket, The Chilkat Blanket, *Emmons, circa 1907.*

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Female style blanket. Ethnological Museum, Copenhagen, circa 1900.

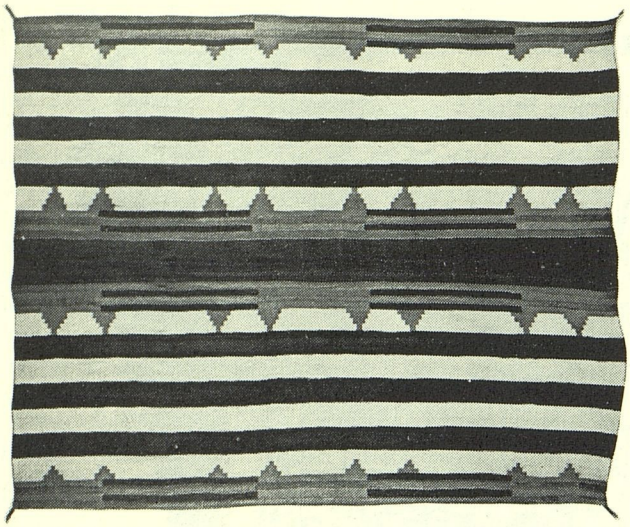
of the design. Because of the limited number of design elements, the variation of combinations gave richness to the weavings. Just as the women were not at the center of the power hierarchy of the Chilkat clans, their art did not rely on signs central to the culture. The limited motifs available to women were indicative of the women's position in relation to the status quo, the fabric out of which the blankets were created.

Both men's and women's blankets were highly valued and were used in a variety of ceremonies. Given as dowry, along with songs, dances and titles, they were commonly made for the potlatch. Potlatch was integral to Chilkat life. These were competitive ceremonies involving the distribution and destruction of wealth. Blankets were often cut up and handed round or burned in vast quantities of salmon oil. Guests sometimes collected pieces of blankets they received as gifts and later reassembled them into new blankets, shirts or dance aprons. In this way they created collage motifs and symbols. The recipient was obliged to pay back the gift, preferably with interest. Blankets therefore were a currency of obligation. The Chilkats based their interpersonal relations on desire for power and control, intense competition coupled with a philosophy of conspicuous consumption. The many social ceremonies in which the Chilkats demonstrated these characteristics created an unending demand for prestigious art objects, like the blankets. At some point in their history the Chilkats began to support professional artists to meet these needs. Partly as a result of the desire to consume or destroy costly items, the Chilkats valued objects that were very difficult to produce. The intricacy of the men's style blanket patterns made them more highly valued than the women's style; these considerations were central to the Chilkat ideas of aesthetic appreciation.

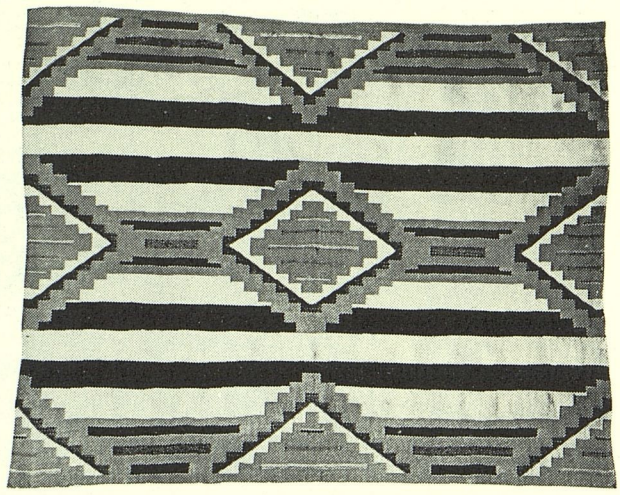
Men's concerns were at the center of their society's power structure—represented in blankets by hunting and mythological motifs. However, even though the women's style did not demonstrate the same access to the culture's core concerns, their blankets were highly regarded. The competitive give-aways which commissioned the prestige-laden blankets of both styles raised the weavers' status. As European contact increased, European standards infiltrated the Chilkat community and affected the production of female-style blankets. The increased demand for representational blankets, sought after for their unique yet recognizable images, limited the time the weavers had to produce their own type of textile. It is partly as a result of this influence that the female-style Chilkat blankets have received so little attention.

L.G.

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Chief Pattern Blanket in red, blue, white, and brown. 56" × 70½". 1855–1865.



Chief Pattern Blanket in predominantly red, black, and white. 59½" × 76½". 1880–1890.

The Navajo

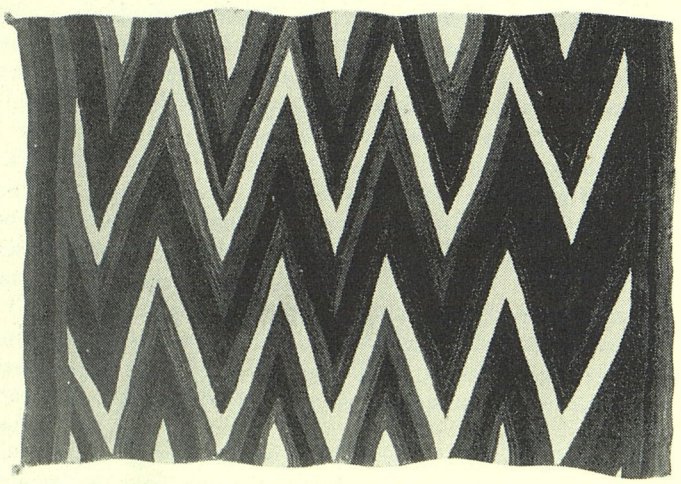
Spider Woman instructed the Navajo women how to weave on a loom. The warp was of spider web. There were crosspoles of sky and earth cords, warp sticks of sun rays, and healds of rock crystal and sheet lightning. The batten was sun halo, and white shell made the comb. The four spindles were of flash lightning with a whorl of turquoise, lightning with a whorl of abalone, a rain streamer with a whorl of white shell and zigzag lightning with a whorl of coal.

—A Navajo Legend

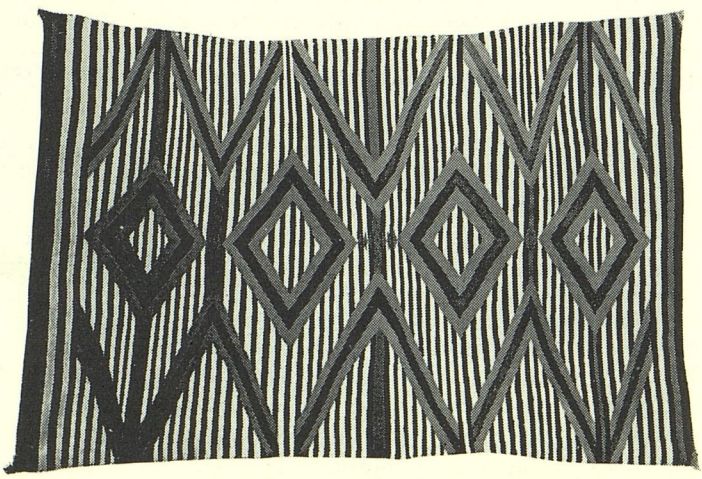
The Navajos explained the origins of weaving through the myth of Spider Woman. As an art form weaving reflected a changing Navajo culture and therefore serves as a valuable and permanent record. Through their vigorous design and color, and the technical skill involved, Navajo blankets expressed women's vision and artistry.

Blankets were woven for many needs, but were essentially used for clothing and warmth. Their other uses were as bedding, saddle blankets and floor coverings for sitting. They were also used as doorways to Navajo homes, called *hogans*. The blankets were secular, not ceremonial, textiles through which the women expressed a strong personal connection to the people using them. Blankets represented, and perhaps symbolized through their design, the life of the wearer. When worn, the blanket's linear design emphasized the verticality of a standing person. The wearing of blankets enlivened the environment, not only visually, but also through the symbolic meanings of color. To the Navajo red meant Blessed Sunshine, white the East or Morning Light, blue the South which was cloudless, yellow the West or the Sunset and black the North where dark clouds originated. Combinations evoked naturalistic images. For example, black vertical lines might represent rain, and on a yellow background, the rain in the evening sky. Women followed certain traditional forms, but each weaver made her own interpretation and wove the blanket herself. Individuality of the blankets was highly regarded; each weaver's ideas and feelings could be expressed in unique designs which were never repeated.

In Navajo society women historically have been greatly respected and thought the equal of men. Deep religiosity and mythology permeated daily life, explaining natural phenomena and daily tasks, and creating their history. Woman was deified in Navajo mythology as Changing Woman, a central figure who designed the *hogans*. By hanging her blankets as a doorway and designating their colors as those of "Dawn, Sky Blue, Evening Twilight, and Darkness," women connected the domestic, natural and religious spheres, a synthesis typical of Navajo life structure. Women headed the separate family units and managed their economic affairs. In this matrilineal society women's participation in rituals and in political activities was considered essential. Their chores included cooking, sewing, caring for the house and children, gathering wood, hauling water, butchering livestock and herding the sheep from which they prepared the wool for their weaving. This preparation included shearing the wool and



Wedge-weave style in red, blue, and white. 76½" × 61½. 1885–1895.



Eye-Dazzler in black, white, red, and green. 51" X 74". 1885–1895.

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carding, spinning and dyeing it. Frequently women built their own looms, which were set up outside in summer and inside the *hogan* in winter. Looms were made of logs placed vertically and could be dismantled for transport from summer to winter grazing grounds. The women designed and wove their blankets, without prior drawings, as their time and chores allowed.

The earliest-known examples of the Navajo blanket date from 1805. However, the first Navajos who migrated to the Southwest United States in 1000 A.D. probably used tree and bark fibers. It was not until the fifteenth century, when Spanish livestock was brought to the neighboring Pueblo Indians, that Navajo weaving changed significantly. Through trade and raids the Navajo got sheep which provided the women with softer threads and the varying colors of natural fleece. Exposure to the weaving techniques of the Pueblos in the late seventeenth century influenced Navajo weavers to experiment with new techniques and develop a style of alternating bands of natural wool colors.

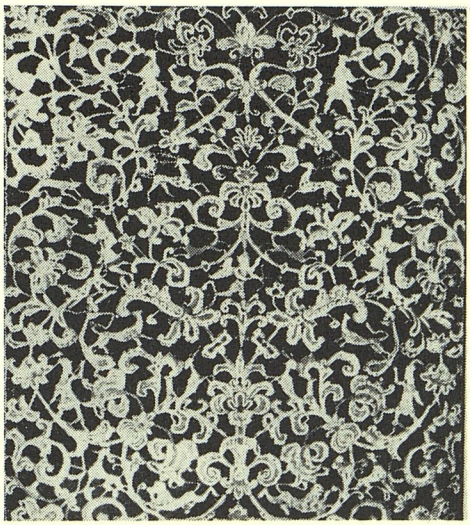
As dyes and yarns were obtained through trade, new colors began to be used. One of the earliest colors was a red whose source was the unraveled, respun and rewoven threads of an English fabric called "bayeta," imported by the Spaniards and traded to the Pueblos. Because of their complexity and technical skill these "bayeta" blankets were reknowned among the Spanish and other tribes. To own a Navajo blanket was considered a sign of honor.

Stylistic changes also occurred after contact with North American culture. In the 1860s the Navajos fought with and finally surrendered to Kit Carson at Fort Sumner, where they were imprisoned for four years. Although conditions there were not good, the Navajos assimilated many new influences. One of the dominant and most startling styles to come out of this period was the "Eye-Dazzler," so called for its interplay of expressive pattern and vivid color. This style, as well as others, showed the weaver's mastery in its finely spun wool, even and tightly woven texture, boldness and energy of design and subtlety in its skillful handling and control. In relation to this highly developed artistic decision-making Gladys Reichard, in *Weaving a Navajo Blanket*, speaks of the weaver Atlnaba who "spends hours experimenting with the colors at her command . . . She may discard a dozen greens and yellows before she accepts one."

Men and women in Navajo society used different aesthetic systems to filter and express their perceptions. Men's art, unlike the women's, was religious. Sand paintings, whose powers were guarded in secret and destroyed after the ritual, used figurative imagery to summon the spirits and gain vicarious control over nature. Women's art, however, was visible in everyday use. Women employed a nonfigurative and abstract imagery, powerfully reflecting the desert landscape in which the Navajo lived, a landscape of horizontality, expansiveness, drama and vivid color. The strength of their aesthetic language and the power of its expressiveness reveal the great pride Navajo women felt in their social and economic importance and the value of their activities.

J.F.

Lacemakers of Western Europe



Panel of Venetian bobbin lace from the 17th c.

Wearing and making lace was important in Europe from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries. Lace appears to us today as a delicate and innocent fabric. The world in which it existed was far from innocent, and despite its appearance, lace and its history illustrate this. Like other luxuries, most lace could be had only by the wealthy. The women who made it rarely benefited from it. While their products were coveted, they worked under poor and sometimes hazardous conditions. As symbols of status, laces left the humble homes of lacemakers to enter a world removed from their lives.

The two most highly prized laces were "needlepoint," which depended entirely on the buttonhole stitch, and "bobbin," in which thread was woven, twisted and braided around bobbins. These laces were made by women of all classes. Wealthier women made it for recreation and because it befitted their roles as "cultivated ladies." Poorer women made it to sell. Lace made for personal use contained any design of the woman's imagination and cultural heritage. Motifs included fantastical animals, birds, human figures or religious scenes or symbols. Designs for commerce were more limited. They were usually created by male patternmakers according to prevailing fashion, although commercial lacemakers' own interpretations were also highly valued. Each country and region had indigenous designs, but if lacemakers moved to new areas, they took their patterns and drawings with them. Many towns were financially dependent on this female industry despite the low wages paid.

The process of making lace was painstaking and required close scrutiny. The thread was so fine that complicated means were necessary to magnify it. Many lacemakers went blind by the time they were thirty. Every effort was made to keep the lace clean and delicate, mostly at the expense of the lacemaker's health. Often thread spinning and lacemaking were done in damp cellars to prevent the thread from becoming brittle and breaking. In winter lacemakers worked in lofts above cowsheds for warmth so that the lace was kept away from smokey fireplaces. Its production was time-consuming; a woman could spend a whole year on a single piece of *Valenciennes*. In 1855 Napoleon III ordered a dress for Princess Eugenie which took 36 women 18 months to complete. Even when not involved in such ambitious projects, women might spend 12 to 15 hours each day making lace.

Lace was produced in whole pieces or in parts depending on the design. Making separate parts entailed a division of labor determined by specialization and skill. Some women were better at making the ground net, others at filling in the flowers, etc. The most skilled worker assembled the entire piece.

To sell their work, lacemakers were immersed in a cumbersome commercial process, called the "facteur" or middleman system. A commercial house (manufacturer) was represented by a facteur who, acting as its agent, supplied lacemakers with patterns and raw materials on credit. Finished pieces were then sold to the facteur who in turn resold them to the manufacturer. There was little or no contact between lacemakers and manufacturers. Facteurs were usually women—former lacemakers who could supervise other lacemakers and who were counted on to drive a hard bargain for the manufacturer. Since lacemakers were totally dependent on facteurs for their work and raw material, they were unable to bargain for better pay or working conditions. Their only other option was to become facteurs. The contradiction of this system is that through personal advancement the women who became facteurs helped to perpetuate the exploitation of their former peers.

For artistocratic women instruction in lacemaking prepared them for futures as "noble ladies." Poor girls were taught at home, in convents or in charitable institutions. Convents established apprenticeships where girls began their training at five and by ten were able to earn their keep. They were taught lacemaking not to master an art but to make a living. Women of both classes were denied the opportunity to direct their own lives. The notion that women were suited to

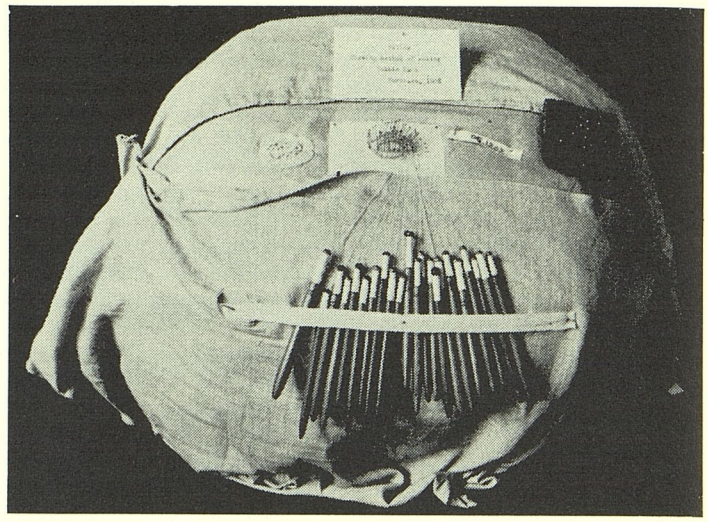
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work which required patience and perseverance directly resulted from the constraints imposed upon them by society.

Ironically most lacemakers did not benefit from the beauty and romance of lace. In addition, their products became symbols in a world in which they did not participate. Lace was highly valued by the rich because it represented their position in society. Men boasted about how much land their lace was worth; they appeared in ballrooms wearing as much of it as they could. Women wore it as a reflection of their husbands' or fathers' wealth. Lace became a nationalistic emblem. Countries were highly competitive in its display and production. Monarchs decreed that only their favorite native laces could appear in court. Edicts were proclaimed banning the use of foreign laces to protect home industries and black markets involving smuggling and kidnapping developed to undermine these laws. When lace designs were traded, they were secretly guarded. When Belgium tried to prevent the theft of lace imported from France, these designs were so cut up when distributed to lacemakers that their entirety was unknown to any individual woman. It was feared that a lacemaker would attempt to smuggle or to sell the design.

Lace made by women for personal use was often kept by their families which also preserved the memory of the lacemakers. Lace made to sell was and is perceived as anonymous. Although most lacemakers remain unknown to us, their art is silent witness to the arduous and creative work which was their tradition.

B.L.



English 19th c. bobbin pillow used in making bobbin lace.

Speculations

Because art, its creation and the theories surrounding it are political, we have placed the textile art made by women in traditional societies into a cultural context, instead of simply considering the artifacts. We have explored aspects of women's art in each of five cultures, relating them to women's broader social identities. Our assumption that art dialectically reflects and contributes to the creation of society was basic to our study and revealed in our research.

Peruvian textiles were viewed as sacred; as such, women making them performed this task as a ceremonial act of creation. Textiles reflected status within Peruvian culture, making the weavers responsible for visibly defining differences of rank.

In Maori society women were considered nonsacred and socially inferior. Activities like wood and greenstone carving were forbidden to them. It was possible for men, on the other hand, to weave and use women's designs, although they usually undertook women's tasks only as instructors in weaving schools where they initiated girls into the ritual, technique and aesthetics of weaving.

In Chilkat society, rank and privilege were inherited matrilineally, but women did not really own the titles passed down to them by birthright. Instead, titles were given by women's fathers to their husbands at the time of marriage. The distinctions of female/male status can also be seen in relation to blanket making. While men designed the representational blankets, women executed their designs. Despite a certain lack of legitimate power, women exerted covert power as weavers by inserting disruptive motifs into the spaces on and between male mythological designs. More importantly, women designed and wove blankets which were also highly valued by their culture, although not representational in style.

Women in Navajo society were well respected. Their responsibilities and powers were equal to those of men. Though it was possible for women to participate in the making of religious art, they rarely did so, preferring to maintain the female tradition of weaving. Their weaving used strong abstract imagery. Their textiles were highly valued both inside and outside the tribe.

Class differences in Western Europe affected the production of lace. Wealthy women made it as part of their required repertoire of ladylike leisure accomplishments. Poor women made it for a living. Paradoxically, this afforded them a certain autonomy that richer women did not achieve, but this autonomy did not extend to conceptual control over commercial lace design.

Because our research has focused on particular aspects of five cultures, we are not making universal claims. Rather we have explored alternative ways of looking at and trying to understand women and their products. These have included:

- working collectively in our research, discussions and writing;
- questioning our information sources, particularly in terms of their andro- and ethnocentrism;
- articulating our own filters, consistent with our contention that objectivity in research or interpretation is neither possible nor even desirable.

We came to our project curious, confused, angry that even within the already denigrated category of "traditional art," women's objects had often been overlooked or misrepresented. We were ready to be sympathetic to the women whose objects had attracted us to this research in the first place.

But we wanted to avoid merely replacing one set of distorting biases for another. We wanted to understand our curiosity, clarify our confusion, find the sources of our anger without anachronistically using contemporary Western notions like "oppression of women" to explain sex hierarchies. We were wary of our sympathy for the objects and their makers and did not wish to impose a simple translation of Western definitions of art on to societies where art had a very different meaning. All the speculations that follow should be read in the context of these qualifications.

There is a contradictory freedom in the abstract style of women's art in some of these cultures (Maori, Chilkat, Navajo). Women's iconography did not directly function in the service of male religion and therefore was not subservient to male mythology. The "abstractness" of women's art has to be questioned. Men, investigating New Zealand Maori male design, have taken great pains to discover that, though abstract, this iconography is an exaggerated stylization of natural objects in the Maori environment. Yet the literature

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on women's styles denies that their abstractions also have meaning. Chilkat men designed their dreams into the blankets woven by their women. Because their symbols have been interpreted more than the designs of the women does not negate the possibility that female abstractions have symbolic meaning too. That the making of Navajo blankets was embedded in the myth of Spider Woman and that their colors and designs call to mind so evocatively the atmosphere of the Navajo environment suggest the possibility of a latent symbolism.

Even the claim that men have often tended to be the designers and women the makers (of Chilkat blankets, of lace) cannot be accepted at face value. In the Chilkat society women challenged the constraints imposed by male designers by inserting their own motifs. By the time lacemaking had become an industry men were the acknowledged designers, although the industry drew on the long tradition of cottage lacemaking. Women had been sovereign over the whole process, and undoubtedly many designs had their origins in what women had been creating for centuries.

Though our focus has been on the female/male contradiction, other forms of stratification existed in Peruvian, Maori, Chilkat and European society. Status distinctions separated women from each other as well as women from men. Lace was made in the context of early capitalism in which old feudal distinctions between the high and low born were giving way to class structures. As lace was produced for commerce, the opportunity for some poor women to become facteurs developed. This created additional inequalities in income and status between lacemakers. In Maori society the advantages of being a *puhi* or woman aristocrat (more elaborate clothing, ornamentation, responsibilities for organizing entertainment) were tempered by restrictions, particularly on her sexual freedom, her choice of husband and lovers. The Chilkat social structure was stratified into chiefs, commoners and slaves; women occupied all three ranks. As has been discussed, though rank was matrilineally inherited, the women who owned titles tended, in turn, to be the property of men. The Navajo society, where women enjoyed equality with men and there was mutual respect between the sexes, was not hierarchical. Apparently the more stratified a society is and the more its production depends on the existence of castes and classes, the more likely it is that women in general, and women in less prestigious groups in particular, will be designated inferior in practice, ideology and myth.

What strikes us is that despite the potential of traditional social structures to muffle and distort the artistic expression of women, the effect on women's artmaking was contradictory. Conceptualizaton was separated from execution of design in Chilkat and Peruvian societies and, most extremely, among employed lacemakers in Western Europe. The range of media and motifs available to women was restricted in Maori and Chilkat societies, and women's art was designated as nonreligious in societies such as the Navajo and Maori where religion was valued. Despite these limitations, women's textiles asserted themselves as beautiful art objects. Out of this contradiction women invented a varied abstract visual language. We are not attempting to resolve that contradiction, which is a real one. It is not our point that the objects women made were, or need to be, judged qualitatively as equal, inferior or superior to those of men. What we are saying is that we do not subscribe to these categorizations.

We cannot neglect the contexts, both real and ideological, in which women's art has been made. Our critique questions the social and political structures which created and perpetuated discriminating hierarchies. By looking at traditional societies through our Western, female eyes, we can acknowledge the biased quality of our interpretations. We can also see how contemporary biases were anticipated by the discriminatory attitudes toward women characteristic of the cultures we have investigated.

We take for granted that women's self-expression in textiles was artistic expression. Social structures and supporting mythologies did have the potential to thwart creative needs of women. What was important was women's ability to break codes, to play with format and to transcend limitations. Women often had to subvert societal dictates in order to gain access to a fundamental human need—that of artistic self-expression. Any attempt to deny this need is a painful form of oppression. That women in traditional societies have been resourceful and spirited in challenging this must be celebrated.

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"ART HYSTERICAL NOTIONS OF PROGRESS AND CULTURE"

Valerie Jaudon and Joyce Kozloff

As feminists and artists exploring the decorative in our own paintings, we were curious about the pejorative use of the word "decorative" in the contemporary art world. In rereading the basic texts of Modern Art, we came to realize that the prejudice against the decorative has a long history and is based on hierarchies: fine art above decorative art, Western art above non-Western art, men's art above women's art. By focusing on these hierarchies we discovered a disturbing belief system based on the moral superiority of the art of Western civilization.

We decided to write a piece about how *language* has been used to communicate this moral superiority. Certain words have been handed down unexamined from one generation to the next. We needed to take these words away from the art context to examine and decode them. They have colored our own history, our art training. We have had to rethink the underlying assumptions of our education.

Within the discipline of art history, the following words are continuously used to characterize what has been called "high art": man, mankind, the individual man, individuality, humans, humanity, the human figure, humanism, civilization, culture, the Greeks, the Romans, the English, Christianity, spirituality, transcendence, religion, nature, true form, science, logic, purity, evolution, revolution, progress, truth, freedom, creativity, action, war, virility, violence, brutality, dynamism, power and greatness.

In the same texts other words are used repeatedly in connection with so-called "low art": Africans, Orientals, Persians, Slovaks, peasants, the lower classes, women, children, savages, pagans, sensuality, pleasure, decadence, chaos, anarchy, impotence, exotica, eroticism, artifice, tattoos, cosmetics, ornament, decoration, carpets, weaving, patterns, domesticity, wallpaper, fabrics and furniture.

All of these words appear in the quotations found throughout this piece. The quotations are from the writings and statements of artists, art critics and art historians. We do not pretend to neutrality and do not supply the historical context for the quotations. These can be found in the existing histories of Modern Art. Our analysis is based on a personal, contemporary perspective.

WAR AND VIRILITY

Manifestoes of Modern Art often exhort artists to make violent, brutal work, and it is no accident that men such as Hirsh, Rivera, and Picasso like to think of their art as a metaphorical weapon. One of the longstanding targets of this weapon has been the decorative. The scorn for decoration epitomizes the machismo expressed by Le Corbusier, Gabol Pevsner and Marinetti/Sant'Elia. Their belligerence may take the form of an appeal to the machine aesthetic: the machine is idolized as a tool and symbol of progress, and technological progress is equated with reductivist, streamlined art. The instinct to purify exalts an order which is never described and condemns a chaos which is never explained.

"

Joseph Hirsh, from "Common Cause," D.W. Larkin, 1949:
"The great artist has wielded his art as a magnificent weapon truly mightier than the sword . . ."

Diego Rivera, "The Revolutionary Spirit in Modern Art," 1932:
"I want to use my art as a weapon."

Pablo Picasso, "Statement about the Artist as a Political Being," 1945:
"No, painting is not done to decorate apartments. It is an instrument of war for attack and defense against the enemy."

Le Corbusier, "Guiding Principles of Town Planning," 1925:
"Decorative art is dead. . . . An immense, devastating brutal evolution has burned the bridges that link us with the past."

Naum Gabo and Antoine Pevsner, "Basic Principles of Constructivism," 1920:
"We reject the decorative line. We demand of every line in the work of art that it shall serve solely to define the inner directions of force in the body to be portrayed."

Filippo Tommaso Marinetti and Antonio Sant'Elia, "Futurist Architecture," 1914:
"The decorative must be abolished! . . . Let us throw away monuments, sidewalks, arcades, steps; let us sink

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squares into the ground, raise the level of the city."

El Lissitsky, "Ideological superstructure," 1929:
"Destruction of the traditional. . . . War has been declared on the aesthetic of chaos. An order that has entered fully into consciousness is called for."

"Manifesto of the Futurist Painters," 1910:
"The dead shall be buried in the earth's deepest bowels! The threshold of the future will be free of mummies! Make room for youth, for violence, for daring!"

PURITY

In the polemics of Modern Art, "purity" represents the highest good. The more the elements of the work of art are pared down, reduced, the more visible the "purity." Here Greenberg equates reductivism with rationality and function. But it is never explained why or for whom art has to be functional, nor why reductivism is rational. Among artists as diverse as Sullivan, Ozenfant and de Kooning, we found the sexual metaphor of "stripping down" art and architecture to make them "nude" or "pure." The assumption is that the artist is male, and the work of art (object) female.

"

Clement Greenberg, "Detached Observations," 1976:
"The ultimate use of art is construed as being to provide the experience of aesthetic value, therefore art is to be stripped down towards this end. Hence, modernist 'functionalism,' 'essentialism' it could be called, the urge to 'purify' the medium, any medium. 'Purity' being construed as the most efficacious, efficient, economical employment of the medium for purposes of aesthetic value."

Louis Sullivan, "Ornament in Architecture," 1892:
". . . it would be greatly for our aesthetic good, if we should refrain from the use of ornament for a period of years, in order that our thought might concentrate acutely upon the production of buildings well formed and comely in the nude."

Amédée Ozenfant, Foundations of Modern Art, *1931:*
"Decoration can be revolting, but a naked body moves us by the harmony of its form."

Willem de Kooning, "What Abstract Art Means to Me," 1951:
"One of the most striking of abstract art's appearance is her nakedness, an art stripped bare."

PURITY IN ART AS A HOLY CAUSE

Purity can also be sanctified as an aesthetic principle. Modern artists and their espousers sometimes sound like the new crusaders, declaring eternal or religious values. A favorite theme is that of cleansing art. The ecclesiastical metaphor of transcendence through purification (baptism) is used to uphold the "Greek" tradition (as in the van de Velde quotation) or the "Christian" tradition (as in the Loos quotation). Cleansing and purification are sometimes paired with an exalted view of the artist as a god, as in Apollinaire's desire to "deify personality."

"

Henry van de Velde, "Programme," 1903:
"As soon as the work of cleansing and sweeping out has been finished, as soon as the true form of things comes to light again, then strive with all the patience, all the spirit and the logic of the Greeks for the perfection of this form."

Adolf Loos, "Ornament and Crime," 1908:
"We have outgrown ornament; we have fought our way through to freedom from ornament. See, the time is nigh, fulfilment awaits us. Soon the streets of the city will glisten like white walls, like Zion, the holy city, the capital of heaven. Then fulfilment will be come."

Guillaume Apollinaire, The Cubist Painters, *1913:*
"To insist on purity is to baptize instinct, to humanize art, and to deify personality."

THE SUPERIORITY OF WESTERN ART

Throughout the literature of Western art there are racist assumptions that devalue the arts of other cultures. The ancient Greeks are upheld as the model, an Aryan ideal of order. Art in the Greco-Roman tradition is believed to represent superior values. Malraux uses the word "barbarian" and Fry the word "savages" to describe art and artists outside our tradition. The non-Western ideals of pleasure, meditation and loss of self are clearly not understood by the exponents of ego assertion, transcendence and dynamism.

"

David Hume, "Of National Characters" (on Africans), 1748:
"There scarcely ever was a civilized nation of that complexion nor even any individual, eminent either in action or speculation. No ingenious manufactures amongst them, no arts, no sciences."

Roger Fry, "The Art of the Bushmen," 1910:
". . . it is to be noted that all the peoples whose drawing shows this peculiar power of visualization (sensual not conceptual) belong to what we call the lowest of savages, they are certainly the least civilizable, and the South African Bushmen are regarded by other native races in much the same way that we look upon negroes."

André Malraux, The Voices of Silence, *1953:*
"Now a barbarian art can keep alive only in the environment of the barbarism it expresses . . ."
". . . the Byzantine style, as the West saw it, was not the expression of a supreme value but merely a form of decoration."

Roger Fry, "The Munich Exhibition of Mohammedan Art," 1910:
"It cannot be denied that in course of time it [Islamic art] pandered to the besetting sin of the oriental craftsman, his intolerable patience and thoughtless industry."

Gustave von Grunebaum, Medieval Islam, *1945:*
"Islam can hardly be called creative in the sense that the Greeks were creative in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. or the Western world since the Renaissance, but its flavor is unmistakable . . ."

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Sir Richard Westmacott, Professor of Sculpture, Royal Academy (quoted in Rediscoveries in Art: Some Aspects of Taste, Fashion and Collecting in England and France, *Francis Haskell, 1977):*
". . . I think it impossible that any artist can look at the Nineveh marbles as works for study, for such they certainly are not: they are works of prescriptive art, like works of Egyptian art. No man would ever think of studying Egyptian art."

Adolf Loos, "Ornament and Crime," 1908:
"No ornament can any longer be made today by anyone who lives on our cultural level."
"It is different with the individuals and peoples who have not yet reached this level."
"I can tolerate the ornaments of the Kaffir, the Persian, the Slovak peasant woman, my shoemaker's ornaments, for they all have no other way of attaining the high points of their existence. We have art, which has taken the place of ornament. After the toils and troubles of the day we go to Beethoven or to Tristan."

FEAR OF RACIAL CONTAMINATION, IMPOTENCE AND DECADENCE

Racism is the other side of the coin of Exotica. Often underlying a fascination with the Orient, Indians, Africans and primitives is an urgent unspoken fear of infiltration, decadence and domination by the "mongrels" gathering impatiently at the gates of civilization. Ornamental objects from other cultures which appeared in Europe in the nineteenth century were clearly superior to Western machine-made products. How could the West maintain its notion of racial supremacy in the face of these objects? Loos's answer: by declaring that ornament itself was savage. Artists and aesthetes who would succumb to decorative impulses were considered impotent and/or decadent.

"

Adolf Loos, "Ornament and Crime," 1908:
"I have made the following discovery and I pass it on to the world: The evolution of culture is synonymous with the removal of ornament from utilitarian objects. *I believed that with this discovery I was bringing joy to the world; it has not thanked me. People were sad and hung their heads. What depressed them was the realization that they could produce no new ornaments. Are we alone, the people of the nineteenth century, supposed to be unable to do what any Negro, all the races and periods before us have been able to do? What mankind created without ornament in earlier millenia was thrown away without a thought and abandoned to destruction. We possess no joiner's benches from the Carolingian era, but every trifle that displays the least ornament has been collected and cleaned and palatial buildings have been erected to house it. Then people walked sadly about between the glass cases and felt ashamed of their impotence."*

Amédée Ozenfant, Foundations of Modern Art, *1931:*
"Let us beware lest the earnest effort of younger peoples relegates us to the necropolis of the effete nations, as mighty Rome did to the dilettantes of the Greek decadence, or the Gauls to worn-out Rome."
"Given many lions and few fleas, the lions are in no danger; but when the fleas multiply, how pitiful is the lions' lot!"

Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger, Cubism, *1912:*
"As all preoccupation in art arises from the material employed, we ought to regard the decorative preoccupation, if we find it in a painter, as an anachronistic artifice, useful only to conceal impotence."

Maurice Barrés (on the Italian pre-Renaissance painters), 1897 (quoted in André Malraux, The Voices of Silence):
"And I can also see why aesthetes, enamored of the archaic, who have deliberately emasculated their virile emotions in quest of a more fragile grace, relish the poverty and pettiness of these minor artists."

RACISM AND SEXISM

Racist and sexist attitudes characterize the same mentality. They sometimes appear in the same passage and are unconsciously paired, as when Read equates tattoos and cosmetics. The tattoo refers to strange, threatening customs of far-off places and mysterious people. Cosmetics, a form of self-ornamentation, is equated with self-objectification and inferiority (Schapiro). Racism and sexism ward off the potential power and vitality of the "other." Whereas nudity earlier alluded to woman as the object of male desire, here Malevich associates the nude female with savagery.

"

Herbert Read, Art and Industry, *1953:*
"All ornament should be treated as suspect. I feel that a really civilized person would as soon tattoo his body as cover the form of a good work of art with meaningless ornament. Legitimate ornament I conceive as something like mascara and lipstick —something applied with discretion to make more precise the outlines of an already existing beauty."

Adolf Loos, "Ornament and Crime," 1908:
"The child is amoral. To our eyes, the Papuan is too. The Papuan kills his enemies and eats them. He is not a criminal. But when modern man kills someone and eats him he is either a criminal or a degenerate. The Papuan tattoos his skin, his boat, his paddles, in short everything he can lay hands on. He is not a criminal. The modern man who tattoos himself is either a criminal or a degenerate. There are prisons in which eighty percent of the inmates show tattoos. The tattooed who are not in prison are latent criminals or degenerate aristocrats. If someone who is tattooed dies at liberty, it means he has died a few years before committing a murder."

Meyer Schapiro, "The Social Bases of Art," 1936:
"A woman of this class [upper] is essentially an artist, like the painters whom she might patronize. Her daily life is filled with aesthetic choices; she buys clothes, ornaments, furniture, house decorations; she is constantly re-arranging herself as an aesthetic object."

Kasimir Malevich, "Suprematist manifesto Unovis," 1924:
". . . we don't want to be like those Negroes upon whom English culture bestowed the umbrella and top hat, and we don't want our wives to run around naked like savages in the garb of Venus!"

Iwan Bloch, The Sexual Life of Our Time, *1908:*
". . . [woman] possesses a greater interest in her immediate environment, in the finished product, in the decorative, the individual, and the concrete; man, on the other hand, exhibits a preference for the more remote, for that which is in process of construction or growth, for the useful, the general, and the abstract."

Leo Tolstoy, "What Is Art?" 1898:
"Real art, like the wife of an affectionate husband, needs no orna-

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ments. But counterfeit art, like a prostitute, must always be decked out."

HIERARCHY OF HIGH-LOW ART

Since the art experts consider the "high arts" of Western men superior to all other forms of art, those arts done by non-Western people, low-class people and women are categorized as "minor arts," "primitive arts," "low arts," etc. A newer more subtle way for artists to elevate themselves to an elite position is to identify their work with "pure science," "pure mathematics," linguistics and philosophy. The myth that high art is for a select few perpetuates the hierarchy in the arts, and among people as well.

"

Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," 1939:
"It will be objected that such art for the masses as folk art was developed under rudimentary conditions of production—and that a good deal of folk art is on a high level. Yes, it is—but folk art is not Athene, and it's Athene whom we want: formal culture with its infinity of aspects, its luxuriance, its large comprehension."

H. W. Janson, History of Art, *1962:*
". . . for the applied arts are more deeply enmeshed in our everyday lives and thus cater to a far wider public than do painting and sculpture, their purpose, as the name suggests, is to beautify the useful, an important and honourable one, no doubt, but of a lesser order than art pure and simple."

Amédée Ozenfant, Foundations of Modern Art, *1931:*
"If we go on allowing the minor arts to think themselves the equal of Great Art, we shall soon be hail fellow to all sorts of domestic furniture. Each to his place! The decorators to the big shops, the artists on the next floor up, several floors up, as high as possible, on the pinnacles, higher even. For the time being, however, they sometimes do meet on the landings, the decorators having mounted at their heels, and numerous artists having come down on their hunkers."

Le Corbusier (Pierre Jeanneret) and Amédée Ozenfant, "On Cubism," 1918: (quoted in Ozenfant, Foundations of Modern Art*):*
"There is a hierarchy in the arts: decorative art at the bottom, and the human form at the top. "
"Because we are men."

Andre Malraux, The Voices of Silence, *1953:*
"The design of the carpet is wholly abstract; not so its color. Perhaps we shall soon discover that the sole reason why we call this art 'decorative' is that for us it has no history, no hierarchy, no meaning. Color reproduction may well lead us to review our ideas on this subject and rescue the masterwork from the North African bazaar as Negro sculpture has been rescued from the curio-shop; in other words, liberate Islam from the odium of 'backwardness' and assign its due place (a minor one, not because the carpet never portrays Man, but because it does not express him) to this last manifestation of the undying East."

Barnett Newman, "The Ideographic Picture," 1947 (on the Kwakiutl artist):
"The abstract shape he used, his entire plastic language, was directed by a ritualistic will towards metaphysical understanding. The everyday realities he left to the toymakers; the pleasant play of nonobjective pattern to the women basket weavers."

Ursula Meyer, Conceptual Art, *1972:*
"In the same sense that science is for scientists and philosophy is for philosophers, art is for artists."

Joseph Kosuth, "Introductory Note by the American Editor," 1970:
"In a sense, then, art has become as 'serious as science or philosophy' which doesn't have audiences either."

THAT OLD CHESTNUT, "HUMANISM"

Humanism was once a radical doctrine opposing the authority of the church, but in our secular society it has come to defend the traditional idea of "mankind" and status quo attitudes. The "human values" such authorities demand of art depend on the use of particular subject matter or particular ideas of "human" expression. Without humanist content, ornament, pattern and ritual or decorative elaborations of production are condemned as inhuman, alien and empty. "The limits of the decorative," says Malraux, "can be precisely defined only in an age of humanistic art." We could rather say that the generalities of "humanist" sentiment characterize only a small part of world art, most of which is non-Western and decorative. But why should anyone prefer the false divisions of these writers, based on ethnic stereotypes, to a historical awareness of the interdependence of all "human" cultures?

"

Camille Mauclair, "La Réforme de l'art décoratif en France" (on the Impressionists), 1896:
"Decorative art has as its aesthetic and for its effect not to make one think of man, but of an order of things arranged by him: it is a descriptive and deforming art, a grouping of spectacles the essence of which is to be seen."

Rudolf Arnheim, Art and Visual Perception, *1954:*
"Paintings or sculpture are self-contained statements about the nature of human existence in all its essential aspects. An ornament presented as a work of art becomes a fool's paradise, in which tragedy and discord are ignored and an easy peace reigns."

Hilton Kramer, "The Splendors and Chill of Islamic Art," 1975:
". . . for those of us who seek in art something besides a bath of pleasurable sensation, so much of what it [the Metropolitan Museum's Islamic wing] houses is, frankly so alien to the expectations of Western sensibility."
"Perhaps with the passage of time, Islamic art will come to look less alien to us than it does today. I frankly doubt it—there are too many fundamental differences of spirit to be overcome."
". . . there is small place indeed given to what looms so large in the Western imagination: the individualization of experience."

Sir Thomas Arnold, Painting in Islam, *1928:*
". . . the painter was apparently willing to spend hours of work upon the delicate veining of the leaves of a tree . . . but it does not seem to have occurred to him to devote the same pains and effort on the countenances of his human figures . . . he appears to have been satisfied with the beautiful decorative effect he achieved."

André Malraux, The Voices of Silence, *1953:*
"The limits of the decorative can be precisely defined only in an age of humanistic art."
"It was the individualization of destiny, this involuntary or unwitting

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imprint of his private drama on every man's face, that prevented Western art from becoming like Byzantine mosaics always transcendent, or like Buddhist sculpture obsessed with unity."
"How could an Egyptian, an Assyrian or a Buddhist have shown his god nailed to a cross, without ruining his style?"

DECORATION AND DOMESTICITY

The antithesis of the violence and destruction idolized by Modern Art is the visual enhancement of the domestic environment. (If humanism is equated with dynamism, the decorative is seen to be synonymous with the static). One method "modernism" has used to discredit its opponents has been to associate their work with carpets and wallpaper. Lacking engagement with "human form" or the "real world," the work of art must be stigmatized as decorative (Sedlmayr and Barnes/de Mazia). So decorative art is a code term signifying failed humanism. Artists such as Gleizes and Kandinsky, anxious to escape the tag of the decorative, connect their work to older, humanist aspirations.

"

Aldous Huxley on Pollock's Cathedral, *1947:*
"It seems like a panel for a wallpaper which is repeated indefinitely around the wall."

Wyndham Lewis, "Picasso" (on Minotauromachy*), 1940:*
". . . this confused, feeble, profusely decorated, romantic carpet."

The Times *of London critic on Whistler, 1878:*
". . . that these pictures only come one step nearer [to fine art] than a delicately tinted wallpaper."

Hans Sedlmayr, Art in Crisis: The Lost Center, *1948:*
"With Matisse, the human form was to have no more significance than a pattern on a wallpaper . . ."

Dr. Albert C. Barnes and Violette de Mazia, The Art of Cézanne, *1939:*
"Pattern, in Cézanne an instrument strictly subordinated to the expression of values inherent in the real world, becomes in cubism the entire aesthetic content, and this degradation of form leaves cubistic painting with no claim to any status higher than decoration."

Albert Gleizes, "Opinion" (on Cubism), 1913:
"There is a certain imitative coefficient by which we may verify the legitimacy of our discoveries, avoid reducing the picture merely to the ornamental value of an arabesque or an Oriental carpet, and obtain an infinite variety which would otherwise be impossible."

Wassily Kandinsky, Über das Geistige in der Kunst, *1912:*
"If we begin at once to break the bonds that bind us to nature and to devote ourselves purely to combinations of pure color and independent form, we shall produce works which are mere geometric decoration, resembling something like a necktie or a carpet."

AUTOCRACY

Certain modern artists express the desire for unlimited personal power. The aesthetics of "modernism"—its egomania, violence, purity-fixation and denial of all other routes to the truth—is highly authoritarian. The reductivist ideology suggests an inevitable, evolutionary survival of the (aesthetic) fittest. Reinhardt declares throughout his writings that all the world's art must culminate in his "pure" paintings. Ozenfant equates purism with a "superstate." Mendelsohn believes the advocates of the new art have a "right to exercise control."

"

Ad Reinhardt, "There is Just One Painting," 1966:
"There is just one art history, one art evolution, one art progress. There is just one aesthetics, just one art idea, one art meaning, just one principle, one force. There is just one truth in art, one form, one change, one secrecy."

Amédée Ozenfant, Foundations of Modern Art, *1931:*
"Purism is not an aesthetic, but a sort of super-aesthetic in the same way that the League of Nations is a superstate."

Erich Mendelsohn, "The Problem of a New Architecture," 1919:
"The simultaneous process of revolutionary political decisions and radical changes in human relationships in economy and science and religion and art give belief in the new form, an a priori *right to exercise control, and provide a justifiable basis for a rebirth amidst the misery produced by world-historical disaster."*

Adolf Hitler, speech inaugurating the "Great Exhibition of German Art," 1937:
"I have come to the final inalterable decision to clean house, just as I have done in the domain of political confusion . . ."
"National-Socialist Germany, however, wants again a 'German Art,' and this art shall and will be of eternal value, as are all truly creative values of a people. . . ."

Frank Lloyd Wright, "Work Song," 1896:
"I'LL THINK
AS I'LL ACT
AS I AM!
NO DEED IN FASHION FOR SHAM
NOR FOR FAME E'ER MAN MADE
SHEATH THE NAKED WHITE BLADE
MY ACT AS BECOMETH A MAN
MY ACT
ACTS THAT BECOMETH THE MAN"

We started by examining a specific attitude—the prejudice against the decorative in art—and found ourselves in a labyrinth of myth and mystification. By taking these quotes out of context we are not trying to hold these artists and writers up to ridicule. However, to continue reading them in an unquestioning spirit perpetuates their biases. The language of their statements is often dated—indeed, some of them are over a century old—but the sentiments they express still guide contemporary theory in art.

Modernism, the theory of Modern Art, claimed to break with Renaissance humanism. Yet both doctrines glorify the individual genius as the bearer of creativity. It seems worth noting that such heroic genius has always appeared in the form of a white Western male. We, as artists, cannot solve these problems, but by speaking plainly we hope to reveal the inconsistencies in assumptions that too often have been accepted as "truth."

☐We relied heavily on Joseph Masheck, "The Carpet Paradigm: Critical Prolegomena to a Theory of Flatness," *Arts* Magazine, Sept., 1976, for the quotes about carpets and wallpaper.

To Amy Goldin whose ideas and encouragement made this piece possible.

Valerie Jaudon is an artist from Mississippi living in New York.

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Women and the Decorative Arts

Linda Nochlin

The feminine presence in the field of the decorative arts, more specifically, those related to textiles—weaving, embroidery, stitchery—is a time-honored one.[1] Indeed, women have continued to make significant contributions in this area through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For example, exhibits—rather conventional ones, to be sure—of lace, embroidery, tapestry and needlework were prominent among the works illustrated in the official publication of *Art and Handicraft in the Woman's Building of the World's Columbian Exposition* in Chicago in 1893. Later, the leading weavers and tapestry makers at the Bauhaus—Anni Albers, Ruth Consemüller, Gunta Stölzl, Otti Berger, Benita Koch-Otte—were women.[2] Nevertheless, this traditional relation, or perhaps relegation, of women to the decorative arts was complicated by a variety of social and economic as well as ideological factors at the turn of this century. One complicating factor was the ambiguous status and prestige accorded to the decorative arts themselves, especially in relation to the so-called high arts of painting and sculpture. Another was the complex relationship of the decorative arts to the evolution of abstract painting and the subsequent development of an abstruse mystique to differentiate the latter from the former. Still another factor was the social, political and moral implications associated with the promotion of the handicrafts and with education in design, especially in Great Britain during the latter part of the nineteenth century.

Have women simply been shunted off into the so-called minor or decorative arts because these were considered less demanding and were certainly less prestigious? It is undeniable that English women were admitted to the Schools of Design, both the Branch Schools and their own Female School in London, long before they were admitted, in any significant numbers, to the teaching facilities of the Royal Academy. The ranks of these schools were swelled not merely by the working-class girls for whom this sort of training, aimed primarily at industrial design, was originally intended, but by vast crowds of impoverished young ladies who were in desperate straits trying to find employment in the arts, primarily as governesses.[3] Even earlier, in France, Mme. Frere de Montyon, a student of Restout's, had founded the Ecole Gratuite de Dessin pour les Jeunes Personnes, a school established in 1805 to help penniless young women become self-supporting, an enterprise perhaps intended as much to aid public morals as to encourage artistic ability. The Ecole Gratuite de Dessin was brought under government jurisdiction in 1810.[4]

The democratizing effort to extend knowledge of the applied arts to the lower classes—and to women—was carried further in subsequent attempts to break down completely the barriers between high art and the decorative arts. The attempt reached a climax in Great Britain during the late nineteenth century with the program of social transformation proposed by John Ruskin and, especially, by William Morris. Interestingly enough, women seem to have served little more than a purely inspirational function for Morris and his followers, although both Janey and May Morris produced embroidery for the cause of arts and crafts. Women in late nineteenth-century England certainly made contributions to porcelain painting, textiles, embroidery, and, often anonymously, to patchwork and other forms of stitchery, and of course Kate Greenaway was active as an illustrator and tile-designer, influencing Gauguin and many other painters. Nevertheless, women as a group were not prominent in the English Arts and Crafts Movement. In Scotland, however, two unusually gifted and productive sisters, Frances Macdonald (1874–1921) and Margaret Macdonald (1865–1933) made major contributions in design. Margaret later married the innovative architect and designer Charles Rennie Mackintosh, and as members of his circle both sisters created imaginative curvilinear designs for architectural ornaments, metalwork, embroideries and stained glass, as well as watercolors that often hover on the brink of abstraction.

Although the effort to overthrow the hegemony of "high art" by merging it with the "minor" arts, an effort that has characterized one current of vanguard ideology from Synthetism to Constructivism, is by no means a feminine invention, the extent to which the decorative arts, especially those involving textiles, have played a role in the careers of advanced women artists is striking. Yet even though their achievements in these realms are often brilliant, the fact that painters like Nataliia Goncharova, Alexandra Exter, Liubov Popova and Varvara Stepanova, Sophie Taeuber-Arp and Vanessa Bell, Marguerite Zorach and Sonia Delaunay were involved in textile design, weaving, tapestry making and costume design nevertheless has equivocal implications. On the one hand, for a woman artist to "return," as it were, to her traditional role in the minor arts, generally less conducive to fame and fortune than a career in painting or sculpture, can be viewed as a retrograde step. Yet from another vantage point, we can say that advanced women artists involved in the decorative arts in the early twentieth century were contributing to the most revolutionary directions—both social and aesthetic—of their times.

Marguerite Zorach may indeed have turned from painting to embroidering tapestries after the birth of her second child, when she "no longer had the hours of uninterrupted concentration that she required to work out her personal views on canvas,"[5] and Sonia Delaunay may have moved from monumental Orphist canvases to fabric and dress design in order to support her husband and herself after the loss of her private income following the Russian Revolution. Nevertheless it is also true that Zorach's needlework, in many ways more original and interesting than her paintings, received more exposure and critical attention than her canvases during the 1920s and '30s,[6] and that Delaunay had had considerable success in the applied arts before the loss of her income[7] and continued to make some of her most original contributions in this area throughout her career. Certainly the experiences of Sophie Taeuber-Arp and Vanessa Bell in the decorative arts exerted a progressive influence on their "high art" creations. Taeuber-Arp, who began as a textile specialist and taught weaving and embroidery at the Arts and Crafts School in Zurich, may well have influenced her husband, Jean Arp, in the direction of greater abstraction as a result of the embroidery and weaving they did together at the time of the First World War. Indeed, it was probably precisely because of her background in the decorative arts that Taeuber-Arp was one of the first artists to think of abstraction as a natural point of departure rather than the end of a long process of evolution from representation.[8] Vanessa Bell's participation from 1913 to 1919 in Roger Fry's Omega Workshops, for which she designed screens, textiles and mosaics, seems to have intensified her penchant for abstract colorism and bold surface treatment which had already been stimulated by contact with the Fauves and Cubists.[9]

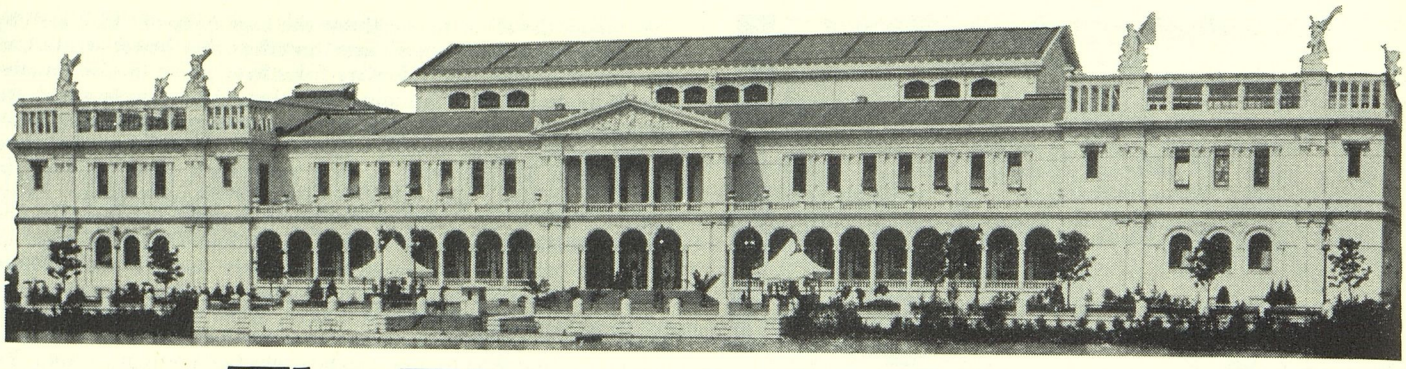
In attempting to evaluate women artists' contributions to the decorative arts, much depends on one's attitude toward the relative importance of the "high" versus the "applied" arts. If we consider painting the ultimate form of aesthetic expression, then it will be a foregone conclusion that Sonia Delaunay made a sacrifice by neglecting her monumental abstract canvases to produce fabrics and fashions, while her husband, Robert Delaunay, was permitted to continue his calling as a painter and, perhaps even more important, as a theorist of abstract art. If, however, we take a less conventional view of what constitutes value in the avant-garde production of the twentieth century, we can see that women artists, by remaining faithful to their time-honored role as decorative artists, have advanced the cause of abstraction and, at the same time, spread its message beyond the walls of the studio, museum and gallery into the realm of daily life—a goal devoutly sought by artists—whether "high" or "applied," male or female—from the time of Ruskin and Morris to the Russian Revolution, the Bauhaus and afterwards.

From Ann Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin, *Women Artists: 1550–1950.* Reprinted by permission from the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and Alfred A. Knopf.

1. See *Women Artists*, pp. 15–17.
2. Although women may have traditionally been involved in handweaving and art weaving, this is by no means true as far as industrial or mass-production of cloth is concerned.
3. Q. Bell, *The Schools of Design*, London, 1963, pp. 135–137.
4. Rosa Bonheur's father took over the directorship in 1848, and his daughter, the following year. The school was headed by Mlle. Nelly Marandon de Montyel after 1860. I am grateful to Professor Albert Boime for much of this information.
5. National Collection of Fine Arts, *Marguerite Zorach: The Early Years, 1908–1920*, 1973, p. 50. The artist was joined briefly in her tapestry work by her husband, William Zorach.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 57.
7. A. A. Cohen, *Sonia Delaunay*, New York, 1975, p. 77.
8. See Taeuber-Arp bibliography in *Women Artists*.
9. See Bell bibliography in *Women Artists*.

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The Woman's Building

Terree Grabenhorst-Randall

"Even more important than the discovery of Columbus, which we are gathered to celebrate, is the fact that the Government has just discovered women."[1] These words were voiced not by a present-day feminist but by Bertha Honoré Palmer, a wealthy Chicago socialite, at the dedication ceremonies of the World's Columbian Exposition in October 1892. While the Fair did indeed mark the 400th anniversary of Columbus's discovery of the New World, more importantly it became the site of an international forum of women artists, writers, educators, scientists and craftspersons. Government recognition, although not enthusiastic, aided the construction of the Woman's Building and the establishment of the Woman's Branch of the Auxiliary Congress which served as a public podium for the discussion of women's status and rights.

In fact, the very existence of the Woman's Building can be credited largely to feminists active in the late 1800s. For instance, in January 1890, when the United States Congress was considering establishing the Fair, Susan B. Anthony and other prominent feminists urged the Senate to guarantee women an active role in its planning. As a token gesture a Board of Lady Managers was authorized, and although it had as many members as the men's Columbian Commission, the latter actually ran the Fair. Nonetheless, the Woman's Department of the Exposition, responsible for the Woman's Building, its contents and overall management, was legally recognized and funded by the United States Government.

Despite a certain second-class status, the women who participated in and managed portions of the Fair wielded considerable authority. One of the major reasons for this was the presence of Bertha Honore Palmer, President of the Board of Lady Managers, who was appointed to oversee the day-to-day operation of the Woman's Building and the Auxiliary Congress. She was the wife of a powerful Chicago millionaire, Potter Palmer, the builder of Chicago's famous Palmer House, who, not coincidentally, was a promoter of the Fair and one of its largest financial sponsors. Bertha Palmer, however, was an extraordinary woman in her own right. Her participation in the Exposition and that of other wealthy and socially prominent women, including textile designer and educator Candace Thurber Wheeler, in the Exposition's work, helped elevate the view of women's art so that it was no longer viewed as an amateurish domestic hobby but as a serious endeavor.

But there was another reason for American women's finally being included in so auspicious a gathering as a World's Fair. With the rapid rise of industrialization in America following the Civil War, Washington found it politic to become officially involved with women's employment in industry if not full female suffrage.

While critics of feminism maintained that woman's status was rooted in her economic dependence on man, one unalterable fact remained: the rise of industrialization required a larger labor force to operate mass-production machinery than could be supplied by males. Women filled that gap. Thus, the number of women working for pay outside the home doubled from four to eight million between 1890 and 1910; a previously untapped economic resource was now being utilized. In addition, industrialization and invention of the telephone, typewriter and telegraph created the need for the office girl.

The Industrial Revolution also had profound social implications. In search of jobs young women (most of them single), like young men, flocked to large urban centers. Upon arriving in the city their social status immediately and perceptibly changed. Young, alone and economically independent, they were freed of their age-old dependence on home and family. Thrown together for the first time, these women forged close ties of friendship, and before long discovered by acting in consort they could be a powerful political force. One of their very first actions was to agitate for the right to vote, which was then denied them.

The Woman's Department was, from the outset, plagued with difficulties. As work progressed on the Fair, the government backed away from its original commitment to the Woman's Building and individual states had to assume the responsibility for funding its various exhibits. As a result, the Woman's Building, one of the smallest at the Exposition, was granted only $200,000 for its construction out of an estimated total of $12,700,000 budgeted for grounds and buildings. In addition, most of the women artists represented in the Woman's Building not only contributed their time and work free, but also had to absorb shipping and installation costs for displays of their work; men whose works were commissioned were usually paid in advance.

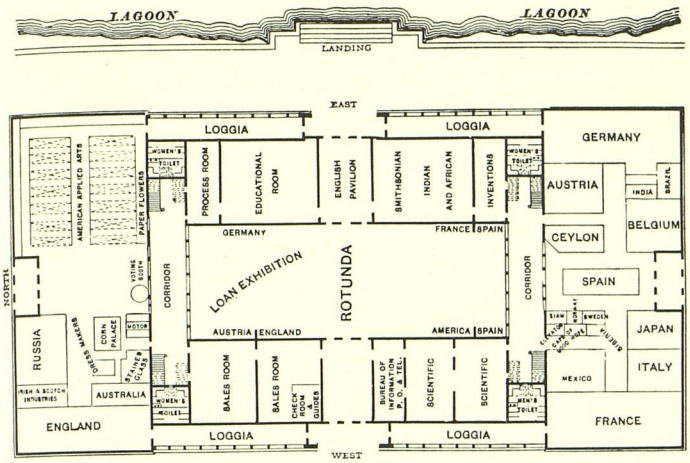
Other forms of blatant discrimination continually hampered the efforts of the Board of Lady Managers and eventually determined the use to which the Woman's Building was put. The building was not originally intended to be used for exhibit space; it was planned as the headquarters for women connected with the Fair. But, as Bertha Palmer noted: the building ". . . has been forced into that relation with the rest of the Exposition because of the partial exclusion of women elsewhere."[2]

Bertha Palmer summarized the difficulties the women had encountered in an address she delivered at the opening of the Woman's Building: "We have been obliged to march with peace offerings lest hostile motives be ascribed to us."[3] She went on to advocate the liberation of women and made it clear that the Woman's Building and its contents represented opportunities to advance the cause of women's rights, especially those of working women. She said, perhaps with tongue in cheek:

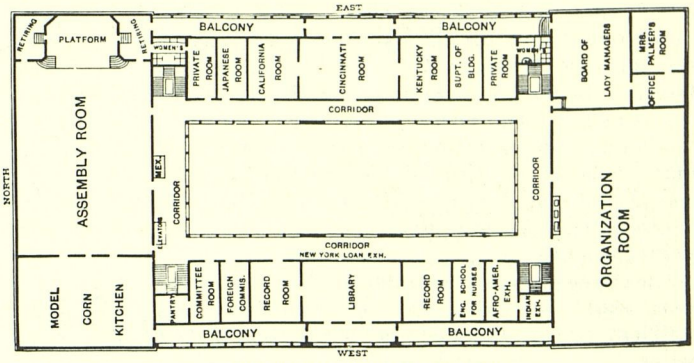
Without touching upon politics, suffrage, or other irrelevant issues, this unique organization of women for women will devote itself to the formation of a public sentiment which will favor woman's industrial equality, secure for her work the consideration and respect which it deserves, and establish her importance as an economic factor. To this end it will endeavor to obtain and install in these buildings exhibits showing the value of her contributions to the industries, sciences and arts, as well as statistics giving the proportionate amount of her work in every country.[4]

In order to fulfill this commitment, the organizers included as part of the exhibition records of women's professional and economic status, reports from social, industrial and cooperative associations and a compilation of statistics on women's legal, social, political and economic status in countries throughout the world. It was the aim of the Board to see that this information was ". . . placed on record as

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GROUND PLAN WOMAN'S BUILDING.



GALLERY PLAN WOMAN'S BUILDING.

public documents among the archives of every country."[5] The Woman's Department further supplied information to women on employment possibilities and training. It was the first time that such a comprehensive survey of women's activities and conditions in every part of the world had been made. The overall impact of this contribution still has not been fully evaluated.

Another far-reaching and innovative idea was the Children's Building. It was conveniently located next to the Woman's Building and provided a place for women to leave their children safely in the hands of a trained staff for a small fee while they viewed the exhibits at the Fair. The Children's Building contained a large gymnasium, a library, a workshop, a nursery and several other departments. The workshop contained every kind of machine and mechanical device, giving both boys and girls an opportunity to learn how to use tools and develop their mechanical abilities. As such, it is probably the earliest example of a day-care center. Like other projects organized by women at the Fair, the Children's Building was given no money by the Exposition authorities and was completely financed by the Board of Lady Managers.

The architect for the Woman's Building was Sophia G. Hayden. In 1890, she became the first woman to complete the four-year course in architecture (with honors) from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Hayden's design was selected from twelve others and she began supervision of the building's construction in July 1891. She designed her building in the neoclassic style which was enjoying a revival at the time and was required by the Exposition committee.

The elaborately ornamental Hall of Honor formed the spine of the structure and rose to the building's full two-story height. Sixty-seven and a half feet wide and 200 feet long, it was topped by a skylight. The Hall of Honor was reserved for the core of the fine arts exhibits in the Woman's Building. The major decoration of this important room was left to six American artists: Mary Cassatt, Mary MacMonnies, Lucia-Fairchild Fuller, Amanda Brewster Sewall, Rosina Emmett Sherwood and Lydia Emmett.

Sherwood and Emmett were sisters who had both studied with William Merritt Chase at the Art Students' League in New York and later in Paris at the Julian Academy. Sherwood's mural was titled, "The Republic's Welcome to Her Daughters." Her sister's mural, "Music, Art and Literature," showed the three disciples personified by three female figures. Fairchild-Fuller, a Bostonian, had also studied with Chase at the League and was a successful miniature painter. Her mural, "The Women of Plymouth," depicted Pilgrim women and children engaged in domestic chores. Sewall was born in upstate New York, studied at Cooper Union and with Chase and William Sartain at the League in Paris. For her mural, "Women in Arcadia," she was awarded a bronze medal by the Columbian Commission.

The two most famous women artists participating in the building's decoration were MacMonnies and Cassatt. MacMonnies's 60-foot mural, "Primitive Woman," located on the north tympanum of the Hall of Honor, was one of the largest ever painted by a woman. It was divided into three sections that illustrated the roles of ancient women as wives, mothers and workers. Cassatt's commission to decorate the south tympanum on the subject of modern woman was her first commission in America and her first attempt at mural decoration. Cassatt's space was identical to MacMonnies's, but Cassatt divided her mural into three separate panels with three allegorical themes. The central and largest panel was "Young Women Plucking the Fruits of Knowledge and Science." In the right-hand panel were three women who personified the "Arts, Music and Dancing," and in the left-hand panel were "Young Girls Pursuing Fame."

Also decorating the Hall of Honor were murals and paintings, etchings and engravings contributed by American, German, Austrian, English, French and Spanish women. In addition, sculpture and numerous handicrafts were displayed. There was even a bas-relief entitled "Ophelia" made by the famous French actress, Sarah Bernhardt. Finally, names of important women from around the world in the arts, sciences, literature and other disciplines were recorded.

Running along the easterly side of the Hall of Honor were rooms largely devoted to the technological side of women's contributions. Among these rooms were two Scientific rooms, an Inventions room and an Educational room.

Passing through the corridors, the visitor could then enter the Northern Pavilion (on the north side of the building) or the Southern Pavilion (on the south side). In the Northern Pavilion were exhibits from countries such as Russia, Australia and England. The Russian section was especially notable. A remarkable reproduction of a Byzantine gate of the twelfth century marked the entrance. It was made of oak and joined together without a single nail. The wood surface was overlaid with gold leaf. The work was designed and constructed solely by Russian women. Exhibits of cottage industries from Scotland and Ireland included hand-knitted stockings and gloves, shawls and ecclesiastical vestments, as well as many fine examples of embroidery and needlework. Examples of uniquely Irish lacemaking techniques could be seen in displays of Irish point lace, Limerick lace and Carrickmacross lace. The Northern Pavilion also included exhibits of stained glass designs, wallpaper and silk designs, book-cover designs and book illustrations, contributed by American and foreign women.

The most notable exhibit in the Northern Pavilion was that of American Applied Arts. The handicraft contributions (specifically, needlework and embroidery) of the Associated Artists Society, one of the first American schools of embroidery and design, as well as the woven textiles and tapestries, were among the best examples of handwork in the Woman's Building. This exhibit had been organized by Candace Thurber Wheeler, who lent her considerable artistic and managerial talents to the Woman's Building and oversaw its interior decoration. It is fair to say that the American renaissance in embroidery and needlework was initiated and largely affected by Wheeler. Thanks to her perseverance and clout, needlework exhibits at the Columbian Exposition were no longer predominantly English or European, as they had been in the Centennial Exposition seventeen years earlier.

Walking along the Loggia for a breath of fresh air and a fine overall view of the Exposition grounds, the visitor could then tour

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the Southern Pavilion which was devoted to exhibits of lacemaking, embroidery, fan painting, jewelry, silverware, carved wood, leather and fans. These exhibits came from France, Italy, Mexico, Japan, Spain, Belgium, Austria, Germany, Sweden and Norway, as well as far-off places such as Siberia, Siam, Ceylon, Brazil and the Cape of Good Hope. One of the most popular exhibits was that organized by the Japanese Woman's Commission. Two rooms of a typical Japanese dwelling were carefully reproduced. The inclusion of such details as fine inlaid boxes, polished steel mirrors and a woman's boudoir gave the spectator a true sense of having actually visited a Japanese home. Another exhibit of special interest was the collection of lace sent by Queen Margherita of Italy which traced the history of lacemaking in that country as well as in all other lacemaking countries.

The elevator, a welcome feature of the building at this point of the tour, would then whisk the visitor to the gallery floor of the building, which contained exhibits primarily from the United States.

Running along the east wall of the gallery floor were the California, Cincinnati, Kentucky and Japanese rooms (the Japanese exhibited here as well as in the Southern Pavilion). The California room was warmly inviting with its ceilings, doors and wainscoting all made of rich, mellow redwood. The room was decorated with stained glass designed and executed by American women.

The Cincinnati room, the largest and most important room of this section of the gallery, served as the Managers' Drawing Room. Its display of pottery executed by Cincinnati women underscored women's unique contributions to the craft. Of special interest was Rookwood Pottery, an adaptation of the art nouveau style with flat, linear floral patterns and varied glazes—all of which had gained Rookwood an international reputation for fine ceramics craftsmanship. In addition to examples of Rookwood Pottery decorated by the Rookwood Pottery founder, Mrs. Maria Longworth Nichols Storer, there were pieces created by members of the Cincinnati Pottery Club. M. Louise McLaughlin, founder of the Pottery Club in 1879, had developed an unusual method of underglaze painting and "Losanti Ware," a hard porcelain with a feldspathic glaze fired at a low temperature. Examples of her work were included in the Cincinnati room exhibit.

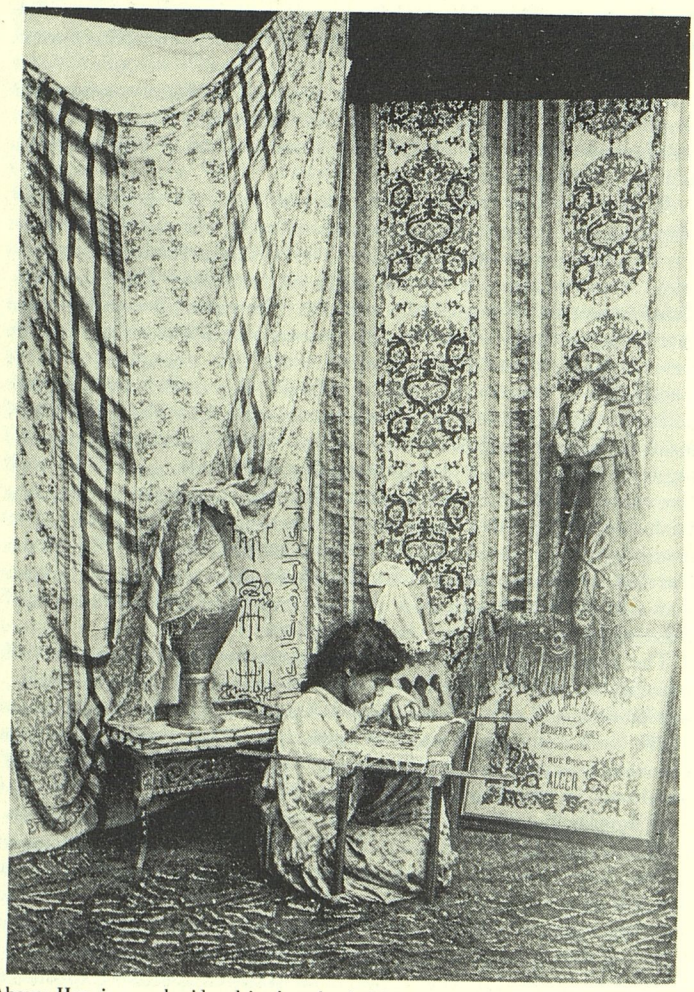
Perhaps the most important room, next to the Hall of Honor, was the Library, located directly opposite the Cincinnati room on the west side of the gallery. The interior decoration, including the dark, carved oak bookcases, was the work of Candace Thurber Wheeler. Dora Wheeler Keith, her daughter, decorated the Library's ceiling. She chose an allegorical theme appropriate to the room: a male figure represented Science; Literature was personified by a woman standing beside Science, and Imagination, also a female figure, stood between the two, symbolizing the reconciliation and binding of one to the other. More importantly, the Library contained over 7,000 volumes of American and foreign women's writings (including such great authors as Jane Austen, the Brontë sisters, George Eliot, the poetess Harriet Monroe, Louisa Alcott and Susan B. Anthony—making it the largest such collection at that time. Two Records rooms flanked the Library and contained statistics of woman's work in several countries.

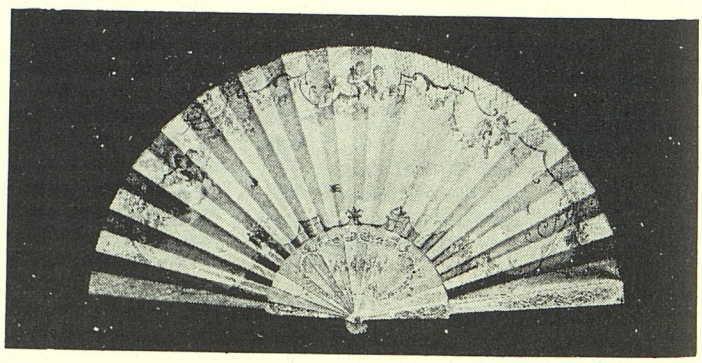
Also located on this side of the gallery was the English Training School for Nurses. It was a model of a room for the instruction of nurses and contained all sorts of medical and surgical instruments along with portraits of women who were famous for their contributions to nursing and medicine, such as Florence B. Nightingale.

After visiting the English Training School for Nurses, the fairgoer could walk through the north corridor to the Assembly Room, which was used for meetings, lectures and concerts, and then on to the large Model Kitchen. The kitchen was equipped with the most modern appliances then available and staffed with teachers who instructed women in the science of preparing nutritional foods and even in preparing Indian corn.

The visitor might pleasantly end the tour by resting and dining in the garden cafe of the Woman's Building—a quiet oasis in green in which, reputedly, the best food at the Fair was to be found.

The significance of the exhibits of the Woman's Building was multifaceted. By making the achievements of many fine women artists and craftswomen more widely known, they corrected misconceptions about women's artistic abilities and made it clear that women held an important place in the history of the arts. In addition, the Woman's Building provided a forum for presenting the theme of the changing roles of women. Facts were available for public and personal consumption, and as they cut across social and class barriers, must have had a considerable impact on both sexes. For women, especially, the new sense of history, pride and accomplishment alone was worth the long and arduous struggle to make their building and its contents public.





Above: Hangings embroidered in the school of Mme. Luce Ben-Aben. Moorish girls and women of Algiers. Right: Fan with Mother-of-Pearl handle in Rococo style. Painted by Clara Jaqueman. Exhibited by The Women's Industrial Association of America.

1. Mary Oldham Eagle Kavanaugh, ed., *The Congress of Women*, Chicago, 1894, p. 106.
2. Kavanaugh, p. 125.
3. Kavanaugh, p. 112.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*

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It was a time when women were flowers, and painted flowers, that is, flowers painted themselves, and they smelled good and talked a special language. Flowers and women were equal under sexist law. Women and flowers and paintings of flowers—so interchangeable and interrelated. But no one has yet spoken of flower liberation.

Ten Ways to Look at a Flower

Barbara Novak

"One of the most delightful accomplishments that can be chosen for the fair sex is that of catching the transient shades of beauty which are found upon flowers, and fixing them on paper. The able pencil shows to us the queen of spring with her spherical form, her delicate colours, the beautiful green of her foliage, the thorns which protect her, the dew-drops which bathe her, and the butterfly which skims lightly over her beautiful form."
—Mrs. Frances S. Osgood, *Flowers of Poetry,* 1841

"To the youth of America . . . May it inspire our Young Ladies to cultivate those virtues which can be truly represented by the fairest flowers."
—Mrs. Sarah Josepha Hale, Dedication, *Flora's Interpreter,* 1834

"Goethe's Urpflanze* *was not a sexist concept."*
—Anonymous

*Goethe's *Urpflanze* was a "primal-plant" or archetype that he conceived, inspired by a sixteenth-century palm he encountered in Padua's botanical garden.

Gentlemen Flower Painters

Heade	*Redon*
Monet	*Demuth*
Fantin-Latour	*Sheeler*

". . . another flower, the human sister of those vegetable ones, as beautiful as they, more beautiful than the richest of them, . . . still to be touched only with a glove, and not to be approached without a mask."
—Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Rappaccini's Daughter," 1844

O'Keeffe on O'Keeffe: *"When you took time to really notice my flower you hung all your own associations with flowers on my flower and you write about my flower as if I think and see what you think and see of the flower and I don't."*

"All flowers have a uniform function, the reproduction of the species through the production of seed. . . . Stamens and pistils are not present together in all flowers. When both are present, the flower is said to be perfect or bisexual. All complete flowers are obviously also perfect. When only one kind of essential organ is present, the flower is termed imperfect, or unisexual. . . . When the same plant bears unisexual flowers of both sexes, it is said to be monoecious: when the male and female flowers are on different plants, the plant is dioecious. . . . When there are male, female and bisexual flowers on the same plant, the plant is termed polygamous."
—Encyclopedia Britannica, 1967

"Sensitive Plant . . . Chastity
"This singular plant is so named from its motions imitating the sensibility of animal life. It contracts itself in the evening and expands with the morning light, and shrinks from external violence, folding up its leaves at the mere approach of one's hand. The Violet is the emblem of that retiring modesty which proceeds from reflection, but the Sensitive Plant is a perfect image of innocence and virgin modesty, the result of instinct."
—Henrietta Dumont, *The Language of Flowers,* 1856

"The exhibition records of the later nineteenth century list literally hundreds of women practitioners of still-life painting, and particularly of flower painting; it would be meaningless to mention them all, especially since practically nothing is known about most of them . . . A mysterious Miss L. Whitcomb was mentioned in the late 1870's as the finest lady flower painter in the country."
—Gerdts and Burke, *American Still-Life Painting,* 1971

Lady Flower Painters

Mary Catherine O'Keeffe
(Georgia's grandmother)
Sophia Peabody
(Hawthorne's wife)
Henrietta Maria Benson Homer
(Homer's mother)
Maria Oakey Dewing
(Thomas's wife)
Jo Hopper
(Edward's wife)
Georgia O'Keeffe
(Mary Catherine's grandaughter)

"Little May was an orphan, alone on the earth;
No aunt, no uncle, no sister or brother;
But with her went Love and Delight from her birth,
For dear little May had a fairy godmother.

She taught her to bloom like a beautiful flower . . ."
—Mrs. Frances S. Osgood, *The Flower Alphabet, or Little May's First Lesson,* 1845

Sweet Peas by Henrietta Benson Homer, 1875; water color and pencil on illustration board. (Courtesy of Cooper-Hewitt Museum, The Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Design.)

Barbara Novak is Chairwoman of the Art History Department at Barnard College and Professor of Art History at Barnard and Columbia University. She is the author of American Painting of the Nineteenth Century. *She is also a flower painter.*

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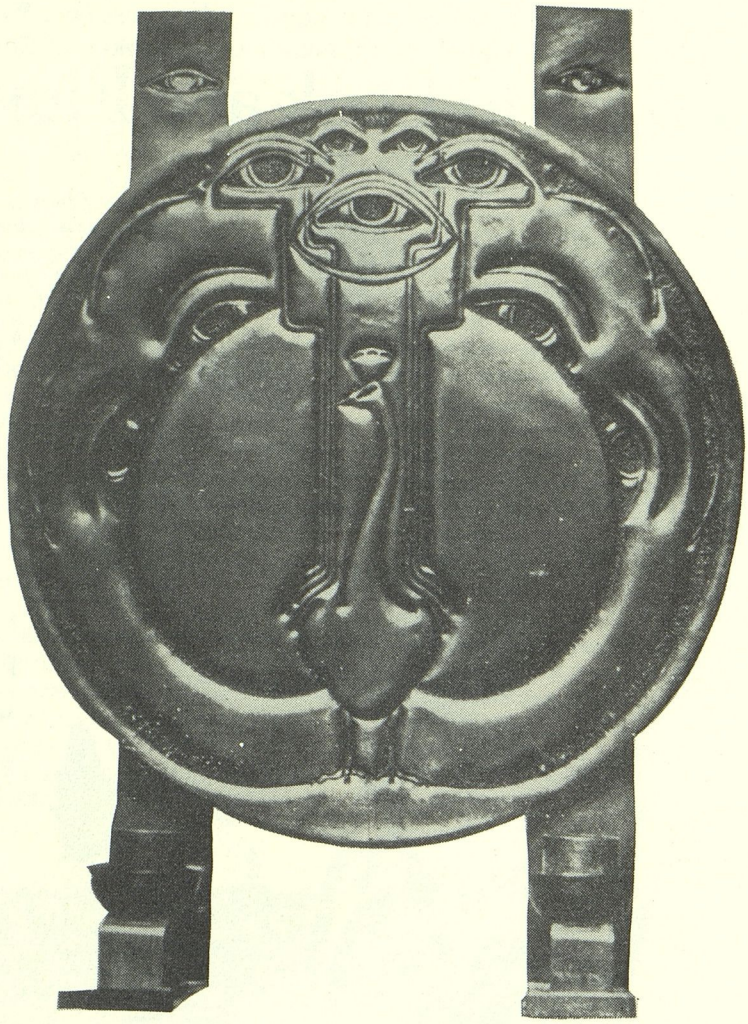


Figure 1

Trapped Women: Two Sister Designers

The large, white, airy and austere room with its severely elegant chairs and tables and attenuated, weeping ladies transfixed in pale olive or light mauve-colored gesso panels around its walls, is now full. Tea cups chink against saucers, silk-clad wrists are held at a delicate angle, feather-plumed hats bob up and down, white lawn and lace-covered bosoms heave sighs of contentment, cheeks flush, tongues loosen, and the buzz of women's talk rises a quaver or two above the level thought acceptable if this room, a tearoom, had been found in London. But the like of this room, and others designed by Charles Rennie Mackintosh, architect, and his wife, Margaret Macdonald, a decorative designer, was not to be found in London nor in any other smart city in turn-of-the-century Britain, but in Glasgow, dirty, robust, tough and far-from-genteel Glasgow, the industrial capital of Scotland.

In the late 1890s in the heart of this city's sober business district a few strikingly different and simple tearoom facades appeared. Their exteriors, interiors, furniture and fittings displayed unconventional solutions, ethereal elegance and flights of imaginative thinking not seen before in the arts of this city. Glasgow was in the throes of an artistic renewal.

Margaret Macdonald (1865–1933), who contributed designs to the tearooms, and her sister Frances Macdonald (1874–1921) were two of a number of women artists who, for a short while, helped make the arts alive in Glasgow. What follows is a brief account of their lives, set against the background of Glasgow, and a discussion of a few of the objects the sisters designed and made.

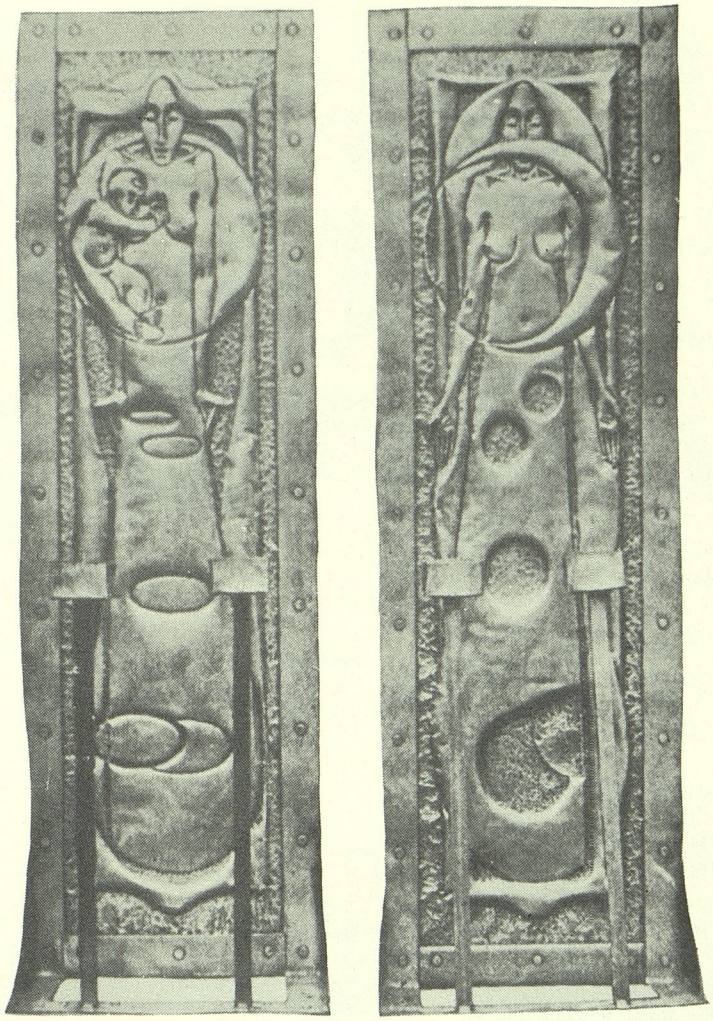
The liveliness of the arts in this industrial capital (Europe's sixth largest city) grew in part from its sound economic base. In the previous half-century the heavy industries of the area, mining and shipbuilding for example, enjoyed boom growth.[1] And some of the profits, often via the increased income and leisure time of Glasgow's upper and middle classes, found their way into the support and patronage of local arts. How pleasant to sit in a new tearoom designed by Scottish artists of national prominence, with works by local and internationally known painters hung about on the walls, to sit there and eat a quick lunch or to linger leisurely over afternoon tea. How very natural to stroll from the tearoom, seek out the painters or the craftsmen or women in nearby studios, chat with them about their work and sometimes, proudly, bear home a painting, a watercolor, or even a beaten metal panel by one of the Macdonald sisters.

In those days it was safe to bet your last brass farthing that any artist whose work turned your head had been a student at the Glasgow School of Art. Founded in 1840, the school grew out of the firm conviction that well-trained artists and designers could promote both the nation's esteem and trade. Its founders had both insight and acumen. Under the bustling leadership of the school's young headmaster, Francis Newbery, and his wife, Jessie, students in the 1880s and 1890s received excellent training and energetic promotion.[2] Newbery's students were also fortunate in that their emerging maturity and talents coincided with their city's peak industrial, intellectual and artistic growth.

Francis and Jessie Newbery fostered the talents of four students in particular: the Macdonald sisters and two young men, Charles Rennie Mackintosh and Herbert MacNair, interior and furniture designers. The sisters were day students and the men were evening students; Newbery, in a critique of their works, told the four about the similarity of their styles, and suggested they meet.[3] In about 1895 the sisters and their two friends formed a group, calling themselves simply "The Four."

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Figures 2 and 3



Margaret and Frances MacDonald

Josephine Gear

Before they met Charles and Herbert, the sisters had already established themselves as designers and craftswomen, showing great versatility in the range of objects they made and the materials with which they worked: embroidered hangings and covers, gesso panels, leaded glass panels, clocks, posters, water colors, book illustrations, and their specialty, repoussé metal panels. Margaret and Frances Macdonald worked well as a team. Not only did they cooperate on ideas and drawing, but they often bent over the same metal panel to work side by side. They enjoyed life. They shared a studio and held salons for all the leading writers and artists of Glasgow. The sisters were more than able to hold their own. During the short years of "The Four's" life, from about 1895 to 1899, the two women continued to work very closely together. "The Four" exhibited together and exchanged ideas and designs. The men, for example, designed furniture in which the sisters' decorative gesso panels were inset. The sisters evidently found the collective working arrangement to their advantage: during these years they produced their most original and vigorous designs.

In 1899 Frances married MacNair and the two moved to Liverpool where he had a teaching post. The next year Margaret married Mackintosh. The MacNairs' move to Liverpool brought the sisters' working arrangement and the collaboration of "The Four" to an end. After 1899, the four artists produced independently or collaborated with their marriage partner on design projects. Although groups of artists were quite common in those decades (members of the various small English arts and crafts organizations around William Morris, Arthur Mackmurdo and Walter Crane worked and exhibited together), no two artists during this period seemed to work and live in such close harmony as the two sisters. Their life and work together in the Glasgow studio gave a certain intensity to their work, an intensity which was lost after they separated in 1899.

The strand of another independent, spirited and middle-class woman, Catherine Cranston, is yet to be woven into the story. Catherine became a principal patron of Charles and Margaret Macdonald.[4] As the creator and owner of the tearooms she commissioned husband and wife to design the rooms' every aspect, from their structure and decoration to designs for posters and menu cards. In the tearooms the arts and crafts mingled freely and complemented each other.

Better yet, Catherine Cranston's women customers found the environment supportive. The tearooms created a social phenomenon by becoming "virtually the first places of their kind where even the richest and most elegant of Edwardian female society might properly meet without chaperons."[5]

Unlike the tearoom clientele, Margaret and Frances lived free from the shadows of chaperons. By the standards of their day they were liberated. Details of their lives before marriage are poorly documented, so it is difficult to locate the source of their independence. Since independence and creativity are so strongly linked, however, and of great interest in the biographies of women artists, I shall undertake a reconstruction of their early lives.

In the late 1880s Margaret and Frances Macdonald returned from England with their father. It is probable that the sisters, raised in England, at first felt foreign in Glasgow. Events that uproot or bring great changes to lives are often those encouraging a sense of self and a desire to do something with one's life. Possibly the move to Glasgow acted as a stimulus to the sisters. At any rate, Margaret and Frances knew who they were, knew what they wanted to do and, soon after their arrival in Glasgow, first

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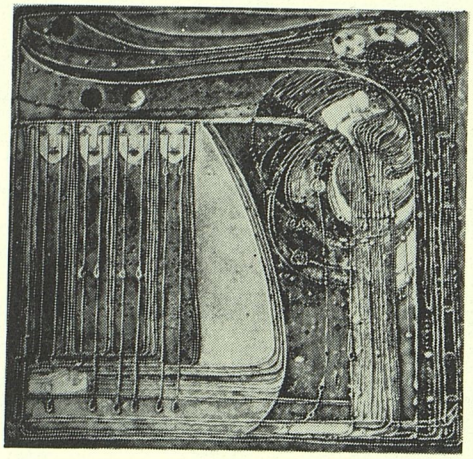


Figure 4

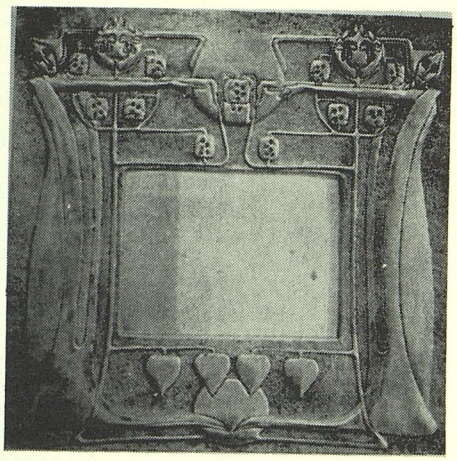


Figure 5



Figure 6

Margaret, then Frances entered the School of Art.

Once in the school, the sisters found support for their ideas in the presence of other like-minded women, such as Jessie Newbery and their contemporaries, Jessie King, craftswoman and book illustrator, and Jane Fonie, an interior designer. A tradition of active women had been established at the school in 1882 when a group of former students founded the Glasgow Society of Lady Artists' Club, the oldest women's club in Britain.[6]

The sisters acquired backbone at the school. They were trained in drawing from the model, drawing freehand, anatomical and botanical drawing, as well as ornamental design. The school encouraged them to develop their own distinctive styles at an early stage. Soon their unrefined and untamed energies led to bizarre shapes, to angular and cutting edges to their female forms.

Shortly after leaving the school the sisters' reputations traveled as far as London. In 1896, the London Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society invited "The Four" to send furniture, craftwork and posters in the "modern style" to that year's exhibition. The sisters sent four pieces, two of which they had worked on together: a clock of beaten silver with beaten brass weights and an aluminum pendulum, a muffin stand, a beaten aluminum panel, *The Star of Bethlehem*, by Francis and *The Annunciation* by Margaret.[7]

The themes of these early figurative pieces express the sisters' two constant iconographic interests, women and babies. Frequently the woman/Virgin appears trapped and isolated within their work. And, though Christian subject matter did not recur as often in the later pieces, apparently the intensity of their religious convictions never dimmed. What a pagan and savage interpretation they gave to their Virgin and Child images. London eyes boggled.

In the mid-1890s the English arts and crafts movement was dominated by William Morris's most faithful disciple, Walter Crane. His designs pleased everyone, but then they were too innocuous to do otherwise. The polite London art crowd moving from a Crane to a Macdonald cried out, "The Spook School!"[8]

We can see why. Look at a mirror frame (Figure 5) made by Frances in 1896-1897. Two excruciatingly thin female figures with ghoulish eyes point accusingly at each other over the seed cases of the Honesty plant. The seed pods look like death's heads. And how spooky is the round copper sconce made by both sisters in 1896-1897 (Figure 1). Imagine it nailed to the wall of a darkened room and lit by the fluttering light of candles in its holders. Visualize how the eyes in the round copper plate, and in its supports, might enlarge and shrink in the jumping shadows of candlelight. Now look at the two female figures, with scraggy, flattened forms and hanging breasts imprisoned within the rectangular panels of a pair of beaten brass candle sconces (Figures 2 and 3), designed by the two sisters in the same years. Strange details give the figures in these sconces an apocryphal air: attached to one figure is an orb, supporting a baby suckling at the breast; on the other a crescent moon superimposes its cruel edges and, in the outspread hands of the same figure, vivid marks, more like stigmata than wrinkles, are slashed in the open palms. The air of suffering and martyrdom in these figures is so marked that I find myself speculating whether the sisters, consciously or unconsciously, made associations between these two female figures and the sacrificial roles lived out by the majority of women they knew. But not themselves; at this point they were still free.

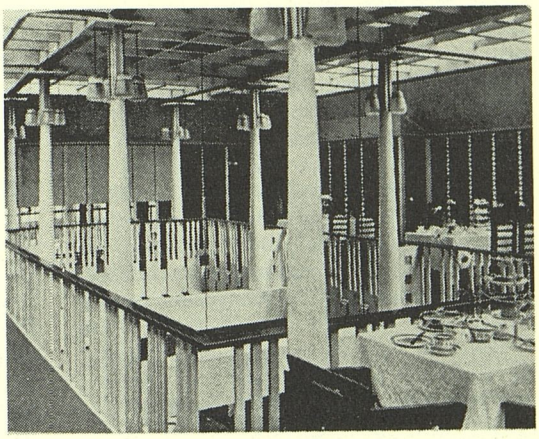
The sisters might have felt dashed by the epithet "The Spook School" since the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society never asked them or "The Four" to exhibit again. However, Gleeson White, editor of the influential arts magazine *The Studio*, responded enthusiastically to the originality of their designs and visited Glasgow to find out more about the arts and crafts movement there. After his visit, *The Studio* published a two-part article on the Glasgow artists with part one almost entirely devoted to the Macdonald sisters' works.[9]

Gleeson White was impressed that the sisters not only designed all the pieces he saw but, apart from some joinery work, they handled, beat and wrought even the large and heavy pieces themselves, including two floor-standing clocks. Neither sister was covetous of her individual contribution to the pieces they jointly designed and executed. They refused to be drawn into games of identification.

After looking at their early emaciated figures, the inflated look the sisters' works acquire in the early 1900s comes as a surprise. Reproduced here is a panel Margaret designed in colored plaster for the Rose Boudoir (Figure 6), shown at the International Exhibition, Turin, 1902. Some of Frances's figures acquire a similar full-blown look in these years. In the early 1900s the sisters changed their models; the influence of Japanese prints and works by the pre-Raphaelites superseded the earlier sources of Celtic art, Aubrey Beardsley and Jan Toorop.[10] In the 1900s an inventive note appeared in Margaret's use of junk materials: colored glass, rope and plaster. The materials cost little and gave a rich, jeweled effect. But the rawness, the evil, the spirits that had made their early metal pieces fairly rattle, had gone. No amount of fancy curvilinear lines or innovative mixing of media could atone for this. Do success and marriage account for this transformation of the sisters' works?

No matter the causes, each new development the sisters and their husbands brought forth was eagerly seized upon by their audience on the Continent. In 1900 they were invited to furnish and decorate an entire room at the eighth Secessionist Exhibition in Vienna. In 1902, along with other Glasgow artists, they exhibited works in the Scottish section of the International Exhibition of Decorative Art in Turin. Everything the four artists sent to the two exhibitions sold. Between 1899 and 1905, articles, reviews and illustrations of their works appeared

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Gallery of Willow Tearoom, Glasgow.

frequently in influential journals such as *Dekorative Kunst* and *Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration*; *Ver Sacrum*, the official publication of the Vienna Secession, devoted an issue to them.

Suddenly, in 1905, curiosity about the four artists declined on the Continent. Even in Scotland the number of commissions began to drop; England never revived the brief interest it had displayed in 1896. Though Charles and Margaret had a highly successful exhibition in St. Petersburg in 1913, where everything but the carpet sold, and though one other show was planned for Paris in 1914, the successes of their first heady decade were never repeated.

It becomes impossible to find published reproductions of the sisters' works after 1905. One of the last I found is a gesso panel made by Margaret in 1905 (Figure 4). Undeniably, this is the most powerfully modeled piece yet seen, but the subject shows a dangerous stagnation. It is no more than a summation of themes explored earlier by the sisters. For whom were those plaster tears meant to fall? Catherine Cranston's tearoom clientele? Or Margaret and her sister? Did Margaret begin to feel she was cast in a mold much as her rope and glass ladies? Did she mourn her lost independence? Were her spirits and her creativity slipping away? I believe so, and I am saddened.

I am against passive readings of history. People, their deeds, as well as those they avoided doing, affect us mightily. The Macdonald sisters capitulated.[11] They allowed their strident voices of the 1890s to fade into soothing murmurs and echoes of what once they were. How dared they! [They make it harder for us to shape ourselves into the creative and independent beings we would like to be. We need all the positive models we can get our hands on, and here are two more negative ones.]

Did this change in their art reflect the constraints of their times? Yes. It was difficult for women in turn-of-the-century Glasgow to train and practice as architects, as the Macdonalds' husbands did. Both sisters would have benefited from the training and practice of this profession. The status of crafts, despite the sincere activities of William Morris who tried to unite the arts and the crafts (and all the activities and organizations that this engendered) remained very much a poor relative of their rich aunt, Fine Art. Margaret and Frances worked at their drawing boards and hammered out their metal panels. They probably wondered what the studio people were up to. Fine artists (among them women) painted decadent images of women—think of Beardsley's art. Could Margaret and Frances humbly working in the lower echelons of the crafts not pick up those cues? As craftswomen working in a stratified society, it might not have occurred to them to push their early independent spirits farther than they did.

The Macdonald sisters' best years were all too short. Their career spanned the period of the realliance between the arts and the crafts and its subsequent deterioration. Neither Glasgow's renaissance of the arts nor women's independence survived two decades. The cycles of local movements were taken up within the larger motions grinding inside the machinery of Western capitalist society in the years preceding World War I. When the confidence, energy and profits of the middle and upper classes decreased in those years, the effect was soon seen in the arts. In the depression of the 1930s, one of the last of Glasgow's tearooms,[12] its wood, brick, colored glass, rope, pale mauve and green gesso ladies, crumbled under the hammers of demolition workers.

[1]The first five cities were London, Paris, Berlin, Vienna and St. Petersburg. Glasgow's other heavy industries were engineering, textiles, chemicals, printing and papermaking. C.A. Oakley, *The Second City* (Glasgow and London: *Blackie*, 1975).

[2]In 1895, at the request of *L'Oeuvre Artistique*, Francis Newbery sent three cases of his students' work to the Arts and Crafts Exhibition in Liege. T. Howarth, *Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the Modern Movement* (London: *Routledge and Kaegan Paul Ltd.*, 1952), p. 37.

[3]Information told to Howarth by Herbert MacNair, p. 25.

[4]Her brother, Stuart Cranston, was also in the tearoom business. Catherine Cranston appears to have been the important patron of Mackintosh and Macdonald. The tearooms' busiest hours were 11:00 to noon, 4:00 to 5:00 p.m. Smoke-rooms were set aside for the men. Margaret Macdonald's contributions to the tearooms were not as important as her husband's were. Therefore, the tearooms are not discussed further. See Howarth on Mackintosh's tearoom designs.

[5]H. Jefferson Barnes, *Furniture by Charles Rennie Mackintosh*, (Glasgow: *Glasgow School of Art*, 1969).

[6]*The Glasgow Boys, Part Two: The History of the Group and Illustrations* (Edinburgh: The Scottish Arts Council, 1971), p. 77.

[7]*Catalogue of the Fifth Exhibition, 1896* (London: Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, 1896), exhibit nos: 285, 475, 508, 511.

[8]The sisters' work was reviewed in *The Studio*, IX, December, 1896, pp. 202–203.

[9]*The Studio*, XI, July, 1897, pp. 86–100.

[10]Ford Madox Brown's *Take Your Son Sir*, 1856–1857, Tate Gallery, is the source of compositional inspiration for Margaret's piece, as R. Schmultzer, *Art Nouveau* (New York: *H. N. Abrams*, 1962), p. 240, among others, has pointed out.

[11]Mentioning the care Margaret took of her husband (he became an alcoholic), Robert Macleod writes how "patiently and devotedly" she had borne "the years of trial and disappointment." *Charles Rennie Mackintosh* (Feltham, *Middlesex: Country Life*, 1968), p. 150.

[12]Oakley (p. 185) states that none of the tearooms have survived intact, though part of the famous Willow Tearoom was doing service, quite recently, as Daly's Bridal Boutique.

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ADELAIDE ALSOP ROBINEAU:

Ceramist from Syracuse

Peg Weiss

Adelaide Alsop Robineau (1865–1929) who worked and lived most of her life in Syracuse, New York, was one of the foremost ceramists of her time and is today regarded by many as America's greatest ceramist. She was a perfectionist: in 25 years of continued creativity she produced only 600 works which she deemed worthy of survival.[1] Nearly every known piece is a superior example of its type, whether it be the *grand feu* (high-fire) porcelain at which she excelled or stoneware; crystalline glaze or flammé; excised or pierced eggshell.

Born in Middletown, Connecticut, the daughter of an engineer and inventor, Adelaide Alsop was artistically talented and determined to be self-supporting. She first turned to the decoration of porcelain, teaching herself the technique from books. She was soon proficient enough to become a teacher of porcelain painting, a career she pursued for several years at St. Mary's Hall school in Minnesota. In the early 1890s she returned to New York where she studied painting briefly with William Merritt Chase, still supporting herself as a china decorator.

At 34, she married Samuel Robineau whom she had met in the Midwest. They joined G. H. Clark in Syracuse to found and publish *Keramic Studio* with Adelaide Robineau as editor. The new porcelain painters' magazine soon dominated the field. A typical issue might include descriptions of new materials and techniques, an art historical article on Chinese porcelain painting and Robineau's own designs and writings. *Keramic Studio* complemented another nationally known magazine published in the Syracuse area, *The Craftsman*. Edited by Gustave Stickley, creator of "Mission" furniture, it promoted the ideals of the international arts and crafts movement inherited from William Morris. The magazines were extremely influential to the development and flourishing of the American arts and crafts movement, achieving national circulation in a short time.

In 1903, Samuel Robineau translated and published in *Keramic Studio* a series of articles by Taxile Doat, the Sevres master, on the making of *grand feu* porcelain.[2] Adelaide Robineau had longed to create new forms and inspired by these articles she went to study with Charles Binns at the pottery school in Alfred, New York. She then set up her own kiln at home and fired her first batch of porcelains, with her husband serving as her advisor and technician. She experimented alone, however, with different clay bodies and developed a remarkable range of glazes, fixed and flowing, crystalline and matte, for which she is famous.[3] She also experimented endlessly to adjust Doat's formulas to her own materials and discovered a special variety of Texas kaolin that lent itself to her requirements of translucency and strength.

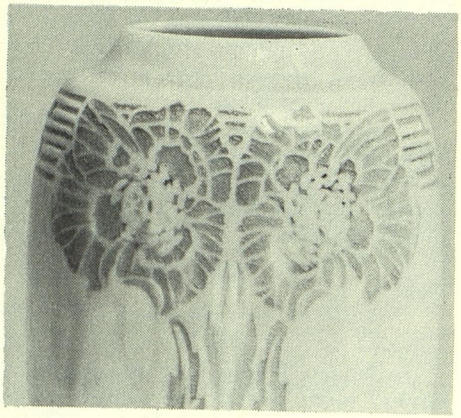
In 1903–1904, the Robineaus built a house and separate studio on a hillside overlooking Syracuse which Adelaide designed with an architect friend, Catharine Budd. The studio building consisted of three stories: the kiln area on the first floor, the pottery on the second and a playroom for the three Robineau children on the third. Having the children nearby while mother pursued her profession was considered drastically "modern" when the Robineau home was featured in *American Homes and Gardens* in 1910.[4] The buildings still stand on Robineau Road in Syracuse.

Adelaide Robineau's brilliant experiments included the oxblood flammé of Chinese tradition, crystalline glazes in blue, white and maize, crackles and inlaid slip designs. She undertook a challenge most of her contemporaries thought was impossible: the creation of eggshell "coupes" or shallow rimless bowls with excised designs. Because the paper-thin porcelain clay is so brittle, it can only be worked in the dry state, and carving it requires extraordinary patience and delicacy. Of her 12 attempts at eggshell pieces, only three survived. The third, with "a beautiful, excised design of swans," was broken in Detroit on its way to an exhibition.

In 1910 Robineau was invited by Edward G. Lewis, founder of the American Women's League, to teach at University City Pottery at St. Louis, Missouri, and to work there with Taxile Doat. According to Paul Evans, "for a short time the University City Pottery had the most notable group of ceramic artists and experts thus far associated with an institution in this country."[5] While there the Robineaus founded another magazine, *Palette and Bench*, under Lewis's sponsorship.

It was also in St. Louis that Robineau created the magnificent "Scarab Vase" which won a grand prize at the 1910 Turin International Exposition. It required 1,000 hours of labor and two firings. Also called "The Apotheosis of the Toiler," the vase is decorated with an excised design of scarabs, a symbolic reference to the patience and skill demanded of the craftswoman. It is of translucent porcelain with an unglazed background and a relief design in a semi-opaque white glaze. Accents in pale blue-green are achieved with a thin, fixed, semi-opaque copper glaze.[6]

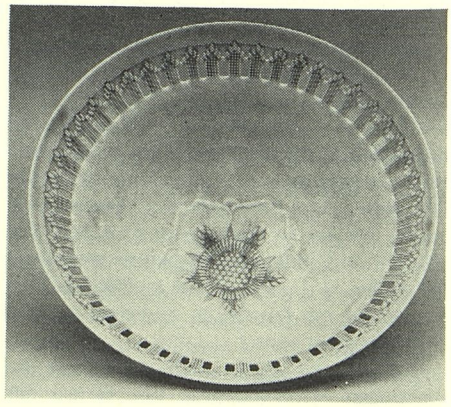
In the "Poppy Vase" of 1910, Robineau expressed a personal style that the influential New York critic, Royal Cortissoz, later called "a blending of precious qualities—of knowledge, skill, judgement, taste, and above all, the sense of beauty."[7] This vase, 6¼ inches high, is decorated with an exquisite poppy and leaf design which was first excised and then inlaid with colored



"Poppy Vase," 1910, by Adelaide Alsop Robineau. High-fire porcelain with modulating greens and red, 6¼" high. Everson Museum of Art. 16.4.3.



"Scarab Vase—Apotheosis of the Toiler," 1910, by Adelaide Alsop Robineau. High-fire porcelain with lid and independent stand, 15 5/8" high. Everson Museum of Art, 30.4.78.



"Eggshell Coupe," 1924, by Adelaide Alsop Robineau. High-fire porcelain, white glaze with pale green design on rim and foot, pierced and excised design, 5 5/8" diameter. Metropolitan Museum of Art.

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slips. In the firing, the glazes remained perfectly set within the inlay, coloring and hardening to produce the effect of a transparent enamel over the whole. Small as it is, the vase has a monumental quality typical of Robineau's best work.

Another masterpiece is the "Viking Ship Vase" of 1905. With rich matte and semi-matte glazes of blue, green, brown and cream, the modest form is decorated with a typical Art Nouveau Viking ship motif, wave-tossed around its rim, a symbol of human transcendence over the vicissitudes of life. In a remarkable tour de force, the Viking ship motif is transformed from relief to sculpture in the delicately pierced, independent stand which supports the vase.

Vase after vase displays exquisite invention, from the subtle striations of the "Snake Bowl" with its delicate reptilian head, to the iridescent crystals of a small untitled white vase. Stylistically, the work ranges from restrained and elegant adaptations of Art Nouveau or arts and crafts movement taste to the orientalizing manner of the eggshell "coupes" to Art Deco urns.

Her work was so specialized and technically difficult that Robineau could not expect great monetary rewards. Whereas Louis Comfort Tiffany in New York and Lalique in France employed many workers and turned out multiple versions of their patterns, Robineau's creations were unique. Once in an attempt to increase her income, she tried to mass-produce porcelain doorknobs, but the endless repetition so frustrated and bored her that the operation ceased almost as soon as it began.

Nevertheless, she was richly rewarded by professional recognition during her lifetime. Her work was introduced to the public at the 1904 St. Louis Exposition and in 1905 Tiffany and Co. became an agent for the Robineau porcelains.[8] She was selected to exhibit at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs and at the Paris Salon in 1911, was awarded Grand Prize at the 1915 San Francisco Exposition, and received special prizes and awards from the Art Institute of Chicago and the societies of arts and crafts in Detroit and Boston. She received an honorary Doctor of Ceramic Science degree from Syracuse University in 1917 and in 1920 she joined the faculty. The Metropolitan Museum mounted an unusual one-person memorial exhibition of her work.

According to Samuel Robineau's accounting, she earned only about $10,000 from the sale of her work. Today it is considered priceless, a fact she anticipated in an hitherto unpublished letter:

In the days of the ancient Chinese potters, Emperors paid fabulous prices for examples of their work, and nobility vied with each other to posess [sic] *each piece which came perfect from the potter's hands. All through the ages kings and wealth have been patrons and eager purchasers of art crafts, not only of former times but of contemporary artists. It remained for grand America, who* [sic] *has been too busy just growing, to neglect contemporary and native arts and crafts so that no country is so lacking in native craftsmen and crafts work. . . . they* [the few patrons] *have failed to see that contemporary talent has to be encouraged by purchase of the best in native work.* [She expresses pleasure in Carter's interest in adding her work to the museum's collection and to encourage him and his board, she suggests the following] *. . . as a simple matter of "boosting" Syracuse such a collection might be a drawing card. When a city wishes to be called to sit up higher in the seats of honor, like a good business man she would put her best foot forward, if she has anything above the average, she writes it in large letters, if she has anything unique, she blazons it abroad—Syracuse has* at least *two unique boasts to make—there is the salt which gives its savor—And there are the Robineau Porcelains!*

She then suggested a purchase plan involving her own donation of some works as an incentive to the board of the Syracuse Museum, and concluded:

In this way Syracuse will have such a collection as no other museum will ever have the opportunity of purchasing even for double the amount. And when the Syracuse Art Museum [sic] *is quoted in future articles as having a fine example of the work of this or that artist it will be added that Syracuse's unique glory is its collection of the porcelains of its townswoman the only individual maker of art porcelain in this country, one of the few—the very few in the world and the only* woman *to attain such prominence in ceramics. All of which sounds very conceited from me but which is true nevertheless. . . .*[9]

Clearly, Robineau was not one to be easily deterred. Her tenacity and confidence in her craft was further shown in an article she wrote for *The Art World* in 1917:

This fascinating work unfortunately is not a paying proposition, but it has given me the satisfaction of doing original work, work which has not been done in this country before and may not be done again. . . . I often dream of all the things I would have done if I had begun earlier in life or if I had been financially independent so that I could have devoted myself entirely to my porcelains. The pieces I have produced are few in number, but they represent in design and shape the best that was in me and I hope that some of them may be an inspiration to some artist of the future, who perhaps will be able to do more and better work than I have done.[10]

Adelaide Alsop Robineau need not have been so modest. Just as she predicted, Syracuse does consider her work one of its "glories." The Everson Museum still celebrates her memory in its regular Ceramics Exhibitions, inaugurated in her honor in 1932. Nearly half a century after her death she is admired by aspiring artists who covet the perfection of the "Poppy Vase" or "The Viking Ship," or one of the unnamed but brilliant crystalline-glazed vases. She was a high-fire porcelain maker, a "high-fire person" and an artist of the highest caliber.

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1. According to her husband's recollection, "All the unsatisfactory pieces were reglazed and refired until they came out good or (were) entirely spoiled." (Samuel E. Robineau, "Adelaide Alsop Robineau," *Design* XXX, no. 11 [April, 1929], p. 205.)
2. The essays by Doat were later published in book form as *Grand Feu Ceramics* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Keramic Studio Publishing Co., 1905).
3. The distinction between Adelaide's creative work in inventing forms, glazes and decorations and in making the actual pieces, and Samuel's advisory role as firing technician has been underscored by their daughter, Mrs. Elizabeth Lineaweaver, in a recent interview with the author.
4. Grace Wickham Curran, "An American Potter, her Home and Studio," *American Homes and Gardens* (Sept., 1910), pp. 364–366.
5. Paul Evans, *Art Pottery of the United States, an Encyclopedia of Producers and their Marks* (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1974), pp. 243–247. The American Women's League, founded in 1907 to provide "wider opportunity for American women," sponsored correspondence courses and invited talented women to study under the personal instruction of the staff. The Women's League failed financially in 1911 and the Robineaus returned to Syracuse.
6. Described in detail by Adelaide Alsop Robineau in an article on "American Pottery," *The Art World*, III (Nov., 1917), pp. 153–155.
7. Royal Cortissoz, *New York Herald-Tribune* (Feb. 24, 1929).
8. See Paul Evans, also "Robineau Porcelains," Tiffany & Co., Agents, Fifth Avenue, New York (undated catalog, ca. 1907).
9. Letter dated November 12, 1915, from Adelaide Alsop Robineau to Fernando Carter (punctuation and italics follow the original), in the archives of the Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, N.Y. Present plans for the Everson's Robineau Collection include an exhibition of the complete collection in a new installation to be accompanied by a major catalog in 1979, the 75th anniversary of the introductior of Robineau's work to the public at the 1904 St. Louis Exposition.
10. Adelaide Alsop Robineau, "American Pottery," p. 155.

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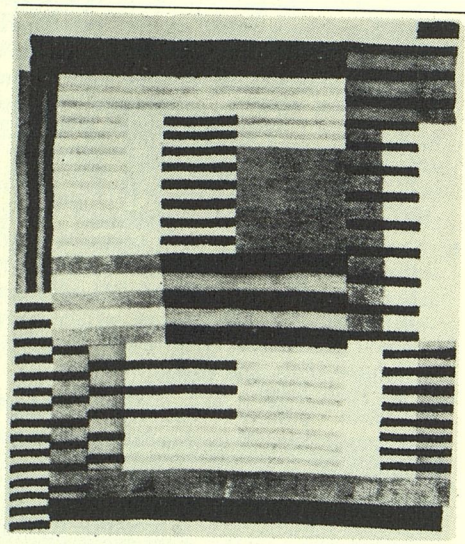
WOMEN OF THE BAUHAUS

Martha Keller

Women comprised about a third of the student body of the Bauhaus, the famous 1920s experiment in art education, and about ten percent of the faculty.[1] Through the writings of these women, we can see the politics of the craft/art split in their time—the sexual division of materials, the rejection of the cult of personality (an affirmation of anonymity), the struggle to amalgamate art and craft into a larger social sphere via industry, etc. These issues are of continuing interest today—for artists, teachers and feminists.

After six months in the preliminary Bauhaus course, students moved on to one of seven workshops in crafts. The workshop organization was sometimes diagramed in circular form to avoid the implication of a hierarchy. Let's look at where women worked in a Bauhaus linear listing.[2]

	STONE	WOOD (cabinet making)	METAL	CLAY	GLASS	COLOR (mural)	TEXTILES (weaving)
Faculty			Marianne Brandt				Helene Borner Gunta Stölzl Anni Albers Otti Berger (sub) Lilli Reich
Students with work in English-language publications		Alma Buscher	Marianne Brandt		Lou Scheper		Gunta Stölzl Anni Albers Ruth Hollos Ruth Citroen-Vallentin Gertrude Hantsch Hedwig Jungnik Suse Ackermann Korona Krause Margarete Kohler Marianne Heymann Mila Hoffman-Lederer Ida Kerkovios Benita Otte Martha Erps Lies Beyer Agnes Roghe



Anni Albers: Knotted rug, smyrna wool (1925) Black, shades of gray and red. Gascard-Diepold Collection, Berlin.

What were the sociopolitical implications of the fact that most of these women were relegated to the weaving workshop? Anni Albers at first objected to being there.

I was tempted by the glass workshop. Unfortunately it was decided that no other students could be admitted for work there. . . . Weaving? Weaving I thought was too sissy. I was looking for a real job; I went into weaving unenthusiastically as merely the least objectionable choice . . . Gradually threads caught my imagination.[3]

Helene Nonne-Schmidt, writing in the Leipzig journal *Vivos voco* in 1926, saw the role of women in weaving as an affirmation of a traditional women's art, but today her position has sexist implications.

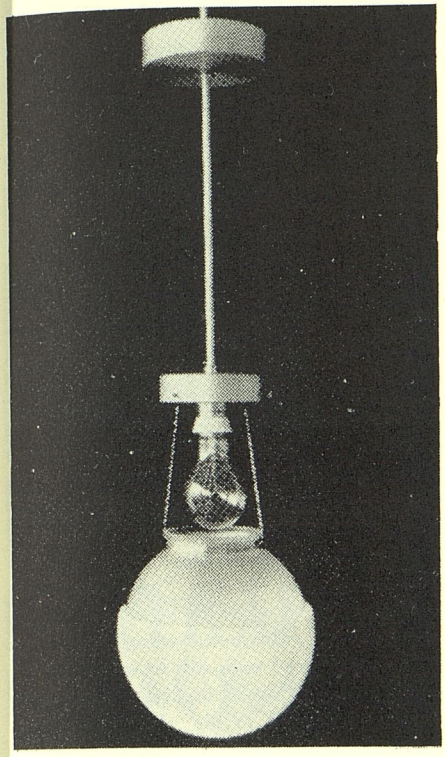
The artistically active woman applies herself most often and most successfully to work in a two-dimensional plane. This observation can be explained by her lack of the spatial imagination characteristic of men. Of course there are individual differences and differences of degree here, just as the nature of the sexes seldom is either purely masculine or feminine. In addition, the way the woman sees is, so to speak, childlike, because like a child she sees the details instead of the over-all picture. The woman's way of seeing things is not to be taken as a deficiency; rather it is simply the way she is constituted, and it enables her to pick up the richness of nuances which are lost to the more comprehensive view. But let us not deceive ourselves into thinking this aspect of her nature will change, despite all the accomplishments of the Women's Movement and despite all the investigations and experiments. There are even indications that woman is counting on her limitations, considering them a great advantage. . . .

Within the Bauhaus and its workshops the woman is primarily interested in the work of the weaving workshop and there finds the widest range of opportunities. Weaving represents the fusion of an infinite multiplicity to unity, the interlocking of many threads to make up a fabric. It is quite evident to what extent this field of work is appropriate to a woman and her talents.

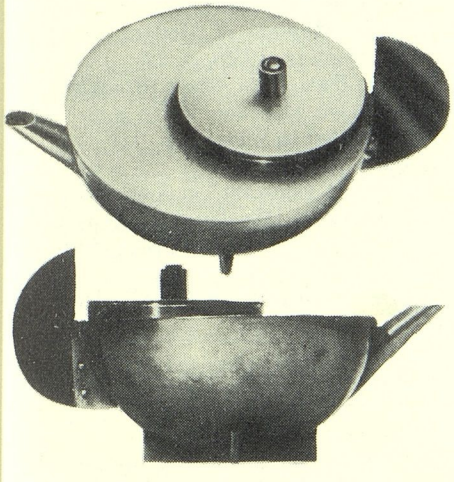
The ability of woman to become absorbed in detail and her interest in experimental "play" with surfaces suit her for this work . . .[4]

What were some other political implications of the fact that weaving was, as Gunta Stölzl put it, "primarily a woman's field of work?" One answer that comes up is the

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Marianne Brandt: Spherical Lighting fixture with safety chains, ca. 1928.



Marianne Brandt: Small pot for tea essence with deep tea strainer (1924) Brass container, silver-plated, inside, ebony handle. Set-in strainer made of silver. Bauhaus-Archiv, Darmstadt.

political value of material. Some art materials are "higher" than others; paint, bronze and marble are distinguished from "low" art materials such as clay, fiber, glass, wood and metal because of cost and accessibility. In this regard, the Bauhaus attitude seemed crucial and ironic. On the one hand there was the declaration about raising no "arrogant barrier between artist and craftsman." On the other, a barrier *was* raised within the crafts, though a few women circumvented it. And it seems significant that the weaving workshop was at the bottom of a (not alphabetical) list of workshops offered in the first brochure published by the Bauhaus.

The career of Anni Albers expresses some of the irony of the Bauhaus attitude. Albers, who studied painting before entering the Bauhaus, had a long successful career as a weaver and teacher, but since 1965 she has turned to another art form, printmaking. It is as though, after fighting to prove that weaving is an art, she has given up. "Weaving," she said in a recent interview with Gene Baro, "is not generally recognized as an art, but as a craft. I find that when the work is made with threads, it's considered a craft; when it's on paper, it's considered art."[5] Yet Albers's early writings abound with support of the Bauhaus's "unprejudiced attitude towards materials and their inherent capacities." She explains this attitude in numerous instances that relate as well to anonymity in design.

. . . all art is form in some material . . .[6]

Any material is good enough for art.[7]

Design is often regarded as the form imposed on the material by the designer. But if we, as designers, cooperate with the material, treat it democratically, you might say, we will reach a less subjective solution of this problem of form and therefore a more inclusive and permanent one. The less we, as designers, exhibit in our work our personal traits, our likes and dislikes, our peculiarities and idiosyncrasies, in short, our individuality, the more balanced the form we arrive at will be. It is better that the material speaks than that we speak ourselves. The design that shouts "I am a product of Mr. X" is a bad design. As consumers, we are not interested in Mr. X but in his product, which we want to be our servant and not his personal ambassador. Now, if we sit at our desk designing, we cannot avoid exhibiting ourselves for we are excluding the material as our co-worker, as the directive force in our planning.[8]

What about the women in areas other than weaving? Margarete Sachsenberg was business manager of the Bauhaus from 1926–1932, organized the transfer of the Bauhaus to Berlin and set up the administration there. Gerda Marx was a physical education instructor. In 1932, supervision of the interior design workshop and seminar was assigned to Lilli Reich; before this, she was Mies van der Rohe's closest associate as an interior designer. When he was director of the Bauhaus, van der Rohe appointed her to direct the weaving workshop as well. Reich was among the last group of faculty in Berlin who voted to close the Bauhaus under pressure from the Nazi regime.

The work of a woman in the cabinetmaking workshop was one of the first Bauhaus products to receive favorable public response. Alma Buscher's design for children's furniture was "thought out equally well with respect to practicality, economy and form." When she designed a toy cabinet, it was made for children to play and build with; most of it could be taken apart and reassembled.[9]

In the metal workshop, Marianne Brandt studied with Moholy-Nagy.

At first I was not accepted with pleasure—there was no place for a woman in a metal workshop, they felt. They admitted this to me later on and meanwhile expressed their displeasure by giving me all sorts of dull, dreary work. How many little hemispheres did I most patiently hammer out of brittle new silver, thinking that was the way it had to be and all beginnings are hard. Later things settled down and we got along well together.[10]

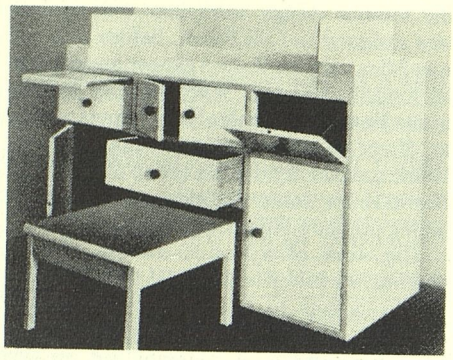
Illustrations of Brandt's work in industrial design can be seen in Wingler's *Bauhaus:* globe lighting fixtures, her famous Kandem lamp, egg cooker, tea and coffee set. A number of these works—along with weavings by Stölzl and Albers—are in the Museum of Modern Art's permanent collection.

Through Alma Mahler, Walter Gropius (founder of the Bauhaus) met Johannes Itten and appointed him teacher of the first "preliminary course" at the Bauhaus.[11] Through Itten's influence, Gertrude Grunow was hired to teach "Studies in Harmony."

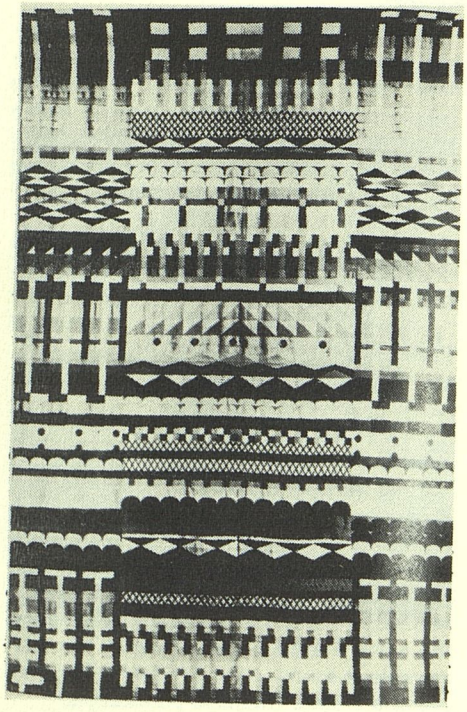
Fifty-five years old at the time of her appointment, Grunow was a woman of "strong spiritual force" with "extraordinary ability to empathize" with students—"an intuitively sure hand in dealing with young people." Felix Klee referred to her as "the good spirit of the Bauhaus."[12] According to her "synesthetic" thinking, one basic entity, the same "original phenomenon," is perceivable in sound, color and form. Her quotation is from a Bauhaus publication.[13]

The supreme law, according to which all order is structured, is called equilibrium. Nature, having placed the organ of equilibrium in the ear, has given man a guardian and protector of order, the ear thus being designated to be the immediate and highest judge of order within the organism. The

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Alma Buscher: Children's Room Dresser, 1924. Wood lacquered in light color. Mrs. Siedhoff, Frankfurt.



Gunta Stölzl: Tapestry, Jacquard fabric (1928–29) Whereabouts unknown. Watercolor sketch in the Bauhaus-Archiv, Darmstadt.

strong effects that sounds have on man can be attributed to equilibrium. The ear, during strain on the organism, senses the living order of that organism in its own specific, highest form of sensation, namely as sound (of any kind, even noise). Every living force, and thus every color, corresponds to a lawful order, to a sound . . .

Further, with regard to the "weight" of color:

The act of weighing derives from the mind "judiciously," progressing materially from the heaviest, the structurally firmest to the lightest, most ephemeral, most flexible. The scales and degrees increase and once more require a special order of colors (forces).

The order of colors . . . occurs as a circular one and constitutes an outward oriented tension of forces . . . The circle, a circle of gravity and equilibrium . . . is a fundamental phenomenon and is of the same importance to statics as the golden section had been for measurement.

Finally, let's look at the view of Bauhaus women on the "community" of the Bauhaus; somehow the social organization of the Bauhaus enhanced its influence. Anni Albers describes it as

. . . a creative vacuum . . . unformalized, unformulated, even contradictory in its various areas.[14]

Called by Felix Klee, "our Bauhaus mother,"[15] Tut Schlemmer, wife of the theater director Oskar Schlemmer, described the climate of the Bauhaus as "like being on top of a volcano."[16] She recalled:

the continuous unrest that forced everyone to express a fundamental opinion of profound problems almost daily . . . It was wild and enthusiastic . . . Boys had long hair, girls short skirts. No collars or stockings were worn, which was shocking and extravagant then . . . We developed a Bauhaus dance—a kind of hop expressing the joy of living. . . . In retrospect I believe I understand the secret of how the Bauhaus could develop in the face of incredible difficulties; we simply loved it . . . and felt responsible.[17]

One gets a feeling here for the "unity in diversity" that Gropius described as an objective of the Bauhaus. Lou Scheper, who participated in Klee's course and Schlemmer's theater as well as in Itten's mural workshop, said:

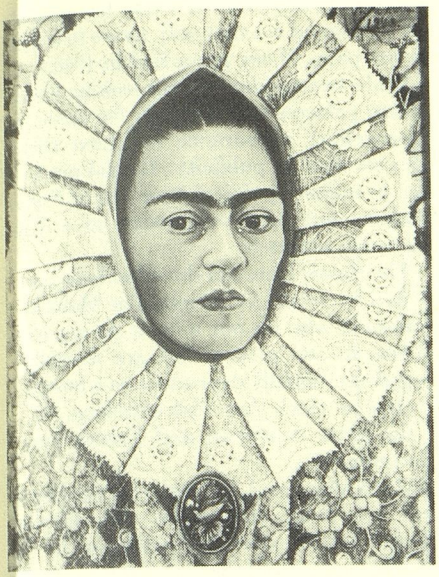
This community corresponded neither to the concept "commune" nor the concept "cloister," even though individual Bauhaus people preferred the ascetic's cell. The Bauhaus community was the sum of significant, independent individuals who could develop more richly in association than in isolation . . . One talked "big"—of the postwar mood of political hope and artistic expectations, of the search for the unified work of art. Play and creative imagination and also a tendency toward mysticism, even to spiritual faith healing and to sectarianism and in addition a delight in nature taken from the youth movement are the badge of Bauhaus members of that time, who were more artists than technicians, more craftsmen than constructors. It was only later that . . . the Cathedral of Socialism was replaced by . . . Art and Technology. Though the Bauhaus had originally started to produce unique, handcrafted pieces, it later developed . . . the models for industrially produced articles. Both were products of the same feeling for form, the sense of function and materials, and both were a consequence drawn from the social tasks of the time.[18]

The craft areas of the Bauhaus (as reflected in its name, meaning "Building-House") were conceived to produce a unified architectural whole. Women largely were consigned to the "additive" crafts while men worked in the structural "essential" areas. Women, except for Lou Scheper, worked with soft or malleable materials, and on objects that were mobile (furniture, weaving) rather than structurally permanent. Although the Bauhaus is generally regarded as the most innovative art school of the twentieth century, its sexual division of craft continued traditional ideas about women's work and men's work.

1) From a roster count in Hans M. Wingler, *The Bauhaus: Weimar Dessau Berlin* Chicago (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1969) pp. 615–621.
2) Herbert Bayer, Ise Gropius, and Walter Gropius, *Bauhaus 1919–1928* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1938, 3rd printing, 1959), p. 23.
3) Gene Baro, *Anni Albers* (Brooklyn: The Brooklyn Museum, 1977), p. 6.
4) Reprinted in Wingler, p. 116.
5) Baro, p. 8.
6) "Art—A Constant" in Anni Albers, *On Designing* (Wesleyan, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1959), p. 46.
7) "One Aspect of Art Work", Albers, p. 32.
8) Albers, p. 6.
9) Wingler, pp. 429, 503, 440, 532.
10) Wingler, pp. 308, 311.
11) Wingler, p. 253.
12) Eckhard Neumann, *Bauhaus and Bauhaus People* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1970), p. 9.
13) Wingler, p. 69.
14) Interview with Neil Welliver, *Craft Horizons*, July/August, 1965, p. 42.
15) Neumann, p. 43.
16) Neumann, p. 155.
17) Neumann, p. 154, 156.
18) Neumann, p. 114.

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SELF PORTRAIT by Frida Kahlo in her Tehuana headdress, now in the collection of Dr. Samuel Fastlicht, Mexico City. Oil on masonite [19" × 15½"], 1948.



Group portrait by Nicholas Muray. From left to right: two women of Tehuantepec, Rosa Rolando Covarrubias, Diego Rivera, Nicholas Muray, Miguel Covarrubias, Frida Kahlo.

PORTRAIT OF FRIDA KAHLO AS A TEHUANA

Hayden Herrera

Frida Kahlo (1910–1954) was one of those strong, vivid people who surmounts all sorts of odds. Unrestrained by her native Mexico's male-dominant culture, Kahlo did pretty much what she pleased. Though she was best known as the wife of the renowned muralist, Diego Rivera, she was admired as a highly original painter whose work pursued totally different goals from her husband's. While Rivera broadcast public messages on public walls, Frida Kahlo painted intensely personal images on small pieces of tin. At 15 Kahlo was crippled for life by a bus accident that almost killed her; yet she became famous for her heroic "allegría." She led a full and complex life, traveling to the United States and to France where she exhibited her paintings. Her house in the Mexico City suburb of Coyoacan, now the Frida Kahlo Museum, was a mecca for visiting dignitaries; the Riveras entertained everybody from Leon Trotsky to André Breton to Sergei Eisenstein.

But what perhaps most attracts the attention of people today is Kahlo's painting. The majority of her paintings are self-portraits, the most accessible subject for someone who spent her life in and out of hospitals and did much of her painting in bed. Self-portraits were a way of confronting, confirming and extending her reality. Kahlo depicted precisely what was going on in her life—birth, abortion, miscarriage, love, divorce, surgical operations, political passions, thoughts of death—with astonishing honesty. The result is a lasting record of female experience that strikes many resonances today. Indeed, Frida Kahlo has become something of a role model for women artists both in the United States and in Mexico.

Anyone looking at her photograph and *Self-Portrait* (1948) can see that Kahlo was a striking beauty. With her full lips, piercing black eyes and heavy connecting brows, she would have attracted attention anywhere. But she enhanced her exotic appearance by choosing as her daily attire the costume of the women from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec—an embroidered blouse and a long skirt of purple or red velvet with a ruffled hem. In many self-portraits, Kahlo wears an elaborate Tehuana headdress that drapes over her shoulders like a shawl and frames her face with pleats of starched lace reminiscent of an outsized Elizabethan ruff. Frida Kahlo arranged her hair in intricate Mexican hairdos decorated with ribbons, clips, combs and flowers. She adored jewelry, and her hands were a constantly changing exhibition of rings. In U.S. cities and in Paris, Frida Kahlo was a traffic stopper and a hostess's delight. Art dealer Julien Levy remembers the commotion Frida Kahlo once created in a Manhattan bank when she walked in followed by a pack of children crying, "Where is the circus?"

Kahlo did not choose her picturesque clothing simply out of exhibitionism, though a taste for spectacle may well have been part of her motive. As her self-portraits in Tehuana costumes show, her reasons for dressing that way were complex. If one compares Frida Kahlo's self-portraits as a Tehuana with the depictions of women in Mexican costumes by the nineteenth-century "Costumbrista" painters, or even with Diego Rivera's portrait of Frida as a Tehuana in a San Francisco mural, one detects something intensely charged and peculiar in the relationship between Kahlo and her costume. In some paintings, her Tehuana dress hangs empty, without Frida in it. The costume seems to have little to do with local color and much to do with a disjunctive sense of her own identity. Surrounded by the lace headdress, for example, her dark, slightly mustachioed face looks perverse and even demonic. Her features are determinedly composed and yet brimming with emotion.

On the simplest level, Frida Kahlo might have dressed in Tehuana costumes because she loved exotic objects that brought the aura of distant places to the confinement of her Mexico City home. Perhaps because she was an invalid and acutely aware of the fragility of her hold on life, Frida Kahlo had a strong love for material objects. She amassed a large collection of "little things"—dolls, toys of clay or straw, costumes, jewelry, pre-Columbian idols and all kinds of popular art. She relished the concreteness of these objects, I suspect, as well as their novelty or visual appeal. Kahlo's friends recall the pleasure she took in the presents they brought her. Souvenirs of other people's wanderings must have precipitated imaginary voyages in her mind. Two years after her bus accident, seventeen-year-old Frida wrote to a friend, "My greatest desire for a long time has been to travel. All that is left to me is the melancholy of those who have read travel books."

Most likely she was not consciously identifying with any specific ethnic myth when she chose the Tehuana costume from the many regional costumes Mexico has to offer. (Kahlo did sometimes wear costumes from other areas of her country as well.) Tehuantepec women are famous for being stately, beautiful, smart, brave and strong; according to legend, theirs is a matriarchal society where women run the markets, handle fiscal matters and dominate the men. Although association with these characteristics

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would not have displeased Frida Kahlo—it probably would have amused her—her selection of the Tehuana costume simply because it was pretty and festive would be more in character. In fact, she said she wore it out of coquetry: she wanted the long swaying skirts to conceal a limp caused by a bout with polio at the age of six that left one leg longer than the other; she also wanted the costume to hide her injured foot.

Besides disguising defects, wearing the Tehuana costume expressed a point of view. It was a statement of Kahlo's passionate identification with her Mexican heritage, an identification stressed by Kahlo's witty, but consciously vulgar, marketplace manner of speaking. Although her father was a German Jew of Austro-Hungarian descent and her mother a Mexican of mixed Spanish and Indian extraction, Frida Kahlo emphasized the Indian in her ancestry. The value Kahlo set on all things native and on all things made by what she called "la raza" (the people) was shared by her husband Diego Rivera and by a whole generation of artists and intellectuals in post-revolutionary Mexico. Their fervent "Mexicanismo" went hand in hand with the adoption of a certain primitivism of style and subject matter in the arts. The folkloric impulse in Mexican culture of this period can be taken as a generally leftist, anticolonialist political statement. Nativism also led to an enthusiastic investigation of the popular arts—including regional costumes. When Anna Pavlova danced a Mexican ballet in Mexico City, she wore a native costume. It was not long before sophisticated urban women adopted the idea for everyday fashion. For example, the Riveras' friend, the painter and photographer, Rosa Rolando (born in Los Angeles) managed to look more Tehuana than the Tehuanas by braiding her hair and wearing Tehuana garb. Her husband Miguel Covarrubias, the writer, painter and cartoonist for *Vanity Fair*, helped to popularize this "Indian" look when he wrote rhapsodically about the Tehuanas in *Mexico South*, published in 1946.

In the 1940s, the cult of Indianism spread to bohemian milieus in the United States. I suspect that both for Frida Kahlo and for urban women in other parts of the world, dressing in peasant costumes had to do with the notion that the peasant is more earthbound and therefore more deeply sensual than the urban sophisticate. To dress in this exotic way, instead of wearing tailored city clothes, gave women a sense of abandon, a permission to feel uninhibited about their bodies. Men liked women to dress in peasant styles too, for in a sense this clothing joined the idea of the earthy, sexual peasant to the idea of the female as nature, not culture. Thus by wearing Indian costumes women declared their primitive connection with nature and their own sexuality. In addition, there is a political dimension to their identification with this popular art form. As usually happens when folk costumes are adopted by sophisticated people, this peasant style did not catch on with men, in Mexico or in the United States. Diego Rivera, for example, chose to wear denim worker's overalls, not the familiar white shirt and pants of the Mexican Indian, to assert his espousal of antibourgeois values. Similarly, in some of her more specifically political moments, Frida Kahlo cropped her hair like a boy and wore denim skirts and work shirts decorated with the Communist star or the hammer and sickle.

Rivera loved the look of the Tehuanas and he brought back costumes for Frida from his trips to Tehuantepec. His enthusiasm for Tehuanas is seen in a series of oil paintings of Tehuantepec women he painted in 1929, the year he married Frida. (Tehuanas also appear in his murals and in a 1935 series of watercolors of Tehuantepec scenes.) Very possibly Frida Kahlo caught Diego's enthusiasm. Before she married, Kahlo dressed in European-style clothes. Her first self-portrait (1926) shows her as an elegantly dressed woman. But, what was unusual for those times, she occasionally wore pants, perhaps to cover the scars from her accident. It was only after her marriage that Frida began to dress and to paint herself as a Tehuana, and it is likely that she did this to please her husband as well as to please herself. Perhaps significantly, Frida explained that the Tehuana Frida in her double self-portait, *The Two Fridas* (1939), was the Frida Diego had loved, while the Frida in the white, European-style, Victorian dress was the Frida Diego had stopped loving during the year they were divorced. The possibility that Frida Kahlo wore Tehuana costumes partly to please Diego is also suggested in *Self-Portrait with Cropped Hair* (1940), likewise painted during her divorce from Diego. Here she has cut off her long hair and dressed herself in a man's suit large enough to have been Diego's. By destroying attributes of sexuality (the long hair and Tehuana clothes that gave pleasure to the man who had betrayed her), Frida has committed a vengeful act that only serves to heighten her pain. (They remarried in 1940.)



Frida Kahlo's Tehuana dress displayed in the room in which she was born (Frida Kahlo Museum, Coyoacan, Mexico City).

Frida became famous for looking like an Indian princess or a goddess. No doubt her eye-catching appearance delighted Diego, who revelled in publicity. He did not hesitate to make a political issue out of Frida's clothes, and once expounded to a *Time* magazine reporter:

> The classic Mexican dress has been created by people for people. The Mexican women who do not wear it do not belong to the people, but are mentally and emotionally dependent on a foreign class to which they wish to belong, i.e., the great American and French bureaucracy.[1]

Frida Kahlo, said Rivera, exaggerating as was his wont, had worn only Mexican clothes for 22 years. Nevertheless, he was thrilled with the effect of Frida's appearance on bourgeois Paris; when she went to Paris in 1938 for an exhibition organized for her by André Breton, Schiaparelli designed a decidedly haute couture "*robe Madame Rivera.*"

By wearing the Tehuana costume, Frida Kahlo created an art object of her scarred and crippled body, and she helped to make herself a living myth. Perhaps the elaborate packaging was an attempt to compensate for her body's deficiencies and for her sense of fragmentation, dissolution and imminent death. A costume can make the wearer feel more visible, more emphatically present as a physical object in space. For a frail, often bedridden woman, this need to establish a theatrical physical presence to confirm her existence must have been strong. Surely this was one of the reasons why Kahlo painted herself so many times.

In addition, the flamboyant costumes, together with Frida's "allegria" and astonishingly direct, earthy behavior, might have been antidotes to the pull of introversion. As her many self-portraits show, Frida Kahlo spent much of her time investigating and communing with herself. Her costumes might also have been distancing mechanisms. They may have allowed Kahlo to dissociate herself somewhat from the painful aspects of her reality. And by wearing colorful costumes Frida could distract friends' attention from her physical suffering. In her self-portraits, tears always signal physical or mental pain, but Frida's features always are unflinching. Her self-portraits are charged with a strange tension because of the contradictions between her festive exterior and suffering interior. Perhaps Frida Kahlo hid behind the exquisite decorative object that she presented to the world. The Tehuana costumes were for her both mask and frame.

1. "Fashion Notes," *Time* Magazine, May 3, 1938.

Hayden Herrera, an art critic, is currently working on a book about Frida Kahlo for Harper and Row. She is curator of a Frida Kahlo exhibition which opened at Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Art in January 1978.

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FEMINISM: HAS IT CHANGED ART HISTORY?

"Until now, no one has been serious and passionate, and certainly no one has been argumentative, concerning attitudes toward women."
Cynthia Gornick, "Women and Creativity" (1969)

Mary D. Garrard

In what way has the discipline of art history been affected by feminism and women's studies?

On one level the answer is obvious. We all know a great deal more about women artists of the past than we did even five years ago, thanks to the efforts of a growing number of scholars who are devoting their research skills to this area. Yet for the most part, this new knowledge remains hermetically sealed in its own world, not touching and often not touched by traditional methods and assumptions of the discipline. Women artists are discussed in courses on women artists, are written about in feminist journals, are grouped in single-sex exhibitions, and if I sound churlish about these activities, which surely have their positive effects, it is only with apprehension that we will all—feminist historians, artists and critics—remain trapped in a great cultural ghetto of our own devising if we do not now begin to force the issue of integration. It is indeed time to put women artists in the regular art history curriculum, and most important, in the standard survey textbooks, so they can be seen by the next generation of students as natural phenomena, and not exotic hothouse plants.

But there are other questions for art history raised by feminism. How has thinking changed? Should it not have changed? A generation of scholars in the early twentieth century were prompted by their response to the Expressionism of their own era to re-examine early sixteenth century Mannerism, and to appraise it positively for the first time. New wine in old bottles, art historically speaking, is a fresh and more complete understanding of the monuments of the past made possible by the analogous, yet genuinely new thought of the present. But where are the Friedlaenders of feminism? Why, now that we see the distorted attitudes and behavior of men and women in the past with a clarity that Plato's cavedwellers would have envied, are we not re-examining the relationship between such artificial, stereotyped behavior patterns and the art produced by those who believed in them?

We can, of course, press the Mannerist analogy far enough to see the danger of imposing modern consciousness on premodern cultures. The heavy emphasis upon *Angst* that accompanies much analytic writing on Mannerism in the 1920s is a prime example of such projection. Similarly, we would be foolish to look for feminist statements in the work of "lady" artists of the Renaissance who never questioned the social order of their day. Undoubtedly discoveries are yet to be made about particular works—a Judith Leyster here, an Artemisia Gentileschi there—in which the woman artist turns a traditional iconographic formula upside down to express a distinguishably female point of view. But not even this is the *terra incognita* we should be charting if we expect art history to be influenced by our thinking.

There are two ways of looking at the history of attitudes toward women in art. One—the only one thus far explored—is to compensate for the lack of scholarly attention to women artists' achievements by writing as apologists. Gabrielle Munter was unjustly overshadowed by Kandinsky; Jeanne-Elisabeth Chaudet was sentimental, but so was Greuze, they all painted flowers and portraits because they didn't have access to the nude model, and so on. All of this is perfectly true, but is a lament from the ghetto, and it will not get us out because it is defensive. The other way is to approach the historic fact of discrimination against women from the other end—what has this politics of exclusion meant for male art? After all, despite the numerical hegemony of male artists, theirs is ultimately an art produced by only one of two sexes, and far from being universal, it is rampant with the prejudices, vanities, insecurities and fears that afflict mere men as well as mere women.

We have been sensitized for nearly ten years now to the fact that the image of each sex in art, and of their interaction, has been overwhelmingly a male perception, and as such, a grab-bag of aspirations, fantasies and neuroses, individual and collective. But if one looks, for instance, through the past five years of the *Art Bulletin*, it is virtually impossible to see that this understanding has affected the way scholars look at their subjects. One of the very few exceptions, Norma

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Broude's article in the March 1977 issue, which debunks the traditional view of Degas as misogynist, met with strong editorial resistance before it was accepted and was first dismissed as a "women's lib tract." Such irrational reaction to logical revisions of thought stimulated by feminism ultimately bespeaks a bunker mentality, a stubborn, last-ditch effort to keep women and attitudes about them outside art history. And this in the discipline that deals with the human experience in its visual, most immediate manifestation.

Resistance by men to the idea of women's equality has produced mixed results in men's art. On the positive side, the sense of superiority is often the mainstay of an elitist perspective that makes art of some sorts possible. One could seriously argue that the Greek's superb confidence in himself as the measure of things was buoyed by his conviction that his wife was a far less perfect yardstick. The Parthenon is not just the triumphant result of that self-esteem, it does not even reflected a glimmer of bad conscience. On the other hand, the notion that females, and by extension that which is feminine in art, are inherently inferior has contaminated art historical thinking in curious ways.

Why is our art history, for example, full of virtuous reversals, in which a virile, heroic or austere style suddenly and dramatically replaces a feminine, lyrical or luxurious one—David over Fragonard, Caravaggio over Salviati, clean International Modern Gropius over wickedly ornamental Sullivan or Tiffany? Does it never go the other way? Who ever heard of a drastic hedonistic reaction to unbridled stoicism? The ornamental and feminine in art are seen as a kind of creeping sickness that gradually weakens the fabric of stern resolve until the virile essence has been fatally co-opted and must forcefully reassert itself. Hercules cleaning the Augean stables is heroic, his submission to Omphale shameful, and when he must choose between virtue and pleasure, we already know the contest is rigged. Yet in explaining all this, it is not enough to point to the Western philosophical bias to favor the moral over the pleasurable; we must also account for the equally deep-rooted attitude that identifies male with purposeful and female with corruptive. This kind of thinking has infected value judgments in art history in subtle ways, one fears, but to choose an unsubtle instance, such "feminine" styles as Maniera or Rococo, and all the decorative arts, have had to be defended against the supposedly devastating charge of frivolity, as if art were not the one sphere of our lives in which play *is* serious.

It is possible, though no one has done so, to view the art of early Mannerism as a reaction against not the style of the High Renaissance, but its high moral (read masculine) idealism. A couple of years ago, I began to look at Rosso Riorentino's *Moses Defending the Daughters of Jethro* in a new way—as a comic parody of such paragons of virility in action as Michelangelo's *Battle Cartoon*, which was its point of departure. I do not know if Rosso intended it as parody, but the painting works as a commentary on the obsessive Renaissance adoration of the heroic male nude and the glory of battle, with its mock-heroic, tough little boy defenders and its kewpie-doll heroine. It is hilarious. Yet it is only possible to see the painting in this way if you take the heretical position that male heroism does not have an absolute value, but in an extreme form is subject to ridicule. No woman can walk around Florence today without some slight impulse to laugh at the material evidence of such an unabashedly phallocentric culture. Though fewer statues filled the squares in his day, Rosso quite conceivably had the same impulse.

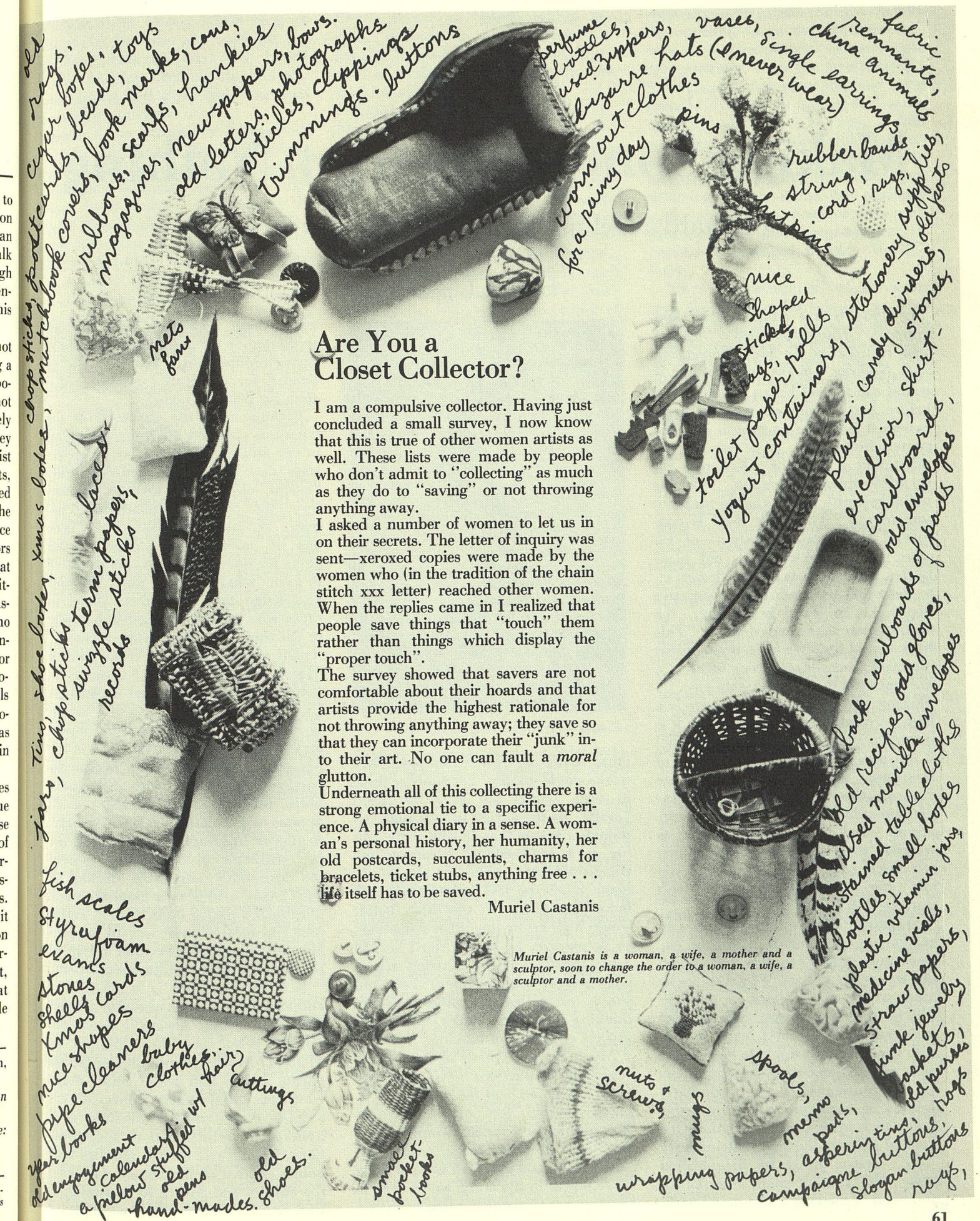
Writers on early Mannerism, on the other hand, have not been able to postulate any conceivable reason for rejecting a heroic idealism other than a wish to explore its formalist potential. Friedlaender explains that Rosso's painting "is not formulated in terms of psychic depth, but is built on a purely aesthetic basis of form, color," et cetera, et cetera. Sydney Freedberg predictably discusses the work largely in formalist terms, and for him, the picture has not one but two contents, with Rosso relegating "mannered grace and subtly distilled sensuality . . . to the feminine and minor components of the picture, and exploiting the subject's possibilities of violence instead."[2] By identifying the "subject" with the male actors only, Freedberg mimics the very male solipsist attitude that Rosso appears to ridicule. Most of all, it is strange that writers responsive to the expressive shift from the calm seriousness of Andrea del Sarto to the hyperintensity of Pontormo should draw a blank on Rosso's expressive tone. Strange, until one reflects that neither formalist manipulation nor heightened emotional intensity challenge any underlying social assumptions. Antiheroic parody, on the other hand, calls into question an entire set of values, revealing the Apollo-David-Hercules images that symbolize such values to be as extreme in one direction as fainting Victorian heroines are in another.

We have before us the prospect of an art history that takes sexual attitudes into account as subjective values and value judgments, rather than as absolute articles of faith. These values can be examined and assessed as part of the content of a work of art, factors often just as relevant to our understanding of it as other factors that we routinely take seriously—military history, theological doctrine or social mores. Also, we are now in a position to recognize and discredit scholarly writing in which sexual stereotypes are imposed on material to which they are irrelevant. To seize these opportunities afforded by feminist insight is an exciting prospect, but more than that, it is a professional responsibility that should now be shared by all art historians, male and female alike.

1. Norma Broude, "Degas' 'Misogyny,' " *Art Bulletin* (March, 1977), pp. 95-107.
2. Walter Friedlander, *Mannerism and Anti-Mannerism in Italian Painting* (New York: Schocken Books, 1965), p. 32.
3. Sydney J. Freedberg, *Painting in Italy, 1500 to 1600 (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1971), p. 129.*

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Are You a Closet Collector?

I am a compulsive collector. Having just concluded a small survey, I now know that this is true of other women artists as well. These lists were made by people who don't admit to "collecting" as much as they do to "saving" or not throwing anything away.

I asked a number of women to let us in on their secrets. The letter of inquiry was sent—xeroxed copies were made by the women who (in the tradition of the chain stitch xxx letter) reached other women. When the replies came in I realized that people save things that "touch" them rather than things which display the "proper touch".

The survey showed that savers are not comfortable about their hoards and that artists provide the highest rationale for not throwing anything away; they save so that they can incorporate their "junk" into their art. No one can fault a *moral* glutton.

Underneath all of this collecting there is a strong emotional tie to a specific experience. A physical diary in a sense. A woman's personal history, her humanity, her old postcards, succulents, charms for bracelets, ticket stubs, anything free . . . life itself has to be saved.

Muriel Castanis

Muriel Castanis is a woman, a wife, a mother and a sculptor, soon to change the order to a woman, a wife, a sculptor and a mother.

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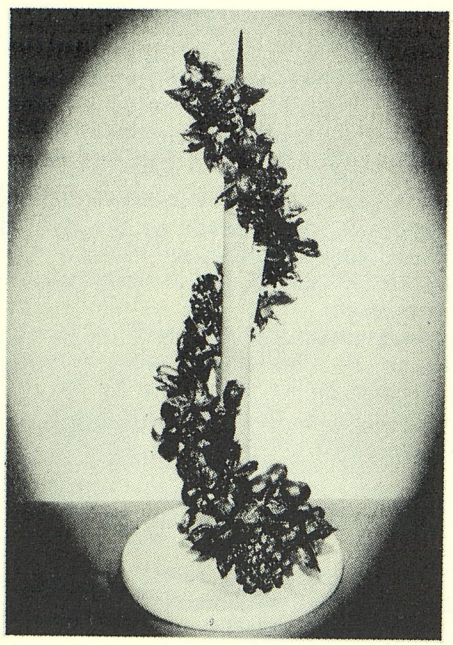
Making Something from Nothing

(Toward a Definition of Women's "Hobby Art")

Lucy R. Lippard

In 1968 Rubye Mae Griffith and Frank B. Griffith published a "hobby" book called *How To Make Something from Nothing.* On the cover (where it would sell books) his name was listed before hers, while on the title page (where it could do no harm), hers appeared before his. It is tempting to think that it was she who wrote the crypto-feminist dedication: "To the nothings—with the courage to turn into somethings." The book itself is concerned with transformation—of tin cans, beef knuckle bones, old razor blades, breadbaskets and bottlecaps into more and less useful and decorative items. As "A Word in Parting," the authors state their modest credo: "This book . . . is simply a collection of ideas intended to encourage your ideas . . . We want you to do things your way . . . Making nothings into somethings is a highly inventive sport but because it is inventive and spontaneous and original it releases tensions, unties knots of frustration, gives you a wonderful sense of pleasure and accomplishment. So experiment, dare, improvise—enjoy every minute—and maybe you'll discover, as we did, that once you start making something from nothing, you find you can't stop, and what's more you don't want to stop!"

Despite the tone and the emphasis on enjoyment—unpopular in serious circles—this "sport" sounds very much like fine or "high" art. Why then are its products not art? "Lack of quality" will be the first answer offered, and "derivative" the second, even though both would equally apply to most of the more sophisticated works seen in galleries and museums. If art is popularly defined as a unique and provocative object of beauty and imagination, the work of many of the best contemporary "fine" artists must be disqualified along with that of many "craftspeople," and in the eyes of the broad audience, many of the talented hobbyist's works *would* qualify. Yet many of these, in turn, would not even be called "crafts" by the purists in that field. Although it is true that all this name calling is a red herring, it makes me wonder whether high art by another name might be less intimidating and more appealing. On the other hand, would high art by any other name look so impressive, be so respected and so commercially valued? I won't try to answer these weighted queries here, but simply offer them as other ways of thinking about some of the less obvious aspects of the art of making.



Centerpiece. From Cattails, Cones and Pods.

Much has been made of the need to erase false distinctions between art and craft, "fine" art and the "minor" arts, "high" art and "low" art—distinctions that particularly affect women's art. But there are also "high" crafts and "low" ones, and although women wield more power in the crafts world than in the fine art world, the same problems plague both. The crafts need only one more step up the aesthetic and financial respectability ladder and they will be headed for the craft museums rather than for people's homes.

Perhaps until the character of the museums changes, anything ending up in one will remain a display of upper-class taste in expensive and doubtfully "useful" objects. For most of this century, the prevailing relationship between art and "the masses" has been one of paternalistic *noblesse oblige* along the lines of "we who are educated to *know* what's correct must pass our knowledge and good taste *down* to those who haven't the taste, the time, or the money to know what is Good." Artists and craftspeople, from William Morris to de Stijl and the Russian Constructivists, have dreamed of socialist Utopias where everyone's life is improved by cheap and beautiful objects and environments. Yet the path of the Museum of Modern Art's design department, also paved with good intentions, indicates the destination of such dreams in a capitalist consumer society. A pioneer in bringing to the public the best available in commercial design, the Museum's admirable display of such ready-mades as a handsome and durable 39¢ paring knife or a 69¢ coffee mug has mostly given way to installations more typical of Bonnier's, DR, or some chic Italian furniture showroom.

It is, as it so often is, a question of audience, as well as a question of categorization. (One always follows the other.) Who sees these objects at MOMA? Mostly people who buy $3.00 paring knives and $8.00 coffee mugs which are often merely "elevated" examples of the cheaper versions, with unnecessary refinements or simplifications. Good Taste is once again an economic captive of the classes who rule the culture and govern its institutions. Bad Taste is preferred by those ingrates

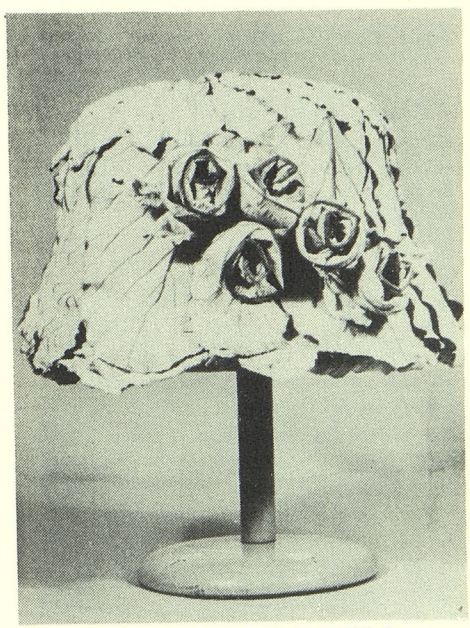
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who are uneducated enough to ignore or independent enough to reject the impositions from above. Their lack of enthusiasm provides an excuse for the aesthetic philanthropists, their hands bitten, to stop feeding the masses. Class-determined good/bad taste patterns revert to type.

Such is the process by which both "design" objects and the "high" crafts have become precisely the consumer commodity that the rare socially conscious "fine" artist is struggling to avoid. Historically, craftspeople, whose work still exists on a less exalted equilibrium between function and commerce, have been most aware of the contradictions inherent in the distinction between art and crafts. The distinction between design and "high" crafts is a modern one. Both have their origins in the "low" crafts of earlier periods, sometimes elevated to the level of "folk art" because of their usefulness as sources for "fine" art. A "designer" is simply the craftsperson of the technological age, no longer forced to do her/his own *making*. The Bauhaus *became* the cradle of industrial design, but the tapestries, furniture, textiles and tea sets made there were still primarily works of art. Today, the most popular housewares all through the taste gamut of the American lower-middle to upper-middle class owe as much stylistically to the "primitive" or "low" crafts—Mexican, Asian, American Colonial—as to the streamlining of the international style. In fact, popular design tends to combine the two, which meet at a point of (often spurious) "simplicity," and to become "kitsch"—diluted examples of the Good Taste that is hidden away in museums, expensive stores, and the homes of the wealthy, inaccessible to everyone else.

The hobby books reflect the manner in which Good Taste is still unarguably set forth by the class system. Different books are clearly aimed at different tastes, aspirations, educational levels. For instance, Dot Aldrich's *Creating with Cattails, Cones and Pods* is not aimed at the inner city working-class housewife or welfare mother (who couldn't afford the time or the materials) or at the farmer's wife (who sees enough weeds in her daily work) but at the suburban upper middle-class woman who thinks in terms of "creating," has time on her hands and access to the materials. Aldrich is described on the dust jacket as a garden club member, a naturalist, and an artist; the book is illustrated by her daughter. She very thoroughly details the construction of dollhouse furniture, corsages and "arrangements" from dried plants and an occasional orange peel. Her taste is firmly placed as "good" within her class, although it might be seen as gauche "homemade art" by the upper class and ugly and undecorative by the working class.

Hazel Pearson Williams' *Feather Flowers and Arrangements*, on the other hand, has the sleazy look of a mail-order catalogue; it is one of a craft course series and its fans, birdcages, butterflies and candles are all made from garishly colored, rather than natural materials. The book is clearly aimed at a totally different audience, one that is presumed to respond to such colors and to have no aesthetic appreciation of the "intrinsic" superiority of



Cecropia leaf hat from Cattails, Cones and Pods.

natural materials over artificial ones, not to mention an inability to afford them.

The objects illustrated in books like the Griffiths' are neither high art nor high craft nor design. Yet such books are myriad, and they are clearly aimed at women—the natural *bricoleurs*, as Deena Metzger has pointed out. The books are usually written by a woman, and if a man is co-author he always seems to be a husband, which adds a certain familial coziness and gives him an excuse for being involved in such blatantly female fripperies (as well as dignifying the frippery by his participation). Necessity is the mother, not the father of invention. The home *maker*'s sense of care and touch focuses on sewing, cooking, interior decoration as often through conditioning as through necessity, providing a certain bond between middle-class and working-class housewives *and* career women. (I am talking about the making of the home, not just the keeping of it; "good housekeeping" is not a prerogative for creativity in the home. It might even be the opposite, since the "houseproud" woman is often prouder of her house, her container, than she is of herself.) Even these days women still tend to be brought up with an exaggerated sense of detail and a need to be "busy," often engendered by isolation within a particular space, and by the emphasis on cleaning and service. A visually sensitive woman who spends day after day in the same rooms develops a compulsion to change, adorn, *expand* them, an impetus encouraged by the "hobby" books.

The "overdecoration" of the home and the fondness for bric-a-brac often attributed to female fussiness or plain Bad Taste can just as well be attributed to creative restlessness. Since most homemade hobby objects are geared toward home improvement, they inspire less fear in their makers of being "selfish" or "self-indulgent," there is no confusion about pretentions to Art, and the woman is freed to make anything she can imagine. (At the same time it is true that the imagination is often stimulated by exposure to other such work, just as "real" artists are similarly dependent on the art world and the works of their colleagues.) Making "conversation pieces" like deer antler salad tongs or a madonna in an abalone shell grotto, or a mailbox from an old breadbox, or vice versa, can be a prelude to breaking with the "functional" excuse and the making of wholly "useless" objects.

Now that the homebound woman has a little more leisure, thanks to so-called labor-saving devices, her pastimes are more likely to be cultural in character. The less privileged she is, the more likely she is to keep her interests *inside* the home with the focus of her art remaining the same as that of her work. The better off and better educated she is, the more likely she is to go *outside* of the home for influence or stimulus, to spend her time reading, going to concerts, theatre, dance, staying "well informed." If she is upwardly mobile, venturing from her own confirmed tastes into foreign realms where she must be cautious about opinions and actions, her insecurity is likely to lead to the classic docility of the middle-class audience, so receptive to what "experts" tell them to think about the arts. The term "culture vulture" is understood to apply mainly to upwardly mobile *women*. And culture, in the evangelical spirit of the work ethic, is often also inseparable from "good works."

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Middle- and upper-class women, always stronger in their support of "culture" than any other group, seem to *need* aesthetic experience in the broadest sense more than men—perhaps because the vital business of running the world, for which educated women, at least to some extent, have been prepared, has been denied them, and because they have the time and the background to think—but not the means to act. Despite the fact that middle-class women have frequently been strong (and anonymous) forces for social justice, the earnestness and amateur status of such activities have been consistently ridiculed, from the Marx Brothers' films to the cartoons of Helen Hokinson.

Nevertheless, the League of Women Voters, the volunteer work for underfunded cultural organizations, the garden clubs, literary circles and discussion groups of the comfortable classes have been valid and sometimes courageous attempts to move out into the world while remaining sufficiently on the fringes of the system so as not to challenge its male core. The working-class counterparts are, for obvious reasons, aimed less at improving the lot of others than at improving one's own, and, like hobby art, are more locally and domestically focused in unions, day care, paid rather than volunteer social work, Tupperware parties—and the PTA, where all classes meet. In any case, the housewife learns to take derision in her stride whether she intends to be socially effective or merely wants to escape from the home now and then (families are jealous of time spent elsewhere).

Women's liberation has at least begun to erode the notion that woman's role is that of the applauding spectator for men's creativity. Yet as makers of (rather than housekeepers for) art, they still trespass on male ground. No wonder, then, that all over the world, women privileged and/or desperate and/or daring enough to consider creation outside traditional limits are finding an outlet for these drives in an art that is not considered "art," an art that there is some excuse for making, an art that costs little or nothing and performs an ostensibly useful function in the bargain—the art of making something out of nothing.

If one's only known outlets are follow-the-number painting or the ready-made "kit art" offered by the supermarket magazines, books like the Griffiths' open up new territory. Suggestions in "ladies'" and handiwork magazines should not be undervalued either. After all, quilt patterns were published and passed along in the 19th century (just as fashionable art styles are in today's art world). The innovative quilt maker or group of makers would come up with a new idea that broke or enriched the rules, just as the Navajo rug maker might vary brilliantly within set patterns (and modern abstractionists innovate by sticking to the rules of innovation).

The shared or published pattern forms the same kind of armature for painstaking handwork and for freedom of expression within a framework as the underlying grid does in contemporary painting. Most modern women lack the skills, the motive and the discipline to do the kind of handwork their foremothers did by necessity, but the stitch-like "mark" Harmony Hammond has noted in so much recent abstract art by women often emerges from a feminist adoption of the positive aspects of women's history. It relates to the ancient, sensuously repetitive, Penelopean rhythms of seeding, hoeing, gathering, weaving, spinning, as well as to modern domestic routines.



Tillie the Tuna Tyke (string holder made from a tuna can). From How to Make Something from Nothing.

In addition, crocheting, needlework, embroidery, rug-hooking and quilting are coming back into middle- and upper-class fashion on the apron strings of feminism and fad. Ironically, these arts are now practiced by the well-off out of boredom and social presure as often as out of emotional necessity to make connections with women in the past. What was once *work* has now become art or "high" craft—museum-worthy as well as commercially valid. In fact, when Navajo rugs and old quilts were first exhibited in New York fine arts museums in the early 1970s, they were eulogized as neutral, ungendered sources for big bold geometric abstractions by male artists like Frank Stella and Kenneth Noland. Had they been presented as exhibitions of women's art, they would have been seen quite differently and probably would not have been seen at all in a fine art context at that time.

When feminists pointed out that these much-admired and "strong" works were in fact women's "crafts," one might have expected traditional women's art to be taken more seriously, yet such borrowings from "below" must still be validated from "above." William C. Seitz's "Assemblage" show at the Museum of Modern Art in 1961 had acknowledged the generative role of popular objects for Cubism, Dada and Surrealism, and predicted Pop Art, but he never considered women's work as the classic *bricolage*. It took a man, Claes Oldenburg, to make fabric sculpture acceptable, though his wife, Patty, did the actual sewing. Sometimes men even dabble in women's spheres in the lowest of low arts—hobby art made from throwaways by amateurs at home. But when a man makes, say, a macaroni figure or a hand-tooled *Last Supper*, it tends to raise the sphere rather than lower the man, and he is likely to be written up in the local newspaper. Women dabbling in men's spheres, on the other hand, are still either inferior or just freakishly amazing.

It is supposed to be men who are "handy around the house," men who "fix" things while women "make" the home. This is a myth, of course, and a popular one. There are certainly as many women who do domestic repairs as men, but perhaps the myth was devised by women to force men to invest *some* energy, to touch and to care about *some* aspect of the home. The fact remains that when a woman comes to make something, it more often than not has a particular character—whether this originates from role-playing, the division of labor, or some deeper consciousness. The difference can often be defined as a kind of "positive fragmentation" or as the collage aesthetic—the mixing and matching of fragments to provide a new whole. Thus the bootcleaner made of bottlecaps suggested by one hobby book might also be a Surrealist object.

But it is not. And this is not entirely a disadvantage. Not only does the amateur status of hobby art dispel the need for costly art lessons, but it subverts the intimidation process that takes place when the male domain of "high" art is approached. As it stands, women—and

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especially women—can make hobby art in a relaxed manner, isolated from the "real" world of commerce and the pressures of professional aestheticism. During the actual creative process, this is an advantage, but when the creative ego's attendant need for an audience emerges, the next step is not the galleries, but to become a "cottage industry." The gifte shoppe, the county or crafts fair and outdoor art show circuit is open to women where the high art world is not, or was not until it was pried open to some extent by the feminist art movement. For this reason, many professional women artists in the past made both "public art" (canvases and sculptures acceptable to galleries and museums, conforming to a combination of the two current art world tastes) and "private" or "closet" art (made for "personal reasons" or "just for myself"—as if most art were not). With the advent of the new feminism, the private has either replaced or merged with the public in much women's art and the delicate, the intimate, the obsessive, even the "cute" and the "fussy" in certain guises have become more acceptable, especially in feminist art circles. A striking amount of the newly discovered "closet" art by amateur and professional women artists resembles the *chotchkas* so universally scorned as women's playthings and especially despised in recent decades during the heyday of neo-Bauhaus functionalism. The objects illustrated in *Feather Flowers and Arrangements* bear marked resemblance to what is now called Women's Art, including a certainly unconscious bias toward the forms that have been called female imagery.

Today we are resurrecting our mothers', aunts' and grandmothers' activities—not only in the well-publicized areas of quilts and textiles, but also in the more random and freer area of transformational *rehabilitation*. On an emotional as well as on a practical level, rehabilitation has always been women's work. Patching, turning collars and cuffs, remaking old clothes, changing buttons, refinishing or recovering old furniture are all the traditional private resorts of the economically deprived woman to give her family public dignity. This continues today, even though in affluent Western societies cheap clothes fall apart before they can be rehabilitated and inventive patching is more acceptable (to the point where expensive new clothes are made to *look* rehabilitated and thrift shops are combed by the well-off). Thus "making something from nothing" is a brilliant title for a hobby book, appealing as it does both to housewifely thrift and to the American spirit of free enterprise—a potential means of making a fast buck.

Finally, certain questions arise in regard to women's recent "traditionally oriented" fine art. Are the sources direct—from quilts and county fair handiwork displays—or indirect—via Dada, Surrealism, West Coast funk, or from feminist art itself? Is the resemblance of women's art-world art to hobby art a result of coincidence? Of influence, conditioning, or some inherent female sensibility? Or is it simply another instance of camp, or fashionable downward mobility? The problem extends from source to audience.



Feathered hibiscus with centers made of hackles, broom straws and stamen. From Feathered Flowers.

Feminist artists have become far more conscious of women's traditional arts than most artists, and feminist artists are also politically aware of the need to broaden their audience, or of the need to broaden the kind of social experience fine art reflects. Yet the means by which to fill these needs have barely been explored. The greatest lack in the feminist art movement may be for contact and dialogue with those "amateurs" whose work sometimes appears to be imitated by the professionals. Judy Chicago and her co-workers on *The Dinner Party* and their collaboration with china painters and needleworkers, Miriam Schapiro's handkerchief exchanges and the credit given the women who embroider for her, the "Mother Art" group in Los Angeles which performs in laundromats and similar public/domestic situations, the British "Postal Art Event," and a few other examples are exceptions rather than the rule. It seems all too likely that only in a feminist art world will there be a chance for the "fine" arts, the "minor" arts, "crafts," and hobby circuits to meet and to develop an *art of making* with a new and revitalized communicative function. It won't happen if the feminist art world continues to be absorbed by the patriarchal art world.

And if it does happen, the next question will be to what extent can this work be reconciled with all the varying criteria that determine aesthetic "quality" in the different spheres, groups, and cultures? Visual consciousness raising, concerned as it is now with female imagery and, increasingly, with female process, still has a long way to go before our visions are sufficiently cleared to see *all* the arts of making as equal products of a creative impulse which is as socially determined as it is personally necessary; before the idea is no longer to make nothings into somethings, but to transform and give meaning to all things. In this utopian realm, Good Taste will not be standardized in museums, but will vary from place to place, from home to home.

References: The Griffiths' book was published by Castle Books, NYC; the Aldrich book by Hearthside Press, Great Neck, N.Y.; the Williams book by Craft Course publishers, Temple City, California. I found all of them in the tiny local library in a Maine town with a population of circa three hundred.

The Hammond article appeared in *Heresies* No. 1; her "Class Notes" in No. 3 are also relevant. The Metzger appeared in *Heresies* No. 2 and is an important contribution to the feminist dialogue on "high" and "low" art. The British Postal Event, or "Portrait of the Artist as a Housewife," is a "visual conversation" between amateur and professional women artists isolated in different cities. They send each other art objects derived from "non-prestigious folk traditions," art that is "cooked and eaten, washed and worn" in an attempt to "sew a cloth of identity that other women may recognize." It is documented in *MAMA!*, a booklet published by a Birmingham collective and available from PDC, 27 Clerkenwell Close, London EC 1.

I have also been indebted in this series of articles (which includes "The Pink Glass Swan" in *Heresies* No. 1) to Don Celender's fascinating *Opinions of Working People Concerning the Arts*, 1975, available from Printed Matter, 7-9 Lispenard St., NYC 10013.

Lucy R. Lippard writes feminist criticism and fiction. She has temporarily and regretfully escaped from the HERESIES Collective to live on an isolated English farm with her son and her third novel.

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Waste Not Want Not

An Inquiry into What Women Saved and Assembled

Melissa Meyer

Miriam Schapiro



FEMMAGE

Virginia Woolf talks about the loose, drifting material of life, describing how she would like to see it sorted and coalesced into a mold transparent enough to reflect the light of our life and yet aloof as a work of art.[1] She makes us think of the paper lace, quills and beads, scraps of cloth, photographs, birthday cards, valentines and clippings, all of which inspired the visual imaginations of the women we write about.

In the eighteenth century, a nun in a German convent cuts delicate lace from thin parchment and pastes it around minutely detailed paintings of saints. Performing an act of devotion in the service of her God, she makes what later, in the secular world, are called the first valentines.

An Iroquois woman in 1775 sews five elliptical quillwork designs at the base of a black buckskin bag, quillwork borders at the top and additional moosehair embroidery at the bottom and sides.

Hannah Stockton, a New Jersey woman, in 1830 dips into her scrap bag in the tradition of waste not want not and finds just the right pieces with which to appliqué her quilt.

In the 1860s, Lady Filmer photographs the Prince of Wales and his shooting party. Later she cuts up these photos and creates a composition of them in her album, producing the first photocollage.[2]

Rita Reynolds, resident of Southend, England, keeps a scrapbook during World War II. In it she glues birthday cards, valentines and clippings from her local newspaper which record the progress of the war. As the world situation worsens, the scrapbook reflects its gravity.

Collage: a word invented in the twentieth century to describe an activity with an ancient history. Here are some associated definitions:
Collage: pictures assembled from assorted materials.
Collage: a French word after the verb *coller* which means pasting, sticking or gluing, as in application of wallpaper.
Assemblage: a collection of things, often combined in the round.
Assemblage: a specific technical procedure and form used in the literary and musical, as well as the plastic arts, but also a complex of attitudes and ideas . . . collage and related modes of construction manifest a predisposition that is characteristically modern.[3]
Découpage: (literally, cutting) a mode of decorating painted furniture with cutouts of flowers, fruit, etc. Also, the art of decorating surfaces with applied paper cutouts.
Photomontage: the method of making a composite picture by bringing photographs together in a single composition and arranging them, often by superimposing one part on another, so that they form a blended whole.

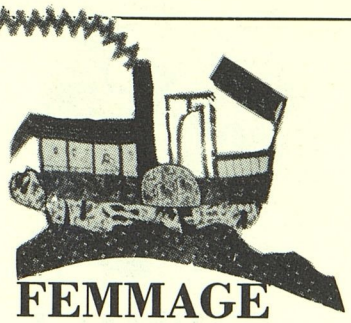
Rita Reynolds



SCRAPBOOK
This store-bought scrapbook (circa 1940s) was found in a London Flea Market. On first impression it seems banal, yet there is novelty in its contents: newspaper clippings, decals, some birthday and holiday cards with portions silhouetted (some are left whole) and commercially colored animal pictures.

Rita Reynolds, in selecting her pictures, showed what was important to her, revealing her personal priorities. The seemingly unrelated information adds up to pre-war and wartime episodes that make "that loose drifting material of life" in fact coalesce into a work of art.[10] This, then, is a visual artist's equivalent of a diary.

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FEMMAGE

Femmage: a word invented by us to include all of the above activities as they were practiced by women using traditional women's techniques to achieve their art—sewing, piecing, hooking, cutting, appliquéing, cooking and the like —activities also engaged in by men but assigned in history to women.

Published information about the origins of collage is misleading. Picasso and Braque are credited with inventing it. Many artists made collage before they did, Picasso's father for one and Sonia Delaunay for another. When art historians mandate these beginnings at 1912, they exclude artists not in the mainstream. Art historians do not pay attention to the discoveries of non-Western artists, women artists or anonymous folk artists. All of these people make up the group we call *others.* It is exasperating to realize that the rigidities of modern critical language and thought prevent a direct response to the eloquence of art when it is made by *others.*

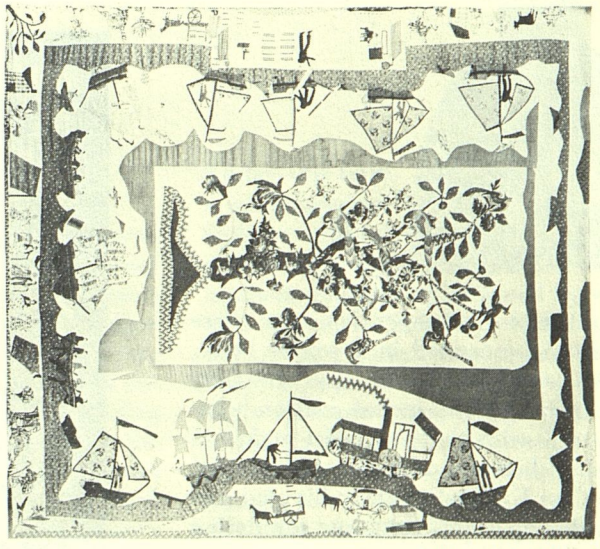
Our information on women artist-makers of the past was inspired by the definitive texts on collage written by critics and art historians Herta Wescher, William Seitz, Harriet Janis and Rudi Blesh. We did not find our material in the main body of their works but rather in their introductions and in their notes in the back of their books, indicating they were unable to relax their modernist theories enough to appreciate the diversity, beauty and significance of the original makers of collage. Many of these ancestors were women who were ignored by the politics of art.

Janis and Blesh put it succinctly: "Collage was once only the simple pleasant fold art or pastime of cutting and pasting bits of paper into pictures or ornamental designs. It was no concern of serious artists. . . . Its origins began so many centuries ago. . . . It is only with this century and the advent of modern art that this quondum delight of schoolgirl and housewife came to the attention of serious artists grappling with revolutionary ideas . . ."[4] It is in fact the "schoolgirl" and "housewife" we must look at more carefully to understand the aesthetics of our ancestors and their processes.

William Seitz includes this information in his work on assemblage: "Valentines, postcards, and folk art of various kinds incorporating pasted elements as well as pictures and objects made of butterfly wings, feathers, shells, etc. were common much earlier. Indeed various stamped letters, passports and official documents can be looked at as a form of unintentional collage."[5]

Now that we women are beginning to document our culture, redressing our trivialization and adding our information to the recorded male facts and insights, it is necessary to point out the extraordinary works of art by women which despite their beauty are seen as leftovers of history. Aesthetic and technical contributions have simply been overlooked. Here, for example, we are concerned with the authenticity and energy in needlework.

Hannah Stockton



LAND AND SEA

This unusual quilt does not adhere to any formula for quilt-making. It has no set pattern—block, brick, half drop or diamond form; there are no predictable geometric or imagistic formulas here. It appears to be a crazy quilt with a theme.

Crazy quilts are made of freely cut pieces of cloth which may seem to be randomly placed. Here the theme is carried out in motifs of land and sea cut from imported English chintz of Oriental design (the technique called *broderie perse*).

Holstein says, ". . . so popular was this technique that in the early nineteenth century, chintzes were printed with patterns especially designed to be cut out and used for the centers and corners of appliqué quilts."[9]

A 103 inch by 91 inch quilt is a large work. Visual control is as impressive in this work as it is on the small devotional pieces.

Calligraphy by Marcy Kass.

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FEMMAGE

When it becomes possible to appreciate a sewn object like a quilt (even though it was created for utilitarian purposes) because it employs thirty stitches to the inch, and uses color which by all standards is rich and evocative, contains silhouetted forms which are skillfully drawn and connects perfectly measured geometrical units of fabric, then it will be clear that woman's art invites a methodology of its own.

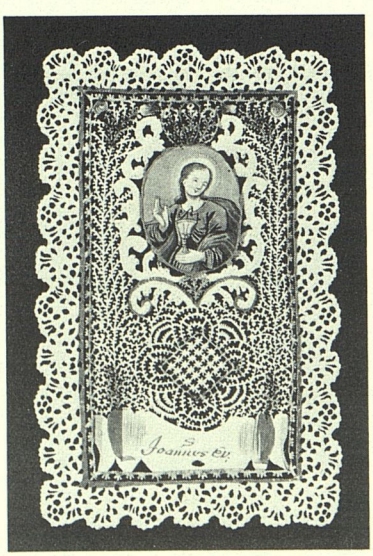
Women have always collected things and saved and recycled them because leftovers yielded nourishment in new forms. The decorative functional objects women made often spoke in a secret language, bore a covert imagery. When we read these images in needlework, in paintings, in quilts, rugs and scrapbooks, we sometimes find a cry for help, sometimes an allusion to a secret political alignment, sometimes a moving symbol about the relationships between men and women. We base our interpretations of the layered meanings in these works on what we know of our own lives—a sort of archeological reconstruction and deciphering. We ask ourselves, have we ever used a secret language in our works? Patricia Mainardi, in her essay, says: "Women not only made beautiful and functional objects but expressed their own conviction on a wide variety of subjects in a language for the most part comprehensible only to other women . . . There was more than one man of Tory persuasion who slept unknowingly under his wife's "Whig Rose Quilt" . . . women named quilts for their political belief . . . at a time when they were not allowed to vote."[6]

Collected, saved and combined materials represented for such women acts of pride, desperation and necessity. Spiritual survival depended on the harboring of memories. Each cherished scrap of percale, muslin or chintz, each bead, each letter, each photograph, was a reminder of its place in a woman's life, similar to an entry in a journal or a diary. Cynthia Ozick says, ". . . a diary is a shoring-up of the ephemeral, evidence that the writer [we substitute artist-maker] takes up real space in the world."[7]

Women's culture is the framework for femmage, and makes it possible for us to understand "combining" as the simultaneous reading of moosehair and beads, cut paper and paint or open-work and stitches. Our female culture also makes it possible to see these traditional aesthetic elements for what they are—the natural materials needed for spiritual, and often physical, survival.

In the past an important characteristic of femmage was that women worked for an audience of intimates. A woman artist-maker always had the assurance that her work was destined to be appreciated and admired. She worked for her relatives and friends and unless she exhibited in church bazaars and county fairs, her viewers were almost always people she knew. In their book, Joel and Kate Kopp tell about Mrs. Eleanor Blackstone of Lacon, Illinois, who in the years between 1880 and 1890 hooked six large rugs, all recording events in the history of her family. These rugs show her six children, their pastimes and their pets including actual strands of the children's hair worked into the individual portraits.[8]

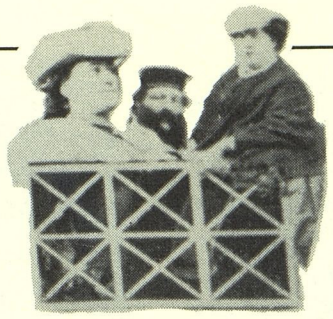
Anonymous Nun



S. JOANNES EV.

Works like this paper femmage were made to be carried in a prayer book. This devotional work, approximately five inches by two inches, was an homage to a saint that the artist-maker, a nun, wished to honor. In this case St. John the Evangelist sits in his oval surrounded by ornate cut paper simulating lace. The whiteness of the lace is offset by an illusionistic rendering of the saint himself. The cutting exhibits an astonishing capability in the use of knives and scissors as tools. The paper lace is pasted around the painting of the saint and part of it is painted as well.
The appeal of these works is their delicacy and the tour de force of the cutting. The artist's process echoes her purpose. The love lavished by this nun on the little object is visible.

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FEMMAGE

We feel that several criteria determine whether a work can be called femmage. Not all of them appear in a single object. However, the presence of at least half of them should allow the work to be appreciated as *femmage*. **1.** It is a work by a woman. **2.** The activities of saving and collecting are important ingredients. **3.** Scraps are essential to the process and are recycled in the work. **4.** The theme has a woman-life context. **5.** The work has elements of covert imagery. **6.** The theme of the work addresses itself to an audience of intimates. **7.** It celebrates a private or public event. **8.** A diarist's point of view is reflected in the work. **9.** There is drawing and/or handwriting sewn in the work. **10.** It contains silhouetted images which are fixed on other material. **11.** Recognizable images appear in narrative sequence. **12.** Abstract forms create a pattern. **13.** The work contains photographs or other printed matter. **14.** The work has a functional as well as an aesthetic life.

These criteria are based on visual observation of many works made by women in the past. We have already said that this art has been excluded from mainstream, but why is that so? What is mainstream? How may such an omission be corrected?

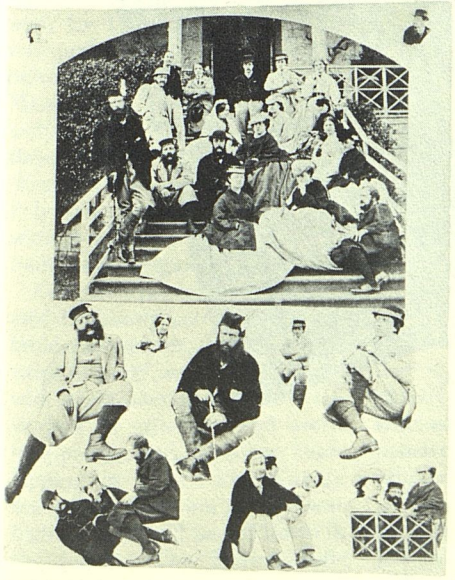
The works themselves were without status because the artists who made them were considered inferior by the historians who wrote about art and culture. Since the works were intimate and had no data or criticism attached to them and were often anonymous, how could these writers identify them as valid, mainstream history?

Mainstream is the codification of ideas for the illumination of history and the teaching of the young. What a shame that the young remain ignorant of the vitality of women's art. Yet the culture of women will remain unrecognized until women themselves regard their own past with fresh insight. To correct this situation, must we try to insert women's traditional art into mainstream? How will the authorities be convinced that what they consider low art is worth representing in history? The answer does not lie in mainstream at all, but in sharing women's information with women.

Toward this end we have evaluated a selection of women's art and looked for similar elements which appeared most frequently. As we recorded them, we discovered with pleasure that they presented a form in many guises—a form we call femmage.

1. Virginia Woolf, *Self Explorations, Diarists in England and America*, Exhibition catalog (New York: 42nd St. Public Library, May 2–September 15, 1977) (excerpted from "A Writer's Diary"). 2. *Women of Photography, An Historical Survey*, Catalog (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Art, April 18–June 15, 1975). 3. William C. Seitz, *The Art of Assemblage* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1961), p. 10. 4. Harriet Janis and Rudi Blesh, *Collage Personalities Concepts Techniques* (Philadelphia/New York/London: Chilton Book Co., 1969), p. 3. 5 Seitz, p. 150, note 5. 6. Patricia Mainardi, "Quilts: The Great American Art." *Feminist Art Journal*, Winter 1973, p. 19. 7. Cynthia Ozick, *The Loose Drifting Material of Life,"* New York *Times* Book Review, Oct. 2, 1977, p. 41. 8. Joel and Kate Kopp, *American Hooked and Sewn Rugs, Folk Art Underfoot*, (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1975), p. 72. 9. Jonathan Holstein, *The Pieced Quilt an American Design Tradition*, (Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphics Society, Ltd., 1973), p. 21. 10. Virginia Woolf, 42nd Street Public Library Exhibition (see #1).

Lady Filmer



PRINCE OF WALES
SHOOTING PARTY



Lady Mary Filmer was an early practitioner of photography, a contemporary of the more celebrated Julia Margaret Cameron. But Lady Filmer took photography to another place. She cut, rearranged and pasted her pictures onto album pages, sometimes adding watercolor. Her work pre-dated the papier collé of Picasso and Braque and the photomontages of Hannah Hoch and Raoul Hausmann. In Lady Mary's circle, most women did fancywork. Today this term is used disparagingly by cultural historians whose aesthetic remains uninformed by women's culture. In their hierarchical sympathies, they elevate the camera above the crochet needle. Although we believe Lady Filmer's photocollages were admirable achievements, the other women of her time were accomplishing equally interesting work.

Melissa Meyer is a painter living in New York.
Miriam Schapiro is a femmagist from New York.

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Sewing With My Great-Aunt Leonie Amestoy

Suzanne Noguere

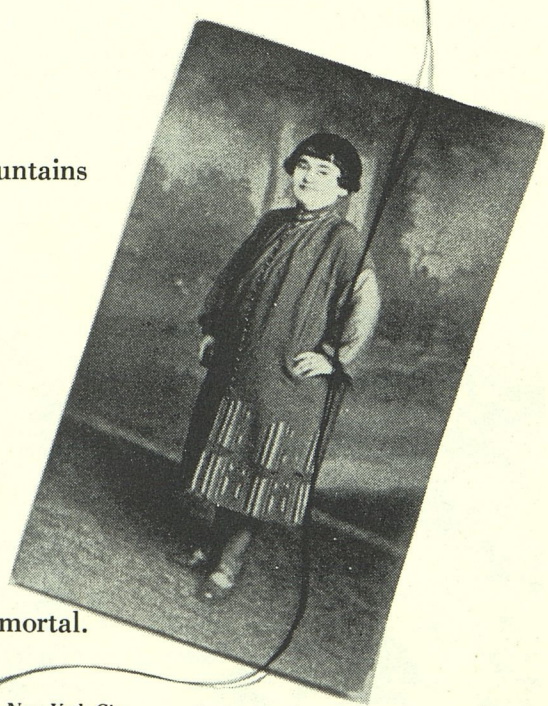
Today you bend over organdy
In organic toil, working the small red squares
The way in your youth old men bent over earth
And still coaxed wheat and corn from the Basque soil.
You fold the cloth, then slowly roll the edges
Until rose petals bloom in your hands,
Vivified by the stitch that shirs them softly
The way the skin is shirred around your eyes.

Crooked like a mitered edge, your index finger
At rest stays poised above an unseen needle.
Indoors, surrounded by left-over silk
And wool, we rearrange the rainbow's spectrum,
Sorting the tools of your trade—bright spools of thread,
Small silver thimbles, scissors, and the red
Pincushions studded with glass-headed pins—
As we need them, laboring in your field.

We overlap the petals; roses thrive
Under the lamplight in your wintry room.
Next you teach me the genesis of frogs:
We turn the tubing and vivid cloth emerges
Out of itself like a snake sloughing its skin;
You whorl it tightly and I think this is
How your great spirit must exist in you
Compactly, coiled like a spring.

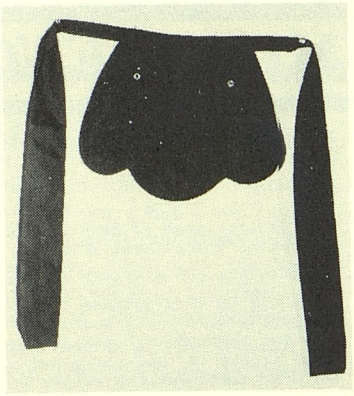
From what misfortune could you not recover
Who as a child made the pilgrimage
To Lourdes, eastward through the low green mountains
Of your own land? You say the Virgin slept
And say it lightly as if you had not been
Bitterly born to your mother's shame
In an age when no one could tell you of
The tiny gland that kept you tiny.

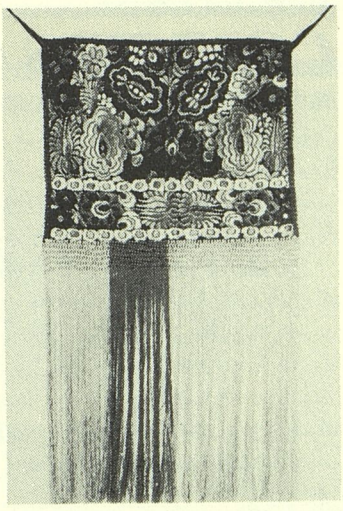
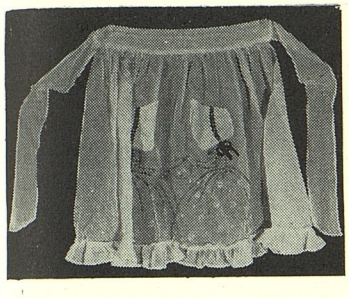
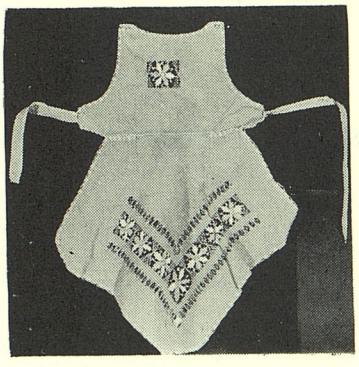
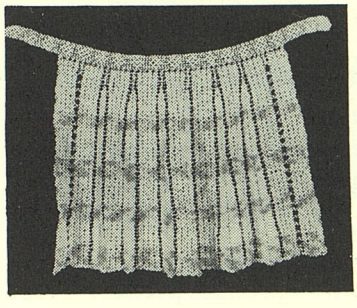
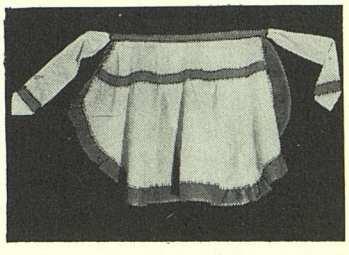
Self-taught and independent by your own
Inventions, you make buttons out of thread,
Handbags with pockets hidden within pockets,
And dresses that unfold as if corollas
With minute parts inside. You instruct me in
Techniques as secret as nature's, my fingers
Sure when yours are, atremble when yours falter
Those sharp days when you feel more and more mortal.



Suzanne Noguere lives in New York City.

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The Apron...

The earliest aprons wove a shield of magical strength about the women who wore them, symbolizing fertility. A Great Mother figurine, the "Venus of Lespugne," 14,000 B.C., wears an apron beneath her voluptuous buttocks. She is carved of ivory, though the apron proclaiming her fecundity was probably woven of pierced cowrie shells.[1]

Among Celts and other early English and European tribes aprons vied with body paint as ceremonial costume and decoration. On every continent tribal women wove aprons of feathers, bark and leaves, and patterned them with natural dyes. Aborigine virgins in Australia still wear aprons of leaves.[2] The fig leaf worn by the mythological Eve was probably a fertility apron rather than a modesty panel. Missionaries, acting upon the body-is-bad principle, replaced these natural materials with cheap cotton pinafores, called in Polynesia the *Pina Foa*, and substituted Victorian needlework for traditional "pagan" designs.[3]

European peasant women created brilliantly colored and embroidered aprons. In Italy long strips of plaid wool or silk edged with embroidered borders were worked in stitchery and worn wrapped around the waist, overlapping in front. The *Koteny* made by Hungarian women was highly prized and passed down in the family. The Indianapolis

Status Symbol...

Children's Museum owns a Hungarian apron exuberantly worked with billowing scarlet and red-violet poppies and finished with hand-knotted fringe on an embroidered blue and green ground. In Rumania style called for narrow rectangles of gold, black and red horizontal stripes, worn back and front. A Czech apron in rainbow silks displays the jacquard brocade weaving technique. Swedish and Swiss aprons were gaily striped, identifying the parish of the wearer.[4]

A gypsy woman can ostracize a male member of the tribe by touching or covering him with her apron or *katrinsa* which symbolizes to the tribe the *marime* or unclean status of the lower half of a woman's body.[5] In the American folk song "Careless Love" the apron is a barometer of virginity lost and the woman's loss of esteem among males seeking wives.

> Once I wore my apron low . . .
> and you came by my door . . .
> Now I wear my apron high . . .
> and you come to my door and
> pass on by . . .

In Elizabethan England aprons came into fashion. Wealthy, titled women created a frivolous parody of the working apron, stitched in white lawn and expensive Franch lace. During the reign of Queen Anne, wedding gowns were not complete without a lace-point apron secured with a jeweled pin.[6]

or Stitchery Sample?

In Victorian England the wife and mother role became separated from household chores for affluent women. A checked gingham apron was worn by the cook. Kitchen servants and parlormaids wore floor-length white aprons with huge skirts and bibs. Ladies sat at their needlework with dainty aprons, announcing their privileged class by the apron's impracticality.[7]

Personal decoration was discouraged as vanity by early American settlers. Pilgrim women wore snowy-white, full-length aprons set against plain green, brown and dull purple homespun skirts.[8] Pioneer women's aprons were tucked many times down the front. This enabled the hems, which burnt as they swept the hearth, to be turned up again and again.[9] Aprons of a century ago still carry stains that bear witness to the enduring nature of woman's work. Middle-class American women in the early nineteenth century wore aprons with their fine Sunday gowns. Those over 30 and/or married were expected to wear black or white, and as a woman grew older, black was her only option. Silk or satin or other fine materials such as dimity and chiffon could be used to make Sunday aprons and hand-decorating demonstrated a woman's wifely skills.[10]

Aprons dwindled in size as industrialization freed women

Elli Siskind

from the making of dyes, soap, condiments and jellies—not to mention the killing of chickens. Although contemporary women have neither the practical nor the institutionalized need for apron-wearing, by rediscovering the apron in the history of the decorative arts, we add to the rich fabric of the emerging history of women's art.

1. Hilaire Hiler, *From Nudity to Raiment* (Paris: Librairie de France, 1929), p. 36.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 80.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Mary Evans, *Costume Throughout the Ages* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1930), pp. 202–245.
5. Anne Sutherland, *Gypsies: The Hidden Americans* (New York: Free Press, 1975), p. 103.
6. Lucy Barton, *Historic Costume for the Stage* (Boston: Baker Co., 1935), p. 230.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 320.
8. Alice Morse Earle, *Two Centuries of Costume in America* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1910), p. 172.
9. Told to me by Dixie Clark, Connor Prairie Farms, Indianapolis, Indiana.
10. Told to me by Mary Jane Teeter, Curator of Victorian Art, Children's Museum of Indianapolis, Indianapolis, Indiana.

Elli Siskind, originally from Kansas and points West, lives in Indianapolis. She does acrylic paintings, including a recent series of laundromat pieces about women's work.

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CONVERSATIONS & REMINISCENCES

One function of the artist in modern Western culture has been to seek out the despised, rejected or totally overlooked visual objects in her environment and discover and reevaluate her aesthetics.

In an issue devoted to Women's Traditional Arts, it seemed essential to me to seriously reexamine those women who never stopped creating, though their work is often bypassed by liberated women artists who have turned away from the trappings of their female environment and past.

The following letter was sent to many women all over the United States. Here are some of the replies.

Dear

The fourth issue of Heresies Magazine is entirely devoted to womens traditional arts.

We know you are a highly skilled craftswoman.

We would be very pleased if you would allow a taped interview to be made where you could talk about your craft. How you learned it, who you learned it from, to whom you have taught it, and how , and what it means to you, are some of the questions we are interested in.
We hope you will demonstrate your craft and allow it to be documented by a photographer.

Martha Edelheit

Martha Edelheit is a painter and filmmaker who lives in N.Y.C.

CONVERSATIONS

THREE CONVERSATIONS by Sylvia Kolbowski, Judy Silberstein, Jean Wagner

IDA WRIGHT



Judy Silberstein

Ida Wright in her garden

These raspberry leaves are very, very good . . . if you are going to have a child it's best to start drinking raspberry tea three months before you give birth and I was brought up that a gypsy woman could have her child, wash it in a mud puddle and walk off, and one of the reasons was they drank raspberry tea and had a very easy labor. The Indian women did the same.

I grew up in Vermont, just across the river. My grandfather came down from Canada; he was Indian so we used a lot of these things [medicinal and wild edible plants] at home always. My mother used some of these things in cooking, during the depression years. My father didn't have work then so we used a lot of these things; some of them, for my mother, the first time. My mother's ancestry was English and she just had never had much chance to learn these things. I learned it mainly from dad and his sister.

I always had a great interest in flowers and what was this and what was that, and I can't remember when I didn't have a guide of some kind. I was encouraged to look things up by myself as well as being told what they were. When I was 11 I went and lived with my grandfather's half-sister and her husband and they tried to take the Indian out of me, but they couldn't do it. They really encouraged me to learn the *names* of plants. But they used to scold because I had a bunch of flowers in one hand and a rock in the other most of the time and they were trying to civilize me. But they didn't. I often wonder now what they really would think to know that I'm teaching the things that they tried to break me of the habits of using. In fact they knew I wanted to teach when I got out of high school, but they didn't believe in borrowing money so you could go on to school. So I got married and started my *own* kindergarten—we had six kids that lived, we had ten children. My husband wanted 12; I would have stopped at two. After my second child was born, a breech birth, the doctor said, "You'd better not have any more children for a while," I told my husband. He said, "Huh, my mother had 13, you can have more than two;" so I had ten. A lot of people say how did you raise such healthy children? When we were on the farm we never had more than $5,000 a year for years, most of their growing-up years. Five or six, seven thousand at the most would take care of the cattle and the family. I tell them, I brought them up on dandelions and venison, what do you think?

I've taught some of my children about plants. I've got daughters-in-law that listen, but don't quite believe. My husband used to say, "I wouldn't eat that, it might be poisonous." I'd say, "What did you eat for supper tonight?" "I don't know, somethin', whatever you put on the table." I'd say, "Well, you just ate it; have you died?" He's beginning now not to talk that way. It was a long time now, but for years he'd been eating these things and I just didn't talk about what I put on the table. Then I began teaching a college course, and he began saying, "Oh, I didn't know about that." I was ever so happy when college came nearby and I could go to school; I'd always wanted to. I got my diploma when I was 49. I was determined I was going to get it before I was 50. I made it.

I do all the canning by myself now. I taught my daughters to can. Yes, it is a lot of work, but I've done it so many years that I wouldn't know what it'd be like to have a summer vacation and do nothing. I would feel all the time that I should be putting away things for the winter. During the time I had polio I never knew that it had been discussed, but I just was told in my hospital bed that welfare was going to give money to help feed my children. They evidently had not asked because I had 500 quarts of canned goods for my family to use.

Until recently I thought everybody knew something about some of these wild plants. I've always lived in the country and people around me always were using things like dandelions, marsh marigolds and milkweed. There's so many things, and just never time enough, nor hands enough in my life. This summer I've had the best time because I did have someone who could drive, who was willing to take me wherever I wanted to go. There's so much still undone.

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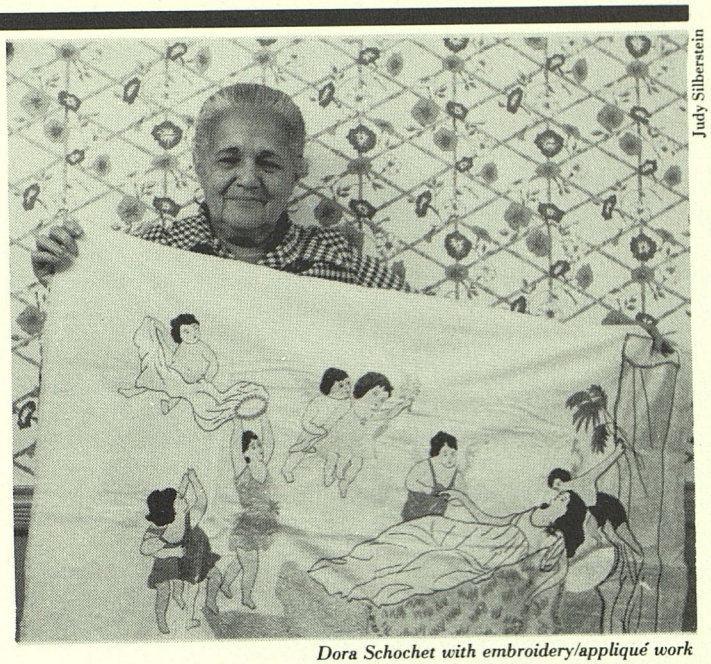
DORA SCHOCHET

I was born in Bialystok. That was Russia then, now it's Poland. I'm 47 years here, and I came here I was 26, 27. I came on Thanksgiving day; the boat came here on Kosciusko. It docked, I went right to the turkey. It was already different times when I came here. Times weren't good. My two girls were born. I had a lot of time in Europe. I never worked in my life. I was not a millionaire's daughter, but a comfortable parents' daughter. This work was having friends, going out. In Europe a girl is not working. Only boys, and boys are in the business or going to school. When I started to go to school, first I learned Yiddish, then I went to public school; it was Russian. When the Germans came in, I learned German. Then the Polish came in; you changed for Polish. And then I was married. I came to this country; I went a little school here, and that's it. Now it's a dream, what it was. We were girls thinking of good times.

My mother always wanted I should go to school and learn how to sew, but I never went. I learned it all myself. When I became of age, 10 or 12, she bought a machine and said, "You must sew on a machine, because I could never do it." We used to wash the whole week. Before washing, you had to fix things, darn things, iron things, but my mother, she didn't know how. So my mother always thought I should know a little. She always wanted me to go to a dressmaker and she will pay to teach me, but I never wanted. I did things that I like to do myself. Maybe I was 12 or 13, I started. I was making my embroidery for myself, for my children. My mother told me it was to prepare for marriage. You always prepare. That's why I thought to make so many things. I thought for children, and I didn't think of selling it. Oh no, I would never let Babe sell them. Not selling. She can give to her daughter.

The colors I always did on my own. I chose the pictures to my taste. Things that I felt, flowers, faces, lots of curls. You like green, I like blue. I didn't make the designs. I used to buy them, like a pattern, and we used to trace them. This was so beautiful when it was done, like a picture of angels. After all, angels should be naked, but how could you have a picture with naked angels. Here was white, here was pinkish satin; this was white wool, like a bear on a floor. Satin like a curtain. This was apple green silk; real silk, beautiful silk. It's not such a nice face one of them, because angels should really have nicer faces than that, but that was the pattern, and I couldn't do any other way, because I wasn't to change the painting. You see, I criticize my own work. Change it? I could not do it. I only could embroider. This has to be done this way, according to the design: some smaller stitches, some longer. Some day I'll wash it, like in Woolite; I'll iron it, and I'll frame it in nonglare glass.

When I came to this country you know I had a lot of stuff. We didn't have television, only a gramophone, then later on, we had



Judy Silberstein

Dora Schochet with embroidery/appliqué work

maybe a radio. In my house my girlfriends and I used to get together. So we did work; all day long the young women, the elderly women . . . We came here; a friend of mine gave me a lot of stuff to sell for money; but nobody wanted to look at it. So I packed it and sent it back. I kept mine, put it away, packed and unpacked, put it away, air it out, put it away again, air it out and put it away again. I made everything to be used. Definite, I thought. When I was here and nobody wanted to look at it, I was very much disappointed. I worked so hard. That's why I stopped to do it here. Look, I could not even give for a gift what I made. They made fun of it. Sure I thought it was art. I thought it something worthwhile to do it. In Europe handwork was very much important.

I'm married 55 years, so I could write a book with a lot of trouble. When I started embroidering I didn't have any trouble. I did it for pleasure. I didn't think of it as a career. Maybe if I was to live now, if I would be as young as you, I wouldn't want to be a housewife, because, let's face the facts, it's a waste of time. It's not appreciated, if you like. Keep on being what you want to be, be successful. I admire women that's going to work now. I say, it's really lovely that my daughter Evelyn goes to work. She's a person, she's somebody.

GEORGINA GARCIA

What I do is embroider. This is the kind of embroidery I do at work—it's called cross-stitch. It's a sample for a blouse to see if the color is all right. Here in New York is where most of this kind of embroidery is done. I'm the "sample-maker." Let's suppose that you're a customer, you come to see it, you like it and you order three or four thousand dozen to be made for you. Then that order goes to the embroidery machines and while I can embroider one piece, those machines can produce 250 pieces. There are a few women who are watchers, who for example put the cloth on the frames and take care of the machines, but they're almost always men. Five or six girls work on each frame; there are helpers there also to change the thread, to mark where the embroidery goes. No one actually draws. The machine works on a key punch. It's beautiful, the embroidery problem. I love it; it's beautiful.

The "sample-makers" are always women. My work is always done by machine, but there are companies that do hand embroidery —like the sweaters that are embroidered by hand. The company I work for has 14 women who work in their houses because they have children. In one hour, I can do both flowers. You have to keep counting the stitches continually or else you're lost, the flower loses its shape completely. You have to have *a lot* of patience. When you do the first one it always takes longer, but I've had so much practice; by the time you do the second or third it's much easier.

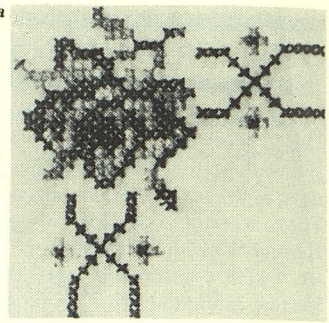
I taught myself how to embroider in Cuba. In my house, as in practically every other house in tropical countries, there was a sewing machine, a Singer. But, as a young girl I liked to embroider so much that I embroidered sheets. Before I got married I made my whole trousseau. Completely. I used to get my designs from people who I saw embroider, and used to see the designs in magazines. I have a dress I made when I was 17 years old; I made the whole yoke by hand. I saw the style somewhere, then I planned out the pattern myself. My mother, she didn't embroider but she sewed. Look, my two sisters work as duplicate makers in dress factories and they do well. They went to school in Cuba for two years and got their degrees in sewing.

In Cuba there was no remedy, if you were from the poor classes, but to learn to sew or embroider. I lived in a rural town in the Las Villas province. The first job I had when I came to this country was making wedding veils. For one year I sewed on the crowns by hand. After that job I did part-time embroidery because I wasn't practiced enough on the electric machines. In Cuba you have to use a foot pedal. Then I stopped doing the embroidery that I had done for myself because they paid me more for doing something that I liked. When you go out for work you have to be practical and leave

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Georgina Garcia and her daughter Mayra. Cross-stitch sample by Georgina Garcia



Judy Silberstein

behind. . . . I don't have a chance any more to do work for my house. Just think, I work at the company for seven hours. Those who embroider get left without their sight. You can't do this work for many years without losing your sight. Everyday that passes I'm left with less sight. After I come home I work for another four hours. I start at about 6:30 and it's 10:30 and I'm still sitting at that machine. Tired. Dead, dead, dead, tired, tired. But I need it. I'm paying for my daughter's college. On Saturdays I work at home till about three or four. And if I don't finish then I finish Sunday morning. They pay me by the hour.

There's no difference at all between the work I used to do for myself and the work I do now. I think it's art. Because not everybody can do it. In my company I've brought out three or four stitches that they didn't know. I've seen them in the beautiful embroideries that come from Switzerland that are done on special machines. I put myself to it and figured out the stitches. Because I love it. I can't explain it, I was born with it. More than any kind of embroidery I like doing the work I do now. I don't work for the money alone. I need to work, because no one works unless they have to, but when I make something I put all my concentration on the job. I do everything I can to see that the work comes out pretty. And when it doesn't come out good I take it out and embroider it again. I love my work, that's the truth. I mean look at that picture, I was 17 and I already knew how to sew with ease.

Sylvia Kolbowski, Judy Silberstein and Jean Wagner are artists who live and work in N.Y.C.

EDNA C. MILLER by Nancy Davidson

Edna C. Miller is a member of the Amish Community, Arthur, Illinois. Age 53, she has nine children—five girls and four boys (ages 9–30). A widow, she supports her family by running a restaurant in her home; her traditional craft is cooking. Edna Miller would not allow her photograph to be taken. The passage from Exodus, "Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image . . ." was given as justification.

NANCY: How did you learn to cook?

EDNA: Handed down from my mother. Of course, my mother died when I was 11 so I used to "work out" for other people until I was married, so I picked up some of it from them.

NANCY: Are your recipes written or oral?

EDNA: Well, like our young girls, they will want a recipe to go by where we do a lot of ours from scratch.

NANCY: Who helps prepare the meals?

EDNA: My girls; they can cook just as good as I can.

NANCY: Do your boys ever help?

EDNA: My oldest boy will help serve and my 14-year-old boy does the dishes.

NANCY: Is that unusual?

EDNA: He wouldn't, not if we weren't serving meals, I've got enough girls, he wouldn't help with the dishes. I let the children have the tips.

NANCY: Do you refer to people that are not Amish as "the English"?

EDNA: We just didn't have another name.

NANCY: I was thinking about being American.

EDNA: Oh yes, we are too, aren't we? That's true. We all are.

NANCY: Are most of the people that come to your restaurant Amish or "English"?

EDNA: "English" people.

NANCY: When you were a girl, what kinds of chores were you expected to do?

EDNA: Everything on the farm. Milking, feed the chickens, feed the calves, anything there was.

NANCY: Is there a difference for your daughters?

EDNA: I've often told them they are lucky they don't have to work like I used to. No, they don't have as many chores. They even complain about feeding the chickens.

NANCY: Does having a restaurant change any of the duties that your daughters have or any of the work you might expect them to do?

EDNA: If they didn't work in the restaurant they would have to have a job someplace else. This is our way of living.

NANCY: What kinds of things do your daughters do when they "work out"?

EDNA: I have one who works in a cabinet shop, the others just do housework.

NANCY: Is the daughter who works in the cabinet shop learning that craft so that she will eventually become a cabinetmaker?

EDNA: I don't know. It's not usually that a girl will—men do. We've got several cabinet shops around here. But she knows how. She does the framing with the cabinets and then she also does the bookwork.

NANCY: You have raised your children for eight years by yourself. Do you get help from others?

EDNA: Oh yes, there has been. I have lots of brothers and sisters, they help and of course my husband's side, they do too.

NANCY: Do you come from a large family?

EDNA: Yes, there were 19. See my mother died when I was 11 and my father married again. There were ten children from my mother and nine from my stepmother. So there's quite a get-together.

NANCY: Do many women in the Amish community have their own businesses?

EDNA: Oh, there's usually, a widow will try to have something for a living, there's like cloth stores, just this and that. Some do baking, so we just started in with this. We enjoy it, people are nice and we get lots of compliments on our dinners. And we enjoyed it until the Health Department came in and we were closed for a month, now my business is really hurt.

NANCY: Why did the Health Department close the restaurant?

EDNA: They said people were getting sick. But I couldn't get any names. We had seven different inspectors, but it kind of died down and some people are coming back.

NANCY: Have you had any interesting experiences with "the English" people who eat in your restaurant?

EDNA: We get tickled at some of the remarks we hear, like "real cow cream" and you know someone even mentioned Amish water and, well, there isn't such a thing. Just, well, you know, they think we're so different when really we're just people the same as they are.

NANCY: Do you find it difficult without a husband to deal with discipline?

EDNA: Well, I've always felt the father can do more with them than the mother, which is right, the father should be the head of the home. It is hard for me to do it alone.

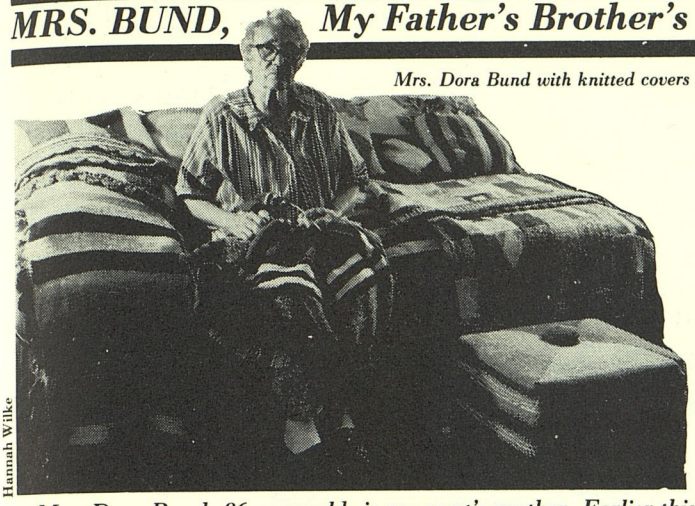
NANCY: How do you think it's changed you?

EDNA: I don't know, I think maybe stronger. I know I used to just cry if things didn't go right, but I can't do that all the time.

Nancy Davidson is an artist and mother presently teaching at the University of Illinois.

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MRS. BUND, My Father's Brother's Wife's Mother by Hannah Wilke



Mrs. Dora Bund with knitted covers

Hannah Wilke

Mrs. Dora Bund, 86 years old, is my aunt's mother. Earlier this year, I visited her in the hospital where I conducted this interview. She has a heart condition. Also present were Mrs. Bund's daughter, Beatrice Butter (Beaty), her daughter-in-law, Marcia Bund, and my mother, Selma Butter.

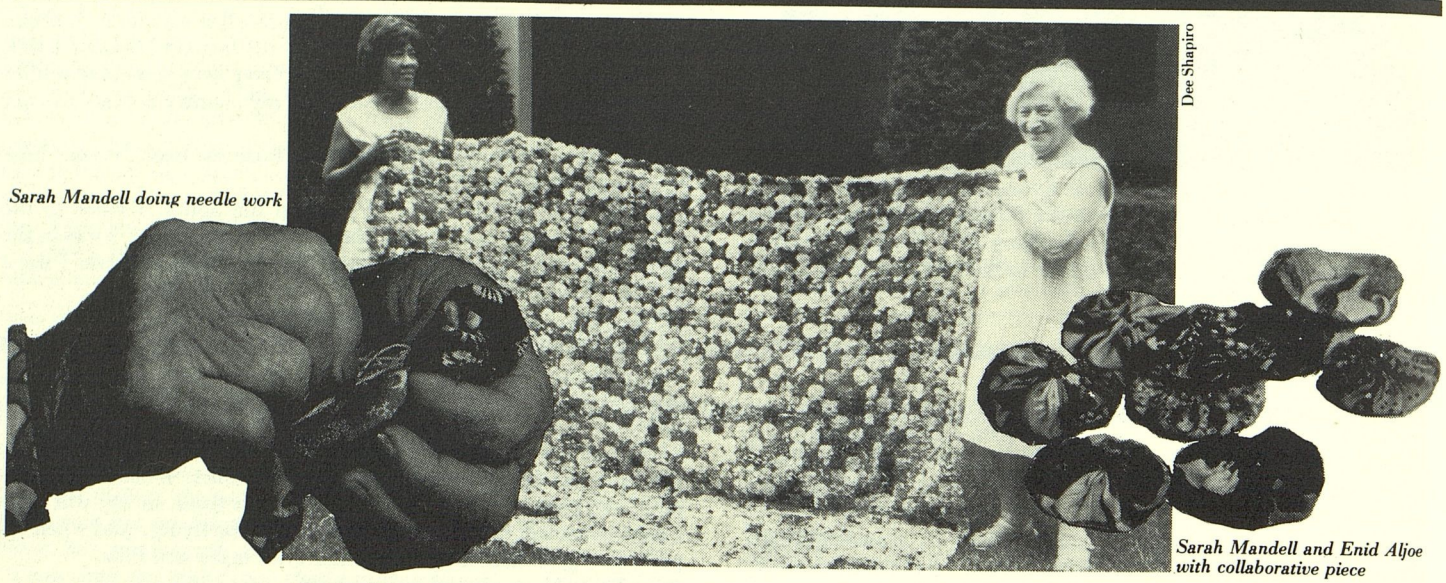
HANNAH: I saw the blanket you made for my mother. How do you make them and why?
DORA: You want in Yiddish or in English . . .
HANNAH: Ich can nich sprechen Yiddish. English, please.
DORA: I make them. It's my work . . . I have to do something.
HANNAH: You never made the blankets until about six years ago?
DORA: No. It cost too much money. Then my grandson-in-law gave me the wool. For the great-grandchildren I got blankets. Every birthday I make blankets. Before I must make money. I sew dresses. Then I stopped sewing, start this.
HANNAH: So, when you were 80, you stopped working and started to make the blankets.
DORA: Even in the nighttime, I'm sick and I can't sleep. I take my work and sit in the bed, till I'm tired. I make the rule, I knit. When I was ten years old I start to sew. Europe is not like over here. Was in school three hours a day, and I only worked to do something. One day my mother looked for me in the whole park. She can't find me. I was with the dressmaker. When it was nighttime I came home. Everybody asked me where I was. And I say, I want to sew. I don't want to go to school. So my mother went to this dressmaker and say, all right, she learn to sew, only she must go two hours to school. My mother paid this lady three dollars for two years to teach me to sew. When the two years finish, I say, this is the last day I be over here. The dressmaker tell me, you owe me ten days because you were in shul one day, you were sick one day . . . After that I got a different dressmaker. She gave me $15 for two years. Thirty cents a week. I was 14, 15 years old. Must be there all day. Come eight o'clock till eight o'clock. Was a strike. Must be union. And the strike was finished, we worked from eight to five, from nine to six. One dressmaker take me for a dollar a week. I was 16. I work for this woman not too long. My family had a big house then. One dressmaker came by and said to my father and mother, she pay $15 a year rent to put her machine in their window. She said, maybe you would buy a machine and I be partners with you. My father go right away and bought me a new machine for $50. And I stop that other work. I was very small. When the people come and I take measure, I can't reach them. My father was a carpenter. He make me a bench to step up. When I married I got three machines. Four girls work for me.
SELMA: I remember you saying you buried your children in a trench during the First World War.
DORA: My husband was in war. In Poland. After the Germans come in my country. Thirty-six people there was in a trench. Others covered us up. It was a day and a night. In the morning about six o'clock the people came and say, come in, the Germans is here! We was three years with the Germans. When my husband came from the war it was four years already.
HANNAH: And you were still a dressmaker?
DORA: What kind of dressmaker? Nobody got even to eat. I give up a machine for the bread.
HANNAH: When did you come here?
DORA: 1922.
HANNAH: Did you open the store immediately?
DORA: No. Right away I bought a machine. In the house. Because I got two small children.
HANNAH: Your husband was with you too?
DORA: We come together. My husband come in America when he was 16 years old. Till 20. He had to leave America to go back to be a soldier. Then we married. Six months after we married, broke out the war and he had to go back. Only my husband became a sick man from the war. He was all life sick. Over here you come soldier from the war, is sick, is got benefits. In my country nobody can get nothing.
HANNAH: At 60 you opened up the business because your husband couldn't work any more?
DORA: My husband was 15 years in the house. I come to the store and I sewing dolls. I sew kitchen curtains. All day I was in the store, and at nighttime. People still now got curtains. Never I use a pattern. Now I can't even take the needle in the finger.
HANNAH: Now you have arthritis, but you can knit?
DORA: To knit I can put the needle in there. But even sewing a button I get stuck in the finger.
HANNAH: Which do you like better?
DORA: I like to be finished already. What can I like now, tell me? Where is going I must go. I got a grandfather. He say, when time is come, he get a summons, he go to court. When is come for me, must go to court. When my grandfather lived, he say will come a time when will be no walking. People will be flying. And when my papa and grandfather lived was not even taxes and bills.
BEATY: No taxis and automobiles.
DORA: I was 15, 16 years old when my grandfather died. We lived together. My grandfather tells my grandmother to go buy a kerchief. I make the hems and he gives me two cents. You be good, this window be for your machine. When he is die, I push right away the machine in this window.
HANNAH: So if you put the machine in the window you were a seamstress. It would be like a sign on the door. And when your grandfather died, you knew it was the time.
DORA: My grandfather was a baker. He baked bread. My grandfather was rich. My grandfather maybe got 12 children. Always die. Small babies, babies, babies die. Only one children. One dog. Before when I was occupied I forgot. Now is come back.
BEATY: She is the only one left.
DORA: Nobody. Only my aunt, was my father's sister, was come over here.
BEATY: At home she [Dora] did a little dressmaking. Like when I was a teenager. We would take a walk on Clinton Street and I would tell her I like the neck of this and this sleeves of this, and she would make it. She used to holler at me because I cried if it didn't look so good, while she was working. And she would say, to a fool you don't show half labor. I always had original dresses. She never worked with a pattern. She should have been a designer in a big place with ideas.
HANNAH: Do you call them blankets or art works?
DORA: I say this is a blanket I make.
HANNAH: And you made that up yourself, the idea of stripes and squares?
DORA: Yeh. Yeh. With stripes, each is a different color, different shape, different size. I sew together and put border around. Make squares is two times as hard as other. Each strip got maybe ten squares, eight inches by eight inches. Each square different design. Make strip 80 inches, then more strips and sew together.
HANNAH: How long do you take?
DORA: I make this in four, five weeks.
HANNAH: You like to make objects that are useful?
DORA: I don't know. I make. I say, you like it, take it.
HANNAH: Did you keep any for yourself?
DORA: I got for myself two. I make over a hundred.
BEATY: A toaster cover she made, a hassock cover . . .

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MARCIA: The cover for my rotisserie. The whole house.
DORA: A couch I covered.
HANNAH: So you are covering all the ugly stuff.
DORA: I never want to be rich. Was satisfied with what I got. Because when I married I was rich. Paper money is no good money. Still have money from Poland. Got a big house. Lose house because the money worth nothing. When the soldiers came they take away everything. Even Beaty was a baby, got shoes, take away shoes. I got when I was married two dozen shirts. Everything embroidered. The soldiers took away. This night they kill four people, because the people don't give them. I say, take. Is come, the knives was like this. You scream, you see, you must be shot.
HANNAH: So you were lucky you had something to give them.
DORA: Take away everything. Wasn't rich wasn't nothing.
HANNAH: Real barter has nothing to do with money. It has to do with survival. We all have our own ways to survive.

Hannah Wilke is a woman-person-artist who has exhibited at museums around the country and is affiliated with Ronald Feldman Gallery in N.Y.C., Margo Leavin Gallery in Los Angeles and Marian Deson Gallery in Chicago.

SARAH MANDELL and ENID ALJOE by Judith Henry and Dee Shapiro



Dee Shapiro

Sarah Mandell doing needle work

Sarah Mandell and Enid Aljoe with collaborative piece

Sarah Mandell, grandmother of Dee Shapiro, is 84 years old, Jewish, born in Russia. For the past 13 years she has been living with her daughter. Enid Aljoe is 55 years old, born in Jamaica, West Indies. She has been the housekeeper in Dee's mother's household for 23 years.

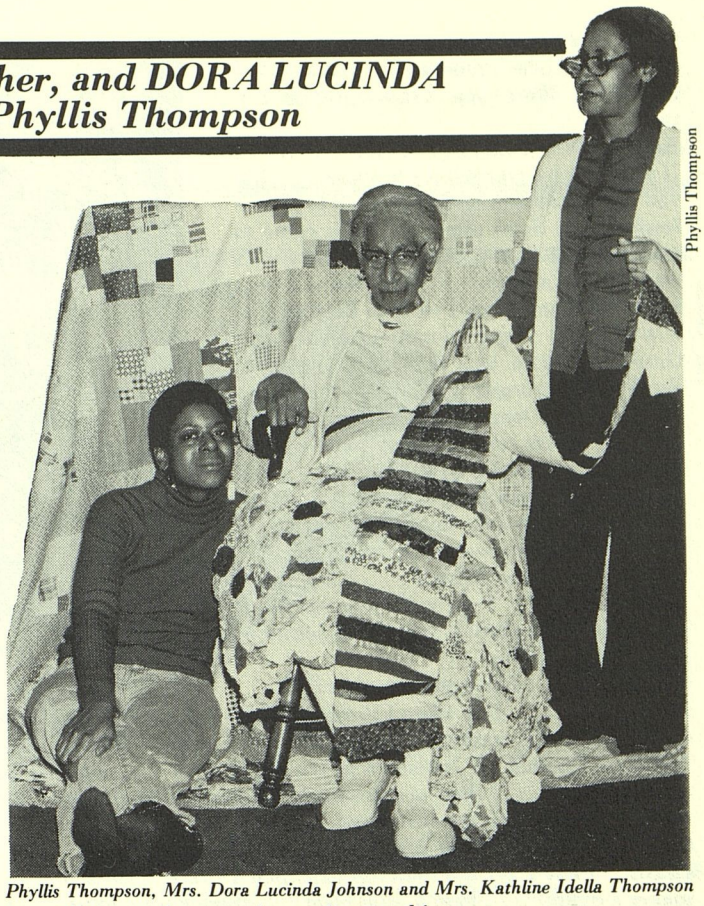
DEE: Where did you learn to sew, Grandma?
SARAH: In Europe they had no school. They just had someone to teach the children how to work so they could work for nothing. If a woman had a house and was getting work from the neighbors, shirts or blouses, so she took a couple of young girls and taught them how to sew—meanwhile, they were sewing for her the things, and when they knew enough most of them went to America and went into the factories and worked on shirts and blouses. That was all they knew, and those who didn't know went into domestic work. I was 12 years old in London, I went to school but one of my mother's friends showed me how to sew buttons on. When I came here I went to the factory and sewed buttons.
DEE: How many years did you work there?
SARAH: Not long, I got married. After 25 years I went back to work again in the same factory. I was what you call a finisher, sewing buttons, making buttonholes, all handwork. It was the men working the pressing machines, sewing machines and cutting machines. After the World War, the women came in and were sewing by machine.
JUDY: Did the men get higher pay?
SARAH: Yes, but it was what you call slave labor.
DEE: Could you work your way up in the factory?
SARAH: No. I didn't want to go back to work as a finisher because the operators were getting a union, but they wouldn't give me a chance to go to the machine, and I knew how to sew.
DEE: Why not?
SARAH: Because I would have to get more money and the boss would say, "Oh, I need you, Sarah, for this kind of work and you can't be bothered going to the machine and work," because he knew I would get more money.
JUDY: Did you do any other kind of handwork?
SARAH: I took home lamp shades, that was when I was married and had two children. I made nice money at the lamp shades, I wouldn't say a lot—just a helping hand.
JUDY: How long have you been doing this [a bed cover similar to a quilt]?
SARAH: About two years. She [Enid] taught me how, and my daughter is in merchandising and gets me swatches of material for nothing. I try not to have two colors the same. If I have a good green, I like to finish it with a brown. Enid is very good for colors; I sometimes make a mistake and put two colors the same. I know I'm not careful.
ENID: Because you're in a hurry.
SARAH: If I wasn't in a hurry I wouldn't have great-grandchildren. I have one 20 years old.
DEE: How did you learn to make these, Enid?
ENID: In Jamaica, the people had sufficient interest in the youngsters, so they would formulate a sewing class at home and they would teach you the different things to do. One of my sisters used to have a class and I watched.
DEE: Have you thought about selling them?
ENID: Who, me? No.
SARAH: How could she get a customer? She wants $500.
ENID: To be honest, I'm not kidding.
SARAH: I'm not kidding either when I know that nobody in the world would give you or me—not even $200.
DEE: Did people make those things for sale in Jamaica?
ENID: They would make appliqué things in Jamaica for a living. They would have an organization and the girls get a weekly or monthly salary. Then it goes to the store where the tourist comes in, it gets the price. You must know the value of handwork to pay for it.
DEE: What did your mother do in Jamaica?
ENID: She had nine children.
DEE: Did she do needlework at home?
ENID: Yes, she sewed my father's shirts and my brother's shirts.
SARAH: My mother sewed by hand till the minute she died. There were not machines in my mother's day. Later I had a machine already and she used to come over to my house and bring me sewing. She always basted it and made me new curtains all the time.

Judy Henry is an artist who lives in N.Y.C. Dee Shapiro is a pattern painter who lives on Long Island.

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KATHLINE IDELLA THOMPSON, My Mother, and DORA LUCINDA JOHNSON, My Maternal Grandmother, by Phyllis Thompson

Dora Lucinda Johnson is 82 years old. The mother of seven children, she resided on a farm in Seneca, Maryland for 70 years. Since the death of her husband in 1974, she has lived with her daughter, Kathline Thompson, in Philadelphia. Kathline Idella Thompson is a widowed mother of four children. Presently, she is a tax examiner for the Department of Internal Revenue in Philadelphia.



Phyllis Thompson

Phyllis Thompson, Mrs. Dora Lucinda Johnson and Mrs. Kathline Idella Thompson

PHYLLIS: Where were you living Granny, when you were piecing quilts?
GRANDMOTHER: Darnestown, Maryland, I reckon.
MOTHER: Probably out Sugarland where she grew up.
GRANDMOTHER: Out Sugarland. Maybe so, I reckon—maybe it was out Sugarland.
MOTHER: I don't know whether she is referring to when she was a child or after she was grown up and married. I know very little about where she lived when she was growing up. When I remember about you quilting, you were married then . . . you had us.
GRANDMOTHER: I was grown up? Don't remember whether I was married or not when I was piecing quilt squares . . . I used to piece lots of them.
PHYLLIS: Did you create particular kinds of designs or patterns that had names?
GRANDMOTHER: I make four pieces you know, like that, then sew'um together, then make another strip, sew it together, then . . .
PHYLLIS: You worked with four squares sewn together. . . .
GRANDMOTHER: Yes, I had my squares cut.
PHYLLIS: Were all of your quilts in square patterns? Were there circles or triangles?
GRANDMOTHER: Just straight squares . . . used to make squares, you know . . . something like that. We sew'um together . . . we sew all four squares together, take another strip of material and put on all four sides and sew it together.
PHYLLIS: Where did you get the fabric scraps?
GRANDMOTHER: We saved the scraps. My mother did sewing you see and she saved the scraps and things to make quilts—quilt pieces. Lots of people used to bring sewing for her to do.
PHYLLIS: She could sew very well then, and made extra money for her family. Did you ever make quilts for your family?
GRANDMOTHER: No. I used to piece quilt squares and things like that when I was home with my mother. I pieced'um for her—she used to make quilts. She'd get material to put on the back side, then take some raw cotton to put in between, then she had a thing called a rack you know, to put the quilt on. We get the quilt on the rack and hang it up and the quilt would be rolled up during the day and down at night when we were working.
PHYLLIS: You would hang it up . . . how? From the ceiling?
GRANDMOTHER: Yes, from the rafters. We'd sit there and sew on it. . . . make little strips across the quilt, about that wide and connect the squares.
PHYLLIS: Well, well . . . here is one right here. About how long did it take to complete a quilt?
GRANDMOTHER: It depended on how long I worked on it.
MOTHER: I'm not sure of course, but I think her mother did this. Aren't these some that you got from up Granmumma's house after she died? Because after she had all of us, she didn't have time to do that.
GRANDMOTHER: Whose is that? They look like some of mine.
MOTHER: This came out of your trunk. I think she helped do that. This was done on the sewing machine too.
GRANDMOTHER: Well, I used to do some on the sewing machine—some by hand and some on the sewing machine.
MOTHER: I just ran upstairs and grabbed these while you were talking. They had to come from up Granmumma's house. She had a lot of time to quilt after her children were grown.
GRANDMOTHER: When we were little girls, we were taught how to sew squares and then Momma would put them together.
PHYLLIS: Did you do any crocheting or knitting?
GRANDMOTHER: Very little.
MOTHER: The only knitting I know of her doing was these little throw rugs to put in the kitchen.
PHYLLIS: Those knitted rugs made out of old stockings and socks. When did you learn how to crochet and knit?
MOTHER: When I started high school. Well, you know, I learned the basic beginning stitches. I would follow directions to crochet doilies. I never really knitted anything. I just learned plain knitting. I liked to crochet. I crocheted quite a few doilies, but they were small. At one time, I used to use them a lot.
PHYLLIS: Yes, I remember when you used them. I recall that there were many women in the Projects who had ruffled doilies in their homes. That was at least 20 years ago. You washed and starched the doilies on Saturdays. Sometimes you used a sugar mixture for starch. How was that done?
MOTHER: I would starch my doilies, but that didn't make them stand up. My neighbor showed me how to fix a starch out of sugar and water. You soaked the doily in the sugar mixture and it began to dry, you pulled up the ruffled sides and they would stand stiff and remain in place. You know, I'm surprised that the roaches weren't attracted to them, but they weren't.

Phyllis Thompson is an artist and teacher. Presently, she is an Assistant Professor of Printmaking at Cornell University.

ELSE GRAUPE by Grace Graupe-Pillard

My mother, Else Graupe, was born in 1912, in the town of Rheda, Westphalia, Germany.

GRACE: How did you get interested in dressmaking?
ELSE: I always liked nice clothing . . . As a child I used to make doll's dresses . . . I had the fanciest dressed dolls . . . They went to the opera in velvet capes . . . If I had my way I would have chosen dressmaking as a profession rather than study medicine [Ms. Graupe attended medical school for one and a half years before Hitler's policy of Aryanization cut off her studies] . . . but no middle-class girl in Germany was ever allowed to make a living working with her hands.
GRACE: Who taught you?
ELSE: A seamstress came to our house and did sewing for the

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family. I watched her. . . the way she cut the material . . . she let me help . . .

GRACE: Were you encouraged in this talent?

ELSE: No . . . no . . . of course not. . . . If you do it for yourself it was okay. . . . but you weren't encouraged to make it your profession. . . . Soon after the Nazis came to power I had to stop medical school . . . I had to learn a trade . . . so of course I went back to dressmaking. I went to Berlin . . . I was lucky . . . I got an apprenticeship with Gerson—a store like Bergdorf Goodman. But I had just begun when orders came that Jews could no longer work there. The head of all the tailors (the "meister") who was also Jewish had to leave. So the store asked him to work from his home. . . . He hired four or five women—three were really experienced and two were learning to sew . . . I started from the bottom . . . I had to do the sweeping . . . I spent three years as an apprentice and then I passed my journeyman's examination.

GRACE: . . . like a guild system?

ELSE: Yes . . . Just when I finished, I had to leave Germany and emigrated to this country. I started here from scratch. Through the National Council of Jewish Women, I got jobs . . . alterations mainly at first . . . then one customer recommended another . . . eventually I got private customers.

GRACE: What is your method of working?

ELSE: First I get the material and then I drape it on a "dressmaker's figure" . . . here a little pleat . . . there a little pleat . . . I play around with it. I get an idea of style and then I start to cut. I always make everything tailored. I believe in letting the material speak for itself . . . giving it an elegant, smart look . . . typically European . . . just use plain, simple, straight lines.

GRACE: Were there any pieces that particularly excited you?

ELSE: I used to make evening dresses with a lot of embroidery . . . all hand done . . . I never use patterns . . . They took me two weeks, working 12 to 14 hours a day . . . I used to love that because the embroidery just came by itself . . . I added all kinds of beads and stuff . . . but the style was still plain and simple . . . all hand done . . .



Grace Graupe-Pillard

Evening dress designed by Else Graupe

Else Graupe in suit she designed and made

GRACE: Did you use a special sewing machine?

ELSE: I have my Singer machine which is about 30 years old. I once had one with all those gadgets, but I threw it right out . . . I don't need it . . .

GRACE: Do you consider yourself an artist?

ELSE: No . . . never . . . for me it was just a living . . .

GRACE: Well, obviously it was more than a living?

ELSE: To tell you the truth . . . it never entered my mind that I might have any artistic ability . . . except for one friend . . . she always said that I was a real artist.

GRACE: Did you ever have the ambition to be a designer?

ELSE: I would have . . . I had several offers to go into business for a big manufacturer. I designed the company's first two samples, from which they manufactured hundreds of thousands of blouses. The boss very much wanted me to be his designer . . . but I didn't feel right . . . it's a nerve-wracking business . . . and second your father wanted me to stay at home with you children . . . I always say . . . now I am liberated, he can't hold me back anymore . . . but at that time I wasn't . . . if I were to do it over again today . . . I would open my own dress design shop somewhere in midtown Manhattan. . . . Remember how I used to take a suitcase and go to the people . . . I should have had a place . . . they should have come to me . . . I wasted so much time . . . but I am not sorry . . . I really enjoyed my work . . . and love it now more than ever . . . since I am free to sew for my best customer—myself [laugh].

Grace Graupe-Pillard is a painter who lives and works in New Jersey and shows at Razor Gallery in N.Y.C.

IDA KOHLMEYER by Lynda Benglis

The first woman of importance to me was one of my art teachers, Ida Kohlmeyer. I made a special trip to New Orleans to interview her and to speak of her past and our relationship at Sophie Newcomb College where I studied art in the 1960s.

LYNDA: Ida, how did you happen to come to art?

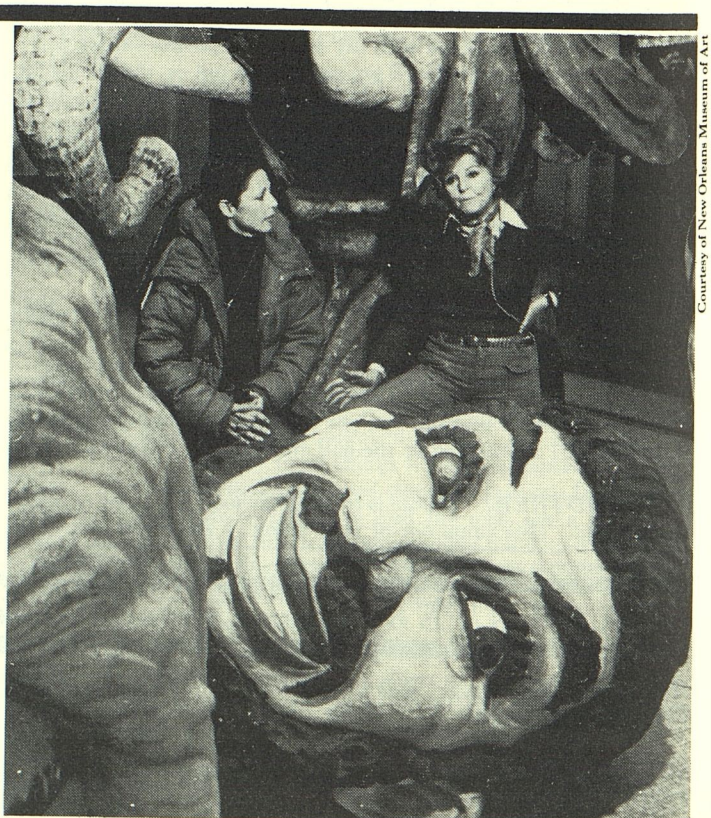
IDA: I'll begin at the beginning. . . . I was not young, almost 29 years old, grievously immature and becoming aware of the shattering fact that my life was without purpose. I attribute my "growing up" to the experience encountered as a soldier's wife during wartime, and to the sobering thought that life might well come to an abrupt and premature end without much warning.

My exposure to art had been sporadic and meagre. I turned to it, I think, with a lingering dilletantism, expecting to find it mildly absorbing. I have never been so mistaken about anything before or since. At the urging of a friend, who was aware of my dilemma, I enrolled in the John McCrady School in New Orleans, and was there initiated into the exhilaration of creative work.

The following fall, I signed up as a part-time student at the Newcomb Art School of Tulane University to take drawing and painting. After two years I began working toward a Master of Fine Arts degree. Because of a part-time curriculum, two small children and not too brilliant progress, it took four years to complete the requirements for the degree. The summer of 1956 I attended Hans Hoffman's School in Provincetown, and during the spring of 1957, Mark Rothko came to Newcomb as artist-in-residence. Both of these artists were great influences in my life.

LYNDA: I think it was unusual that an artist with your background should have had the seriousness of purpose to pursue your interests with both of these major artists.

It was your professionalism that impressed me, for I had never had real contact before with a woman artist. You always were pre-



Courtesy of New Orleans Museum of Art

Installation shot: Five from Louisiana (Jan. 28–Mar. 27, 1977) with Lynda Benglis (left) and Ida Kholmeyer (right) with Carnival masks

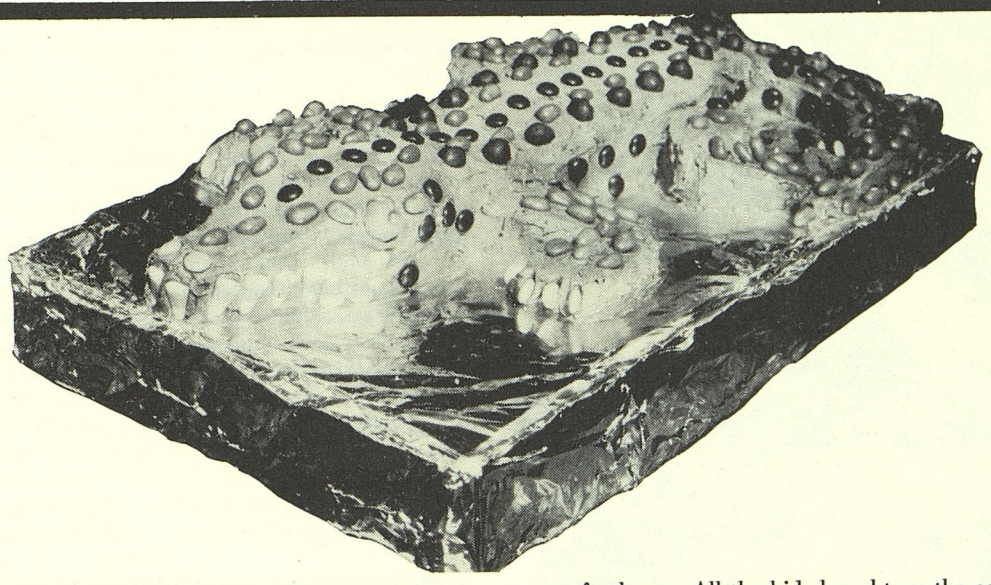
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pared with notes and examples of art works in class, and I can remember never wanting to miss those classes. Further, I was amazed and thrilled that you actually wanted to buy my art work and did! Also, you saw that it was placed in a serious commercial art gallery in New Orleans.

IDA: Lynda, I don't remember doing this for many of my students, but there were others and this was my extra dividend in gratification as a teacher.

Lynda Benglis, an artist, was born in Lake Charles, Louisiana, in 1941. She left Louisiana in 1964, lived in New York from 1964–1973, and since 1973, has been living both in Venice, California, and N.Y.C., spending an equal amount of time in both places.

STELLA CHASTEEN by Barbara Zucker



Ancil Chasteen

Alligator Birthday Cake

Cakes are like clowns. Both are so deeply imbedded in our culture that their strangeness is ignored.

The day I got married the car broke down so my parents drove us to our wedding. I sat in the back seat looking up front at the cardboard box which held the cake wedged in between my parents. Two circles had been cut out of the top so that the heads of the tiny china bride and groom had enough room to peek out. It looked like people in a surreal sweat box.

In Florida I once had a student whose art was all about food and feeding people. In one piece a thin girl lay still on a table for hours, wearing the entire meal which spread down around her in careful patterns. Spectators consumed bits from her throughout the evening. Ethel Ann's real piece de resistance was her Master's project: an exorcism of her marriage. She made a gigantic wedding cake, carved of wood and foam, complete with doves, net, roses and festoons. In the performance she stood on the cake, wearing her wedding dress, talking out her marriage. A man in a tux acted the groom and other performers straightened up, made beds, fetched and carried. She also baked a traditional wedding cake and mixed some punch which the audience consumed. Her work-for-money and her art work overlapped. She cooked each week for an entire church congregation—shopped, baked and served the Sunday meal.

Stella Chasteen lives in Woodstock with her three children and her husband. Trained in art academies in London, she came to America in the sixties. She stopped painting because she "didn't know what to paint." Her cakes, which she makes as an act of love for her children, are wonderful.

STELLA: My first cake was a car.
BARBARA: How do you carve it?
STELLA: I bake the cakes, then freeze them and carve it while they're frozen. I can carve it quite precisely frozen. It doesn't crumble or squoosh. I use poundcake because it's a nice solid consistency, not too heavy. Someone advised me to use toothpicks to hold it together.

The first one was such a success. The children said, "I want one too, I want one too." They can think up whatever they want. The mountain cake, I had just started teaching Tom how to ski. His birthday is in the winter. You can always tell what he was into that year by what his cake was. The others are more into their fantasies. I did a monster head for Rhody. Sometimes they give specific directions. Tessa's dog *had* to be black and white. Rhody's monster had to have a head that was half blue and half green. After that, at a school fund-raising I made miniature monster heads. I used cashew nuts for horns. All the kids bought up the cakes immediately.

I use regular butter frosting and then color it with food coloring and when I want real white I have to get white butter.

I made Tessa a fairy. It was the most difficult because it was tall and tended to topple over. It was a hot day in June and the fairy kept falling; I had to keep propping it up. I painted the fairy's face like a china doll. It was holding a magic wand which was a sparkler which I lit.

There was a show at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London of cakes. A friend saw the show and said my cakes could have been there. I said, "No," because for me it is very important that the cakes be eaten. I would have a totally different attitude about what I was making if it was going to be around for any length of time. It can be more outrageous, more goofy—it's carefully considered, but not in the same way as something permanent. Besides, the kids get such a thrill out of eating it. It's sort of gory: "I want the head, I want the eye, give me the leg!" It's great!

I like to make use of edible stuff to decorate them with and find unusual things. For the wheels of Rhody's car I found cookies that looked like spokes of a wheel. For Tessa's dog's ears I used Oreo cookies. I once made Tessa a circus cake. All the ropes and trapezes were made out of shoelace licorice.

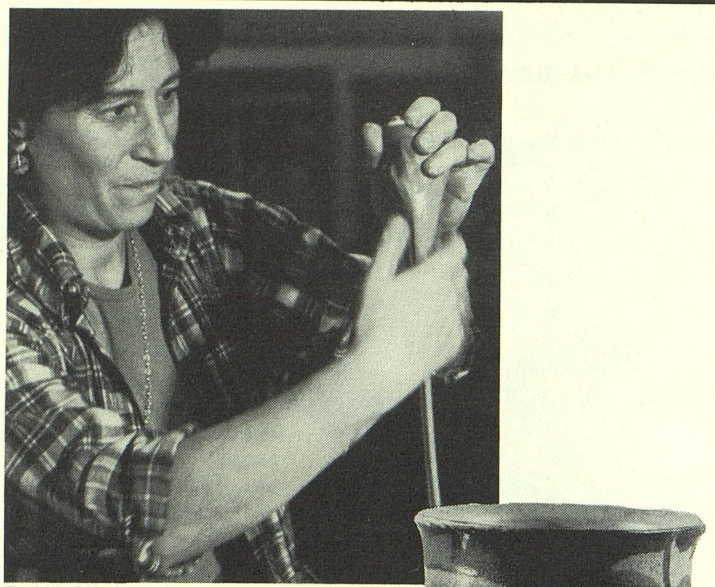
BARBARA: Why don't you have more photographs of them?
STELLA: I make the cake the morning of the party. It takes about three hours just to decorate. Then I've got to get the party together. The rush of the party prevents taking pictures. I never have any film in the camera. For the tropical island cake, you know that health food sugar? I used that for sand for the beaches. I also made a traditional English castle with gray frosting. The grownups looked at the frosting and said, "eeeough, gray frosting!" but the kids thought it was terrific because it looked like a castle. I bought knights on horseback and little flags to fly from the turrets. I love doing it.
BARBARA: Is there anything else that gives you that kind of pleasure?
STELLA: Yes, pottery does, ceramics. Actually, making it is what's so nice about the cake. It's all in the doing of it. Then it's gone. It's not sitting around. The appreciation is immediate. You've got all the kids who come to the birthday party.
BARBARA: You don't think of them as art?
STELLA: No, I don't really.
BARBARA: Why not?
STELLA: I think of them as cakes.

Barbara Zucker is an artist who teaches, writes and loves her daughter.

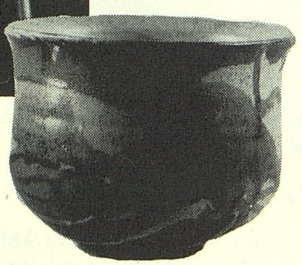
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7 WOMEN IN NEW JERSEY:



Barbara Schaff



Ceramic bowl by Barbara Schaff



Vivian O'David



Lois Gerb

Barbara Schaff—pottery
Joan Wortis—weaving
Pat Frank—goldsmith
Vivian O'David—quilting
Adele Blumberg—embroidery
Lois Gerb—rug hooking
Paula Wachtel—Ikebana (Japanese flower arranging)

BARBARA: You are talking to a potter who's into function. I have been through a kind of soul-searching siege about whether I should make ART, capital letters, the way most of my contemporaries are doing, and I very self-consciously set out to do that, which, of course ended in total disaster because it wasn't fun, wasn't free and I didn't enjoy it very much. I make things that are according to my grandmother's proverb who, may she rest in peace, was Russian . . . she said, "You should never have anything in your home but what is useful and beautiful." I make very simple, very quiet, useful things for everyday because I have this vague philosophy that it enriches the quality of human life to use handmade things. I don't believe in using good things only for company—Who is company? I deserve good things. I am a maker of crocks and jugs and cups and mugs and teapots and bowls and everything that you can possibly use in the kitchen. Very primitive, very traditional, tremendously satisfying.

MADGE: Joan, what about your weaving?

JOAN: I feel very close to what Barbara is saying. I do functional work.

BARBARA: It goes against the trend.

JOAN: Yes, very much against the trend. I make garments for both women and men, primarily for women. I came to it really from a great love of folk art, which I've always been attracted to—particularly embroidered things, woven things. I want things to be worn. I'm not making things that you might wear once to a costume ball—I want people to wear things to adorn themselves and feel beautiful in what I make.

BARBARA: Neither one of us designs anything for use only. Aesthetic considerations are extremely important. It has to be both useful and beautiful.

DEE: This issue is concerned with breaking down these barriers. Not considering yourself an artist because of the attitude toward crafts.

BARBARA: That's a tempest in a teapot. Art versus craft.

JOAN: That position—that your work is an art work, the pots no longer have openings, they are nonfunctional pots, the weaving is no longer weaving—that is for use, for a floor cover or a wall cover to keep out the cold or on the body. It becomes a wall hanging in the same way that a painting is. Those of us who are working in the contemporary crafts market, as Barbara and I are, are sometimes made to feel like second-class citizens because we are not arts/crafts people.

PATTY: I think of myself as an artist, and it doesn't matter what I work in, I'm an artist, period. I think Barbara's an artist even though she's very stubborn about considering herself a craftsperson. Anybody who has an idea, takes some material and transforms it into something usable, whether you hang it on the wall or put soup into it or stick it on your arm, *that* is an art object. If nobody in the world likes it except you or your mother, then you have a problem.

PAULA: Poverty.

PATTY: Right. Or you get a job in the supermarket and so you have time to do the other stuff. We're all artists. Painters are just as much craftspeople, if they're worth their salt, because they have to learn how to deal with the materials they work with.

DEE: How did you get into jewelry?

PATTY: My mother and aunt dragged me through lots of department stores. My mother would give me jewelry to play with, good costume pieces. I would sit around and stare at them for hours—they were like things I played with as a kid. When I got into college, I had rocks which were semi-precious stones and I thought I would take a jewelry course to cut stones. I had an instant rapport with the silver. I sold my first ring in three days and I thought, my goodness, I didn't sell my first painting. So the monetary aspect of my personality . . . hm, there's gold in them thar hills.

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Part of a discussion by Dee Shapiro and Madge Huntington

DEE: Now your mother is collecting your jewelry.

PATTY: I can't keep anything that's gold around my mother. It's like the company store; I borrowed money from her, then she says, "Let's work a deal." She's got three of my chains.

BARBARA: Now you know how I feel. I'm into Patty up to my neck in hock.

JOAN: But isn't the satisfaction wonderful to have all those things people made?

BARBARA: I'm a trade junkie.

JOAN: We go to the craft fairs, running around looking at other people's things and wanting to live with the things that other people have made with their hands, which we couldn't afford.

PATTY: Right. I can't afford to keep my jewelry.

MADGE: Vivian, are you a crafts artist aside from being a school principal?

VIVIAN: No. What I think makes me legitimate in this group is that I came into quilting via a sister. I lost my sister a year ago and I've gone on with the work because it's something I've grown up with. I brought along with me a quilt my grandmother did, it's over 100 years old.

DEE: I think many of the crafts came out of a definite need for the objects as a function in the home.

JOAN: However, there were the crazy quilts that were done in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and I've seen many of them come pristine out of the trunk and never been backed, never been used. Why?

VIVIAN: I think even with the 11 children, no doubt there would have been one quilt that was put someplace that certain people saw and the rest of you wouldn't.

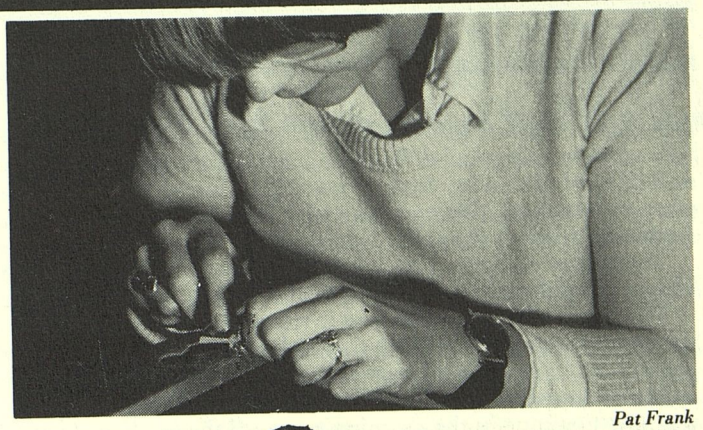
ADELE: I've always worked with the needle.

VIVIAN: And beautifully.

ADELE: From the time I was five until now, which is a considerable number of years, I have always had something in my hand or in my pocketbook. If I travel, I always have something with me. And it's amazing how you get contact with perfect strangers if you've got something in your hands. We were in Cuzco, Peru, and our plane was about five hours late. I was working on that seat you're sitting on, Dee. An Indian woman with a baby was learning these stitches with me, and it was the most wonderful thing . . . I wanted to give her child a doll that we had just bought; she said no, she couldn't accept it because she made it [the doll]. So we were exchanging our crafts and a perfect stranger took pictures of us and sent them to me. Me with this Indian woman learning these stitches. For me, the culmination of a busy day is when we can sit down at 11 o'clock and watch the news and I don't have to do any other work. You don't have to watch television, you can listen, you can be with your husband, you're doing something with your hands, and you're creating something. Before I was married I had this tremendous passion to accomplish all of these things. Wherever I went visiting relatives, I'd take my tablecloths along with me. And they used to kid me. I don't know if they were hurt that I was doing it. Some men object if you sit and embroider in front of them at board meetings.

PATTY: You can be a total participant. You basically make these decisions and it's just a matter of moving the needle. It's not coming from the part of you that you need to listen and speak and think with.

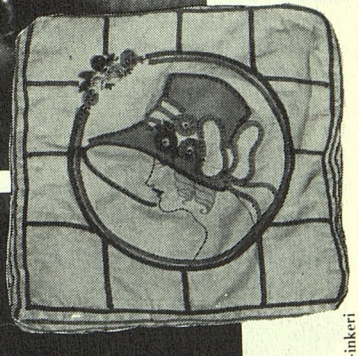
ADELE: You spoke about wanting to keep what you do. I know that what I make has really very little value, unless I put it on a good piece of linen, but you can't compare it with a goldsmith's work. I feel very possessive about what I've done and I don't give it to anyone except people that are very close to me. Organizations say now see how much hand stuff you can bring in for the bazaar or for the auction and we'll have a big sale . . . I give of myself all the time to the community, but never my needlework. I still have the little crooked tea towel I did at age five because my mother wouldn't throw it out.



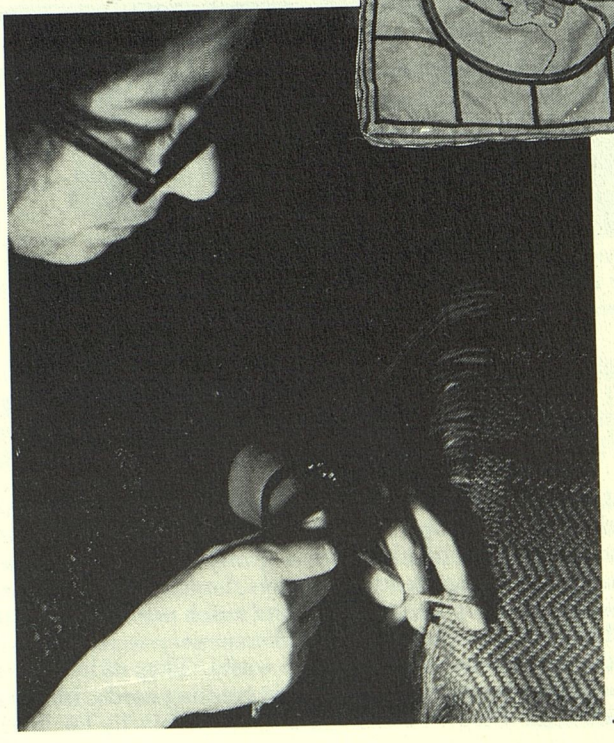
Pat Frank



Adele Blumberg



Embroidered pillowcase by Adele Blumberg, Age 12 (1928)



Joan Wortis

Dee Shapiro, Pat Frank, eeva-inkeri

Dee Shapiro is a pattern painter who lives on Long Island.

Madge Huntington is a self-taught artist working with fabric collage wall hangings who lives in N.Y.C. with her husband and children.

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REMINISCENCES

KATHI NORKLUN

My grandmother loved flowers. I remember the garden. There were hydrangea, bouncy and big on their wood stems; violets and lilies-of-the-valley that we learned to search out in the shadowy spots in our own yard and pick for Mother's Day; roses that grew on crooked, thorny stems with rough, toothy leaves, each one a simple perfection out of which my grandmother picked Japanese beetles, dropping them with their glistening green-and-purple backs into a rusty can of kerosene.

There was a cherry tree whose fruit we never ate because the birds got there first. Beyond that was the vegetable garden. There grandmother's flowers found a place, one corner graced with arching stems of bleeding hearts and regal purple irises.

The house was big, open and inviting, full of textures and smells and old-fashioned colors. The wallpaper in the foyer had little pastoral figures repeating themselves in identical landscapes along the stairs. The paint on the ceiling above my bed was old, peeling off in places and resembling in one spot an old hag with a long nose. My room was papered pink and green, my grandmother's favorite colors, and had the musty, long-used, faded smell that pervaded the house. My grandmother had a wringer washing machine in the cleaning room off the kitchen. It had its own smell of old clothes and soap, and the clean/rotten smell of potato peelings and other organic leavings that were kept separate from the burnable garbage. On the door she kept an old calendar with the saying, "Oh, Lord, Thy sea is so great and my boat is so small."

She braided rugs. She bought old wool coats at rummage sales, tore them apart, cut them into strips, folded, stitched and braided them into long coils. One of these rugs was on the floor of the dining room, all dark browns and greens and tweeds.

My grandmother kept things. In her sewing room there were always piles of clothes from rummage sales, dresser drawers filled with jewelry, gloves and other fine, delicate things. Knick-knacks were all over the house, and a wonderful eight-day clock under a glass bell sat on the mantle in the living room.

She wore dark print dresses that came down past her knees, and she looked like I thought all grandmothers looked: solid, peasant stock from Eastern Europe, apron tied at her waist, hands gnarled from tending her flowers, smelling wonderfully like her kitchen or the earth in her garden.

There is a church in the town, and my grandmother often provided flowers for the altar from her garden. I used to tremble when my grandmother, in her goodness, walked right up to the altar and arranged the vases on it. The Church teaches humility and service through its female saints; certainly my grandmother belongs with that long-suffering celestial choir.

Why are there no flowers on my grandmother's grave? Since she died, eight years ago, I have grown up, and my memories of her have been disturbed by the glimpses my mother has given me of another side of this woman.

"She was very bitter, she was ready to die," my mother told me. My mother's own anger distilled into bitterness as she talked about my grandfather's travels with his new wife. My grandmother had always wanted to travel, but never had.

"She would not see the priest who came to visit."

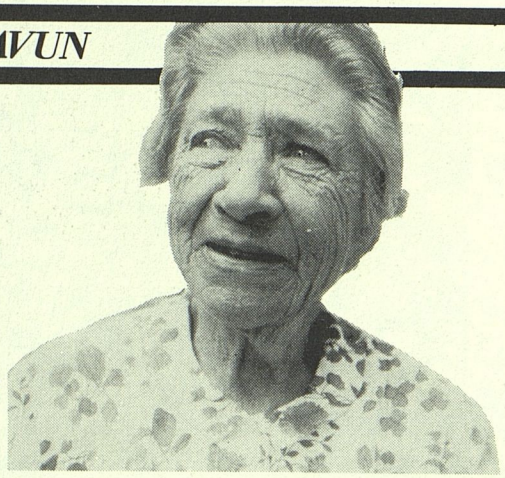
"She . . . had to lie in the bed she made for herself." What a cold, cruel thing to say. She had encouraged my grandfather to play the role of a man as she knew it, and he did. He hung around with the boys. They grew apart. When she died, my grandfather married a woman who would be a companion.

My grandmother was caught in the center of a web of caring she had spun around all of us. I find I never really knew her. No one talks of her, no one reminisces. The family has scattered, the children have grown, the house is no longer the center of a vital network. Weeds have taken over the garden; I believe my grandfather has mowed it down.

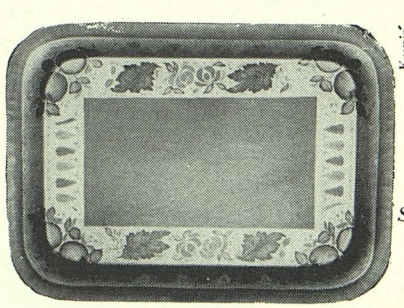
Grandmother's bitterness seems to have come from what she did with her life. Yet for me as a child, she was part of an undifferentiated environment of warmth, comfort and beauty.

Kathi Norklun is a free-lance writer and art historian living in N.Y.C. She has been working on an exhibition of women's domestic imagery.

BETTY KLAVUN



Alice Watters Beebe



Kunie'

Stenciled tray by Alice Watters Beebe

My first clear memory of my mother is of her fishing in hipboots in a northern lake, casting with one of her own flies—gorgeous bugs with fantastic wings which she had tied herself from brightly colored feathers and bits of materials.

In the late thirties Mother and a group of her friends became interested in stenciling. They researched old designs and redesigned them for application on trays, lamps, chairs, boxes. The stencils were cut from a very hard waxed linen paper so that the edges stayed sharp and clear despite much use. To celebrate my wedding Mother stenciled a design on the walls of our living room. These women worked hard and were very serious about their work. They were middle-class women without aggressive or competitive ambitions in the business world. They didn't object to working commercially but did so only if asked. One might illustrate a child's book; one might paint greeting cards. Mother even translated children's books into Braille. Despite the professional quality of these women's work it was primarily for their own pleasure and that of their families. The quilts they designed

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and sewed went on their own beds. The rugs they hooked or braided went on their floor. My father, however, brought my mother's stenciled trays to elegant stores like Hammacher Schlemmer's to sell with the outdoor furniture which he designed and built after his retirement.

Most discarded items or worn-out materials were preserved as grist for the household mill. Stockings and clothes were kept for rugmaking or cleaning rags. Broken bottles were for scraping furniture, paper bags for absorbing cooking grease, newspapers for laying fires with one special pleated fan to dress up the kindling. The recycling was continuous. It was part of running a home.

Mother invented all sorts of gadgets which my brother tried to patent. Every possible drawer in the kitchen cupboards opened into the dining room as well as the kitchen. There was a special holder for soaking brushes upright, a knitting yarn winder and lamps that swung on long arms.

Mother respected and understood the unpredictable in nature. She studied the agricultural information published by the state, learning about crop rotation, and even after we no longer had animals, continued to cultivate the fields for hay. She never quite believed that the flowers she crossed and the trees she grafted would take.

Mother made a vegetable and berry garden, a flower garden and a rose garden. In the cellar under the carriage barn, she grew mushrooms.

The planning of all her gardens was quite similar to outdoor environmental sculpture. She never imposed a formal design but used the land as she found it. Rocks were centers for small flowers, "hens and chickens," succulents and herbs. An existing shrub might be tied into the rest of the garden by more massive clumps of tall plants. The land was planned with appropriate flowers for knolls and valleys, sun and shade. In my memory all the flowers were an exaggerated extension of the wild flowers in the field around them. My sister calls this an old-fashioned garden.

When we had cows, mother made butter and cottage cheese and buttermilk, the by-product. The milking was done by hand and then came the separating of the milk and the cream. There seemed to be a countless number of discs to the separator. Then came the slow endless turning of the handle of the big wooden churn until the butter suddenly came.

Mother also raised bees and for a short time we had our own honey until Mother, who scorned most of the protective bee costume, nearly died of bee sting.

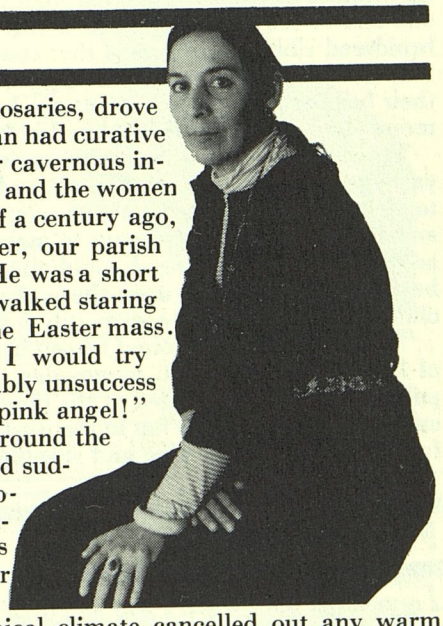
She took great pleasure in growing vegetables and fruit and canning them. We all gathered berries for her jelly making. She was a champion blueberry picker. She made both elderberry and blackberry wine. We probably had one of the first freezers, a memorable event. Half of our favorite vegetable, peas, instead of being eaten fresh, were frozen.

Late in life she became excited by the possibilities of reproducing old china designs, pots of her own, and glazing. She enrolled at the Sharon Art Center nearby and eventually had her own kilns and worked at home.

She was a shy, small woman, prophetic in her time, generously responsive, filled with a natural curiosity and a great love of the earth.

Betty Klavun is a sculptor interested in doing pieces that involve people.

LUCHITA HURTADO



My family lived in Caracas, Venezuela. Ladies at that time, nervously twirling their rosaries, drove down the perpendicular dangerous road to bathe in the sea. It was believed that the ocean had curative powers. Huge bathhouses stood on the coastline, waves pounding and resounding in their cavernous interiors, the dusky air pierced with streaks of sunlight while crabs walked the high ledges and the women and children squealed with delight. It was during a sojourn at the beach, a little over half a century ago, that I was born. Memories of my childhood still invade today's reality. Padre Peñalber, our parish priest, is at least partly responsible for my lifelong aversion to a certain shade of pink. He was a short stocky man with very bushy eyebrows and a thunderous voice. Cassock swinging, he walked staring at the line of children waiting to hear what the color of their angel dresses would be for the Easter mass.

At that time dark complexioned children were thought to look best in pink and so I would try holding my breath, hoping that perhaps my complexion would change. I was invariably unsuccessful in these attempts for when he looked at me, he would always say, "Pink. You are a pink angel!" Little girls with papier mache wings strapped to their backs were placed on a scaffold around the altar kneeling on a space hardly larger than a small cushion. I never knew whether I had suddenly grown too tall to be an angel or whether, rebelling against the pink I wore, I disrupted the mass by falling asleep kneeling on one of the higher platforms. Whatever the reason, I was never again chosen to be an angel at Easter. Being a painter, color has always been a very important part of my life. I go through color periods when anything purple or red or green or blue seems magically endowed, but never ever a certain shade of pink.

Venezuelan girls were taught to sew at an early age. They didn't knit—the tropical climate cancelled out any warm clothing—but they did sew, crochet, embroider and make beautiful lace. I don't believe I ever saw a group of women working together on a common project; rather, they worked alone, even if in a group, spending long hours embroidering a pillow case or making a lace doily.

My grandmother, Rosario, taught me how to sew. If she caught sight of me sitting under a tree enjoying the afternoon breeze, she would ask me to bring her my favorite dress. "Idle hands tempt the devil," she would say; then together we would undo the hem. Once done, she would say, "Now, sew it up again and let me see how well you can do it." It never occurred to me to ask her why it was that when I daydreamed I was tempting the devil, whereas when boys daydreamed they were lost in thought, planning some great project.

I didn't like to sew then, and it took me years to discover that it could be a pleasurable experience. When I became pregnant with my first son in New York, I learned to enjoy sewing. In the forties, when he was born, the only maternity clothes available in stores were called "butcher boy" dresses with an ugly hole cut out in the skirt. I had a vision of a long, silk, black and white striped dress with a velvet ribbon and red geraniums and promptly began to make it. It took me weeks and because I set the sleeves in backward, I had to stand with my shoulders at an odd angle. However, what I remember most is how good I felt when I finished and wore it. When my son, Daniel, was born, the dress had been so constantly worn that, like the placenta, it was discarded in the process. I went on sewing then whenever I coveted some imagined piece of clothing or visualized my infant son in a red vest with blue satin ribbons. Sewing has afforded me great satisfaction through the years.

Luchita Hurtado is a painter working in Santa Monica, California. She has four children.

Luchita Hurtado, 1974

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ANN SPERRY

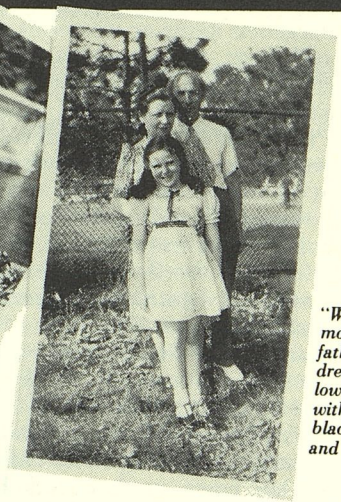


"As a Scotch lass. The lining of the coat matched the Tartan hat."



"With my mother—the dress was white georgette with white lace trimming on the ruffles."

"As a Russian princess—camel's hair outfit trimmed with beaver, 2-inch scraps sewed together to make long strips."



"With my mother and father—the dress was yellow dotted swiss with green and black velvet dots and ribbons."

I was a Scotch lass one fall, a Russian princess the next winter. I had feather or fur-trimmed hats to match every coat and lace-collared, lovingly hand-tucked party dresses. The buttons on my blouses were ceramic fruits or mother-of-pearl hearts; enameled flowers closed my sweaters. I was the embodiment of my mother's fantasies—the outlet for her frustrated talents. Trained in Poland as a fine seamstress, she emigrated to America at 18, took a course at the Traphagen School of Fashion and became a dress designer. My father believed that a wife's place was in the home, and even though her income would have been a welcome addition to the small salary he earned as a Yiddish poet working for the Yiddish newspapers, she stopped working to take care of their home, and me, their only child.

She designed and sewed every kind of clothing for the two of us; shirts, ties, jackets, pyjamas and bathrobes for my father; curtains, slipcovers, bedspreads for the house. Her sewing machine in the bedroom was overflowing with projects. Scraps of fabrics and pieces of thread were always on the rugs and floor.

Sometimes she took me with her to hunt for the fabrics—remnants were all she could afford. We would plow through rolled up bundles of cloth wrapped around the middle with a strip of brown paper. The material would tumble out when you pulled one end of the string that tied it together. We searched through boxes of laces, trimmings, scraps of fur, end pieces of embroidered ribbons, all scraps that could be bought for a few cents by anyone who could think of a way to use them.

Usually the remnants were wrapped the wrong side out. It wasn't until we got home and opened them that we were able to see their full beauty. My mother always knew what treasures she had found. "Look," she'd say, fondling a piece, "this French silk moiré, how it reflects the light; this Italian knit, it must have mohair in it, feel how it moves."

There was such challenge and excitement when she started making something. Almost always, the pattern called for more yardage than was in the remnant, and she would hover over the fabric on the floor, clouds of pattern pieces surrounding her, tape measure draped around her neck, folding and unfolding in every conceivable way until she managed to maneuver the two-and-five-eighths yard remnant to make a three-and-a-half yard skirt. It was magical to me; she could make something out of anything, out of nothing. I could almost see the fabric grow to fit the need. Then she would pick up her enormous shears and begin to cut. (I once used those shears to cut out some paper doll clothes, and got one of the worst spankings of my childhood—those shears were only for fabric.)

This past summer I found myself in a junkyard, trying to pull a beautifully patinaed piece of two-inch pipe from under a pile of I-beams. It was a hot, muggy day. I was going to the beach when I spotted this likely-looking heap of scrap, and felt compelled to stop. As I tugged at the pipe, sticky and sweating, trying not to stab my sandaled feet with a sharp rusted iron bar, cursing, I wondered: What in the world am I doing here? Why this need to stop and explore every junkyard? Why is my studio full of scraps of steel pipe and sheeting and odd iron shapes?

Ann Sperry's sculpture combines fluid painted steel elements with rusted found objects. She lives in N.Y.C. with her husband and three children.

FAITH RINGGOLD

I remember once when I was about 12 years old I tried to make a pair of sandals and a brassiere from some pink satin scraps of material my mother, Willi Posey, had given me. She was the first person to teach me to sew as her mother, Ida, had taught her. The tradition of teaching and sewing in our family probably goes back to our roots in Africa. My mother remembers watching her grandmother, Betsy Bingham, boil and bleach flour sacks until they were "white as snow" to line the quilts she made. Mother also remembers Betsy cutting out basket shapes, triangles and circles out of brightly colored scraps of material to create the design of the quilt.

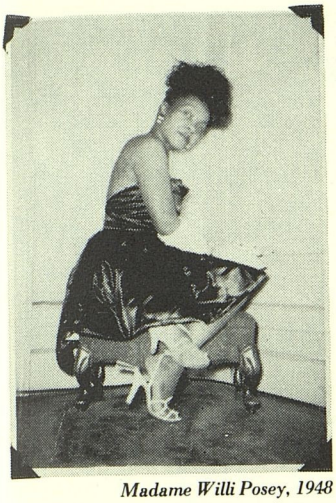
Susie Shannon, Betsy's mother, had taught her to sew quilts. She was a slave and had made quilts for the plantation owners as part of her duties as "house girl." Undoubtedly many of the early American quilts with repetitive geometric designs are slave-made and African-influenced.

Ida, my grandmother, made clothes for a living when she came north from Jacksonville, Florida, after her husband died in 1910. He had been a teaching principal setting up schools in Florida and South Carolina, moving frequently to the next place that needed him and could pay for his services. Ida taught with him in the South, but up North there was no job for her and she still had two young children to support.

My mother made our clothes, and sewed for friends free during the depression years. She created original designs and made and cut her own patterns. By the forties, no longer a housewife, she was making a living sewing and giving seasonal fashion shows of her designs. Many are high fashion today, such as the bat-wing sleeves and knee-length pants.

My mother was always an artist, but she thinks of herself as a business woman, and measures her success by the number of steady customers she designs for during each season. Today she is in her seventies and her five or six steady customers keep her in business wearing "Posey" originals.

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Madame Willi Posey, 1948

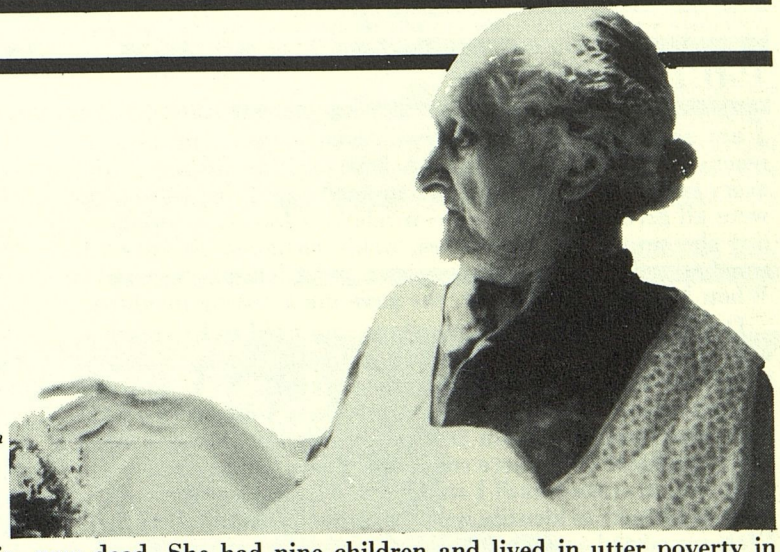


Thomas J. Morrison

Madame Willi Posey, 1950

Faith Ringgold, artist, teacher, writer, is currently completing an autobiography and lecturing and exhibiting nationally.

HELENE AYLON



Celia

I just came across this photo of my mother-in-law, Celia, now dead. She had nine children and lived in utter poverty in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. Her husband worked in a sweatshop and studied the Torah.

Celia's art was "making do," patching up, stretching the dollar. She boasted that the only thing she threw out were eggshells—"and to begin with, the eggs can be bought cracked for next to nothing." She knew of a place to buy stale bread which was "better for you than fresh bread." She'd cut up old telephone books into six-inch squares and use this for toilet paper. Once she came to my house and stared at the soapy water gushing out of the washing machine into the sink. With the speed of lightening, she was triumphantly caught the water in a pail, so that it could be used for washing the floor.

Now that I think of it, there was one extravagance: the small bouquet of fresh flowers that traditionally enhanced her "Sabbath Table." This she would arrange and rearrange.

Helene Aylon is a New York painter who left to live in Berkeley, California, four years ago. She shows at the Betty Parsons Gallery in New York and feels that the Art World is a better place since feminism.

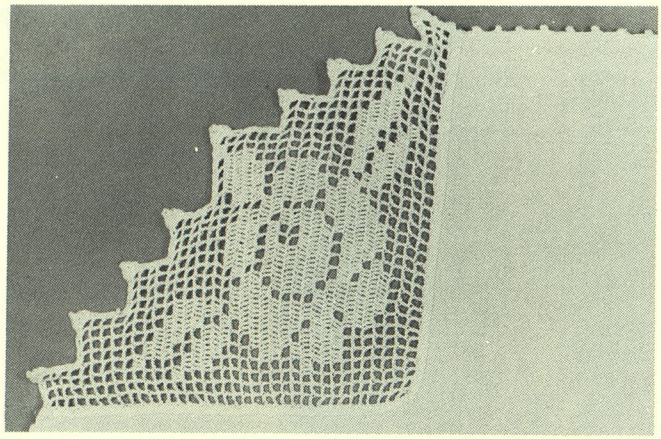
JOYCE AIKEN

Many of my childhood memories center around the women of the family and their work. Both my mother's and father's parents lived 25 miles from us in a small farming community and we visited them each Sunday. My maternal grandmother lived on a ranch that grew grapes and peaches. My twin sister Janice and I never looked forward to those Sunday trips, but our boredom was relieved when Grandma was making a quilt. We would quilt while the men went outside to smoke or sit under the umbrella tree. Sometimes the quilting frame stayed up for weeks and no one thought it strange that it took up most of the living room.

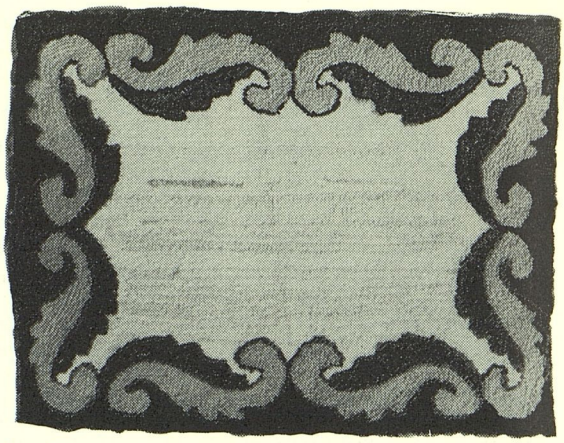
The depression had brough renewed interest in many kinds of needlework because of the poor money situation and the need to use spare time profitably. The women's magazines were filled with needlework patterns for embellishing dresses, towels and table linens. Neither my mother nor my grandmother could read a crochet pattern, but both could easily work from a piece already made. With friends they formed a women's group in the early 1930s to trade new ideas for crochet projects or stitches. In 1934 after we moved to a new town Mother went to the Methodist Church once a week to make quilts for the missionairies. She would take us along and we would play on the floor around the "sewing ladies." Within a few years this group would be sewing for the Red Cross and the war effort. Twenty-five years earlier my mother had learned to knit for the service men during World War I.

My father's mother, Emma Braun, was a rugmaker who had learned her craft as a child in Canada. There was a small room in her house that held her rug frame, fabric scraps and burlap. She was constantly searching for good burlap sacks and wool

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Rose pattern in fillet crochet on corner of tablecloth by Marjorie Braun



Hooked rug, scroll design, by Emma Braun

clothing from the Salvation Army stores. When wool was hard to find, she dyed cotton sheet blankets for rug strips. She designed her own patterns and carefully drew them on the burlap before starting to hook. I was about 11 years old and visiting her in the summer when she taught me the process of washing and preparing the rags, stretching and sewing the burlap to the frame, and doing the hooking. Rugmaking is a solitary craft and Emma Braun was a very private person. She said that when other women went to quilting bees, she preferred to stay home and spend part of each day working on a rug. She hooked about 40 rugs in her lifetime, the largest one, 8' x 10'. The last rug I remember her making was made for me when she was 82.

There are few days in my life when I am not involved with some kind of handwork. My mother and I talked about it recently and discovered we were both filled with guilt if there was spare time available and we had no "projects" to work on. She thought it was our nature to be that way. I think it is because neither of us ever saw our mothers idle.

Joyce Aiken is a Professor at California State University at Fresno in crafts and feminist art. She has published a number of crafts books and works in fabric and wood.

PAULA KING

I am an ex-mother, ex-housewife who grew up in a home where evidence of my creative heritage was displayed on every bed. My mother never completed a quilt herself—they were all given to her by women relatives for her wedding—but she sewed all our clothes, made curtains, slipcovered couches and insisted that my sister and I learn to sew well. When I was married at 18, she gave me a sewing machine.

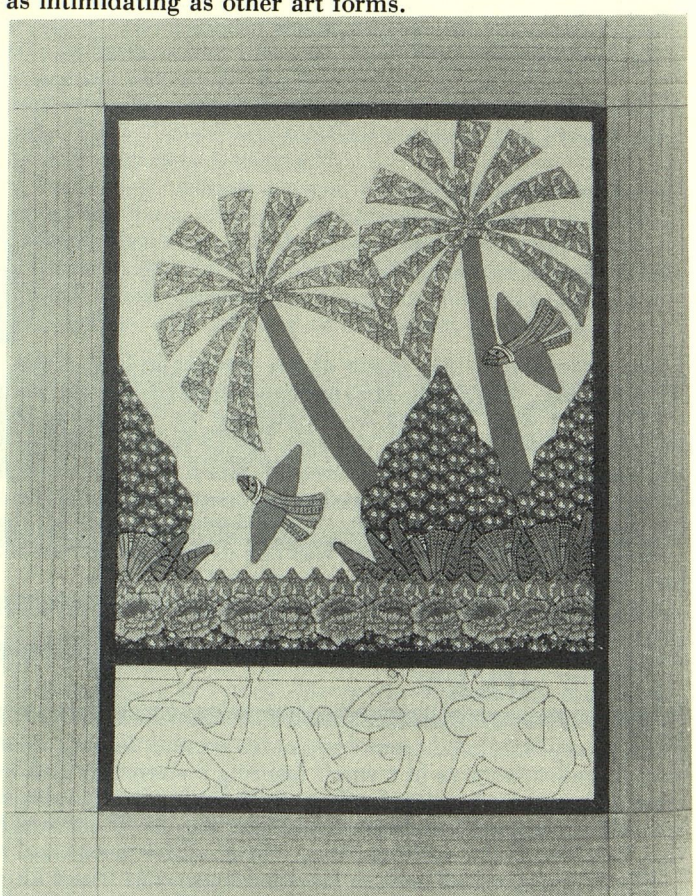
During my ten years of marriage, my need to be creative was suppressed, except for decorating the house, making things for the kids, conquering new recipes. Following my two marriages I spent five years in the heterosexual Left at a time when both feminism and art, of any but the most blatantly political kind, were condemned as a bourgeois self-indulgence. It wasn't until I stopped doing political work with men and began to identify with the women's community that I felt supported enough to deal with my own creative needs.

The fact that quiltmaking skills have become a focus for me is tied up with my former identification as a homemaker and with my self-image as a nonartist. Although I am now a lesbian and no longer have any but minimal duties as a mother, the home and all the roles connected to it are still potent material for me. It is with women in those roles that I mainly think of sharing my work.

I have been doing stitchery for three years now. I restricted myself to using a needle, thimble and a hoop and set out to experience how it was that women had sewn for most of their creative history. I began to understand that both the form and the content might have political meaning, and that the very act of making stitchery in a way that was respectful of tradition could be a celebration of the creative spirit of generations of women who have never been considered artists.

This last year most of my energy has gone into developing stitchery as a political art form. I am not at all interested in having stitchery elevated to its rightful place among the arts. That would make it susceptible to male standards of criticism, and stitchery, at least at the amateur level, is one of the few crafts still controlled by women.

Because stitchery is not defined as art and because many women have some knowledge of the skills involved, it is not as intimidating as other art forms.



The Takeover of Eden or A Little Knowledge Is a Dangerous Thing, *appliqué quilting, by Paula King*

Paula King is currently employed by Rape Relief Hotline in Portland, Oregon. She is involved in organizing around the issue of violence against women, and—along with 95 others—was just acquitted of criminal trespass at the Trojan Nuclear Power Plant.

DEBORAH JONES-DOMINGUEZ

When I found a beautiful quilt in my aunt's closet recently I remembered a little Bo-Peep quilt I had had as a child and the stories told to me by my father about his family.

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During the second half of the nineteenth century his maternal grandmother and her sisters came to America from the British Isles. They brought with them the lore of quiltmaking. Orphans, they had learned needlework from the women in charge of the households in which they were raised. These women's lives were practical and unadorned. They lived in rural communities, and during the long winter months mobility outside the home was curtailed. The men, railroaders and coal miners, were gone from the home for long periods, leaving the women time to work at quilting in the evenings after their chores. From their elders the young girls learned stitching and other "womanly" skills. Their abilities were increased by working very young in factories producing needlework.

The process of quiltmaking began with a metal template for shapes to be used in the designs. From this template a dozen cardboard copies were made of each shape. The cloth was then pinned to the cardboard and cut around its perimeter. The women were able to cut these small shapes quickly and precisely from whatever goods were on hand, such as ginghams and calicoes.

In piecework, the cloth shapes were laboriously sewn together a piece at a time, joining the units from the center outward. The components of many quilts were worked on at the same time and were stacked, ready for use. In designing the quilts the women were self-sufficient; the home magazines that published quilt designs were seldom used. When the women were not pleased with their work, they stripped the threads out and recut the cloth to use it as another shape in a different design. They continuously rearranged colors in the designs or made variations on shapes to create their own unique patterns. Once they established what was best for that particular "block" or "circle" they took care that the symmetry and sewing were precise; there was nothing ever left over.

Appliqué differed from piecework; the units were hemmed to another piece of cloth, which served as a base to form a design, instead of being pieced together. All the raw ends of cloth were turned under and sewn around the edge with small, invisible stitches. Often the symmetry of the appliqued design was stitched into the quilted background. When they gathered around the table to work together, the women sometimes joked about friends whose stitching was coarse.

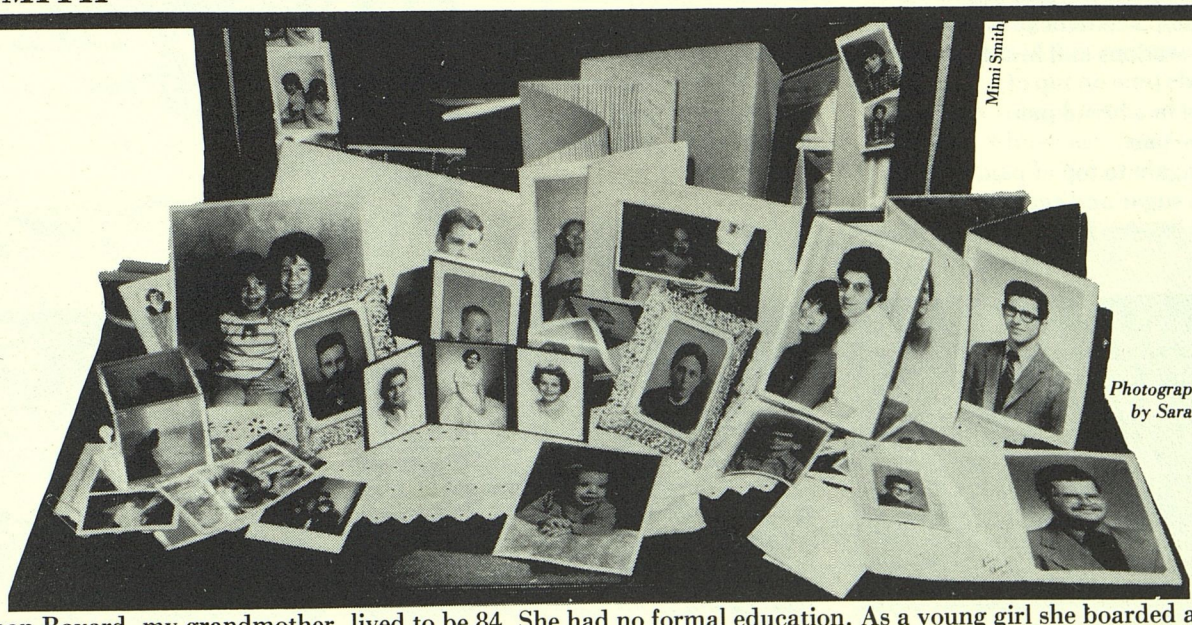
When the clans came together for quilting bees, many of the women brought unfinished quilts already cut and assembled. It was a time for catching up on all the family news. During the bees they applied the units to the base. They knew the overall plan and moved easily through the process. There were two long poles about two feet apart stretched eight feet in length across the old-fashioned dining room. They were wrapped from one end to the other with the quilt. As one pole wrapped, the other unwrapped in front of it, traveling in tandem as the work progressed. Four women worked along each side of the quilt while an additional two worked on the borders.

Women studied their friends', neighbors' and relatives' stitching and designs. They copied from each other and each was proud when she created something unique. Cloth was traded among friends from as far away as 30 miles. This compensated for the sameness that existed in a neighborhood in which there was heavy trading. People went out on their swings in the evenings, sauntering around the neighborhood, exchanging pleasantries and inviting friends in to "see my quilts." The quilts, carried around on family visits for display, kept the tradition alive. Sometimes one would hear stories about very old and valuable quilts, made of cotton with cotton seeds still in the fiber. This was not seen as a sign of imperfection but age; old quilts were more valuable because the cotton used was not refined by cotton ginning.

Deborah Jones-Dominguez is a painter and teacher who lives and works in N.Y.C.

Quilt by Hannah-Jones family

MIMI SMITH



Mimi Smith

Photographic arrangements by Sarah Lyman Bayard

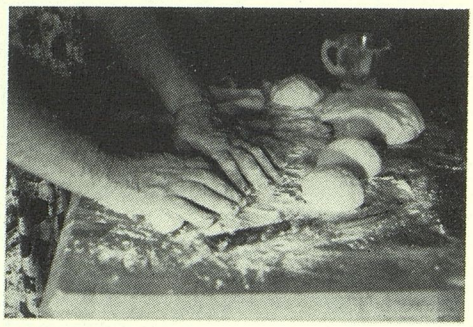
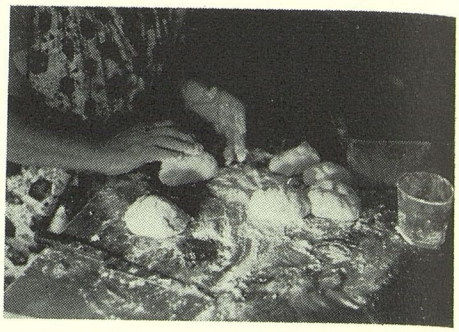
Sarah Lyman Bayard, my grandmother, lived to be 84. She had no formal education. As a young girl she boarded a ship alone and sailed from her village, her parents and ten brothers and sisters to America. Her entire life was sent doing work with her hands. She had no concept of what I call art, and the only time I ever heard her mention the word was shortly before she died. She told me that upon arriving in this country she had worked as a stitcher in a sweatshop. After her children were born she earned money by sewing piecework at home. She would spend many, many hours making men's suits. "When I finished a man's suit it was a work of art."

During the last seven years of her life she moved all of her belongings into a room in my parents' house. Her most prized possessions were her pictures. They covered two pieces of furniture in her small room. She had certain systems for arranging the pictures. Some were pinned to each other in rows with straight pins, others were just piled or leaning against each other in groups. The arrangements and displays were constantly changing. Guests were always invited to see the changing exhibitions. She was always seeking newer pictures. She told me that she had never had her own life and that all of the people in the pictures had been her life. She said that dusting and hanging the pictures were now her work. She died in 1975. This photo was taken a few days after her death.

Mimi Smith is an artist who lives in N.Y.C.

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Grandma Sarah Bakes

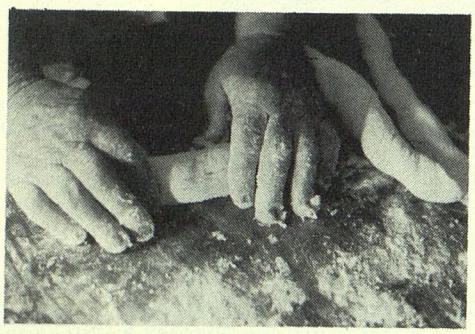
SARAH'S CHALLAH

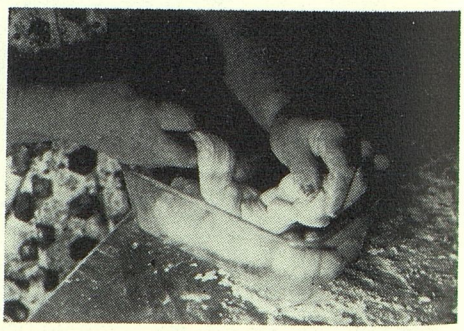
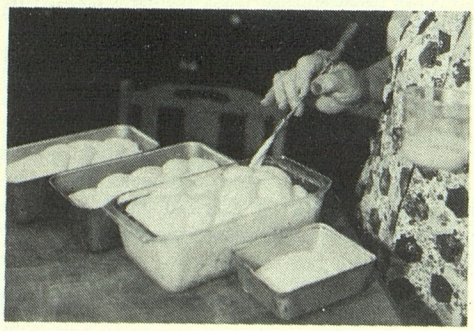
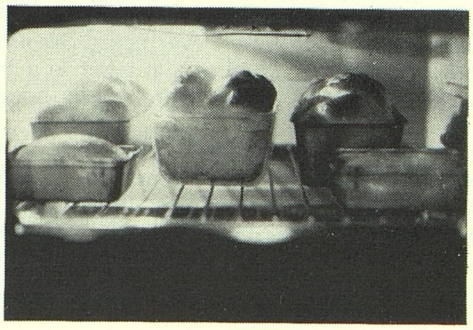
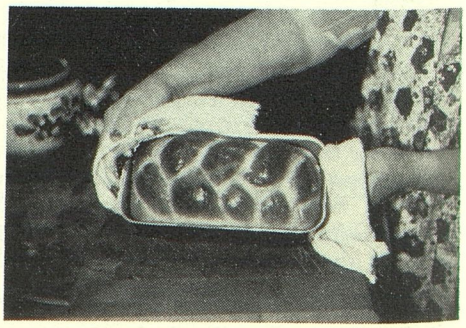


Use all warm ingredients.

2 pkgs. yeast dissolved in
3 tbs. warm water.
Let rise for 15 minutes.
Beat 2 eggs mix with
¼ c. oil
a chip of salt
2 tbs. sugar
2½ c. flour (unsifted like Gold Medal)

Knead and let rise for 20 min.
Cover with dish towel and put
it in a warm place. Knead it again.
Roll out 3 sections and braid.
Put 2 braids (one on top of
each other) in a bread pan.
First oil the pan.
Let it rise again to top of pan.
Baste with sugar and egg mixture.
Bake 300° in oven for a good half hour.



Sarah Mandell baking challah. Photographs by her granddaughter, Dee Shapiro.

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aran kitchens, aran sweaters

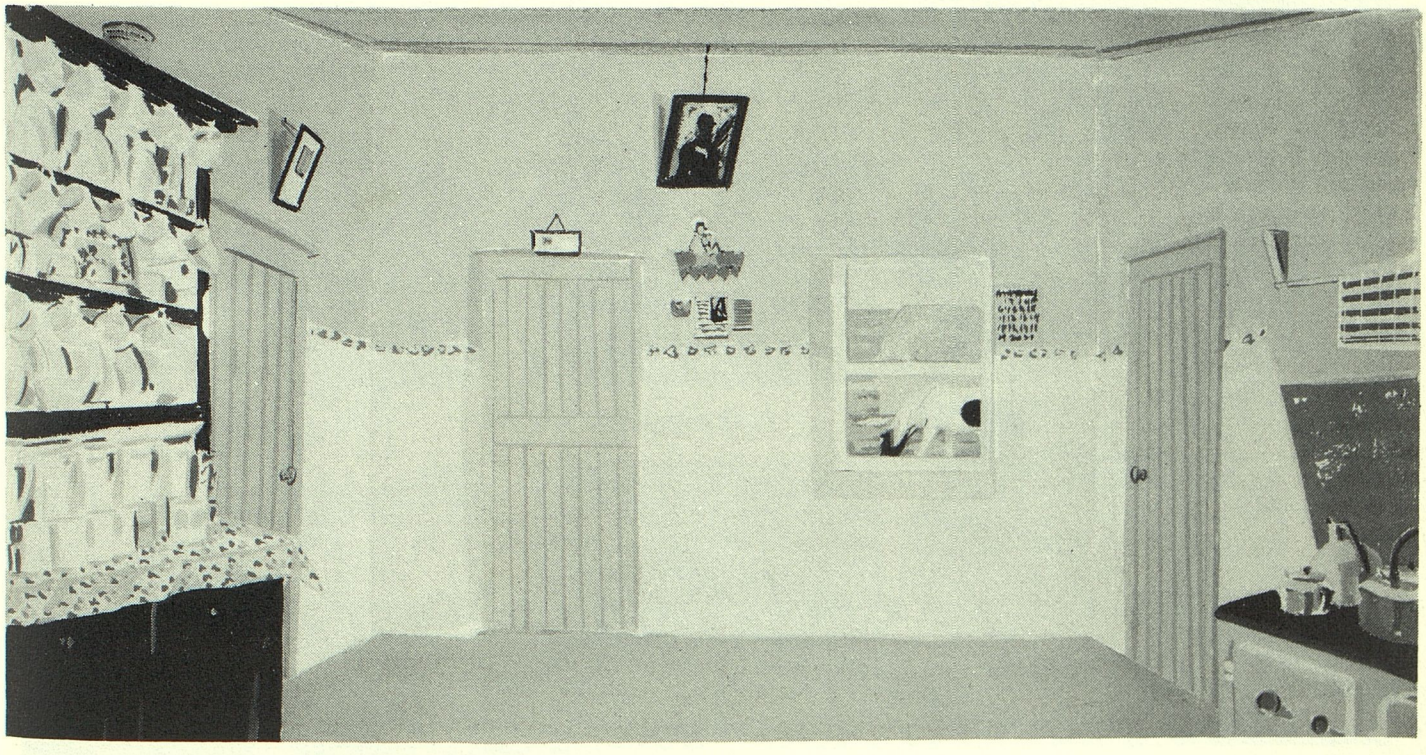
Patricia Patterson

The island women love to talk but they seldom talk in aesthetic terms about the houses which are their medium and arena for a lifetime. They talk maliciously, sentimentally, tartly, and vividly about people, animals, crops, and weather, things that move and change. "Hasn't he a God-forsaken appearance?" "Nothing for it now but to put the thought of the evil day on the long finger." "You have two firm little ankle bones that'll walk you there and back again." Animated and daring while describing any event, living intensely inside their all-purpose kitchen, the chameleon like hub of Aran life, which changes constantly with each chore, meal and ceremony, Kate Conneeley and Nan Mullin treat their kitchens like their worn clothes, as things to be taken for granted. But the two crafts executed by Aran women, interior design and knitting, are decidedly legitimate art forms, each with its aesthetic devices, which could not have been developed anywhere except on this slab of rock twelve miles out in the Atlantic.

The Aran house, thatched or slate roofed, stands straight up on top of sheets of dark gray limestone with nothing, no flower borders or architectural fancies, to soften the abruptness of its construction. Inside it is mostly a kitchen with some adjunct rooms on the side for sleeping and storage. This versatile kitchen exists in marked contrast to the raw, for the most part untouched rock and soil outside. Within is a world of absorbing chores, but there is nothing at all cozy or domestic about the awesome views through the windows or open door in Aran. It's customary in this windy place to leave one of the two facing kitchen doors open all day for light. Shifts in the wind dictate which of the two it's to be. A glance outside Nan Mullin's east-facing kitchen door reveals the mountainous Connemara coast, a vaulting sky with a drama of gargantuan clouds. If a strong wind came against it, this door would be shut fast, its west-facing twin would be opened, and all the daily traffic habits would be reversed. The cliff-side view is almost Martian in its desolate, terraced expanse of limestone walls, cheered only by "those cheeky devils," the foraging chickens in Nan's yard.

The less affluent houses on the remote western tip of Inishmore (largest of the three islands that sit at the mouth of Galway Bay on the Atlantic coast of Ireland) are structurally simple and straightforward with little if any molding or refined carpentry. The rooms have thick plaster or mud-covered walls, which are divided into upper and lower halves of differing colors by a border, a strip of patterned paper. One of the visual pleasures of these kitchens lies in the eccentric deployment of erratic quantities of paint. A dish cabinet or a door is painted from the same can of bright enameled paint as a small frame around a religious picture. The paint used to define a three-dimensional object may show up as a flat band around a deep-silled window. The movement of the colors—heavy and bright worked against luminous whitewash—compensates for the minimal skills in carpentry and masonry. The unpredictable color patches create a liveliness and variety in a house made up of white and two colors. But what colors! A kelly green and a chrome yellow, used in equal amounts. This kinetic, frugal paint scheme keeps the eye moving. When a paint can is opened, any object that looks woebegone receives a fresh coat. It's an anarchistic way to paint. Shelves made of cardboard receive the same irreverent, carefree enameling used on a door. The general effect is that paint equals freshening.

An Aran woman with her two cans of paint and whitewash brush would not



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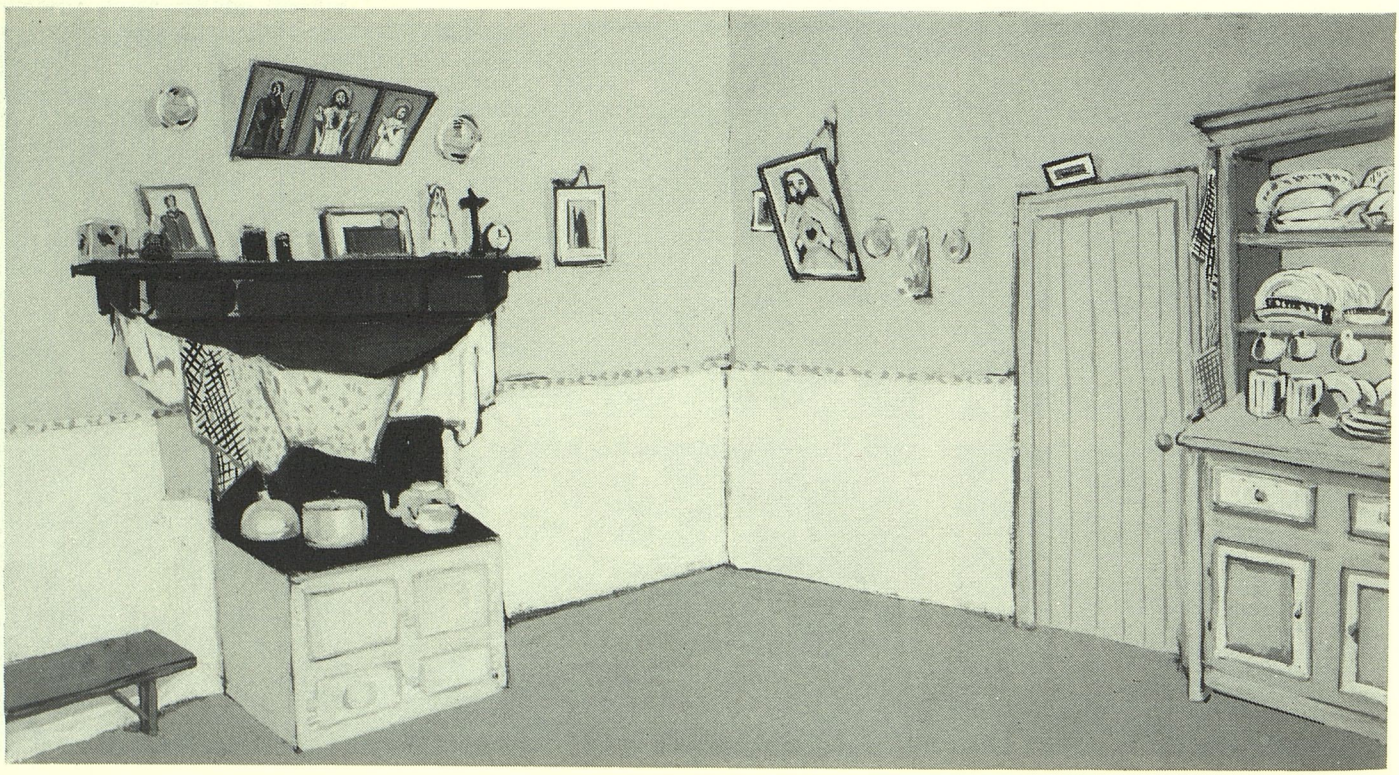
be likely to win a home arts competition. Most of the items she uses to decorate her home are 80-cent purchases: plaster statuettes of the Virgin Mary or quickly put together cardboard shelves, nothing to compare with the hand-painted wonders of the Pennsylvania Dutch. But the placement of these store-bought objects throughout the room is witty and innately elegant. Rooms dominated by a vivacity of language and dramatic physical gestures pick up sparkle from the stray spots of decoration, the luminous white walls, and the vivid shifting of wall levels. Except for the religious items, everything in the room is intensely handled: buckets, kettles and dishes. There is a natural flow between room decor and people. Objects with multiple uses seem fitting for a talkative people with a variety of skills. The stove is used for warming the room, washing and drying clothes, and cooking.

The Aran people either emigrate or stay put—nothing else. Life is controlled by specific facts of nature and history. The lack of trees, the phenomenal wind and rain, and the astonishing contiguity of the swarming, changeful life in the homes exist side by side with the somber Celtic and Christian debris (prehistoric forts, beehive dwellings of the saints, and Celtic crosses). Everything goes on within a cultural-psychic frame. Just as life is lived within rigorous structures—of a subsistence economy, Catholicism, no big city distractions, no birth control, no divorce—the frames are the motif everywhere. It is an island framed by water, framed by the Gaelic language; the mantel frames the coal stove or the hearth and is itself framed by a march of mementos and photos across its top.

Not even Mondrian lived more within rectilinear plasticity than the woman who boils, bakes, mends, churns, washes, sweeps, skims and spiffs up her gridded workroom. The frame is used mostly as a definer, signifying "this is a door, this is the cupboard," setting off religious chromos with an inexpensive wooden frame. The placements, choice of objects, designing of the frame never seem off-handed, although the spatial judgements are never as precise as those made by the Shakers. Much of the architectural play is achieved by hanging frames at various levels, setting up a rhythm of unpredictable unions and divisions. There are three basic conventions for hanging pictures. The first is to hang the largest, always Jesus or Mary, about six inches from the ceiling, its top edge angled out from the wall. The second is to arrange groups in relation to the patterned divider which circles the room. The third convention relates objects to the doors and windows. A framed prayer, suspended by a string smack in the center above the door, does double duty, blessing the house and welcoming the visitor. None of the objects is placed only for decorative effect: these presences are like protectors spotted around . . . or connections. They create a stage set of cultural locators, defining the family's world as Catholic, Republic of Ireland, Gaelic-speaking, and their lineage as either Hernon, O'Brian or Concannon.

The most baroque object in any kitchen is the dish cabinet with virtually every piece of dishware owned by the family on display, exposed and handy. A flood of plates, mugs, jugs, saucers, cups (either plain white or bearing stripes or floral patterns), in an inordinate number of layerings, stackings, hanging spots and pattern changes. The mantelpiece is runner-up for most objects per square foot. Statues of the Virgin Mary, the Infant of Prague, small porcelain roosters, windup clock, battery-run radio, official portraiture: John F. Kennedy, Padriac Pearse (the Irish nationalist and poet), at least one pope, Pius, John or Paul, or St. Martin de Porres, a black saint who is a popular favorite all over Ireland.

The baroque condition of the mantel top and dish cabinet emphasizes the tendency of Aran rooms to throw all items into sculptural relief. The smallest item, a minute frame with a baby photo, a tiny white plastic statue of Mary, are tactically transformed by framing, color and placement, so that each item is emphatically present, a strongly defined object. The foot-and-a-half thick walls contribute a massiveness that is echoed by other hard-edge devices, the space divisions created by the borders are made more dramatic by the interplay of the cool luminous whitewash and the glossiness and hard insistence of the thick, brilliant, full-strength enamel.



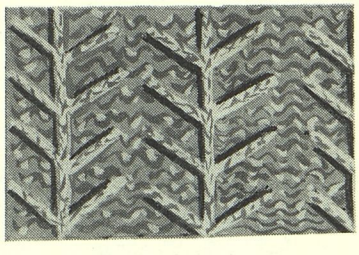
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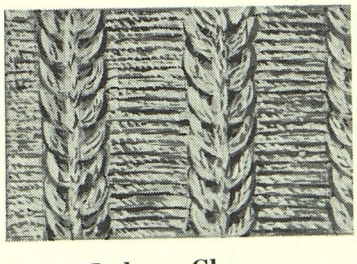
Some of the most enticing designs occur along the room's equator, an inch-and-a-half wall divider, a strip of paper with a flower pattern. Teasingly deployed with themselves and with the border are a potpourri of small articles: ceramic mementos, calendars, post cards, sentimental homilies and illustrated prayers. A souvenir plate just nudges the edge of a door frame, while its other side touches a prayer card which sits an inch above the patterned divider. These small gifts work as touchstones to the culture, but their minute echoing and alteration, one against the other, is endlessly enticing to the mind and eye.

While the Aran women may take their work as interior decorators for granted, they are proud, byedad!, of their sweaters and well aware of the art involved in making them. Sculptural (with a surface level varying as much as an inch), monochromatic and tight-fitting, these encrusted sweaters are meant to be worn in a harsh climate. Textures are coarse like the fissured and gashed surface of the island. Made of wool from which the natural oil has not been removed they're close to waterproof. They are so tight that they have buttons at the neck so that the head can get comfortably through. The close fit cuts down the possibilities of entanglement and interference, allowing it to be easily worn under a worker's jacket.

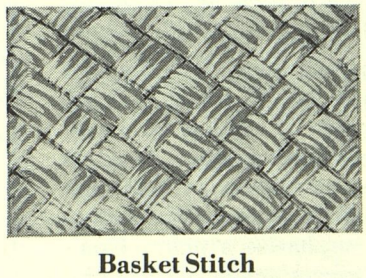
The patterns are arranged into clear representations of the island's physical terrain, with its staggering number of stone walls enclosing myriad tiny fields. The trellis, zigzag and diamond patterns crisscross the sweaters as walls



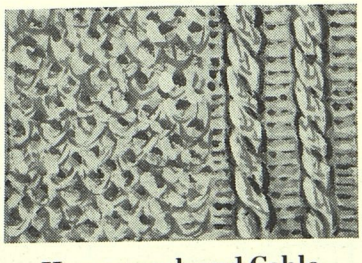
Tree of Life



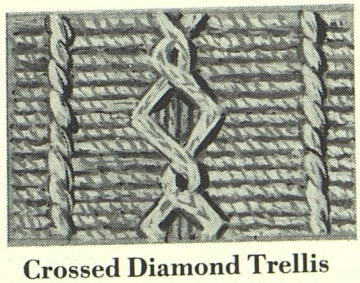
Lobster Claw



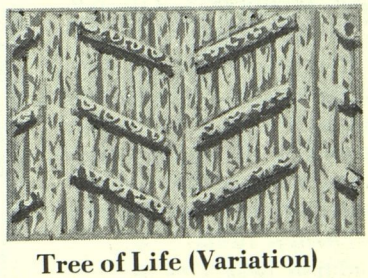
Basket Stitch



Honeycomb and Cable



Crossed Diamond Trellis



Tree of Life (Variation)

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cross the rocky island. Imagine a vertical row of diamonds enclosing a field of seed stitches with a bobble inside each of the diamond points, every diamond framed on its side by a band of cable stitches.

The sweaters are always a single color, usually a dark tweedy gray, indigo black or subtle browns with moss green or maroon casts to them. They possess an intriguing tone . . . nutty colors, like dark cinnamon or the shells of Brazil nuts. The women dress against the dourness of the island in bright primary colors, floral-print cottons and plaids; the men wear the colors of the landscape, brindled gray pants and sweaters, dark browns and dark blues, which harmonize with the stone walls, the fields, the sweep of limestone.

The names of the stitches and patterns refer to the trade of the men who originally wore them: the cable, rope, ladder stitch, the herring bone, triple sea wave, lobster claw, fish tail. These explicit names are different from the lyrical ones still used in Scotland, such as Sacred Heart, the Rose of Sharon, Star of Hope, Crown of Glory. But the Aran fisherman's sweater has its own biblical stitch, the Tree of Life. Originally, the sweaters were made by fishermen, a rather natural step from making and mending nets, weaving ropes and making knots. Now, and for an undetermined length of time, the women have taken over.

One of the finest knitters is Una Flaherty, a Bohemian spirit, her clothes held on by safety pins, who runs the shop in Bongowla, the last village on the western tip of the island. In between chasing chickens out of the open door, receiving a new shipment of goods from Galway with high-spirited witticisms and sarcastically getting tea for her husband Patrick, she knits. She has an energetic way with her works in progress, dragging them along the floor after her as she goes in search of a can of peas or couple of candles for a customer. An entertaining talker, she knits swiftly while carried away with her stories and suddenly throws her work to the floor to emphasize a point. Una's sweaters are exceptionally rich with interlaced designs, reminiscent of the patterning on Celtic stones and crosses.

Mary Flaherty, mother of nine, knits with amazing speed even while walking down the road with three of her youngest clutching at her skirts. Garrulous and multicrafted, these animated women live within a contradiction of clutter and simple geometry. In the rooms, the two most common design elements—frames and conscriptive devices which force the framed items into assemblies, groups—give the sense of rootedness, enclosure, a life of clear limits, a grounded life with few choices. Yet there are in both the sweater and kitchen design, contrary effects of intense, crowded together activity: the wildest puckishness within an economic pinpoint.

Kate Conneely's kitchen was often transformed by a heady stream of language from Kate herself, her children and her cranky, bragging 87-year-old mother. A battery of kettles and pots were kept on the stove at all times. Shoe repairing, baking, butter churning, clothes washing, butchering, saddle mending, knitting. Often such activities required furniture to be shifted about and the room to take on an entirely different character. A heavy clothes washing called for the table and chairs to be moved out of the way, a massive amount of hot water boiled on the stove, the big tin tub moved in from the fields, sleeves to be rolled up and the floor to be doused with sudsy water. The long wall in the back of the house would be decked with clean wet sheets, shirts, underwear, trousers, pinafores, and these would have rocks placed on top of them so that the newly washed clothes would not blow away.

Two ancient grandmothers are stationed statuelike, in territorial possession of their spot in front of the fire. The population here, which includes animals welcome (dogs) and unwelcome (cats and chickens), is transformed during special occasions: dances with four accordionists, four or five singers taking turns between jigs, hornpikes, waltzes and polkas. During wakes, the corpse is laid out in the side bedroom and the kitchen is filled with people all night long.

Given the generations, needs, events of an Aran home, art is indeed not a central fact. As I was leaving, Kate said: "Patricia, it's a pity you're leaving now, because one of those two old ladies at the stove will be going soon. We'll have a great night here, that time." The two old women were nodding in agreement: "Yes, it's a pity."

Life's conditions in the awesome stoneyard of Aran don't leave any apparent space for the visual arts. Yet, the cheapest item, as well as the most honored elder, gains "presence" by the way the women decorate the kitchens and design their sweaters. The intense, rectilinear use of space creates a fun, a garrulity, that is not unlike the famous Island talk. Wherever the eye lands, there is an elaborate fooling with decoration, intentional or otherwise.

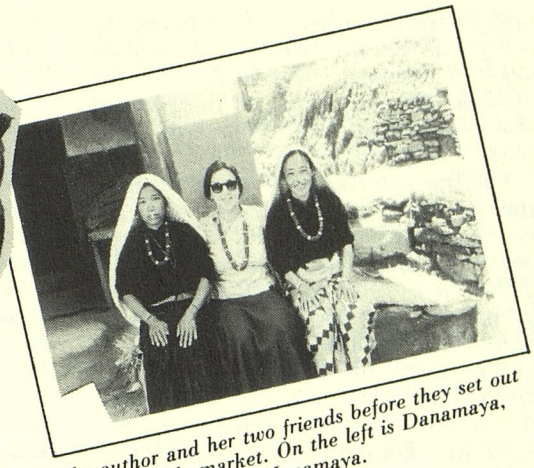
Patricia Patterson is a painter and writes film criticism in collaboration with Manny Farber. She teaches drawing and painting at the University of California at San Diego.



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Nepal Hill Art and Women's Traditions

Barbara Nimri Aziz



The author and her two friends before they set out for the weekly market. On the left is Danamaya, and on the right sits Monamaya.

Chait Purnima, the full moon. Warm spring air drifts through deep disappearing valleys. It rustles across Kobek village and reminds me a month has passed since my arrival in this Himalayan hamlet. I've been studying economy and social change in eastern Nepal for almost a year now.

It was during an earlier visit to do anthropological work that I first began to learn about the Limbu people. Exploitation of Limbu land rights by high caste Brahmins had been well publicized, and recently the Limbu had been one of the few ethnic groups in the country to criticize the government's policy regarding minorities. I had also heard about the economic independence and sparkle of Limbu women from medics and development officers impressed by their culture, so I decided to visit the region. It was easy for me to include them in a comparative study of three different ethnic groups, each one living on a main north-south trade route artery. I had already surveyed a Sherpa community and a village composed of Newar and Tamang farmers. The Limbu are not only a different race from the other two, but their rice cultivation and their culture are so different that I often felt, living among them, I might easily be in North Burma or Southeast Asia.

On my second day in the village, I moved into the house of a fairly prosperous Limbu family and arranged a corner for myself in an empty hayloft behind the main house. It gave me the privacy I needed while allowing me to be close to the family. As the weeks passed, I found myself spending almost all my time around the main house with Danamaya and her family.

The house is one of a cluster of two-story farmhouses on a steep hillside. Lemon bushes and groves of bamboo veil the next house, but we can hear neighbors in their courtyards. Those familiar sounds blur the boundaries between family and neighborhood. The dark interiors of these mountain dwellings are primarily used for cooking, for sleep and for storage. No one works inside.

The busy routine of domestic work proceeds on the veranda and in clean-swept courtyards, fusing imperceptibly with social life. It is here that villagers stay through the pleasant, dry winter months. But now, with the arrival of spring, activity shifts from these verandas to muddy fields on slopes above and below the village. Early wheat wants cutting, and the patchwork of terraces must be softened so that tender millet and rice sprouts will take hold.

At the time of the full moon, however, the fields are empty. People are freed from agricultural labor for the holiday and remain at home feasting and visiting. Today, neighbors will converge on our veranda. They know we plan to make a special Limbu ornament. Around the straw mat at our door will sit the artisans of the village—a team of women. All of them can weave the Limbu tartan cloth and knot straw mats. They are renowned brewers of beer and spirits. The polishings of rice and pressing of oil are but two of their many skills in the preparation of food.

I have invited these women to come make a Limbu necklace, a *naugiri*, so called because of its nine (*nau*) golden jewels (*giri*) set among the mass of beads arranged one by one by deft fingers. Since my arrival in the hills of Nepal, I have encountered a range of peasant cultures: robust Sherpa herders and farmers, the richest of the highland people; progressive Newar traders and shopkeepers, many of whose daughters are in school; Rai hill people, a large ethnic group, also good farmers; Magar villagers who seem impoverished by the standards of other groups who are squeezing them out; Brahmin and Chetri high caste people, frugal and industrious, whose women sometimes become ascetics and join hermitages near their tropical shrines. All of these people wear elegant, homemade jewelry. Limbu women, however, stand out for their industry, their boldness, their assertiveness and their pride. Their chunky *naugiri* necklace, worn day and night, in the fields and at weddings, typifies the general status of these women; it has become, for me, a symbol of their vigor, and one which I want to take with me when I leave.

When I expressed interest in having my own *naugiri*, Danamaya, my host, and her friends were delighted. The first question was where to get one for me. I wouldn't want an old one bought from the bank, my friends assured me. Those worn jewels have value only as security against land purchase loans. I must have a new one, they insisted. But new necklaces cannot be purchased. They are not produced for a market. A Limbu woman obtains her *naugiri*, made especially for her by women in her family, at the time of her marriage. My surrogate family here in Kobek will make mine.

I committed myself to this scheme with the purchase of the basic material—a *thola* (about a half ounce) of pure gold costing 500 rupees ($50) on the Limbu market. I bought this from a villager recently returned from military service in Malaya. Next, I was introduced to the local goldsmith. His decrepit hut (on the outskirts of the village because of his pariah caste) has a second-story veranda. Here he fashions jewels with his fingers and toes for the constant stream of Limbu customers. Over the course of a week I watched him tap the worthless-looking lump of metal I had entrusted to him into lustrous, paper-thin yellow sheets. The precious metal was finding its beauty in his experienced hands. Finally he molded and engraved each of the nine leaves of gold he had made into individual jewels, knuckly and assertive.

Between each of these chunks, we women will set thousands of glassy green beads. I bought these at the weekly market out of a dazzling array of bangles and beads imported from India and sold by squatting vendors huddled in rows, one beside the next, on the floor of the market square. I also

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bought red cloth from which to cut the furry washers that will be set on both sides of the gold. And finally, for the rope on which to string all this, we cut the yellow nylon cord from my backpack.

On the morning of Chait Purnima, the essentials for our day's work are ready for our guests who will shortly converge on our veranda mat. A five-gallon pot of *kodo* (millet beer) sits gurgling in the darkness of the house. With it are six bottles of *raxsi*, a clear ginlike drink distilled from fermented *kodo*. The beer is not of as fine a quality as I would have liked—sweet and aged for months in cool, sealed pots such as I have had in the homes of other women. Such *kodo* is not for sale; it is for guests and a family's own enjoyment. What is sold is coarse and aged for only a week. That is all we have today, prepared by my host Danamaya and sold to me for this occasion. Good *raxsi*, customarily made for sale, is more readily obtained. Danamaya sold me three bottles; another three came from a neighbor, glad to have cash before market day when she had expected to sell this brew, glass by glass, at the side of the road.

I mention this trade for several reasons. First, it is an essential medium of payment for the assembly of women who will fashion this necklace. Second, Limbu alcohols facilitate warm memories of time spent in the households. And not least, the sale of liquor is an important source of cash, the main means of women's marketing experience. Exclusive brewers of this much appreciated product, these women (like other hill women throughout Nepal) refine their skills and compete for the cash rewards.

Nowadays, much of the cash a person accumulates is invested in new fields and farming equipment. Nevertheless, jewelry retains its high value and status. Women have a right to jewelry from a very young age. This right comes through their family membership and their economic contribution to the household. A nose ring is a girl's first acquisition; she may be no more than ten years old when she gets the first band. Later, year by year, twirls of gold are added to it, sometimes from her own earnings, since children are given goats to raise and can keep the profits from their sale. So by the time she is 18, a Limbu girl may have earned enough to purchase her first gold earrings. But the *naugiri* is a different matter. It is acquired with womanhood and marriage, a gift from her family at the time of her betrothal.

Five women from our house initiate the day's work. Danamaya takes charge from the outset by anchoring the nylon rope. She must have done this many times before. She rubs the loose end of the rope in her palm and patiently separates its single strands. Forty-five individual threads fan out in front of her from her toe, which anchors the knotted end. Each of us takes a single strand, then sits around Danamaya. We become a human loom fastened together by the strings from her toe. Thus situated, Danamaya coordinates the entire enterprise. She takes each beaded string as it is filled and hands us an empty thread in exchange.

Such a pivotal role is not new for this sober woman who manages our entire household. No one appears to object to her leadership, a situation which strikes me as strange since Danamaya does not permanently reside here. It is true this is her natal house. But Danamaya gave up certain rights when she married and took her dowry with her to another village. This house is now her *maitighar* (maternal house) and Danamaya is a visitor along with her baby girl, Deepa. In Limbu culture, it is not uncommon for women to bring their children to live for months in their *maitighar* while their young husbands go off to seek work in the Indian and British Gurkha forces. Danamaya has decided to do this while her husband is away in the army. I don't know what he and her mother-in-law think of it, but her own family is much gratified by Danamaya's long visit.

We begin to string beads after our morning meal. Soon Danamaya's neighborhood friend, Lakshmi, joins our circle, grasps a nylon thread and becomes part of our loom. She holds the thread taut and quietly feeds on the little green bits, one by one. Lakshmi is also visiting her *maitighar* in Kobek. But unlike Danamaya, she does not intend to return to her marriage house. She had remained there, she told me, only until her baby was born. The infant is here with her, and she has no intention of rejoining her husband, because, she says, she doesn't like him. As long as she is welcome in her *maitighar*, a Limbu woman in this situation can divorce her husband. She may also remarry. This is not Lakshmi's concern at the moment. She has joined us in our full moon project, a group of women, each clutching a string on this human loom, eyes fixed on specks of green glass.

There is no relief. When one string is completed and conversation dwells on the tedious operation confronting us, Danamaya interrupts our dawdling. "That's enough," she orders. "Here, give it to me." And she hands us an empty string.

An hour passes. Finally Danamaya's left hand holds only a few bare threads. In her other are the rest, threaded with several inches of beads. We rush to complete the remaining strands. With all threads beaded, we can now fit on the first knob of gold. First a cloth washer of bright red is fed onto the clump of threads, drawn together to squeeze through. We sit back, delighted as the golden knob shimmers its way down the cord. Another disc of red cloth fixes the gold in place. This is our signal to reassemble around Danamaya. She resumes her anchoring position and again separates the threads, allocating one at a time to each of us. We bend over our beadwork again.

The second section of the necklace seems to take far less time to complete. There are seven of us and we have established a pace independent of any instructions. Soon the 45 threads are equally full of green beads. Once again, we relax while Danamaya tightens them together and pulls on the red washer, then the golden *giri* and another band of red cloth. By now the pattern of the necklace is apparent. Sparkling glass beads, tiny and bright green, then a red flash, the soft luster of gold, red flash, a block of twinkling green, red, another gold knob, red again. Time for respite.

The first to move off our communal mat is Ama, who disappears into the darkness of the empty house to the waiting hearth. She starts a fire from red-hot coals nestled under ash. And alone, she eases the pot of *kodo* onto the rock grill. In seconds it is warm and waiting for us. There is no invitation; we simply rise and move inside, gathering around the hearth. Danamaya takes a ladle and stirs the brew, ready to scoop out the steaming liquor.

In front of each of us Mylie sets a small dish with a spoonful of black spice. This is the pickle, *achar*, a sharp lemony condiment which all Nepalis enjoy with their alcohol. Next, we are served a larger brass bowl with the brew Danamaya has poured out. Some of us drink this *kodo;* others take small goblets of *raxsi*, also warmed to taste.

This is Mylie, the only unmarried woman in our household. The author had wanted to employ her as a research assistant, but the family wouldn't agree, since it would mean the loss of its most valuable worker.



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This woman, a widow, no longer wears the naugiri, *but she is very fond of her modernistic silver ring which, she says, is an old design made of very old metal. Silver is no longer valued as adornment among these peasants.*

I'm surprised," I remark. "My friend, Monomaya is not yet here. She told me she would certainly help with my *naugiri*."

"She'll be here," murmurs Danamaya, "as soon as *raxsi* is ready."

Hardly have we spoken than into the darkness struts Monamaya. Her face is that of a timid Oriental peasant, but her bearing resembles that of a blusterer. She cheerfully notes our leisure and sits down among us as Ama serves her an immodest portion of *raxsi*. "Ah, so you're going to have your own Limbu jewlery, eh, eh?" says Monamaya reaching over to take my cigarette. She lights one for herself from the smoldering tip. "A sheep got loose and my sisters and I spent the whole morning chasing it home," complains the grinning latecomer. Everyone takes a drink.

People speak little about Monamaya in my presence. They know she and I have become good friends since my arrival in the village and they respect that friendship. It is true Monamaya is a social oddity. She doesn't like to work in the fields, an aversion which in this rural community is interpreted as irresponsibility and laziness. Monamaya is also the only unmarried woman I've met here. And she's the only villager who walks alone like me on the three-day trek to the nearest town. I was never able to discover the reason for my friend's unpopularity; I continued to like her raucous manner.

When we have drunk our fill, we all return to the veranda and remain there the rest of the afternoon, until all the beading is complete. Monamaya joins in and like the other workers she shows no incapacity from the bowls of Limbu alcohol we have just consumed around the fire. "*Kodo* and *raxsi* are nourishment for us," explains Monomaya. "Without it, we can't work; and when we take it, we don't need any other food."

Our work force is now supplemented by two elderly women of Salaka lineage and therefore clanswomen of my hosts. One of these is Buddhamaya, a tall, dry-witted lady with aristocratic features that glare from her heavily wrinkled face. We make some space on the mat and Danamaya hands her one of the nylon threads. "Who is this for?"

"White *Didi* here," nodding at me. (*Didi* is a widely used Nepali title employed as a term of respect for young women, both strangers and friends.)

Buddhamaya continues. "Why do you want this? It is for poor farmers. You should have solid gold pieces, here . . . here . . . here," stroking me and indicating how the gold might encase my head and arms like some Aztec-Limbu warrior-princess. Even the thought itself is an encumbrance.

"No, no," Monamaya earnestly replies. "White *Didi* is going to wear this to the Chatrapeti festival next week, and then she'll take it with her back to America. Everyone there will admire it. And *Didi* will tell the Americans about our poor land."

I am silent, having already passed many hours fruitlessly arguing with these and other Nepal hill people about the importance of their artistic traditions. I have not succeeded in convincing them that an important distinction exists between our admiration and our curiosity. They insist my interest is only curiosity, and this *naugiri* will be presented as a curio to evoke discussion of their culture, which will dwell on economics they believe we must interpret as poverty.

I myself have always found it difficult to understand how these humble farmers can afford such jewelry. A *naugiri* is the price of a good plowing bullock, and while every woman wears a *naugiri*, less than ten percent of households possess a pair of oxen. This is not, however, a case of naive peasants investing only in precious objects. As I have said, land is high-priced and people work and save to buy and develop new fields. The value of a *naugiri* is hard to fix. Certainly one should not compare the cost of a *naugiri* with that of an ox. The *naugiri* is an obligatory expense for every family, like wedding feasts when each daughter marries. It is an integral part of family social and economic obligations.

Most Limbus are unable to say why they value the *naugiri* so highly. To them its meaning is a whole set of sentiments, deeply implanted, that I cannot possibly understand, let alone share. It is not my dowry. It does not mark my marital status. Nor is it my personal indulgence in ornaments because, as they have already noted with some dismay, I don't wear earrings, bangles or baubles. Nevertheless, they do want me to take this piece of jewelry with me when I leave. Curio or art, my Limbu friends feel it is their gift to me, something that symbolizes our bond and the cooperative spirit from our months together.

I want the *naugiri* because it has come to symbolize for me the vigor of Limbu womanhood. I like its coarse, knuckly shape and its dull gold luster. But I also see it as a beautiful object, a true piece of art which in any circumstance, in any culture, retains its beauty. It is this beauty that I admire. It is in this respect that we discover a value the Limbus and I do not share. To them, this *naugiri*, while it is a well-made object, is not particularly beautiful. For them, an ornament's beauty is a direct function of its weight in gold. This is a basic difference in our values. And it is because of this that my interest is seen as curiosity and not admiration. This is probably the reason why these people may eventually allow the *naugiri* or a simpler imitation of it to be produced for sale in the marketplace.

The gold disc earrings and naugiri *were borrowed for this portrait since the older women had passed theirs on to their married daughters while the two young women, not yet married, were still to win theirs.*



For further reading: L. Caplan, *Land and Social Change in East Nepal*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970; B.N. Aziz, *Tibetan Frontier Families*, Durham, N.C.: Carolina Academic Press, 1978; R. and S.K. Jones, *The Himalayan Woman*, Mayfield, 1976.

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Elmina, the best known calabash carver of the Plain Longuda (center) and her two apprentices. (Guyuk, Nigeria 1968)

The Equivocal Role of Women Artists in Non-Literate Cultures

Jehanne H. Teilhet

Examine the claim: nonliterate art is a system of communication which manifests the ideologies and beliefs that bring order and definition to a person's culture. This statement seems fine, but who makes these art forms and whose view does the culture indeed reflect? I have come to realize that the arts, the hieratic arts in particular, reflect male behavior and opinion, for it is men who dominate the "important" arts. Women artists (and their art forms) play a more equivocal cultural role because they cannot work in certain materials or use specialized tools or technology and, in many cultures, cannot make figurative images.[1] But we shall neither analyze nor interpret the role of the woman artist in nonliterate cultures until we have examined the role of the male artist.

Most of the documentation of nonliterate art assumes that only a man can be an artist. This man, depending on the cultural area, must possess talent, skill, intelligence and, on occasion, genealogical rights of privilege. Polynesia has a distinct class of professional artists to which one can belong only if one is born male and has the appropriate lineage and natural talent.[2] In Melanesia talent and competitive skill rather than genealogy are the requisites for the coveted position of artist, but it is still only the male who qualifies.[3] The men often serve an apprenticeship since the ritual meaning and knowledge of the objects they make are as important as learning the essential skills and exercising the necessary talent. In contrast to Oceanic cultures, in the Arctic it is generally believed that all male adults are able to make art. As Edmund Carpenter comments: "carving is a normal, essential skill [for the Eskimo], just as writing is with us."[4] In Africa the position and training of the male artist ranges between the extremes of Polynesia and the Arctic.

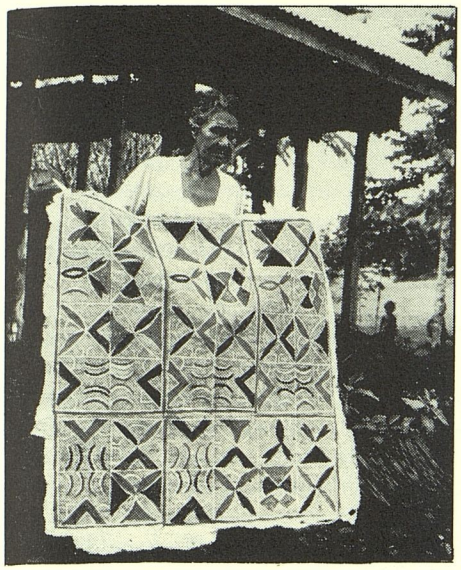
Though the social status of the male artist varies in these societies, as do their artistic skill and training, the women have uniformly limited access to the art arena. Even in societies such as that of Polynesia, where they have political and economic importance, women work in "barkcloth and weaving, but the important hard-media crafts [are] the preserve of men."[5] In Melanesia, where the political and economic power lie mainly in the hands of the "Big Men," women work in pottery and weaving. In many African cultures, the Yoruba of Nigeria for example, women can achieve political and/or economic importance and are not entirely excluded from ritual, yet "the women do the spinning, dyeing, matting, and the potting; and the remainder of the crafts are practiced by men."[6]

Douglas Fraser points out that "primitive man," though he may not have a word for "art," "almost always differentiates between objects produced by a slow, repetitive process, such as weaving or pottery (crafts), and other objects of paramount significance for his culture. He relegates craft work to inferiors (i.e., women); only men, as a rule, practiced carving and painting."[7] Fraser's observation is accurate, but Andrew Whiteford, in response to Fraser, raises the question of whether the crafts made by women can be considered, from a Western perspective, any less an art form than the "art" made by men. In reference to American Indian cultures, Whiteford writes: *That one type of painting is realistic, religious, and male-produced, while the other is geometric, secular—although it may have religious connotations we do not know about—and female-produced does not suffice to put them in different categories. If we insist upon separating them, we are led to the disparaging conclusion that Indian men created sacred art: women only manufactured mundane crafts.*[8]

Our aesthetic and cognitive response to these art forms made by women is often different from the response in the cultures that produced them. We may indeed designate many of the objects made by women as "art." But we must realize that *we* differentiate between "art" and "craft" in terms of ideas of "innovation," "creativity" and "significant form;" by strict Western definition most nonliterate arts would then fall into the category of craft. This distinction between art and craft by Western standards is thus an arbitrary one when applied out of context to nonliterate art: women artists are neither more nor less innovative and creative within the media they use than are men artists. *The specific difference between the artist and non-artist seems to be one of degree. This is more obvious in a non-literate, or so-called primitive society, than in our own. In pre-European Hawaii, for example, nearly all women made bark cloth called kapa (tapa), decorating it with highly creative designs. In a broad sense most of these women were artists, some better than others, for some examples of tapa display more intuitive inventiveness and mastery of technique than others."*[9]

Many nonliterate cultures distinguish between what might be called secular, utilitarian objects and religio-political, status objects. The latter are classified either by their use or their

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A Samoan woman from Vailoa village showing the author a tapa cloth she has just finished. The bark cloth is used in their homes as room dividers and decoration, and they also give tapa-cloth gifts to people building new homes, as a kind of housewarming gift. (Savaii, Samoa, 1972)

ritual process of manufacture, or in some cases, by a finer quality of workmanship. For example, in the Marquesas, a serving bowl not made by a male artist with deep knowledge of magic and ritual would be just a bowl because it had not been properly initiated into the Universe.[10] Both men and women produce secular objects, but in most cultures it is the expert male artist who usually works on the culturally determined, more important "art" objects. (We must remember that it was the Western world—mainly via male anthropologists and art historians—that introduced the concept of "art" to nonliterate cultures, and determined what would qualify as "art," with until recently, little corroboration from the indigenous people themselves.) The issue here, however, is not whether we accept the objects produced by women as "art," but why most women were and are traditionally denied access to the specialized role of artist as creator of religio-political objects. The relevant factor is that however art is defined, all nonliterate cultures distinguish between the "art" produced by men and that produced by women; and this is our concern here.

The disparities of style, technique and media between men and women artists appear to be universal. In most cultures women are rarely allowed to make anthropomorphic or zoomorphic forms; these are the prerogative of men. In most cultures women are rarely permitted to make objects requiring the knowledge of ritual process or the skill and knowledge of manipulating certain specialized tools. And there seems to be a universal taboo against women's sculpting in hard materials such as wood, bone, ivory, stone, gold and metal compounds; these materials are used exclusively by men.[11] Women can work only with soft, malleable materials: clay, gourds, basketry, leather or weaving. We can therefore say that a distinction exists (in traditional nonliterate societies) between the arts made by men and women.

Franz Boas has commented that the stylistic differences he observed in an Eskimo community arose both from differences in the technical processes and (even more) from the fact that men do the realistic work and women the clothing and sewn leather work.[12] William Bascom pursues Boas's notion that a sexual division of labor must also be considered in regard to stylistic differences:

> *In painting, for example, there are marked contrasts between the representational designs of men and the geometric patterns of women among the American Indians of the Plains and the Great Basin; and the same is true in bead-working. Among the Ashanti and the peoples of the Cameroun grasslands, the anthropomorphic pottery pipes made by men contrast sharply with the pottery produced by women.*[13]

He has also noted that artists divided within a society by sex and/or craft may develop distinct styles, just as isolated subtribes do.[14] Both Boas and Bascom address the broad issue of distinct styles within one society, and each notes that when the men and the women work in the same medium their products are markedly distinguishable. Robert Rattray, working among the Ashanti of Ghana, also notes this distinction: "Men do not fashion pots or pipes unless they represent anthropomorphic or zoomorphic forms, for women are forbidden to make these."[15] Such a distinction is also observed among American Indians: Whiteford found that women's art, excluding tourist art, rarely portrayed animal and human forms.[16] The media shared by men and women are also distinguished by technique or process. For example, Yoruba men and women both weave. The men use a horizontal, narrow band loom. The women, however, use a vertical cotton loom.[17] Men may have adopted the horizontal loom because it can produce an endless strip of cloth, thereby relegating the more restrictive or "inferior" process of the vertical loom for the women.[18] Roslyn Walker, however, suggests that the women's use of the vertical loom is "a practical distinction," since the vertical loom is not placed against the abdomen and allows a woman to continue weaving during pregnancy."[19] Her argument is not compelling since women are only pregnant for a few years of their working life.

Anthropomorphic and zoomorphic forms are usually reserved for the more important or sacred religio-political representations of deities, ancestors and benevolent and malevolent spirits or divine personages. One might conclude that women are restricted from making these forms because of their powerful association with the supernatural. But, among the Anang of Nigeria and other societies, human and animal figurines are used as house decorations and toys.[20] Since these figures are purely secular, we might question why women are not allowed to make them. Women cannot make them because they are carved in wood; they would probably be allowed to make a rudimentary toy figure in clay. But as women do not generally make these images they would not necessarily be able to make even a clay figure, so it is not surprising to discover that women do not try. In the final analysis, one must conclude that anthropomorphic and zoomorphic forms are of such paramount importance that making them is a privilege given almost exclusively to men.[21] There are exceptions to this restriction: certain women have extraordinary talents and skills not unlike a shaman, for which particular societies make allowances. I will return to this point later.

Certain oral traditions relate how women once made anthropomorphic images. One such story is reported by Rattray. The Ashanti people told him about a potter, Denta, who became barren because she modeled "figure pots." Thereafter, according to the Ashanti, women did not make highly ornamented pottery.[22] Rattray was also told that women were forbidden to make anthropomorphic forms because they required greater skill.[23] (In connection with the grave punishment of becoming barren, Ashanti women are forewarned that they do not have the greater skill, which implies the skill of ritual knowledge.) Little literature is available relating specifically to the prohibition against women's making anthropomorphic or zoomorphic forms, but of the accounts that I know, women who initiated the making of such images were either killed, sworn to secrecy or made barren.[21] That some women initially created figurines may relate to their innate role as natural creator of anthropomorphic forms. Adrian Gerbrands writes: ". . . it is no wonder

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*The beating process in the making of tapa involves two instruments: a wooden anvil (*tutua*) upon which the tapa is laid and a wooden mallet (*ike*) used to beat the bark. (Kolovai, Tongatapu, Tonga, 1972)*



that the woodcarver, the maker of wooden images, has a special place in the Asmat society. Just as a new human being develops in the body of a woman, so does wood come to life in his hand. His creativity, however, belongs to another sphere. From the woman comes the life of this world, whereas he creates supernatural life."[25] One might also argue that women, as creators of human beings, had no subliminal need to create anthropomorphic representations. But if that were the case, men would not have thought it necessary to restrict the women's imagery.[26] One could surmise that women, with their innate powers to give birth in the real world, were already too powerful and to balance that power men took as their prerogative the right to create supernatural life in the forms of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic images.

Some women, mentioned above, are allowed to make anthropomorphic and zoomorphic forms in soft materials such as clay. A survey showing the cultural distribution of these women has not been compiled. Women in Melanesia (i.e., Wusi, New Hebrides, and the Chambri lakes district of New Guinea) and Africa make figurative images in terra cotta. Robert Thompson, in his article "Abatan: A Master Potter of the Egbado Yoruba," gives us an excellent portrait of a woman artist. Both Abatan's mother and maternal grandmother were potters. Unlike male artists, she had no formal training. She learned her technique and inspiration from the constant observation of her mother. Abatan is known for her figurative vessels (*awo ota eyinle*), a vessel for the stones of Eyinle, a Yoruba god with "an amazing synthesis of powers of the hunt, herbalism, and water."[27] Abatan's "parents believed that she came into the world through the grace of Eyinle. Accordingly, as an invocation, she received the name of the deity before his transformation, Abatan. . . . As the senior member of the cult of Oshun and Eyinle at Oke-Odan, Abatan lives a life of prestige, balanced just short of hauteur. . . ."[28] Thompson stresses the fact that Abatan is a women artist of stature among the Egbado Yoruba. She is not an ordinary woman, she has religio-political and economic status. But had she not been born the daughter of a potter and not come into the world through the grace of Eyinle and not been talented, she would not have had the opportunity to make figurative pots and accrue status. This safeguards the making of figurative images from incursion by just any woman.

Among the Plain Longuda of Nigeria, certain women are allowed to make anthropomorphic and zoomorphic pots for the Kwandlha cult.[29] The master of Kwandlha must be an artist as well as a healer, for the spirits of diseases will not take up their abode in poorly executed Kwandlha vessels. Dasumi, of the village of Guyuk, is respected for her knowledge and skill in making the Kwandlha pots. She is woman past child-bearing years, and unlike Abatan, she did not inherit her position. In the early 1960s Dasumi was plagued with a series of illnesses; she went to Moudo, an elderly woman living nearby, to be cured. Moudo told Dasumi that the Kwandlha were worrying her, they were calling her to become a member of the cult. Dasumi apprenticed with Moudo for about two years before she became a master of the Kwandlha.

Dasumi specializes in children's diseases; when a child is sick, the mother will consult Dasumi. She examines the child and then takes one of her diagnostic Kwandlha pots from their own special hut (*tanda Kwandlha*). If the particular Kwandlha stays submerged in a basin of water, then her diagnosis is correct; if not, she will take another Kwandlha and repeat this process until one stays submerged. The child is given some medicine and the mother gives Dasumi some of the special red clay required to fashion a Kwandlha. Dasumi will touch the child's body with the red clay, beseeching the spirit of the disease to leave the child and acknowledge that she will be making an abode for it. In seclusion Dasumi will create, with the coil and mold method, a Kwandlha pot that personifies that disease. *Gurguburile*, for example, is a pot given a human form: the feet are the base of the pot, the legs, arms and belly make up the body of the pot, the neck is the neck and the open mouth of the head is the mouth of the pot. *Gurguburile* is covered with festering sores, one arm is eaten away and the other holds a calabash for water. This anthropomorphic pot is used to cure leprosy.

Upon completing a pot, Dasumi gives it to the mother to sun dry for four days before firing. Once fired, Dasumi returns to begin the ritualized process of calling the spirit of the disease to leave the child and enter the Kwandlha; this entails a special Kwandlha language, the sacrifice of a chicken or goat and a special drink called *Sinke* contained in a special terra-cotta urn, *Suthala*. Dasumi is paid in kind or coin for her work.

Though Dasumi works within an iconographic tradition, she is allowed to introduce new elements as long as it pleases the spirits. She was, when I interviewed her in 1968, more famous than Moudo, her teacher. My informant, Elam Robaino, attributed this to her artistic skills as a maker of Kwandlha pots. The spirits of the diseases are pleased with her pots; they like their abodes.

I asked Dasumi if men made Kwandlha pots; she replied that a man in Purokayo village, some four miles from Guyak, makes small ones for children. There is also an old man in Kuryi village who makes Kwandlha from wood, but it takes him much time to do it. She added that her grandson, who was three, seemed to have a calling for the Kwandlha; her daughters were not called to the profession.[30]

Both Dasumi and Abatan were called to their particular cults and both proved to have the necessary artistic skills to make figurative vessels; one inherited the profession, the other apprenticed. Of equal importance is the fact that their own society made allowances for women of unusual talent to enter the male domain of the figurative arts.

Lacking sufficient data from other societies, one can only conjecture that the tradition of making figurative imagery is open, in certain societies, only to exceptional women—women who cross the boundary between the sacred and profane.

More universal in its application is the taboo against women's working with hard materials and certain specialized tools.[31] Although terra-cotta in comparison with wood is a relatively permanent medium, the women work

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this medium when it is soft and malleable. That it is transformed when fired into a relatively hard and durable substance does not appear to be an issue.

The hard materials used as a primary medium by male artists are usually rated in most nonliterate cultures according to their relative importance. The scale of relative importance, power or sanctity of the medium varies from culture to culture, but the culturally defined criterion is generally determined by the material's durability, scarcity, the skill and/or technology necessary to work it and the medium's innate magico-religious properties. As a general rule, the more important materials are reserved for the more important deities or supernatural forces. Among the Yoruba, wood is rarely employed to represent the gods because of its perishable nature. Wood is used, however, for votive sculpture representing priests or devotees.[32] To the Asmat, who live in an alluvial mudflat that lacks stone or metal ores, wood becomes the important medium. Wood is so important in this culture that man and tree are regarded as interchangeable concepts: the human being is a tree and the tree is a human being.[33] That wood is a "mortal" living substance can enhance its value as a symbolic referent, as intimated by the Asmat man/tree equivalent. In cultures that have a variety of materials to choose from, one also finds, as with the Yoruba, that the mortal-decaying aspect of wood relegates its use to the more human realms associated with ancestor spirits, culture heroes and demigods, as well as priests and devotees. Because of its accessibility and the varying skills of adeptness cessary to carve it, wood is a popular medium in nonliterate cultures.

Stone is valued for its durability, its magical origin and the skill necessary to carve it. Many nonliterate cultures have access to stone, but few utilize its potential (as sculpture in the round in contrast to petroglyphs)—possibly because they lack the tools and necessary knowledge to carve it. Polynesians knew how to work stone (volcanic tuff), but none achieved the monumental scale of the *Moai* on Easter Island. African artists worked in stone, but few if any today carry on the tradition of their forefathers.

Where stone is worked extensively, the stone (like wood) is graded in importance. To the Canadian Eskimos, for example, hardness is more important than color or shininess; only the weaker and less competent Eskimos carve soft stone which is "jokingly referred to as 'women's stone.' "[31]

The hard, white ivory of the walrus tusk is still the Eskimos' favorite material.[35] "The desire to use ivory as an adjunct to stone carving is powerful in nearly all areas, whatever the nature of the local stone."[36] As Nelson Graburn explains, the ivory is desired for its maleness. The forward thrust of the natural form is associated with male assertion.[37] It should be noted that with the introduction of the tourist market, women have been encouraged to carve. But the women only carve occasionally and "they do not seem to have impressed their values on the activity."[38]

Whale ivory was also valued in Polynesia; in Hawaii the whale ivory (*lei niho palaoa*) necklace was *tapu* to all except the chief (*alii*). In Melanesia pigs' tusks are highly valued as are elephants' tusks in Africa. In former times, elephant ivory could only be possessed and used by the divine chief (*Oba*) of Benin, Nigeria. In addition to the given, man-defining metaphor of that particular ivory-bearing animal or mammal, the form, color and density of the ivory enhances its symbolic reference to the male genitalia. Ivory, carved or in its natural state, always signals important religio-political concepts. Bone, human or otherwise, is also an intrinsic carrier of religio-political concepts.

Metals, because of their permanence and technical manufacture, are an esteemed material. Though the cultures of Oceania did not manufacture metals, they were quick to trade with Europeans for this desirous material. Among the Gola of Liberia, "the skill of working with metals was considered one of the most mysterious and remarkable forms of knowledge in the traditional culture."[39] The traditional bronze or brass casters and the blacksmiths of Africa are often distinguished in that the former are creators of "art" objects and the latter creators of secular objects, such as tools and weapons. Both can, however, create art forms; both belong to a separate caste, guild or disjunctive social group signaling that both have "mysterious powers" in connection with the process of manufacturing metals. That the working of metals is a male prerogative also refers to the use of metal objects in war and hunting. Precious metals such as gold and silver reflect the splendor and panoply of the conjoined realms of man and god.

The above is not an exhaustive survey of hard materials, but it gives a summary view of the values and ideologies men have attributed to certain materials. In short, it seems that men

On the Solomon Islands of New Georgia the women skillfully weave, only now they weave purses and other items for Western consumption. (New Georgia, 1970)



have come to identify their maleness with materials they have explicitly or implicitly chosen as their exclusive prerogative. Women work in soft materials that "best" reflect their femaleness. In comparison with hard materials, these are generally less enduring, fragile, more pliable, secondary or subservient, common and secularly oriented to women's work: i.e., the home, garden, cooking and childraising. Originally there may have been little or no status differentiation between the media; that is, the men's materials were not necessarily better than the women's materials, until a conscious effort was made to give certain materials qualities of status and importance. It is plausible that women initially had less leisure time than men did and therefore turned their creative talents toward the materials close at hand to make the objects necessary for domestic life, without identifying with the material. But as sex roles became more defined, the art-making habits developed into political moves, and the material that the men initially worked in was given an imaginary power to justify male seizure of power and status over women. I believe the values and ideologies attributed to certain materials were a male invention to keep women in their place because I find it curious that women did not choose to explore the use of different media once the society became more settled. Evidence in fact indicates that women must have tried to work in other materials, otherwise there would not be so many *tapus* against women achieving this goal.[40]

In traditional cultures men have controlled women's use of materials by not allowing them to use the tools necessary

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A Samoan woman brings out the pattern of the upeti *board with a cloth soaked in dye, staining the tapa cloth. (Vailoa village, Savaii, Samoa, 1972)*

to work hard materials. In many nonliterate cultures the artist's tools are somewhat animistic; they are thought to possess intelligence, given their own family names, and in some areas, such as Polynesia, their own genealogy. Tools can accrue prestige, power and sanctity, for it is the conscious, conjoined effort of tools and men that create carvings. Carving is a religious act; among the Ashanti and other African societies, sacrifices and prayers were made to the tools to ask them for their assistance and freedom from accidents.[41] In Hawaii the artist "consecrated his tools by a sacrifice and a chant to insure that sufficient *mana* was contained in them, consequently insuring the efficacy of the image, 'the house of the god.'"[42] By ritualizing the artist's tools, women were barred from using them because, as sources of pollution, women would nullify the tools' efficacy. Women were also handicapped in that they could not work in the hard materials necessary to make their own tools. By restricting women from using specialized artistry, tools or technology, men have safeguarded hard materials for their own use. Many scholars have commented on the fact that "the act of carving should exhibit those qualities central to the male hunting and sex role."[43] Tools and technology in the hands of women would cause an imbalance in the equipose of sexual labor.

In addition, a certain cosmology often clearly ordains the privilege of carving to men. In the Anang society we are told that women do not carve because the Creator God, Abassi, "wills it and has instructed the fate spirit not to assign the craft to a female."[44] In New Ireland there is a legend that the first woodcarver learned his craft from a ghost. The woodcarver instructed students who then became famous artists. Women were not only excluded from art and ritual, they could not even see the objects or use the sacred word for them, *alik* or *uli*, on threat of being choked to death by men.[45]

For the "important arts" men have developed an elaborate process of manufacture regulated by a prescribed set of rituals. The special, prescribed actions, repeated over and over again, lend continuity and stability to the ritual. These formal actions, sanctioned by religion, are thought to have an esoteric importance which is only fully comprehensible to the initiated male artists. Rituals have many levels of significance, but it is possible that the ritualization of the art process developed, in part, as a further precaution to prevent women from entering this domain. Women have rituals of their own and in some cases are allowed to join the men's rituals, but women do not have a prescribed set of ritualized actions in the creation of their arts. Even though Abatan and Dasumi worked in the realm of the supernatural, made figurative images, and, in the case of Dasumi, used a special red clay, their artistic processes were not ritualized. This signifies that women's artistry deals with the more profane real time and space.

The ritualized making process has many variants among nonliterate cultures, but the majority, if not all, share the belief that women are sources of pollution. Strict precautions must therefore be taken to exclude women from these ritualized activities. In Polynesia *tapus* of unsacredness "were associated for the most part with women, to whom dangerous spirits were likely to attach themselves, and who were at times in a contaminated state psychically; and with sickness and death which were the signs of the presence of fearful demons."[46] This equation is present (in varying degrees) in other nonliterate cultures, and an important aspect of the ritualized artistic process is to purify and protect the male artist from malevolent forces, which include women. In all nonliterate cultures the most dangerous form of pollution is connected with menstrual blood. Menstrual blood was regarded among the Maoris of New Zealand as a human being *manqué*.[47] The Mbum and Jukun of Nigeria segregated menstruous women because the household gods found the menstrual blood abhorrent.[48] An Ashanti "woman might not carve a stool—because of the ban against menstruation. A woman in this state was formerly not even allowed to approach wood-carvers while at work, on pain of death or of a heavy fine. This fine was to pay for sacrifices to be made upon the ancestral stools of dead kings, and also upon the wood-carver's tools."[49] Rattray believes that the abhorrence of the unclean woman "is based on the supposition that contact with her, directly or indirectly, is held to negate and render useless all supernatural or magico-protective powers possessed by either persons or spirits or objects. Even by direct contact, therefore, an un-clean woman is capable of breaking down all barriers which stand between defenseless man and those evil unseen powers which beset him on every side."[50] This belief, with subtle variations, is common to all nonliterate cultures.

Not only is there a *tapu* against menstrual blood, but, in addition, most male artists have to abstain from sexual intercourse because they believe it has an adverse effect on their work. In Oceania sexual intercourse can endanger or nullify a carver's *mana*. In Africa an Anang carver will not have sexual intercourse the night before he begins an important carving because his work is impeded.[51] "Too many acts of intercourse is thought to weaken him for a day or two, inhibit his desire to carve and his creative impulse, cause him to shape his pieces poorly, and lead him to cut himself."[52] The carver's fear of wounding himself, of *bleeding*, is a prominent concern which can relate to punishment, death and menstrual blood. Equally common is the belief that should the wife be unfaithful, without her husband's knowledge, his

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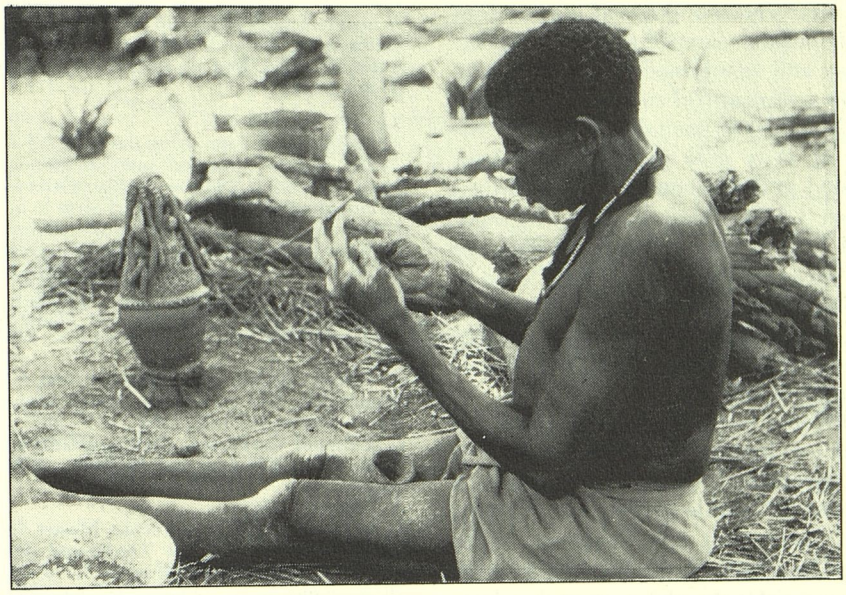
tools will cut him when he goes to carve.[53]

Warner Muensterberger (1951) was the first, to my knowledge, to address the issue of women's exclusion in the arts of nonliterate cultures. His article emphasized why men felt it necessary to exclude women from the major art-making processes. In summing up he writes:

The overanxious exclusion of women discloses the regressive tendency involved. The artist relinquishes communication with an inhibiting or disturbing environment. Women are phobically avoided. . . . The regressive tendency for isolation is a security measure. Affect is being avoided. Objective reality is denied while strength is gained from the narcissistic retreat to a level of omnipotent fantasy. . . . If these are the conditions under which artistic activity among primitive peoples is possible, then two seemingly contradictory tendencies are at work: the necessary isolation indicates that distance from the oedipal mother is sought. The menstruating woman is avoided or even dangerous. On the other hand, reunion with the giving mother of the preoedipal phase is wanted."[54]

Muensterberger's Freudian interpretation is one viewpoint on the seemingly universal exclusion of women in the arena of "important arts." There are, however, other ways to examine this phenomenon.

The paradigm for the ritualized process of man's creations may be found in the cultural behavior of women during their menstrual cycles, pregnancy and childbirth. When men work on important objects, they usually do so in seclusion or with other men of status. And should they carve in the sanctuary of the men's house, this interior is often referred to as the womb.[55] When women have their menstrual period they usually move to a special house of seclusion or some equivalent; and in many cultures there is also a special childbearing area. In these situations, both the men and women are, in effect, particularly powerful, negatively or positively, and must be removed from the realm of the ordinary. During the process of creation, both men (creating important objects) and women (creating human life) are subject to specific *tapus* imposed upon them for their own and their creation's protection and the implied protection of others. These restrictions vary from culture to culture, but vulnerability in creation is common to both men and women in all nonliterate cultures. If the *tapus* are broken, men may cut themselves with their tools, miscarve a spiritless object or even die; women may miscarry, give birth to a dead or deformed child or die in labor.



Dasumi, of the village of Guyuk, is respected for her knowledge and skills in making the Kwandlha pots.

Analogous to this concept is the Polynesian belief that a new (art) object is comparable to a newborn child.

Like the child, the canoe, house, or other object had a soul and a vital principle that required strengthening, for all objects were conscious and animate. . . . It is evident that the new object, as a living being, needed the same kind of rites to free and protect it against evil, and to endow it with mana *and other necessary psychic qualities, as did the human infant.*[56]

In looking at other nonliterate cultures we can find parallels between the "consecrating" of "important" objects and the consecration ceremonies for children, particularly the male infant.

A final point concerns the "creativity" of male artists. George Kubler writes: "Many societies have accordingly proscribed all recognition of inventive behavior, preferring to reward ritual repetition, rather than to permit inventive variations."[57] Under different situations, inventive variations can and do occur, but in the main, the ritualized art process constrains innovation and free self-expression. Hieratic art emphasizes repetition and encourages clever and ingenious manipulation of the iconographic elements within a given iconography. Because women do not have their own ritualized process of art-making and their art is not hieratic, it follows that women artists can be more innovative and more self-expressive in the arts than men. Women, however, are restricted in their use of materials and lack of specialized tools, but as typified by the work of Abatan and Dasumi, they have a great deal of freedom in the way they interpret the existing iconographic elements and add on new, inventive iconographic elements.[58] I suggest that the style and technique of the arts produced by women is a better indicator of the society's changing notion of aesthetics than that of the arts produced by men. The objects made by women are used by everyone: as the culture's aesthetic norm changes, the women's art is the first to reflect this since these arts are nonhieratic. In the hieratic arts of men, an innovation conjoined with an aesthetic change introduces a state of anxiety as the artist's risk factor is high. To introduce an innovative form, the male artist risks his religio-political status. He risks offending the supernatural realm and the ruling chiefs. Male artists who do not work within a ritualized process and are not making hieratic art are apt to be the ones with lesser ability and are therefore not as reliable as a source of aesthetic notion.

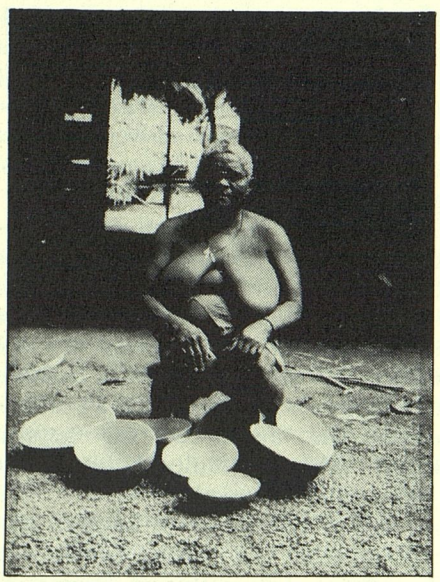
It appears, then, that women are believed to have greater innate powers than men. Women have the power to create and control life. They control life through death as signified by the menses and abortion. Without children the family lineage dies, as do all the ancestors who live in the supernatural world. The continuity between the present and the past is broken. Women are feared and respected for their creative powers. Conversely, women who are barren lose status; in nonliterate cultures a barren woman is undisputedly grounds for divorce.

To balance women's innate powers,

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men have created external powers that slowly became steeped in ritual and ceremony and sanctioned by the authority of the supernatural realm. Women, in the main, were excluded from the rituals of men and more or less constrained in their economic and political power. There are exceptions, including those women past child-bearing age who are viewed as "men" among women. The male artists rival the women's innate powers as both are in the position to manipulate the forces of creation and continuity.

How and why women were relegated to the less important arts is a gray area of conjecture; I do not believe it is a question of female preference. Rather, it is likely that the dominant male group has claimed the hieratic arts for itself consistently: the men make them because they are important and they are important because the men make them. Should the less dominant group (which shall remain unspecified) do something valuable, then the men will adopt that too. It has been a zero-sum game of distribution. The hieratic arts became instruments to articulate meaning structures and problems; in addition they were a powerful way to control women. Male hieratic art has been promoted in general by males to maintain their own importance. It is no wonder that men, particularly in nonliterate cultures where women have achieved prominence on political, economic and even religious levels, have rarely, if ever, allowed the women to create the "important" arts. The old belief systems bound by tradition are hard to break, as witnessed by the scarcity of contemporary women artists from the third world.



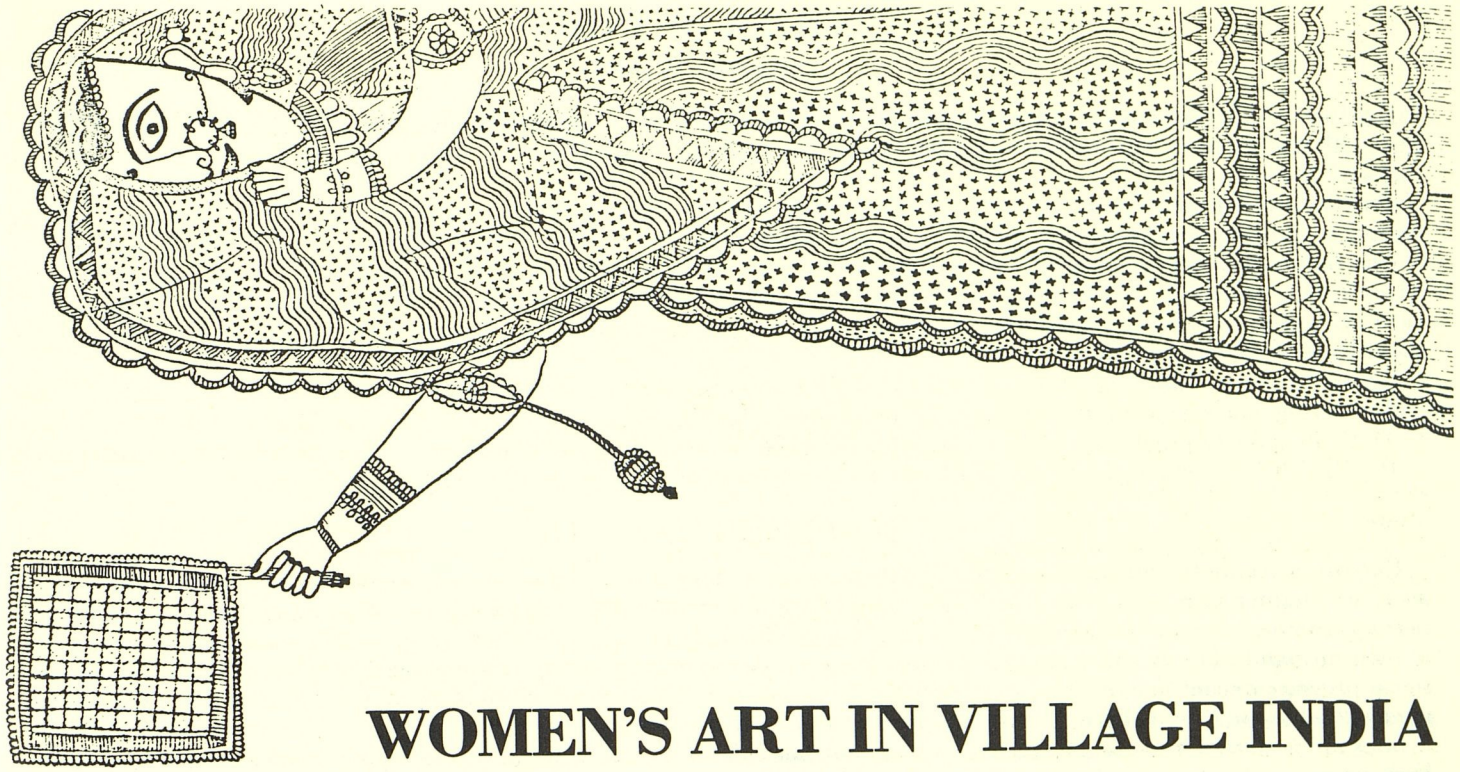
In Surinam, the Aucaner women carve in soft materials, calabashes. What is unusual is the fact that the women only embellish the interior of the calabash. (LokoLoko village, Surinam, 1975)

*I wish to acknowledge and thank Robert Elliott, Moira Roth, Melford Spiro and especially David Antin and Zack Fisk for their critical comments on this paper.

1. In this paper I am using the terms "art" and "artist" on the most conventional, ethnocentric level; the artist is a maker of objects which could be considered in isolation an art form to a Westerner's sensibility. I would also like to apologize to the anthropologists for occasionally generalizing to the primitive world from one tribe or one culture area.
2. Terry Barrow, *Art and Life in Polynesia* (Tokyo, Japan: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1973), p. 58.
3. Alfred Buhler, Terry Barrow and Charles Mountford, *The Art of the South Seas* (New York: Greystone Press, 1968), p. 97.
4. Edmund Carpenter, *Eskimo Realities* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973), unpaged.
5. Barrow, p. 58.
6. William Bascom, "A Yoruba Master Carver: Duga of Meko," in *The Traditional Artist in African Societies*, ed. Warren L. d'Azevedo (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1975), p. 68.
7. Douglas Fraser, *Primitive Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1962), p. 13.
8. Andrew H. Whiteford, "Enriching Daily Life: The Artist and Artisan," in *American Indian Art: Form and Tradition* (New York: Dutton and Co., 1972), p. 10.
9. Halley Cox with William Davenport, *Hawaiian Sculpture* (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1974), pp. 4-5.
10. Ralph Linton, "Marquesan Culture," in *The Individual and His Society*, ed. Abram Kardiner (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939), p. 146.
11. Roslyn Walker notes that women carvers have been reported in the Wakemba society of Africa. Roslyn A. Walker, *African Women/African Art* (New York: African-American Institute, 1976), p. 50.
12. Franz Boas, *Primitive Art* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1955), p. 181.
13. William Bascom, "Creativity and Style in African Art," in *Tradition and Creativity in Tribal Art*, ed. Daniel Biebuyck (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969), p. 109.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 110.
15. Robert S. Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 301.
16. Whiteford, p. 13.
17. Bascom, p. 66.
18. Roy Sieber, *African Textiles and Decorative Arts* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1972), p. 155.
19. Walker, p. 50.
20. John C. Messenger, "The Carver in Anang Society," in *The Traditional Artist in African Societies*, p. 110.
21. Of the two forms, the anthropomorphic image is usually the more important.
22. Rattray, p. 301.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 301.
24. Lewis's translation of a myth collected by Kramer tells about the origin of the sun *malanggan* from New Ireland. To paraphrase: a woman, searching for her pigs, was forced to spend the night in a cave. "Her spirit went away in a dream and saw a house in which goblins were at work plaiting a sun. She saw how it was made, and when they had finished she returned back to her home, and then showed her knowledge to the men of the village. When they had learned exactly how to make a sun, they hanged the woman, to punish her for dealing with sacred matters. Today the *oara* is sacred and women must not see it. Even a glimpse of it meant death for a woman." Philip H. Lewis, *The Social Context of Art in Northern New Ireland* (Chicago: Field Museum of Natural History, Vol. 58, 1969), p. 107. Myths of this type are interesting; it is possible that the men did adopt new and important art forms initiated by women; it is equally plausible that the men invented these myths out of guilt.
25. Adrian A. Gerbrands, *Wow-Ipits*, trans. Inez W. Seeger (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1967), p. 35.
26. Men, however, may deliberately make a prohibition against activities which women have no desire for anyway, to make it seem that women obey their law—a kind of Tom Sawyerism.
27. Robert Thompson, "Abatan: A Master Potter of the Egbado Yoruba," in *Tradition and Creativity in Tribal Art*, pp. 132, 135.
28. *Ibid.*, pp. 155, 173.
29. Kwandlha is the generic cult name for the figurative vessels which are the embodiments of the particular diseases they personify. In addition, each Kwandlha has its own name by which it is identified.
30. In 1967-1968 I worked for the Nigerian Department of Antiquities; my field research on the Longuda was carried out through their auspices in the spring of 1968.
31. The rare exception is the Wakemba tribe, cited by Walker.
32. Thompson, p. 147.
33. Gerbrands, p. 29.
34. Nelson H. Graburn, "A Preliminary Analysis of Symbolism in Eskimo Art and Culture," in *Proceedings of the International Congress of Americanists*, Vol. II (Geneva: Tilgher, 1972), pp. 165-166.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 166.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 166.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 169.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 169.
39. Warren L. d'Azevedo, "Sources of Gola Artistry," in *The Traditional Artist in African Societies*, p. 320.
40. As a further precaution, perhaps, many of the nonliterate cultures believe that offerings must be given to the god(s) or spirits of the material that is to be used, such as trees, and these protective gods or spirits are male.
41. Rattray, p. 217.
42. Cox with Davenport, p. 34.
43. Graburn, p. 169.
44. Messenger, p. 106.
45. Warner Muensterberger, "Roots of Primitive Art," in *Anthropology and Art*, ed. Charlotte M. Otten (Garden City: Natural History Press, 1971), p. 125.
46. E.S. Craighill Handy, "Polynesian Religion," *Bernice P. Bishop Museum Bulletin* No. 79 (Honolulu: Bishop Museum, 1927; reprinted New York: Kraus Reprint, 1971), p. 47.
47. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966), p. 96.
48. C.K. Meek, *Tribal Studies in Northern Nigeria*, Vol. II (London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., Ltd., 1931), p. 490.
49. Rattray, p. 271.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
51. Messenger, p. 109.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 109.
53. Rattray, p. 217.
54. Muensterberger, pp. 127-128.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 125.
56. Handy, p. 295.
57. George Kubler, *The Shape of Time* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1974), p. 68.
58. The Yirrkalia of Arnhem Land, Australia make string-figure art; the string figures are an example of no-status art as it is mainly a "woman's pastime." However, when the men make string figures it is useful. Nevertheless, as an essentially women's art the string figures reveal a number of innovative forms. "The women dream new string game designs but do not tell the men about them." One Yirrkalia woman, Narau, had a repertoire of over 170 string figures, many of which she invented. Frederick D. McCarthy, "The String Figures of Yirrkalia," in *The American-Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land*, Vol. II, (London and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1960), p. 424. 433-438.

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WOMEN'S ART IN VILLAGE INDIA

In discussing the articles we received on different aspects of women and their art in village India, we noticed a recurring theme: artmaking in India is in a state of flux. Colonization, industrialization and the impingement of the world market have influenced choices of material, means of production, the meaning of ritual content, the relationship between artist and consumer and the status of the artist in society. Women's traditional arts such as embroidery and ritual painting on walls and ground, themselves often affected by such changes, co-exist with nontraditional forms such as painting on paper produced specifically for the market. Nontraditional paintings by women from Mithila have received recent attention through articles, a book and exhibitions in India and Europe.

As we discussed the articles submitted to us, a dilemma became apparent since two distinct interpretations of the meaning of Mithila paintings in terms of ritual content and social significance emerged. It seemed to us that we were seeing a demonstration of ways in which feminist analyses develop and some of the problems in making an accurate woman-centered description.

Véquaud and Stendhal[1] connected the Maithil[2] women to a tradition of independent women artists who perpetuated ancient matriarchal customs. We were attracted to their picture of Maithil women as "a nation of women artists." But as editors we felt that this analysis, in the light of fieldwork observations by feminist sociologists, did not adequately reflect the extremely circumscribed life typical of women in village India. We noted, moreover, that the traditional painters of Mithila were women of the upper caste, the caste which most strictly requires seclusion of women and absolute obedience to men.

On the other hand, the sociological writers tended not to emphasize some of the strengths of women, even in this extremely segregated (sex and caste) society. Women developed their creativity, forming women's art traditions outside of male control. Most prized by the women themselves is the work derived from weaving raffia or embroidering cloth. Paintings exist in a category other than art; they are sacred acts in themselves. But they are exclusively women's work—and there lies their interest to us, as we search for examples of traditional women's art, their designs, materials and techniques.

Why a connection was made to matriarchal traditions becomes clearer if we note that in southern India, at least, the ritual wall and ground paintings are made in honor of the goddess Lakshmi, who is throughout Hindu India a patron goddess of women.[3] Thus the paintings reinforce female concerns and a sense of female community. However, this is the sense of community that occurs when one group is systematically oppressed. A visually rich and religiously meaningful woman's art exists. But this does not deny, to our dismay, the real exclusion of women of Mithila, as of other areas of India, from full control of their lives. ——The Editors

[1]Yves Véquaud, *Women Artists of Mithila* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977); Renate Stendhal, "Ein Volk von Malerinnen" ("A Nation of Women Artists"), *Emma*, No. 6 (June 1977), pp. 50–53. Thanks to Tobe Levin for her translation of this article. [2]Maithil is the adjective form of Mithila. [3]Personal communication, Tamara Wasserman—E.W.

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WOMEN OF INDIA

Sharon Wood

Despite the complex and heterogeneous nature of Indian society, there are certain consistent attitudes and values. Such is the case with the status of women: their positions relative to men and to other women, and the practical effects of prevailing attitudes on their lives.

The following description of the roles open to the majority of women is based on my own observations and written sources. Four-fifths of the population are caste Hindus, and unless otherwise indicated, I am referring to caste Hindu women.

The family, not the individual, is the primary economic and social unit in India. A joint family, where married sons, their wives, unmarried daughters and parents live together, is the Indian ideal. Most women's lives are spent within the family courtyard while men circulate between home, fields, markets, villages and cities. Home is where children first learn to perpetuate the subordination of women.

Inferior status is more evident in North India where many women still practice a modified form of *Purdah*, seclusion at home and covering one's face in the presence of most men. *Purdah* became popular during the Muslim rule (approximately 1200–1700) and was practiced among royal and upper-class women. Centuries of foreign invaders attacked the North, but prior to the British, few penetrated to the South, so it was not necessary to "protect" women by hiding them.

TOO BAD IT'S A GIRL

Parents welcome the birth of their first daughter as a manifestation of the goddess of wealth. It is considered pious to give away a daughter in marriage, but with each daughter a dowry must be given, and succeeding daughters mean substantial, perhaps ruinous expense. Dowries, the only property traditionally allowed to women, supposedly guarantee their maintenance in their husband's family and serve as a tangible measure of economic strength to the community at large. There is considerable social pressure to continue the dowry system despite its illegality. Dowries are given by some families who know that the law is unenforceable, and by many more who do not know of the law's existence.

Sons are preferred because they will remain to contribute financial and physical support, perpetuate the family line and perform necessary funeral rites for their parents.

Considered temporary residents, daughters are frequently reminded that they will marry and go to live with their in-laws. Their share of household work depends on the economic standing and *jati* (lineage group within broad caste categories) of their family. Regardless of caste, all women are expected to know how to cook, clean and care for children.

Traditional education, memorization of religious texts, was denied to women and the lower castes. Modern education, though prestigious, is an economic luxury for women.

THE ARRANGEMENT

The major event in most people's lives is marriage. Families select potential spouses to strengthen or improve their social position. In North India this takes the form of affiliation between families in distant villages, and in South India consolidation within a local setting. Thus, a North Indian bride faces total strangers, perhaps a new language, while a South Indian bride may marry someone as familiar as a cousin. The transition from parents' to in-laws' home is rarely as traumatic for her.

There are a few socially acceptable alternatives to marriage for upper- or middle-caste women. One is to secure employment in a "proper" profession,[1] such as teaching, and continue to live with their parents, celibate, in a social limbo, their public behavior subject to scrutiny and criticism by neighbors. A more drastic but traditional choice, available to malcontents and nonconformists of both sexes, is to leave society and become a religious devotee: a hard and often solitary life. Most women get married.

DEVOTION, DUTY AND SACRIFICE

By adolescence, young people have witnessed many marriages and know their obligations and expectations. A bride should serve her mother-in-law, respectfully avoid older men, show symbolic and real deference to her husband and have babies. She expects to be ill-treated by her mother-in-law, to have little in common with her husband except sex and to be allowed occasional visits to her parents' home where she is a privileged guest.

During menstruation women are considered unclean and not allowed to cook. Instead of resting indoors, they frequently work harder than usual outdoors. As protectors of domestic purity, they are expected to be more ritually strict than men. Defying such restrictions is one way women express their anger.

Childbirth is ritually unclean. Low-caste midwives, otherwise shunned, enter homes of all castes and assist. Their freedom of movement is envied by upper-caste women who haven't fully rationalized and internalized their own sequestered lives.

On almost every social level, a wife's status improves with the birth of a child, especially a son. Children are wives' social insurance and the most acceptable focus of their attention and affection. If women do not produce sons, husbands who can afford it take another wife. Divorce is an unspeakable disgrace, so the first wife stays on, adjusting to her lowered status as a barren woman.

THE LATER YEARS

Maintenance of a joint family demonstrates stability, reliability and strength to the community, which rewards the family with prestige and economic opportunities. But many forces work against its continuance: difficulties of integrating brides into the household, rivalries between nuclear units and possible conflict between brothers over family property. These find expression in battles between mothers- and daughters-in-law and among brothers' wives. Quarrels among women are an acceptable release of tension. It is believed that women drive apart families which would otherwise remain peaceably united.

In matters beyond the domestic sphere, women are expected to indirectly wield what power they have through the men in their family. A wife's status depends on her husband's position in the household: after his mother, the oldest son's wife has the most authority. Some widowed mothers have considerable influence over their sons, much to the displeasure of the sons' wives.

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Antagonism between mothers- and daughters-in-law keeps them divided, competing for their son/husband's support, and diverts them from more fundamental sources of discontent inherent in the repressive hierarchy of family relations.

Age is respected, and unless widowed, women can attain a secure and powerful position in their later years.

Treatment of widows varies widely depending on their age, relations with their children and family resources. Young, childless widows dependent on their in-laws are undoubtedly treated the worst. Widows' heads are shaved, their glass jewelry broken and their saris replaced by permanent mourning clothes. Widows are not allowed to remarry. A proper widow should devote herself to religion and quietly pine away. Those with the means, interest and determination become involved in community social services or charity work.

In later life, people are encouraged to turn to religion, the selection and practice of which provide more personal choice than any other aspect of Indian life. Continued participation in family and social activities is frowned upon.

ANOTHER WORLD

Low-caste, Harijan (untouchable) and tribal women are more independent economically, socially and ritually. Poverty forces them to work, and although they receive lower salaries than men, the result is freedom unknown to their upper-caste sisters. They choose their husbands, leave or divorce them and remarry if widowed. This is possible because these people are so poor that a woman's wage-earning ability is of great value. But Harijan and tribal women must contend with real and threatened violence, insults and humiliation due to their caste ranking.

HOW MUCH CONTROL DO WOMEN HAVE OVER THEIR OWN LIVES?

In one lifetime, women fulfill a number of assigned roles, each with its own privileges and constraints. Transitions between roles are often abrupt, making it very difficult to retain and consolidate power or authority.

Upper-caste women have more economic security and community respect, accompanied by physical and social confinement. Lower-caste women have the possibility of choice in their domestic relations, but live and die in crushing poverty.

A U.N. report notes that on a worldwide basis

> . . .even where women have made major gains in acquiring access to knowledge, training and economic independence, their share in decision-making in both the family and in public life—that is, their share of political power—appears to lag behind their share in other resources.[2]

[1]*The ideal profession is medicine. Doctors may defy almost all domestic and societal restrictions and still are highly respected. Nursing, however, is undesirable because it is associated with traditional midwifery, a low-caste profession.*

[2]*U.N. Department of Economic and Social Affairs,* Status of Women and Family Planning.

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On The Status of Women in India

Contrary to demographic averages, the ratio of men to women in India is 100:93. This is attributed to the neglect of females.†

90% of abandoned babies in Delhi, the Indian capital, are female.§

The Indian Constitution proposed universal, free, compulsory education but postponed it to 1965, then to 1981. In 1971, 97% of boys and 62% of girls aged 6 to 11 years were enrolled in school. Actual attendance figures were not available.†

60% of all children drop out of school before the fifth grade.‡

39% of the male and 18.7% of the female population were literate in 1974; 40% of the "literate" women can only sign their names.†

4/5 of the population is rural; 13.2% of rural women are literate.†

Women formed 18% of the work force in 1971, a decrease from 27% in 1961. The official explanation was "economic stagnation," but employers use protective labor laws as excuses to not hire women.†

80% of working women are agricultural laborers, 15% work in factories or plantations, or as unorganized laborers such as *bidi* (cigarette) makers, hawkers, and domestic servants. 90% of working women are illiterate.†

5% of urban women who matriculated and 20% of university graduates find work; only 0.4% of Indian women hold degrees.†

50% of employed, educated women teach primary school, 15% are clerks or typists, 15% teach secondary school, 7% are nurses and 10% are doctors, lawyers, college teachers, artists, administrators, etc.†

15% of all rural women are married before 14 years of age.†

71% of women aged 15 to 19 were married, widowed or divorced in 1961.§

100,000 women, mostly widows, aged 20 to 45, become destitute every year due to lack of work.†

Life expectancy for men is 51.3 years, and 49.6 for women.†

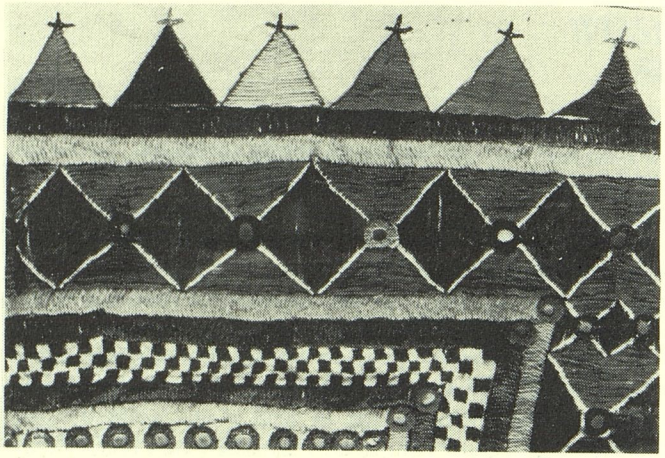
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Sharon Wood is a student of film at San Francisco State. She traveled in India in 1974 and plans to return to do further film work.

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Embroidery from the Northwest

Zette Emmons

In the 700,000 villages of India, the peasant woman is born into a set of prescribed rituals which she is responsible for maintaining and transmitting. Traditional art is one form these rituals take; in Northwestern India, an area historically rich in all kinds of textiles, peasant women embroider. A classification of textiles made in India for domestic use includes "skilled work of weavers and dyers, who work close to large market towns; articles of luxury made under court patronage or in the court tradition; folk embroidery; and fabrics of the aboriginal tribes."[1] The first two forms of production are dominated by male weavers and craftsmen working in a commercial structure. The fourth is outside the mainstream of Indian village life, though folk embroidery draws upon many aboriginal antecedents which have become tangled with Islamic and Hindu influences.

The depth of religious feeling and devotion that permeates Indian village life does not exist in the West in any comparable way, and it is from this regard for the deities that the impulse to create something beautiful and worthy seems to come. Outer and inner worlds are merged in a relationship kept flowing and harmonious by the constant application of visible symbols and signs. Everything is part of everything else; there is none of the "disconnectedness" that is so much a part of life in the West. When the woman embroiders, she is conscious of the decorativeness of what she does, but she also has the satisfaction of honoring the world of the spirits residing in the plants and animals which she imitates in thread. Even the poorest village woman is capable of making her life more bearable and secure by the application of decoration to her house or herself. A Krishna proverb which applies to village women at work is—"I take the form desired by my worshippers."[2]

Women wear blouses, full skirts and shawls, all heavily embroidered. They spend their spare time embroidering not only their own clothing or trousseaus for their daughters, but also *natis* (children's headdresses), *toranas* (wall hangings), animal trappings and small bags for carrying jewelry and other small items. To wear someone else's clothing would be unthinkable. When the wearer dies or when a garment is worn out, the old garment is cast off.

Patterns to be embroidered are drawn onto cloth, which is worked in flat sections and sewn together when finished. Chain, cross and buttonhole stitches cover the surface with patterns; satin stitching fills large areas with color. Small mirrors or pieces of mica are used extensively, interspersed fancifully with the embroidery. Mirrors also decorate walls, furniture and even chicken coops. They are not only attractive, flashing in the sun, but also frighten away demons.

In the designs of peasant women in all parts of India, the essences of the animals, flowers and gods are revealed, emphasized by repetition. Dots, triangles and lines are arranged in panels surrounding abstracted symbols and objects. Even buses, bicycles and airplanes may be incorporated into the work. The sense of color is more pronounced in the Northwest than in any other part of India. Traditional dyes have been derived from indigo, cochineal (red made from crushed insect bodies), iron filings (black), saffron and various other plants yielding yellows and oranges. Pupul Jayaker of the All-India Handicrafts Board describes the emotional content for peasant women of the colors they use.

> **Red was the color of *Chunari*, a tie-dyed sari, and was the symbol of *sohog*, the first days of marriage and love-play. It was the garment worn by the *Abhisarika*, the young woman seeking in the darkness of night her waiting beloved. Saffron or *gerua* was the color of *Vasant*, of spring, of young mango blossoms, of swarms of bees, of southern winds and the passionate cry of mating birds. Maroon and black were the colors of mourning. Blue or *nil*, the color of indigo, was also the color of Krishna, the cowherd child-god who bore the name of Navjaldhar—he who is of that color, that of the newly formed cloud, dormant with the darkness that is rain. But there was another blue, *Hari nil*, or the color of water which is reflecting a clear spring sky.[3]**

Daughters learn embroidery from their mothers who teach not only the techniques but the mythology that provides much of the subject matter for their images. Styles in the village gradually change according to the inclination of successive generations of artists and the impact of cultures. Islamic influence is seen in the geometric mazes and flower patterns; the bright colors and looser flowing lines are Hindu in origin.

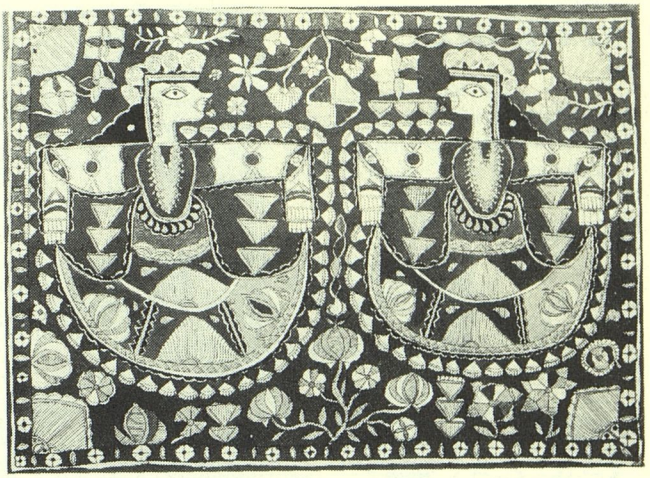
In the twentieth century industrialization has made inroads on every Indian village, no matter how remote. The survival of women's arts, especially embroidery is being threatened by the adoption of bright, mill-made cloth. Synthetic dyes have largely replaced traditional ones. Imitation printed or machine-sewn embroidery also appears now in place of the real thing. In recognition of this the All-India Handicrafts Board has provided incentives for maintaining quality by turning some previously noncommercial arts into quality-controlled commodities. This often has the opposite effect of the one intended, because the spark of life may go out of work produced for an unknown market whose needs are irrelevant to the rural craftsperson. Gandhi believed that it was possible and desirable for India to return to a village-centered economy in which the machine would be relegated to a minor role and the villager dictate the pace of life. Although his ideas are out of favor in present-day India, there is still a sentimental longing for that kind of simplicity in which the drive to create and survive comes out of the soil. The peasant woman holds on to the old ways for the time being, but there is no doubt that even she will become a victim, willing or not, of the changes that have afflicted the West since the industrial revolution.

[1]John Irwin, *Textiles and Ornaments of India* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1956), p. 29.
[2]Anand, Mulk Raj, "The Hand and the Heart," *MARG* (Bombay: Marg Publications, 1969), p. 6.
[3]Irwin, p. 20.

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Mithila Paintings

Erika Moser

Mithila is a large region in North Bihar with an ancient high culture which is represented in the Sanskrit written tradition of the Brahman caste. The "painting women of Mithila" who belong to this elite sociocultural stratum are a numerical minority. They have more leisure time to practice their art skills than do women of lower castes.

What is specific to the art of these Maithil women? To answer this question it is necessary to understand the traditional hierarchy of arts and artisans. As in our own culture, manual labor and handmade art such as sculpture or painting have, in spite of highly developed techniques and theories, been considered less prestigious professions than mental labor and intellectual art like poetry. In a male-dominated hierarchical society like India's, the latter sphere is traditionally occupied, with few exceptions, by men of high rank. Tasks requiring skilled hands are relegated to low-caste occupational specialists.

In addition to the arts and crafts of specialists, nonprofessional domestic art is produced by women as part of their household duties. Ornamental decoration with symbolic meaning is made on festive occasions to beautify the home, household utensils, and those who live in the house. The numerous festivities of the life and calendar cycles, especially marriages, are functional occasions for the art of women. The most eye-catching of the domestic arts are the wall and floor drawings, two aspects of the total range of women's traditional arts which use many media, styles and contents. Wall murals feature motifs of gods and goddesses, epic scenes, brides and grooms and fertility symbols. Floor designs are made with rice flour dissolved in water and drawn with the fingers to mark a kind of ground altar for household rituals. What is considered the ritual center of the drawing is covered very carefully with earth after ritual use so that no one will accidentally step on it. The other ornamental forms, however, remain exposed to the sun and rain.

Objects of high aesthetic quality are created as gifts for friends and relatives and as donations to the gods. Such domestic art done by women is usually not highly esteemed. In fact the concept of art is usually not applied to it though its creative qualities equal those of classical art. There are various explanations for the low prestige of women's traditional domestic arts:

The objects are primarily functional, having an everyday household use rather than being representative monuments of social prestige. In addition, symbolic items are prepared for one time use only in a specific ritual context.

The raw material out of which the art is made is usually regarded as being of little value because it is freely available, e.g., grass, mud, flowers and other organic material, self-prepared colors. Also, the materials tend not to be durable so that objects become unattractive within a short time. The objects are predominantly hand-worked. Highly developed tools and technologies are rarely used in their production. This kind of art is available without cost, a feature which tends to undermine its appreciation.

High-caste Brahman males may become defiled by doing manual labor; thus domestic work is left to low-caste servants and housewives. In this context, how was it possible that out of the mass of women in India a few could break out of the rigid traditional value system to become famous as a group in the world market of naive and folk art, producing paintings which sell as "Mithila paintings"?

A clue to the answer lies in the word "market." In 1967–1968, after a famine, the government of India carried out a relief program in North Bihar. At that time, various handicrafts were bought and women were encouraged to prepare *sikki* grass work and other traditional folk arts on payment. Pupul Jayakar, the woman who headed the Handicrafts and Handlooms Exports Corporation at that time in Delhi, introduced the idea of distributing handmade paper among village women so that they could transfer their traditional motifs from murals and floor designs on to paper and create marketable products. The All-India Handicrafts Board promoted this project. In response to a Western demand for naive and folk art with ritual and oriental themes, the Mithila paintings became commercially successful. Unlike the ritual traditional art forms, the paintings on paper are not symbolic forms of meditation and prayer, but are made explicitly in order to earn money. (When the demand is there, they are produced daily.) This, at least, is the way the women themselves view their artistic achievements.

About 500 women in the region paint for the market. For most women painting is not the main source of family income. The money earned through painting is rarely available for personal use. In most cases, male members of the family collect and spend the money the women earn. But even though the earnings are not theirs to keep, most benefit from their work either psychologically or by eliciting what has rarely been possible for them—social prestige and respect from male family members. (Three of the women received the highest prize, the "National Award of Master-Craftsmen" from the All-India Handicrafts Board.) Together, the women painters of Mithila have achieved collective acclaim for their region.

The concepts of art and creativity in our Western sense do not exist at all in this context. What we mean by traditional art is for these women a part of domestic ritual decoration, which extends far beyond the area of drawing and painting. Painting has been selected for promotion from the whole complex of domestic art skills because critical criteria have been brought in from the outside. These criteria, deduced from Western traditional art academic categories, value painting as highly-esteemed bourgeois art. Typical female skills like embroidery do not have much worth on such scales. The women of Mithila in fact value textile art skills and, above all, the fine weaving of *sikki*, higher than painting.

Interestingly, when formerly disregarded female work succeeds commercially, males join the ranks, and, in this case, even Brahman men have acted as helpers, publicity agents or even as painters.

The art of the women of Mithila is exemplary of an indigenous woman's art as opposed to women's art in the West which still, in the realm of "fine" arts, may be regarded as imitative of dominating male art styles. The ideology that male artists have been the major creative geniuses and that women have been the followers is usually accepted without question on the simple basis that there have been more famous male artists in the history of art. Only in some seemingly insignificant corners of the world has female creativity had the chance to develop without male competition, mainly in the domestic sphere.

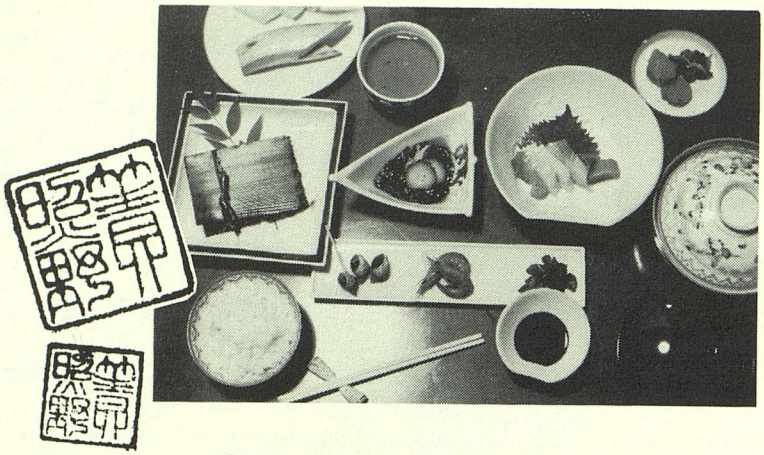
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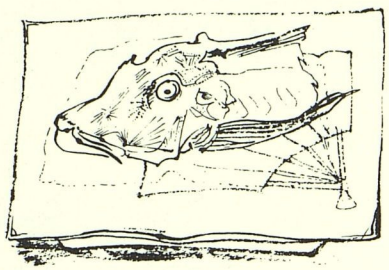
Japan.

Food! I dreamed of it incessantly!

It was a challenge. I could see it but couldn't order it. In Japan it was beautifully arranged. Everytime I went into a restaurant I tried to photograph it first - before and after shots. Sometimes the fish were so strange and combinations so exotic, I'd have to draw them first, before I ate them... Perhaps it took their power away. Or, I just got accustomed to them.



One day I went into the kitchen of a Ryokan. (Japanese Inn) to see who was doing all the wonderful arranging. I was surprised to see it was an established pattern. Each inn used certain plates and textures for certain dishes.



Everything was arranged according to color, or texture.

A bowl of rice had red pickles in it for color. A fish was covered with a leaf to hide its bones. One morning they started breakfast with a cherry on a toothpick. I thought I'd starve - but it was just to set the stage.

Dinners are studies in still life. Plate sizes - lacquer against porcelain. Or images. One of the fanciest dinners I had was... sake first... Then a chestnut, three pieces of raw fish on a leaf, four tiny caramelized things that I first thought were roasted roaches but luckily turned out to be only little dead fish. Also, Still an hors d'oeuvres - a tiny scallop like substance on a piece of lemon, decorated on the plate with a stem from an iris or day lily. The main course was tempura. Presented in a beautiful basket were four large shrimp - a fried leaf and two pieces of squash. The host stopped eating after the hors d'oeuvres. Guess he really shrunk his stomach!





Mingei... Folk arts can be found everywhere.

This grandmother - a retired nurse - makes Wara-Uma. (Straw horses)

Made from fresh straw and an acorn, decorated with fabric - it is used as a symbol of good luck, or as a wish fulfillment for a marriage.

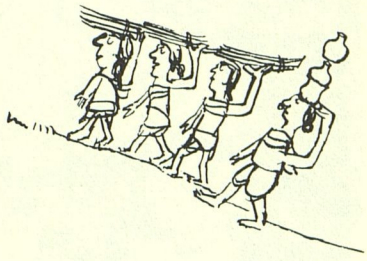
Supposedly, it carries the GOD Doso-Gin on its back when he visits the world to bring prosperity and avert disaster.

Photographed in Magome - a posting station on the old Nakasendo highway.

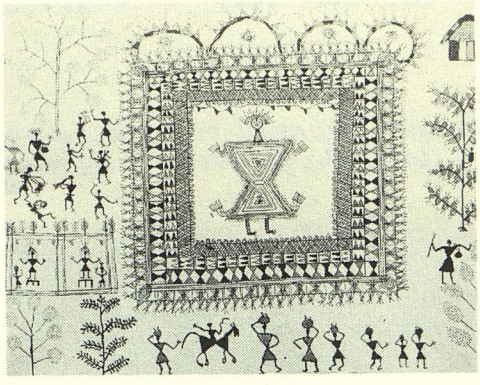
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INDIA.
WARLI TRIBAL WOMEN
AND THEIR WALL PAINTINGS

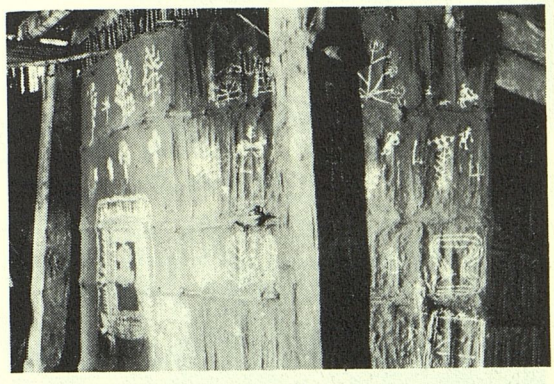




To beautify is a human impulse. In this Warli Tribal village, several hours outside of Bombay, the hand is used to decorate the home. It is both a protection and a design. The side of the hand and the fingers were also "stamped" in a repeat pattern. Perhaps this was the forerunner of the paisley print!

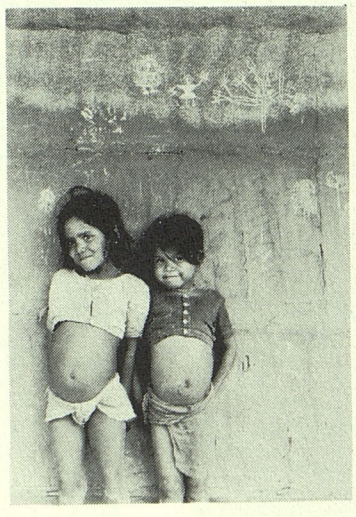


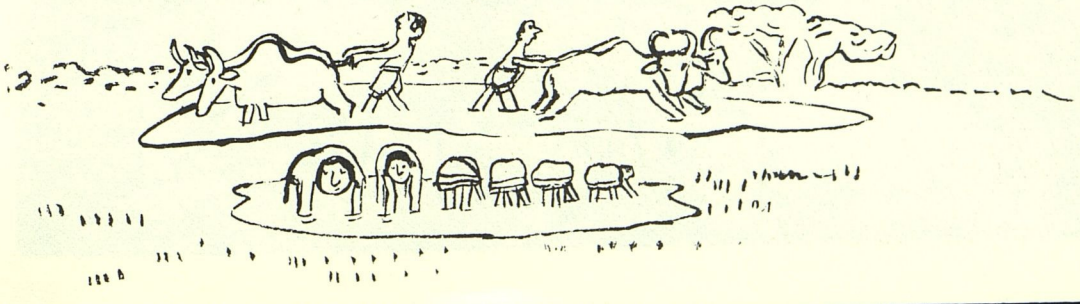
Traditionally, the women paint on the walls inside their homes for festivals, harvests or marriages. It is a group tradition - the women enjoy singing and decorating together and telling stories with their pictures.



It is a job for mature women! The young girls learn by watching their mothers, and practicing on the outside walls of their homes.



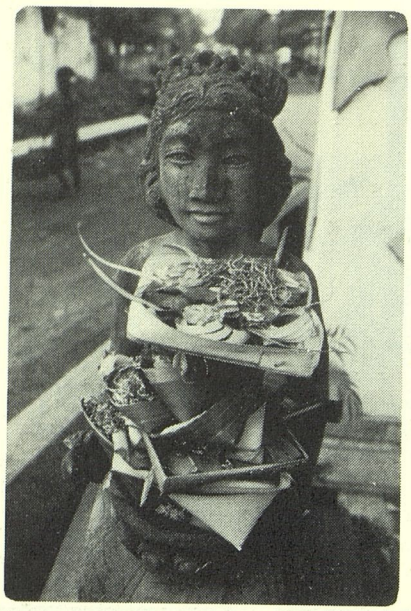




The village is small. All work as a collective unit. The day I was there, all the women were harvesting rice.

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Indonesia, Bali. Island of Spirits, Temples...and of the Arts...



Offerings everywhere. a country that smells of flowers and cloves. women making daily offerings in the home, the family temples or the hotels.



Color. Leaves and flowers.

Women may be seen carrying huge offerings on their heads. They may be walking up a steep mountain, or riding their bicycles to the temple grounds. After the festival, the offerings are taken home and eaten.

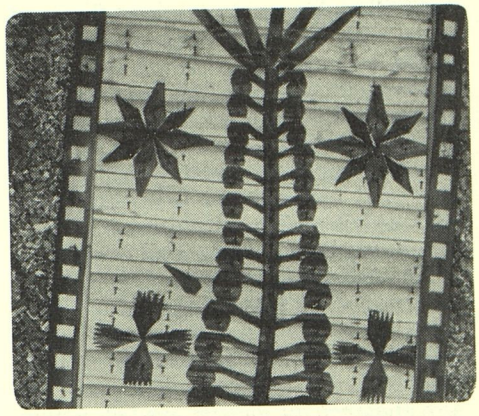


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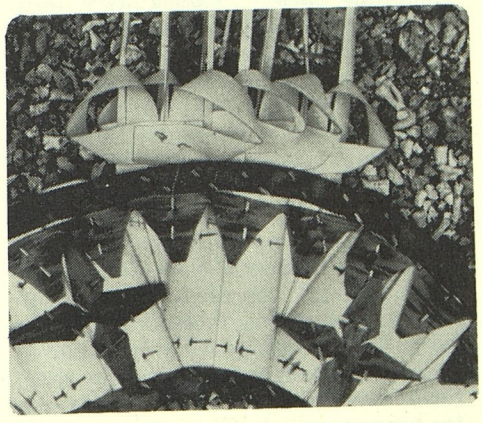


Offerings, sometimes six feet high, are made of colored sticky rice in rich pinks and yellows, arranged in patterns and decorated with leaves, flowers and barbecued chickens. Everything is gaily decorated, including the ornate base.

Lamak offerings are hung in the temples and from the trees. They are made with cut leaves and bound together with strips of bamboo as toothpicks.



Leaves are twisted, notched and curled.

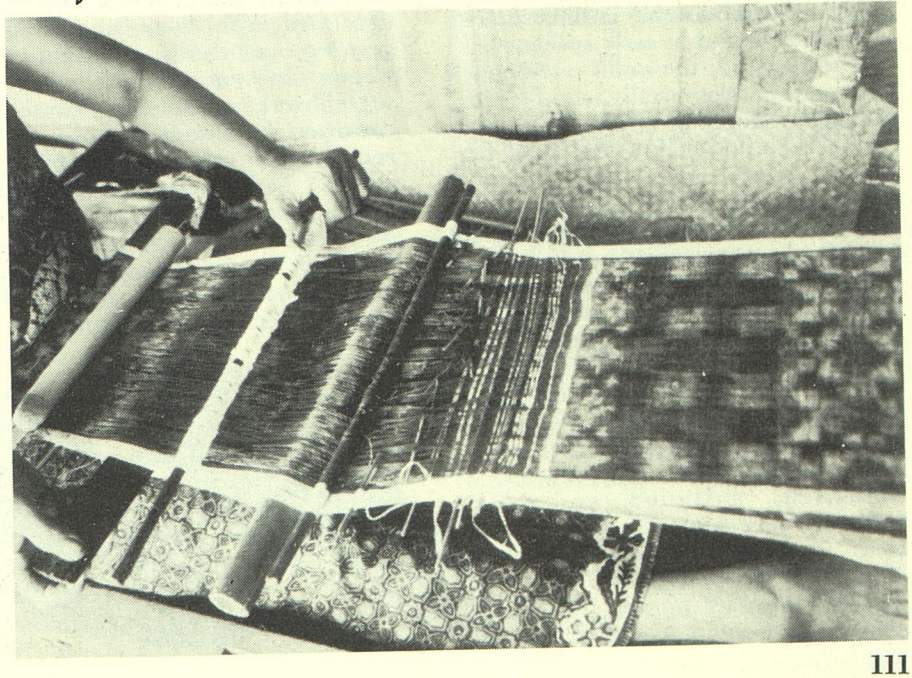


Some lamak offerings are twenty feet long. These beautiful objects wither and die within a day. So they are made afresh — with the same loving devotion, for the next festival.



Cloth is still used as a ritual fabric. In the village of Tenganan, a rare double ikat called kamben gringsing (or "flaming cloth") is woven. Some take as much as five years to weave. Then, only the "imperfect" ones are sold.

In 1973, there were just three women left in all of Bali who knew the complete technique.



Evelyn Stern is a graphic designer, teacher and the Director of the Society for Folk Arts Preservation, Inc.

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QUILL ART

Carolyn Berry

Quillwork, the decoration of animal skins with dyed and natural porcupine quills, was unique to North American Indian culture and practiced only by women. This art form probably originated in the Great Lakes area and the surrounding woodlands. As white invasion and colonization intensified, the various tribes of corn farmers originally inhabiting the area migrated west to the Plains where eventually their culture centered on buffalo hunting. The Cheyenne were one such tribe who brought with them women's ancient art of quillwork.

A balance of power existed within Cheyenne society. Chiefs were men, but there were memories of women's holding this position. Cheyenne society was matrilineal. Women owned the tipis in which they lived with their husband, daughters, daughters' husbands and unmarried sons. A wealthy man could have more than one wife; frequently sisters married the same man. If the first wife didn't approve of her husband's choice she could divorce him, although she might commit suicide (by hanging herself with her braids). Chastity was highly honored; girls and women wore the chastity rope. Seduction and rape were extremely rare (as was murder). Girls' puberty was celebrated ritually, and women maintained their own societies, traditions, religious beliefs and secular position. Sharing of work by women made possible the long hours necessary for such a precise and painstaking art as quillwork.

Quills, obtained from porcupines which the men hunted, were removed promptly, sorted into different sizes and stored in bladder bags. The largest and coarsest quills, taken from the tail, were used in broad masses of embroidery. Medium quills came from the back of the animal and small ones from the neck. The finest were taken from the belly and were used for "the most delicate lines so noticeable in the exquisite work to be found in early specimens."[1]

After sorting, the quills were boiled with natural dyes usually found locally, although Cheyenne would travel great distances to find plants needed for particular colors. Dye stuffs included moss, stones, buffalo-berries, wild grapes, cattails, oak bark and many other barks, flowers and seeds. The ingredients and process were often kept secret. Eventually quills were colored with commercial dyes or soaked with dyed trade cloth.

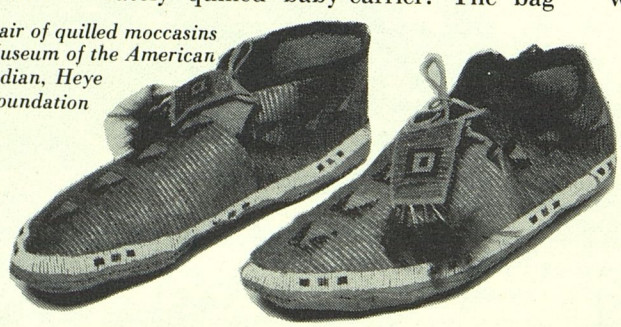
Quills were sewn onto skins tanned by the women; in this process, many days long, the skin was stretched, scraped, bleached, softened and stretched once again. Tanning tools were handed down by women from generation to generation. After tanning the skins, the woman would cut and shape the leather into the object she intended to embroider with quills.

As she worked, the woman held a supply of quills in her mouth to soften them so they could be flattened. Since they would split if punctured, quills were held to the skin between rows of stitches or with a stitch over each quill. Sinew, dried black grass and fine roots were used for sewing. The sinew thread was kept moist except for one end, which was licked, twisted and let dry to stiffen. This was then threaded through holes made in the hide with an awl. Extra sewing supplies were carried in a quill-decorated purse trappers called "possible-sacks," in which women also kept small ornaments, medicine, counters for gambling, plum stones for the seed game and clothes for small children.[2]

Countless articles for daily and ritual use were embroidered with quills: tobacco and tinder bags, work bags, knife cases, cradles, burden straps, moccasins, shirts, leggings, arm and leg bands, robes, horse trappings, dresses, deerskin rolls for braided hair, lodge linings, stars for lodges, back-rests, pillows, lodge sacks, flutes, saddles, combs, stick rattles for dancing and ceremonial gift pipes.

The two distinct natural surfaces—the soft tanned hide and the stiff colored quills—made an extraordinary and beautiful art form. The quills were shiny, almost translucent, as if some spirit of the animal remained. Later when beads were used in many of the ancient quill patterns, old people often complained that they had no life, that beads were dead. Though quills were individually small, the mass of a rope decorated with them was large and glowing, colorfully accentuating the wearer's movements.

Quillwork was not only beautiful but conveyed important symbols. "To a considerable extent each article decorated had a characteristic design which bore some relation to the use of the article or the attributes of its owner."[3] A quilled bag for a baby to handle was suspended from an elaborately quilled baby-carrier. The bag contained the child's umbilical cord and was carried for her or his life on the left side.



Pair of quilled moccasins Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation

Some designs were specific to either women or men. Turtle designs were worn only by women. They were "used on the yoke of a woman's dress and leggings and at the head or side of the baby-carrier or cradle . . . as a talisman. The U-shaped design below the yoke of the woman's dress represented the breast of the turtle, the wing-like extensions corresponding to the sides of the shell. Used symbolically the turtle design had power over the diseases peculiar to women and also over birth and infancy."[4]

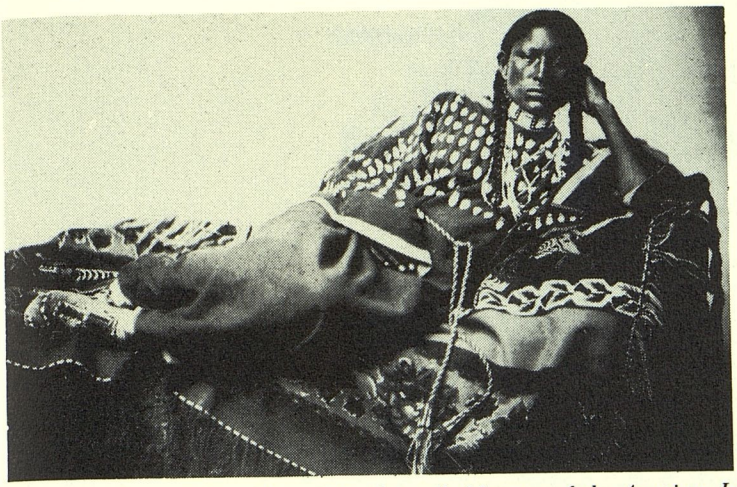
"The red line, much used in both quill and beadwork, was known as the life span or 'the trail on which woman travels,' and was regarded as symbolic of that portion of a woman's life during which children may be born. Red lines or stripes on articles used by women were often associated with women's functions and virtues and symbolized the good life."[5] The face of a girl at her first menstrual period was painted with red lines (or she might be painted red all over). Red lines around the edge of a lodge indicated that people coming into the camp would be fed by the women living there.

In Cheyenne quillwork the majority of designs were abstract. They "had significance above specific happenings and were related to religion. These designs were composed of symbols which followed the pure geometric forms [woman's art]. Later they acquired a protective connotation in which a circle, spiral or some other motif represented the power which would offer magical aid or give comfort to the one for whom the needlework was made."[6] Circles representing the ancient sacred circle were used in both women's and men's art. Women added quilled circles to robes as holy protective objects.

In the art of the Cheyenne (and the Sioux) a spiderweb design was quilled onto a child's robe by a medicine woman as a symbol of power and future well-being.[7] Since a spider's work frequently has been a metaphor for women's weaving and embroidery, this recurrent design may have had symbolic importance for the Cheyenne. The analysis of women's iconography has been overlooked in most descriptions of their work, which also discount the women's style as "merely decorative" because it is abstract.

When Americans or others commissioned an Indian woman to quill or bead an object, they often expected a replica of something beautiful they had seen and admired. The showman Buffalo Bill asked a famous Cheyenne woman, "The Bead Woman," to make a decorated shirt for him, but was unhappy with it because it was a floral design. When he ordered another one

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Woman with smoother, Mrs. E.C. Grinnell, Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation

from another Cheyenne woman he was again disappointed. He was not aware that "the Cheyenne designs are a sacred trust that comes down the woman's line, to be used only for full-bloods."[8]

As quillworkers women participated in creating ritually important objects. They worked with the men in the creation of scalp shirts which held the hair of enemies killed and horses wounded in battle. Only the bravest men could possess them, and only the most moral women decorated them. Men hunted the animal and women tanned the skin. Men painted the shirt and women quilled or beaded the panels with sacred designs. Each did the work under strict supervision of an honored person of their sex who had done the work before and was ritually approved.[9]

Sacred quillwork was permitted only to members of the Quillworkers Society which, like the Women's War Society, consisted of the most courageous and skilled women, known as *Mon in i heo*, the selected ones.[10] Quillwork "must be done in prescribed ceremonial fashion, and the [initiate] must be taught to perform it by some member [of the Society] who had previously done the same thing. The making and offering of such a robe [or other item] in the prescribed way secured the maker admission to the Society of women who had done similar things."[11] A candidate would announce her intention to embellish a certain item, usually to bring protection to a child or warrior or to fulfill a sacred vow. If the Society approved, a crier announced the plan to the tribe.

The woman prepared a feast for members of the Society. These individuals reviewed past creations—the designs and the circumstances—very much as warriors recounted their coups. After the feast an old woman was asked to make the design for the robe, which she drew on the skin with a stick and white clay.[12] Throughout the long period of work to make the robe or other objects there were many strict observances. If the woman made a mistake in sewing, a brave man who had counted many coups was called upon. Reciting his experiences, he slipped his knife under the sinew to cut the thread. The completion of the object was announced by the crier of the Society and ceremonies followed.



Northern Cheyenne dress made of cloth with cowrie and dentalium shells (Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation)

Cheyenne tradition respected the Quillworkers Society whose "origins were sacred, for their ritual and ceremonies came from the Man who married the Buffalo Wife. The traditions concerning the Buffalo Wife are, in turn, linked to the coming of the Sun Dance ceremonies from the Buffalo people themselves.[13] Part of the strength and power that enabled the women to do the work emanated from the sacred bundle associated with the Society.[14] Their work was so important that a warrior could count coups on a completed work under certain conditions.

Glass beads and woolen and cotton cloth became valued trade items for the Plains tribes. As early as 1595 Europeans were considering what color beads provided the best rate of exchange.[15] Women adopted beads for traditional and innovated designs. By 1850 cloth was replacing skins for use as robes or being combined with skin on various articles.[16] Quilling was the preferred way to embellish highly religious objects, even after beadwork had become popular.

Around the time the tribe was being relocated in Oklahoma (Indian Territory), many fine old pieces were traded for horses, especially when one group, the Northern Cheyenne, started returning to its native lands. Traders, aware of how extraordinary these objects were, had begun to obtain them in the mid-19th century and maybe earlier. It is remarkable that any of the fragile quillwork survived the years of warfare and relocations during which the Cheyenne struggled for their very existence as a culture. Because of the reverence in which sacred quillwork was held, skins decorated with ceremonial symbols were handed down for centuries from one generation to another.[17]

Today Cheyenne women make beadwork in the old way, but it is slow, as it has always been. No one doubts its value or beauty, but the women say no one will pay for the labor necessary to make elaborate pieces with customary care. Despite the difficulty for Cheyenne women of obtaining materials and the necessity of their selling work for income, the Beadworkers Society still sponsors women's honored work, continuing traditional tribal values. Its existence reflects the strength of Cheyenne women—particularly as a force for maintaining their culture in the rapidly-changing world in which they now live.

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1 William C. Orchard, *The Technique of Porcupine Quill Decoration among the Indians of North America* (New York: Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, 1971 [1916]), p. 9.
2 George Bird Grinnell, *The Cheyenne Indians*, Vol. II (Omaha: University of Nebraska, 1972), p. 245.
3 Carrie H. Lyford, *Quill and Beadwork of the Western Sioux* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Division of Education, 1940), p. 78.
4 Lyford, p. 78.
5 *Ibid.*
6 Georgiana Brown Harkeson, *American Needlework* (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1938), p. 7.
7 Lyford, p. 78.
8 Mari Sandoz, *Cheyenne Autumn* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1953), p. 180.
9 Peter J. Powell, "The Enduring Beauty of Cheyenne Art," *The American West*, July 1973, p. 9.
10 Grinnell, Vol. I, p. 168.
11 Grinnell, Vol. I, p. 160.
12 Grinnell, Vol. I, p. 163.
13 Powell, p. 9.
14 Harkeson, p. 3.
15 Lyford, p. 66 and p. 37.
16 Sandoz, p. 36.
17 Harkeson, p. 7.

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Turkmen Women, Weaving and Cultural Change

Mary A. Martin

Turkmen carpets are fine examples of weaving done by nomadic tribal women. In the last 100 years the context of weaving these carpets has changed considerably; formerly women produced them in the home for local consumption, now contract weavers and female and male factory workers produce for urban and foreign markets. In the nineteenth century the Turkmen lived in the Kara Kum desert in that part of Central Asia which is now the Soviet Socialist Republic of Turkmenistan. This tribe primarily raised sheep and occasionally farmed. They sometimes raided neighboring areas. Nomads, they lived in tents called *yurts* which could be packed up and taken with them when they moved from one grazing area to another.

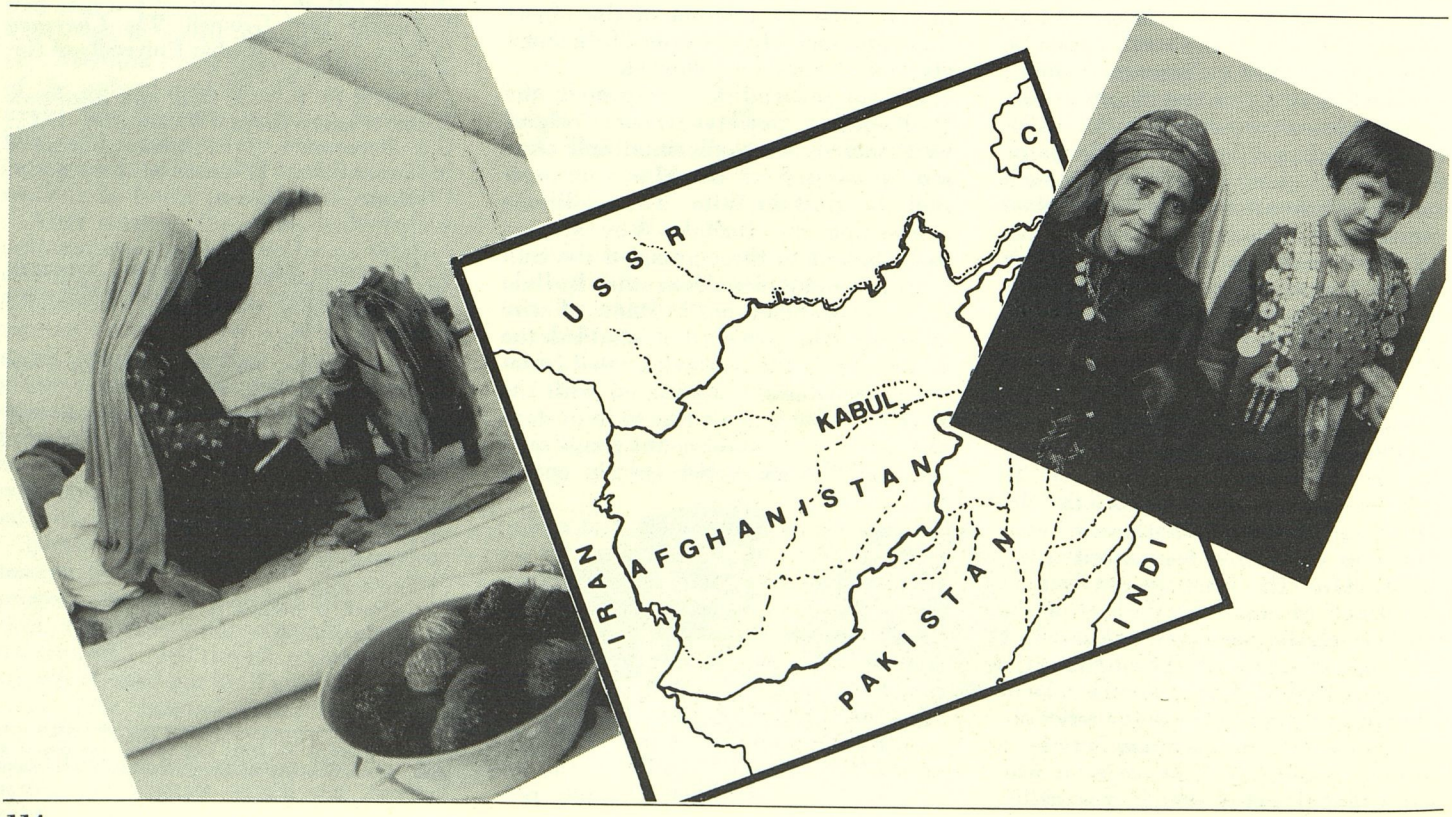
Traditionally women made textile items for domestic use. For their *yurts* they made felt walls and decorative bands. They also knotted or embroidered individual bags for carrying tent poles, utensils, provisions and other household possessions. A special carpet was hung at the entrance of the *yurt* and another was hung to function as a door.

Carpets woven by women were central to household, cultural and religious life: used for entertaining, given as gifts, spread for community gatherings, used to furnish guesthouses, and used for prayers. Turkmen society regarded a woman's weaving skill much as it esteemed a man's code of valor; weaving defined a woman's status, indirectly gave her access to wealth, was the one domain in which a woman was able to distinguish herself.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century the life of the Turkmen changed because Russia took permanent political and military control and inhibited Turkmen raids of surrounding populations. At this time many Turkmen moved to Afghani territory although it was not until the 1920s that large numbers fled to Afghanistan to escape Soviet collectivization.

In Afghanistan the Turkmen competed for pastures and living space with other ethnic groups—Pashtun, Aimaq, Hazara, Tajik, Baluch, Arab and Uzbeg. As the pasturage was limited in Afghanistan and Turkmen flocks reduced, many Turkmen settled into villages; few continued to live as nomads in *yurts*. If families did not raise enough sheep to provide wool for their weaving needs they had to purchase it—no longer from other Turkmen but from other tribes, such as the tent-dwelling Pashtun. Individual or market trading formerly carried out with kinsmen and other Turkmen was now done with groups who were neither.

The move to Afghanistan severely affected carpet weaving. For ten to fifteen years after arriving in Afghanistan Turkmen women did not make carpets.* When they began making carpets again, they had to overcome this break in tradition. They remembered carding, spinning and weaving techniques, but colors and patterns changed. Young girls had grown up without learning the traditional designs. When older women had died, they had taken with them the knowledge of traditional patterns and of dye recipes. Changes in color in twentieth-century carpets may also be related to the difficulty of obtaining customary vegetable dyes and mordants in a new ecological setting. The breed of sheep and quality of wool also differed in the new environment. De-



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signs once unique to particular tribal sections, isolated from each other in the past, changed as they came into direct contact with each other. Women now married into other groups which led to the mixing of traditional designs.

The society in which Turkmen live has been transformed since the nineteenth century, affecting the women who traditionally weave the carpets as well as their relation to the mode of production of these carpets. Production has shifted its locus from kinship units to a nonkinship context, the factory. The family mode of production could not meet the rising demand for carpets, thus contract weaving and factories increased.

The first factories in the provinces employed only men, but women were weaving out of the home in women's centers or prisons at that time. In the past few years factories in Kabul have begun to train and employ women who weave in rooms separate from the men. Because of the profit to be gained from weaving, non-Turkmen women have begun to take up carpet weaving—often by apprenticing themselves to Turkmen women in their homes or by going to the factories to learn. Weaving now serves as one of the few nondomestic occupations open to women in Afghanistan. At a time when the family-centered tribal society is breaking down, carpet weaving allows women an opportunity to participate in a more complex, non-kin-based economy.

Since the days when Turkmen women lived on the Russian steppes and wove for their families, conditions have changed. The women who remained in the Soviet Union were employed in state-controlled factories before the women who moved to Afghanistan.

Afghani Turkmen women still weave under traditional conditions or on contract; primarily it is non-Turkmen women in Afghanistan who have begun factory work. Where Turkmen women oversee the process in factories, the high quality of weave has been maintained.

Turkmen women have always had an important influence on weaving, originally produced for exclusively domestic use but now produced for market consumption as well. Although the traditional colors and designs have changed because of political boundaries, migration and altered modes of production, Turkmen women continue to produce fine examples of weaving.

Note: Material for this article comes from travel through Turkmen regions in Afghanistan in 1971 and observations in a Kabul carpet factory in December 1975 and February 1977. Special thanks are due to Hajji Ewaz Badghisi, his wife, Bayram, and daughter, Aidgol, for their patience in explaining the techniques of weaving and dyeing. I also wish to acknowledge the assistance of Dr. Brian Spooner and Pat Barr for their part in helping me learn about the Turkmen and their weaving in the twentieth century.

*Brian Spooner, "Afghan Carpets," *Expedition* 15 (2), 1973, p. 15.

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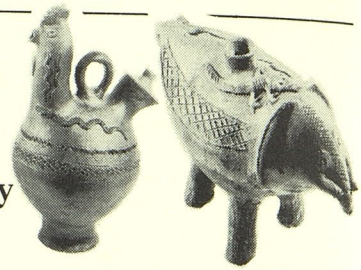


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Kongo Pottery: Woman's Art from Zaire

Janet MacGaffey



The superb work done by some African potters has been neglected as an art form and, since pottery is fragile and hard to transport, few examples of their work appear in museums. Potters among the Kongo people of Western Zaire in Central Africa are women and, in the region in which I lived during the course of anthropological fieldwork, they make a matte black ware. Its production continues to flourish in the face of competition from factory-made products, although on a smaller scale than in the past, because the potters have adapted the form and function of their pots to changing social conditions.

One of these potters is Mayivangwa Thérèse. Watching her making a pot, one is struck by her absolute absorption and obvious satisfaction and enjoyment in perfecting its shape and decorating it. Sometimes she sings to herself as she smoothes a surface or incises a hatched band of decoration. Her meticulous care in achieving a perfectly shaped pot or delicately attached molded ornamentation is the mark of a perfectionist and her works are masterpieces of the potter's art.

To reach her village, Mbanza Manteke, I found a local truck carrying passengers and produce. The houses in Manteke are strung along the road and vary from cement block to adobe brick to wattle and daub. Arriving in the village on a hot afternoon I found Mayivangwa sitting on a mat behind her house making pots. She does not do this every day since potting is a part-time occupation that has to be fitted in with all the other things a Kongo woman does. Women produce and prepare all the food—sowing, cultivating and harvesting the crops—as well as fetching water and firewood, and caring for their homes and children. When potting, Mayivangwa works for most of the day, making a number of pots in each of several styles, drying and storing them until she has a number suitable for firing.[1]

The village of Mbanza Manteke has a population of 582. It is the seat of local government for the district and has a school, dispensary and the offices of the mayor and police, but most of the villagers are subsistence farmers with little money. The village is isolated from town life with its stores and businesses, which is why Mayivangwa's pots are still in demand in the village despite the influx into Zaire of enamel ware, cheap crockery and aluminum pots and pans.

Traditionally pots were made for purely utilitarian purposes; their decoration and artistic merit varied according to the talent and creativity of the potter. Big conical vessels for cooking

Myth and the Sexual Division of Labor

Virginia Maksymowicz

Clay is a material packed with connotative richness. For the past few years, it has been my primary medium as a sculptor. The fact that many cultures traditionally have assigned clayworking to women began to intrigue me.[1] Is it merely the pliability of clay or the fact that it can be worked on near the home, among children, that has, in many cases, made it a female-connected material?

In terms of cross-cultural study (including both Western and non-Western societies), George Murdock and Caterina Provost[2] have made one of the best attempts at examining some of the contributing factors to sexual division of labor: tendencies for males to be physically stronger than females; for females to be "burdened" by pregnancy and childcare, and thus to be assigned to soft materials and simple tools and processes; and for the sex that utilizes a product to be the sex that produces it. Even though these factors are certainly worth mentioning, Murdock and Provost's study avoids even hypothetical explanations of some of these tendencies and skirts around a major cultural component: *the myth*. Myth permeates the structure of all societies; entire social systems can actually be constructed around myth (modern U.S. society included).

Since the majority of societies do seem to function, I find it hard to believe that they are based on pure fiction. Myth is not fiction alone. It is, in a way, a combination of fact *and* fiction which results in an "extended" fact (fact + story = extended fact/myth). And so when Murdock and Provost suspect at one point that masculine strength is an inadequate explanation for the division of labor, they begin to hit on something: perhaps most societies are not based on the actual physical differences between the sexes *but on the myths surrounding and extending these differences.*

Mythmaking seems to be an attempt to explain the unknown and to unify disparate elements in the world. Whatever its origin or purpose, the tendency nevertheless runs strong in humanity and is closely tied to symbolmaking. But while Murdock and Provost have described the *denotative* meanings of tasks and materials in their study, they have overlooked the *connotative*—the symbolic and mythical aspects to which many of these activities and objects are bound. If symbols are "storage units" (Victor Turner's term[3]) which consolidate a maximum of information and if, as much research has shown, a great number of things have both functional and symbolic meaning, then we can probably assume that many sexually assigned tasks are very "loaded" indeed. So maybe it's not the actual hardness or softness of the materials, or the ease with which they can be worked upon that determines sex divisions (though in extreme cases this might hold true), but the *connotations* attached to these qualities.

I propose that the "femaleness" of clay is based on the mythology and symbology surrounding this material rather than on the material itself. This seems even more likely when one considers how complex and widespread clay—and, inseparably, earth—symbolism is.

On a general level most of us have encountered a common modern earth/woman myth: "Mother Earth" is the progenitor of all living things. The earth is a womb into which seeds are placed to be nurtured; the sky (masculine) pours down its rain (semen) to produce plant growth (life). Countries (home-lands) are quite often referred to in feminine terms. The dead are returned to the earth, their origin, their "mother." In our society, however, the origin of these myths has been lost. We no longer remember the stories on which they are based. True, we still have the Creation in the Book of Genesis, but in terms of earth/woman symbology, the link is weak. Nevertheless the symbolism lingers in verbal analogy.

But on a specific level, how does an individual culture integrate myth with the operative functions of society? While researching this article, I came across a society where the women are the primary clayworkers and where the female/earth symbolism and mythology are strong: the Mwambao Zaramo of Tanzania.

The Zaramo are matrilineal. Their creation myth (see Marja-Liisa Swantz[4]) traces the origin of life to a woman, Nyalutanga, who is connected to the origin of everything. The name itself is related to Zaramo verbs meaning to spread about and to nouns referring to large ground mats as well as to a cucumber plant which crawls and spreads rapidly. In the myth, Nyalutanga emerges from the earth and, as her name suggests, this first woman and the fertile earth become nearly interchangeable.

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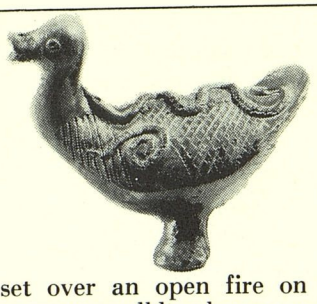
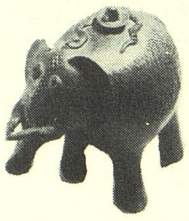
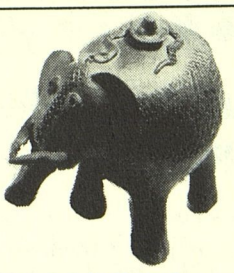




photo: Charles Metzger

were set over an open fire on three hearthstones; small bowls were used for eating and drinking; small water carriers fit into a long, narrow, plaited palm-frond basket carried from the spring on a woman's head; large jars two feet high were kept in houses to store and cool water.

A Kongo woman has a budget separate from her husband's; once she has fed her family she can do what she wants with the surplus produce of her fields and keep the proceeds if she sells it. Likewise a potter keeps the money she earns from selling pots.

Mayivangwa sells her pots for a small sum in the village: in 1965 the price was about 25 cents. Sometimes she takes some to Kinshasa where they fetch about six dollars in the Ivory Market, a big market in the city center catering to tourists and the wealthy. The reason for the higher price in the city is a change in the function of these pots: from being considered purely utilitarian objects they are now in demand in the city as items of traditional art. For some time Mayivangwa has been making a number of purely ornamental pottery pieces, as well as the traditional utilitarian forms, to cater to this new art market. Some examples are shown here: two elephants, a water pot in the form of a chicken and a duck. They reflect the influence of European ornamental china animals that Mayivangwa has seen in stores or that have been brought home to the village by sailors, but she has created her own Africanized version, decorated with molded snakes and lizards. These creatures also appear on her water pots. Their significance is that they are considered by the Kongo to be mediators between this world and the other world of the dead: in Kongo cosmology water and amphibians are believed to mediate between the two worlds.

At the National Fair in Kinshasa in 1970 some of Mayivangwa's pitchers and ornamental pieces were exhibited. She had previously won prizes at similar events. Hers were the only pots from Lower Zaire in the exhibit; potters of her ability are rare in this area.

Generally potters pass on their skills to a relative. Mayivangwa is teaching her sister who lives in Kinshasa. These Kongo women are adapting to industrialization and urbanization by maintaining traditional forms appropriate to life today and responding creatively to changing needs.

1 For a detailed description of potmaking and pots, see my article "Two Kongo Potters," *African Arts*, Vol. IX, No. 1 (October, 1975).

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In this story two known facts are combined, and the resulting myth presents an equation: if earth produces life and growth and if woman produces life and growth, then earth = woman. The two are mutually symbolic, and one cannot be referred to without invoking the other. Thus to be a woman is to be part of the earth and to share in its fertility, to reproduce with vinelike profusion, drawing nourishment from decaying matter (the symbolic cucumber plant flourishes on rubbish heaps). Initiated by woman, the earth became covered with people (a matrilineal line of descent).

Accordingly, that which is inextricably bound up with the earth and growth—agriculture and the cultivation of plants—is also symbolic of, and therefore delegated to, woman. Women are recognized as the originators of cultivation. That Zaramo women are prominent in agricultural work is supported by Nyalutanga's gift of the knowledge and use of plants to women, who in turn instructed the men.

The very existence and cycle of human life are dependent on woman/earth and are consolidated in and assured by Nyalutanga. Everything taught to young girls during formal instruction, maturity rites and pregnancy rites centers around this earth mother. She is the link between the earth, life and death. In agriculture, decaying life is the fertilizer for new life. In Zaramo mythology, there is a continuing theme of existing life arising out of the death of other organic matter. The earth becomes a womb where decay must take place before new life, human life, can begin. In Zaramo ritual, female and death symbolism are inseparable: if earth = woman and if the earth brings about decay and death, then woman brings about decay and death.

These life, death and earth ties constantly cross-reference themselves as well as other rituals. A Zaramo birth ritual involves performing a ritual burial after delivery. In various versions, the placenta, umbilical cord, first excrement and nail clippings are buried, returned to the earth. It is hypothesized that since the child had these things when s/he came into the world, they do not really belong to the child but rather to the true mother, the earth, to which they are returned. In another version of the birth ritual, the earth symbolism is reinforced by a reference to the death ritual. The placenta and cord are buried under the bed where the mother is resting and waiting to be washed. The bath waters are run over her body onto the ground and buried placenta below. The death ritual involves washing the corpse on a similar bed in nearly the same manner: the water is allowed to run over the body into a hole in the ground below.

The same "under the bed," "close to the ground" ritual elements are apparent and function as female symbolism in extra-ritual activities as well. The cooking pots (symbolically female in themselves, not only in Freudian "enclosure" terms, but in terms of their reference to cooking and the sustenance of life through food, and their being made of clay) are kept under the bed—again cross-referencing life and death.

It can be recognized from even these few isolated examples that female/earth symbolism permeates and reinforces Zaramo society. With such a strong cross-referencing symbol system, it becomes impossible for anyone *but* a woman to be involved in clayworking. If women are the source of all earth-, life- and death-related activities in every aspect of Zaramo life, then *only* a woman could employ a material like clay. And considering some of the uses to which the earthenware artifacts are put—pots for cooking (nourishment), vessels for washing (birth and death rituals)—it is again in keeping with the mythological structure for a woman to make these objects.

Fortunately, Zaramo mythology is easily accessible and ostensibly at work in their culture. It provides us with an opportunity to see some of the origins of sex-linked traditions in their society. Modern Western culture, on the other hand, has managed to overlay its own complex mythology with a veneer of apparent (to our eyes, at least) factuality. At this point, we are only beginning to take the first steps toward uncovering these myths which form the basis of our own cultural conventions.

1. Textor, Robert B., *A Cross-Cultural Summary*. (New Haven, Connecticut: HRAF Press, 1967).
2. George P. Murdock and Caterina Provost, "Factors in the Division of Labor by Sex: A Cross-Cultural Analysis," *Ethnology*, vol. 12, 1973.
3. Quoted in Marja-Liisa Swantz, *Ritual and Symbol in Transitional Zaramo Society* (Sweden: Almquist and Wiksells, 1970).
4. Swantz.

Thanks to Dr. Jehanne Teilhet for encouragement and guidance in the development of these ideas.

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Selections from

Recitation of the Yoruba Bride*

Those who stand—let them stand well.
Those who stoop—let them stoop well.
Those who sit on the verandah—
let them receive our thanks.
You the elders, who have come from far,
I thank you for honouring this day.
I pounded yam softly,
I offered it to Eshu the trickster,
Eshu refused to eat.
I prepared yam flour softly,
Eshu refused to eat.
Then I asked him:
'Will you stay indoors or outside?'
He said: 'Outside.'
When the dead come looking for me,
they will meet Eshu outside.
When disease comes looking for me,
it will meet Eshu outside.
But if a child comes looking for me,
it will meet me in my room.
When I left my house
my father told me
don't go through the market.
I said: 'But why?
Are you in debt?
Do you owe the butcher?'
When I left my home
my mother told me:
'Don't go through the market.'
I said: 'But why?
Are you in debt to the salt seller?'
You people of the world,
help me to thank my mother,
for she decked me out in clothes
rich enough
to make Olokun jealous,
the god of the sea.
My mother dressed me
in clothes so rich
I could confuse a god.
I am like a beggar woman
turned into a king's daughter.
They wanted to lead me to my husband's house
like a sheep to the market.
But my mother said, I should be escorted
like a free born child.
Let everybody thank my mother:
she did not allow me to borrow dresses
from those who would abuse me later.
And you, my friend Ilajue,
you my best friend:
This sudden marriage has spoiled many things for us.
We have been abusing people together,
we have been scorning together and laughing,
good things and bad, we never did them alone.
They say that marriage brings happiness
greater than any known before.
But were they thinking of you?
And you my parents:
when you don't see the river
will you forget the waves?
When you don't see the thunder
will you forget the rain?
When you don't see me any more—
will you forget me?
Is it not you who decide
when a child is old enough to have a quiver?
Is it not you who decide
when a child is old enough to have an arrow?
It was you who decided
that I was old enough
to move into another house.
Don't leave me alone in that place.
What I am proposing to do
you have done it yourselves with success.
Then let me succeed also.
If you don't know an elephant
at least you hear his voice.
If you don't know the sea
at least you have tasted salt in your soup.
If you don't know me: don't you hear my voice?
I looked right
but I saw no tree
taller than the silk cotton tree.
I looked left
but I saw no tree
taller than the silk cotton tree.
I looked in front of me
but I could not see anyone
who resembles my father.
What kind of god created me
in a sickly town
to make my relatives die like rotten yams?
If luck is not against me
I shall have them back
where I am going.
If luck is not against me
they shall re-enter the world
through me.
May luck not turn against the mother.
When luck turns against the hunter
the animal escapes.
When luck turns against the farmer
his land does not yield.
When luck turns against the mother
she will bury her children,
as if she were planting yams.
It is not my head that is bad
only fate.
My head—which is wearing a bright scarf today—
will surely give me
male and female children.
By this time last year
my husband was writing angry letters.
By this time last year
he was writing fighting letters.
But when this year came
he tore up his letters.
I am afraid—
not because I am a coward.
I am afraid—
not because I cannot fight.
It is this strange house
that is upsetting me.
Don't bathe me in medicines.
Forget about your charms.
My mother's care is enough for me.
I honour the bitter kola nut,
for through it I will gain Shango's favour.
I honour the red kola nut,
for through it I will gain the favour of the other gods.
The melon seed soup only offends the hungry man
who was not invited to the feast.
The smell of fried bananas only offends the hungry man
who was not invited to the feast.
I who have come to this world
with ripe breasts
I have offended my younger sisters.
Whom shall I turn to in this new house?
In the strange corridors
I never walked?
In the strange doors
I never entered?
Whom can I turn to in this strange house?
Some of them may say:
'See a loose girl coming.'
Let them talk today—
for tomorrow they shall be silenced.
Today is a glorious day.

From Ulli Beier, ed., *Yoruba Poetry* ©1970 Cambridge University Press. Reprinted by permission.

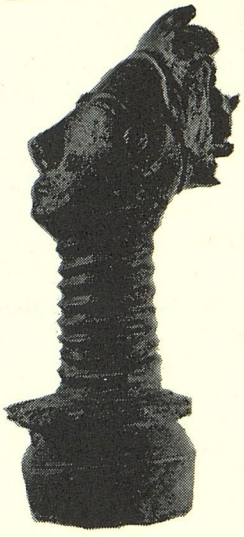
* *This long recitation by a bride is an example of improvised poetry that is common in Yoruba. The bride is decked out in her finery and, accompanied by drummers and a crowd of relatives, she is led to her husband's house. She is in a state of great excitement and, chanting all the time, she speaks about everything that comes to her mind.*

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"BY THE LAKESIDE THERE IS AN ECHO"

Towards a History of Women's Traditional Arts

Valerie Hollister and Elizabeth Weatherford



Delicate terra-cotta figurines were molded in clay by Agni women (Ivory Coast) as portraits destined for royal tombs.

"By the lakeside there is an echo. As they stand there with an open book the chosen passages are re-uttered from the other side by a voice that becomes distance and repeats itself . . . I say that that which is is. I say that that which is not also is. When she repeats the phrase several times the double, then triple, voice endlessly superimposes that which is and that which is not. The shadows brooding over the lake shift and begin to shiver because of the vibrations of the voice.
—Monique Wittig, *Lés Guérilleres*

For a more complete history of women's art we must know the actual circumstances of women's creativity and aesthetic contributions to culture. Scholars of traditional societies* assume that men's "art" is sacred and dangerous to women and children, while women's "craft" is significant only in the daily sphere and of no prime importance. These assumptions obscure the real and complex situation of women's artmaking and totally block an appreciation of their art.

We approached this article from different experiences. One of us, an anthropologist, is concerned with the current debates in feminist anthropological theory about women's power or lack of it. One argument states that in all cultures women, no matter how actively they participate in the society's life, are always considered inferior to men. Is this analysis true or are we so dependent on fragmentary reporting, usually based on the information of men, that we have not developed a way of knowing either women or their own evaluation of what they do? The other of us, a painter, interested for many years in the arts of Africa and the lives of African women, began this collaboration unknowingly influenced by the traditional arts of women. Both of us had been moved by the beauty of women's art in traditional societies and wished to consider the ramifications of women's public and private artmaking. This article comes out of our readings and conversations.

By assembling and analyzing the sparse information on the art of women in traditional societies we hope to raise questions which will provoke further research. We have organized our discussion into categories which emphasize questions about the scope of women's art and its relationship to their societies and to women's status within those societies.

THE ART OF WOMEN'S RITUALS

Birth, initiation, marriage and death are ritually celebrated by women in most societies and many female cults worship a patron goddess or god, but we can find only scattered references to the ritual art objects women make. Early missionary accounts of earth goddess rites in Nigeria[1] state that ceramic votary objects and clay goddess figures were made by the priestesses and their female initiates. Recent reports do not mention women making these clay figures.[2] Agni women of Ghana and Mangbetu women of Zaire make ritual funerary ceramics with portrait heads. (This anthropomorphic art is considered atypical of women's artmaking.) Ceramic "figurines," abstract in form, are made by adult women in many African societies for the initiation rites of girls to explain the women's view of women and sexuality. Made of sundried clay, these are rarely collected by museums and little known by scholars.[3] Is women's ritual art not found because researchers assume that women do not make ritual art? We presume far more examples exist. Extensive documentation of these objects is necessary to expand our knowledge of women's art and their lives.

ART AS SYMBOLS OF AUTHORITY

Masks, free-standing figures and other carvings (apparently always made by men) are used as symbols of secular authority in traditional societies. Western anthropologists and collectors have been especially impressed by these forms, since they conform more closely to Western definitions of art. As the most frequently collected traditional artifacts, they are the most available for study. These objects are believed to be invested with power and the person who uses them wields that power. (Since they are usually commissioned, the artist is not identified with the object's power.) The literature implies that since women do not use these symbols of authority, they have little public power. The following examples show that these assumptions are not true.

In Sierra Leone and Liberia, the all-female Bundu society commissions masks for use as symbols of their authority. The helmet mask and woven body coverings worn by the women lend an awesome appearance to their dance performance and are invested with such power that they are utilized both in funeral rites and in intimidating males or females who insult women. In the Ivory Coast

*Tribal and peasant societies, with a nonmechanized technology, and with much social and political life centered on a kin group consisting of many generations connected by blood or marriage ties, not partaking indigenously of the Western cultural or economic tradition.

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Woman dancer of the Bundu *society wearing commissioned helmet mask.*



Woman from Hupa (north California) tribe in typical dress embellished with sea shells. Credit: Smithsonian



Fulani woman (the western Sudan) wearing traditional hair style.

Senufo women commission carvings for use in their divination society, the Sandogo.[4] Women's divination is considered essential to determining outcomes of important events and discovering causes for social disruptions. Although male-commissioned Senufo masks have been well analyzed, the art of the Sandogo society is frequently not discussed, giving an unbalanced view of women's power in this culture. In stratified societies, such as African cultures in which power was wielded jointly by female and male sovereigns, art work was commissioned by both, but we do not know in what ways it represented the female aspects of power.

Besides commissioned objects, women use dance to affirm their authority. Among the Kom and other groups in the Cameroons women participate in a disciplinary performance called *anlu*, if a parent or pregnant woman is insulted or beaten or an old woman abused, if incest occurs, or when the women of the village want to use discipline against men.

"*Anlu* is started off by a woman who doubles up in an awful position and gives out a high-pitched shrill, breaking it by beating on the lips with the four fingers. Any woman recognizing the sound does the same and leaves whatever she is doing and runs in the direction of the first sound. The crowd quickly swells and soon there is a wild dance to the tune of impromptu stanzas informing the people of what offence has been committed, spelling it out in such a manner as to raise emotions and to cause action . . . Then the team leaves for the bush to return at the appointed time, donned in vines, with painted faces, to carry out the full ritual . . . Vulgar parts of the body are exhibited as the chant rises in weird depth . . . [Account by Kom man].[5]

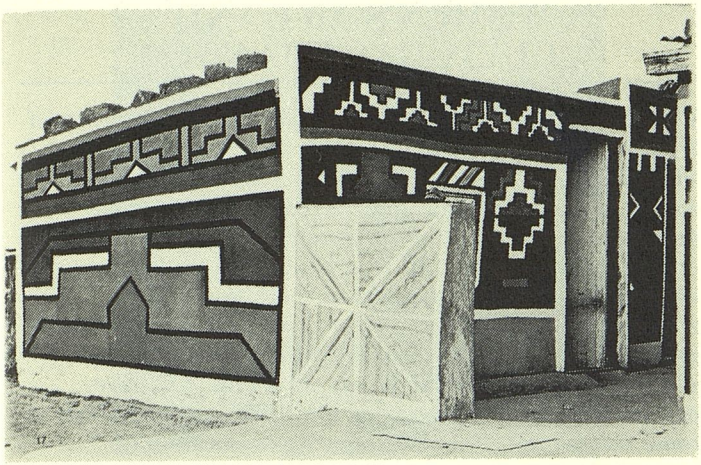
During the Aba riots of 1921 when 10,000 Ibo women demonstrated against the British, their final, most powerful show of force was a performance like *anlu*. In what other instances do women's arts of authority exist and what forms do they take?

PERSONAL DECORATION

In many cultures personal ornamentation, perhaps more than any other art form, provides the basis for a complex system of signs. The body becomes a background on which messages about rank, wealth, sexual maturity, marital status and occupation are expressed. Clothing, jewelry, tattooing, scarification, body painting and hair styling are consciously designed to convey these messages. Young Zulu and Swazi women in southeastern Africa make necklaces as courting poems in which the beads are carefully ordered, each bead a metaphor for a range of meanings. White beads, for example, symbolize all that is good, and have cleansing and purifying powers. They appease ancestors, bring good luck and represent the heart and love itself.[6] Because societies like these do not use writing, such codifications of messages are especially significant.

Excessive neck lengthening, knocking out of teeth, amputation of fingers, wearing of multiple weighty anklets, necklaces and bracelets, footbinding and clitoral and labial excisions are all done in the name of beauty. Why is women's personal decoration apparently more extreme than that of men of their cultures, and why do women's clothing and jewelry so often seem to hinder their

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Women's wall murals in South Africa combine archaic and modern techniques. This work portrays the village of the artist, a Ndebele woman, Kulele Mohlangu. Credit: Thomas Matthews, African Arts

mobility? To what extent is personal decoration an expression of self-identification and to what extent is it a sign of women's being property and a reinforcement of women's inferior status?

THE UTILITARIAN ARTS

Although frequently centered in the home, women's utilitarian arts form a fundamental and pervasive part of the public visual aesthetic. Women create a visual environment by the arrangement and cleanliness of their tents or compounds; the making of pots; the incising of calabashes; the weaving, dyeing and embroidering of cloth, baskets, mats and rugs; the application of quill and beadwork to cloth and skins; and the painting of murals and application of decorations to the interior and exterior walls of houses. In spite of the documentation of the existence of these arts, there is little analysis of them or of the status of the women who make them. Why has the impact of women's art on their cultures been so neglected by scholars when it plays such a pervasive role in people's lives?

Women's traditional art has received little attention from Western writers not only because it is utilitarian but because it is almost always abstract. Neither the iconography, the formal structure nor the symbolism of women's abstract images and patterns has received serious attention and analysis with a few exceptions, such as a study of *bokolanfini*, "mud" cloth made by Bamana women of Mali, which describes the designs as abstractions of specific historical events.[7] The assumption that women's abstract designs have no meaning is directly related to the idea that traditional women artists are not creative. How do women's choices of image and pattern reflect their traditions, their own inventiveness and concerns of their society?

In traditional societies men as well as women produce utilitarian art. Yet even when they work with the same materials their form, content and technique differ markedly (for example, Plain buffalo-skin robe designs and the loom widths in West Africa and Spanish America). There has been no satisfactory explanation of these differences. Western art scholars seem to favor psychobiological explanations, often ignoring the impact of historical events, such as colonialism and the introduction of foreign technologies.

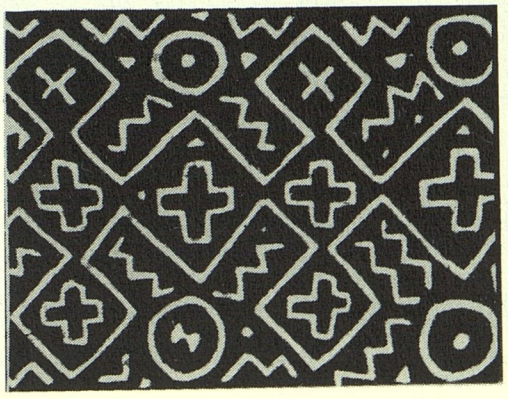
FEMALE MUSICIANS, BARDS AND SINGERS

Musical instruments are frequently particular to one sex or the other. Among the !Kung of the Kalahari Desert men play hunting bows, with one end placed in their mouths. Adolescent girls play the pluriarch, the "women's" instrument, which consists of several small bows attached to a box plucked by the fingers.[8] Adult women apparently are not musicians as often as men. In the context of dance !Kung women frequently provide the percussive back-up for men's dances by hand clapping. For their own dances, melon tossing, women sing elaborate lyrics and provide their own hand clapping. Men can join the women's dance although women cannot join that of men. How do musical instruments and musical performances by women reflect their roles and status in other spheres?

Through their lullabies women's song universally provides the earliest environment in which children develop language and musical sensibilities. When women work and perform rituals together and for each other, song and dance play an important part, but have rarely been recorded. The songs' explicit erotic content (often satiric and bantering) may have militated against fuller description.

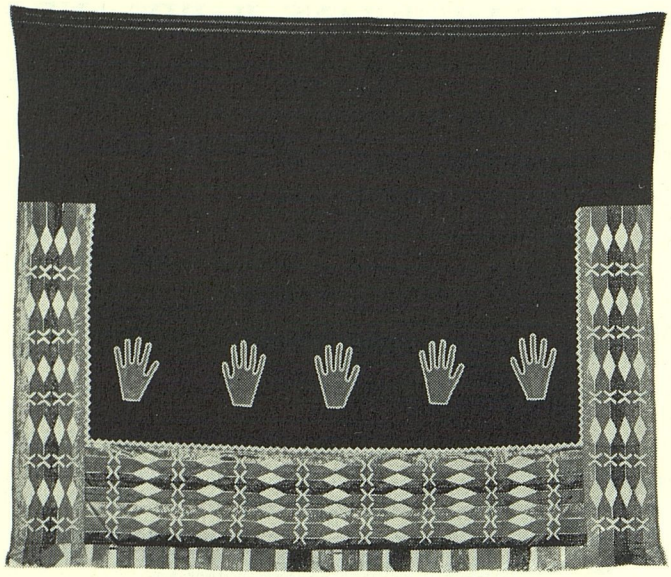
Where women have major economic and social roles, as in tropical Africa, women's participation and leadership in public song and dance performance is traditional.[9] In other cultures where the sexual spheres are more clearly hierarchical, men's and women's music is segregated. In rural Yugoslavia there are two categories of songs, "heroes'" songs and "women's" songs. Sung before an audience by a single male, heroes' songs idealize the male as heroic warrior. All other songs are called women's songs and are usually sung in groups by women, children or men: by describing suffering and everyday reality, they reveal women's skepticism and resistance to the heroic ideal.[10]

In many agrarian cultures when women sing alone before a public audience they are considered prostitutes. A "respectable" woman is therefore restricted in her public activities.[11] Nomadic Arabic desert cultures, however, encourage women poets of distinction to compose commentaries on their society, which are sung in public. Among the Bagarra of the Sudan women bards sing the history of the group, lead warriors into battle with songs and in the system of tribal justice sing of the crime and punishment of the convicted. "In performance a [bard] always stands out in the position of respected authority, her wit is appreciated and her techniques for composition are copied by young women aspiring to her position of influence in the community.[12] In what contexts are women's musical performances a commentary on their culture's history; and in what contexts do women articulate their own history, myths and opinions through dance and song?



Detail, Bokolanfini cloth. Resist-printed by painting negative areas with mud and decorated with motifs representing a nineteenth-century battle. The cross represents a Mauritanian woman's cushion, which symbolizes nobility. Credit: Marli Shamir

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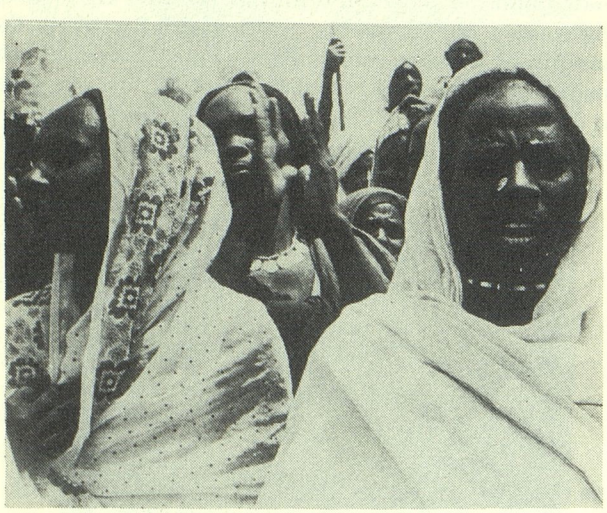


Osage ribbon-work blanket. The hand motif may have represented family members, or perhaps it had a more mystical meaning.

WOMEN ARTISTS' COMMUNITIES

Traditional women artists work in groups either by collaborating on one object (such as the long *tapa* cloths of Polynesia) or by establishing networks for techniques and innovations to be exchanged and for traditions to be taught. Women artists working as a community have been emphasized in research on Pueblo and African potters; Pomo, Yurok and Karok (California) basketweavers; and Plains quill and bead workers. Although expertise is recognized and acknowledged among these women, their artmaking is not highly competitive. In the village of Ushafa, Nigeria, women who "make the best ware only make special pots when commissioned to do so . . . otherwise, their pots are made to be indistinguishable from the rest."[13] How do women artists interact and criticize each other's work in traditional societies, and do their communities differ from those of men artists?

Since colonialism, commissions by traders who deal in traditional artifacts have tended to isolate experts from the other artists. Modern governments, by creating new training centers for the unskilled, have usurped the traditional roles of the experts. How does the alteration of their artistic communities affect women's art and status in their cultures?



Contemporary female bard of the Baggara of the southern Sudan Republic. Credit: R. C. Carlisle

WOMEN'S ART AND CULTURAL CHANGE

With the introduction of new materials, the substitution of imported objects and the influence of new images, colonialism and cultural contact have altered the art of women in traditional societies. Women's response has often been inventive, appropriating objects and images and putting them to novel use. In a Ghana village women decorate the exterior doorways of their houses with imported china plates, turned to expose the manufacturers' inscriptions, which they consider picturesque.[14] Many colonized peoples, curious about other cultures, have incorporated their observations into their art, sometimes as ironic commentary, sometimes as an exploration of "exotic" designs. North American Indian women developed vine and flower patterns in their beadwork based, perhaps, on the crewel arts of the northern European colonists. The art of non-Western women has been appreciated in turn by Western women and used to decorate their homes. Near Eastern and native American rugs, for example, are a traditional women's art which has had a special place in the aesthetic environment of Western people. In contrast to the intense interest of art historians in discovering exactly when Western artists first saw African masks, the influences of the women's art from traditional societies on Western art of all kinds remains undocumented.

The impact of colonialism has been contradictory for women. In some cases it has weakened the hold of patriarchs over women. In others, by ignoring women's traditional economic independence, it has provided education and employment primarily for men. If women are educated, they are required to sever connections with their own traditions. Most women, however, seem to retain the traditional fabrics and dress longer than men do, indicating, perhaps, both their skepticism about the benefits of modernization and their attempt to keep their cultural traditions intact. Modernization has sometimes eroded the barriers which traditionally prevented women from using anthropomorphic and zoomorphic images and from carving in wood and ivory.[15] In addition, since colonialism, wider markets for both old and new forms of women's art have developed.

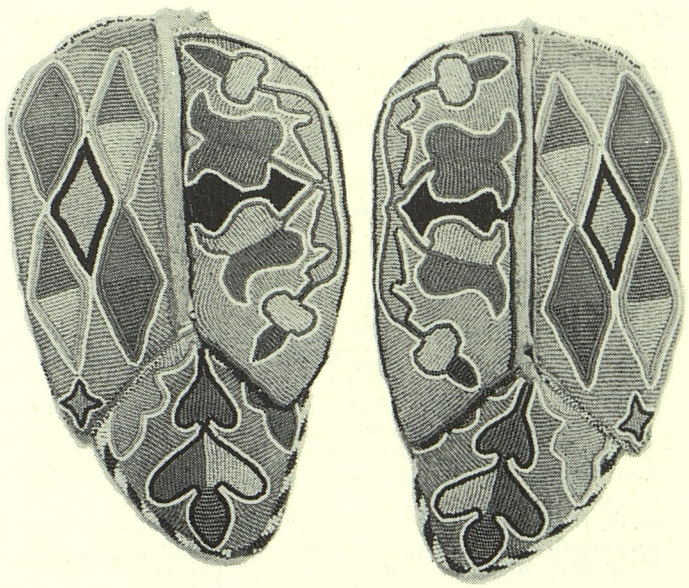
Colonization and modernization have also had quite negative impacts on women's artmaking. Institutions that once commissioned art produced by women, such as the refined *tapa* cloth used in Hawaii to wrap god-figures,[16] have often disappeared as the result of contact with Western missionaries. The basis for sharing resources by women and men has also changed. Baule women thread-makers lost their traditional ownership of the cloth men wove from their thread when it was replaced by manufactured thread.[17] Many of the utilitarian arts—local cloth, decorated hides, baskets and ceramics—have been replaced by imported cloth and plastic and metal containers. As traditional art forms are replaced by ones made from modern materials and by modern techniques, they may become rare commodities, sold to tourists and collectors. Through such sales the entire history of women's art may disappear from the culture which produced it.

Although under modern influence women's traditional arts may continue, usually new images, styles or techniques are developed. How have these changes occurred? What changes in quality and meaning take place when women artists use new materials and begin to produce art for unfamiliar buyers? With the expansion of

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Cuna women dancing. The molas *which serve as panels on their blouses are sewn in appliqué and embroidery, using several layers of brightly colored cloth. This is the most complex visual art of the Cuna. Credit: F. Louis Hoover*



*Iowa beaded moccasins (c. 1860) beaded in blue, green, red, pink, yellow and black. A fine example of a colorful abstract style which developed near the Kansas-Nebraska border. (Private collection/*American Indian Art*)*

the marketing of their arts has their economic base been eroded or strengthened? And, in those cases where the women's traditional art has disappeared, how do women adapt to this loss?

We have reviewed some of the scattered evidence of the kinds of art women make in traditional societies and we have asked questions to stimulate further investigation. The few available in-depth studies were written mainly in the 1920s and 1930s by women anthropologists studying native American cultures.[18] These ethnographers approached their field research with the attitude that within those cultures women's participation was real, perhaps central, and as women they had greater access to information from women. Many of the questions we want answered now were not asked by them. In order to compile a more complete history of women's artmaking, more ethnographies are needed, informed by feminist ideas. Women's art from traditional societies excites us with its beauty and its relevance to life. We want to know more about the circumstances in which it is made, used and appreciated. Only then will be begin to understand fully how women create culture.

We are at the lakeside. To construct a feminist history of women artists we must consider all that has been written and unearth more. We must consider all that has been left out, as well. We must talk with each other, and out of the dialogue will come new ideas, new critiques. Through the superimposition of what we have known and what we are insisting on knowing, we can dispel the shadows which have remained too long.



Karok basket, twined with knobbed lid, decorated with yellow porcupine quills and rich brown maidenhair fern stem. Credit: Denver Museum, YKa-58

1. P. Amaury Talbot, *Tribes of the Niger Delta* (London: Sheldon Press, 1932), p. 94 and figures. In this and other works Talbot describes the roles of Nigerian women in the various cults of their tribes. These may include the making of figurines, symbol-laden pots, and wall decorations of shrines. It is unclear if women created figures for *mbari* houses, but they created portrait ceramics of ancestors and famous priestesses. Whether, and how, their religious art differed in form and function from that of men deserves further investigation.
2. See Herbert M. Cole, "Art as a Verb in Iboland," *African Arts*, Autumn 1969, pp. 34-41; "Mbari is Life," Spring 1969, pp. 8-17; "Mbari is Dance," Summer 1969, pp. 42-51.
3. See Hans Cory, *Ceramic Figurines: Their Ceremonial Use in Primitive Rites in Tanganyika* (London: Faber and Faber, 1956).
4. Anita Glaze, "Power and Art in a Senufo Village," *African Arts*, Spring 1975, pp. 25-29, 64-67.
5. Eyewitness account cited in Shirley Ardener, "Sexual Insult and Female Militancy," in *Perceiving Women* (New York: Halsted Press, 1975), pp. 36-37.
6. Regina Twala, "Beads as Regulating the Social Life of the Zulu and the Swazi," reprinted in *Everyman His Way*, ed. Alan Dundes (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968), pp. 368-369.
7. Pascal James Imperator and Marli Shamir, "Bokolanfini, Mud Cloth of the Bamana of Mali," *African Arts*, Summer 1970.
8. N. England, cited in Seth Reichlin, *"Bitter Melons": A Study Guide* (Somerville, MA: Documentary Educational Resources, 1974), p. 27.
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14. Barbara Guggenheim, private communication.
15. Simon Kooijman, *"Tapa* Techniques and *Tapa* Patterns in Polynesia" in *Primitive Art and Society*, ed. Anthony Forge (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 110.
16. Mona Etienne, "Women and Men, Cloth and Colonization: The Transformation of Production-Distribution Relations among the Baule (Ivory Coast)," *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines* 65, XVII (1), 1977 (n.p.).
17. For example, Ruth Bunzel, *The Pueblo Potter* (New York: Dover Publications, reprint, 1969) and Lila M. O'Neale, "Yurok-Karok Basket Weavers," *University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology* 32, 1932, pp. 1-182.

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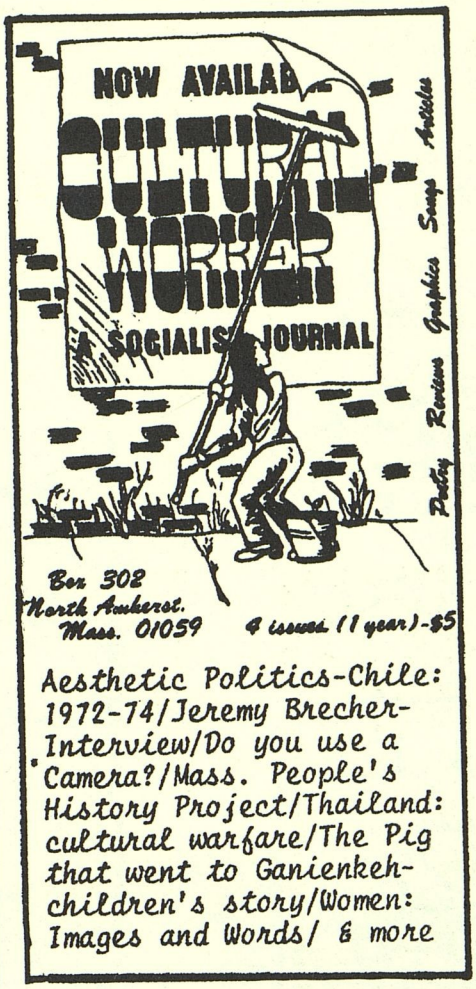
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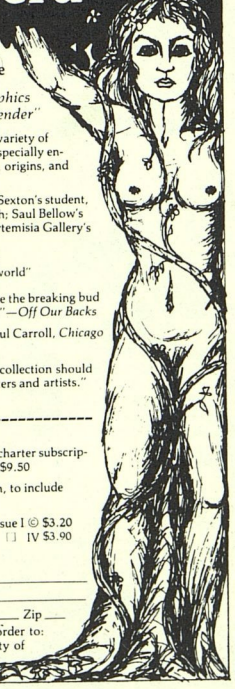
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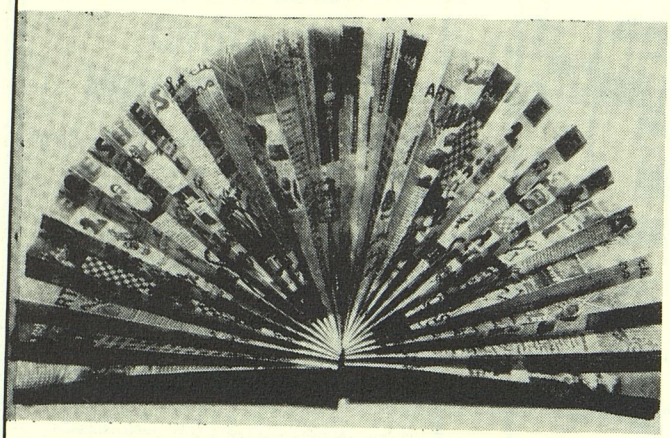
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ERRATA: Third Issue of HERESIES

In the Table of Contents Phylane Norman was omitted as a contributor to "What Does Being a Lesbian Artist Mean to You?"

On page 22, the woman photographed is Lotte Jacobi, a German photographer.

On page 46, the photograph of Debbie Jones's "Autoerotic Bowl" is by Merilyn Rivchin.

On page 72, the photograph of Louise Fishman's "It's Good to Have Limits," was cropped incorrectly. The painting has an irregular, deckle edge.

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Adrienne Anderson
Carl Andre
Joyce Aiken
Zeldy Appel
Art Programs, Inc.
Lisa M. Berk
Ruth Bocour
Ruth Bowman
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Sherry Brody
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Angela Westwater
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Eugenia Zuckerman

HERESIES thanks everyone who made our benefits so successful. Special thanks to Leslie Cohen at the Sahara Club and Patricia Hamilton Gallery for the use of their spaces and to Rita Mae Brown, Sheila Jordan, Eve Merriam and Adrienne Rich for donating their time and talent.

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The Next Issues of Heresies:

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The Great Goddess/Women's Spirituality: Common bondings in the new mythology; ritual and the collective woman; avoiding limitations in our self-defining process; recipes and wisdom from country "spirit women"; the Goddess vs. the patriarchy; the Goddess movement abroad; hostility against and fear of the Goddess; original researches; locating the Goddess-temples, museums, digs, bibliographies, maps; the new/old holydays; healing; political implications of the Goddess; psychological impact on women of female-centered spirituality. *Available May 1978.*

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Women and Violence: *Cultural:* violence against women in mass media, literature and art; women's self-image . . . *Family:* wife beating; child abuse; sex-violence among lovers and friends . . . *Institutionalized:* incarceration in prisons and mental hospitals; repression in traditional religions; racism; imperialism and economic deprivation; torture of political prisoners; sterilization abuse; homophobia; rape . . . *Rebellion:* feminism as an act of self-defense; revolutionary struggles; art which explores violence; art-making as an aggressive act . . . *Deadline: April 15, 1978.*

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Working Together: 'True Confessions': An issue to be edited by the HERESIES Publishing Collective, with an emphasis on examining collectivity, work and individuals; an examination of different collective, past and present, white, Third World, lesbian, female/male; women working with women; an exploration of feminist networks, structures and process; the development of feminist criticism; the trials and tribulations of going public; our own view of HERESIES' working process and substantive critical response to the first four issues of HERESIES. *Deadline: July 15, 1978.*

Guidelines for Prospective Contributors: Manuscripts should be typewritten, double-spaced, on 8½" x 11" paper and submitted in duplicate with footnotes and illustrative material, if any, fully captioned. We welcome for consideration either outlines or descriptions of proposed articles. These are due no later than one month prior to the deadline for manuscripts. If you are submitting visual material, please send a photograph, xerox or description—*not the original.* HERESIES will not take responsibility for unsolicited original material. Only manuscripts and visual material accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope will be returned. HERESIES will pay a fee between $5 and $50, as our budget allows, for published material. There will be no commissioned articles and we cannot guarantee acceptance of submitted material. We will not include reviews or monographs on contemporary women.

Dear Lesbian Issue Collective:

We appreciate all of the work the *Lesbian Arts and Artists* issue of HERESIES represents. We find it appalling, however, that a hundred years from now it will be possible for women to conclude that in 1977 there were no practicing Black and other Third World lesbian artists. It is not sufficient to explain such grievous omissions merely by stating: ". . . yet biases which informed our choices of material were certainly conditioned by the fact that we are all lesbians, white, college-educated, and mostly middle-class women who live in New York and have a background in the arts." Feminist and lesbian politics and creativity are not the exclusive property of white women.

We would like to know if any of the hundreds of contributors you had to choose from were Third World women and if so to know more specifically the basis on which their work was rejected.

We look forward to your response.

THE COMBAHEE RIVER COLLECTIVE
SECOND BLACK FEMINIST RETREAT
November 4, 5 and 6, 1977

Cessie Alfonso	Somerset, N.J.
Lorraine Bethel	Cambridge, Mass.
Gwendolyn Braxton	Chicago, Ill.
Camille Bristow	Bronxville, N.Y.
Margie Butler	Plainfield, N.J.
Nivea Castro-Figueroa	Dorchester, Mass.
Cheryl Clarke	New Brunswick, N.J.
Charley B. Flint	Edison, N.J.
Domita Frazier	Dorchester, Mass.
Cecelia B. Homberg	Sunderland, Mass.
Gloria T. Hull	Newark, Del.
Bonnie Johnson	New York, N.Y.
Audre Lorde	Staten Island, N.Y.
Carroll Oliver	New York, N.Y.
Linda C. Powell	New York, N.Y.
Sharon Page Ritchie	Chicago, Ill.
Barbara Smith	Roxbury, Mass.
Beverly Smith	Cambridge, Mass.

Dear Combahee River Collective:

Although we did not systematically exclude Third World women from the Lesbian Issue of HERESIES, we did participate in a kind of passive exclusion. The editorial collective that formed was all white. Our knowledge of the Third World artist or lesbian community was limited. By not making a concerted effort to contact Third World Lesbian artists we became an only too typical all-white group operating in a racist society.

The inclusion of Third World contributions was based on the same criteria applied to all work submitted to the issue. We don't know exactly how many Black and other Third World women submitted work, but we received nothing that specifically dealt with being a non-white lesbian artist or which spoke from an identifiably non-white position. As far as we know, the work of only one Third World woman was included in the issue. It is probable that we didn't receive much work from Third World women.

HERESIES has had a similar problem with every issue. Most of the editors and contributors have been white women. As you may know, each issue of HERESIES is edited by a different group of women. Each issue is thematic and any women with an interest in that particular topic is welcome to work on the issue. We hope that, increasingly, Third World women will want to participate in issues of their choice.

Also, though we haven't done this yet, if a group of women approaches us with a proposal for an issue they want to put out themselves, we will consider giving an entire issue to them to produce. A group of women who are already organized, such as the Combahee Collective, might want to do an issue devoted to Black and other Third World artists. In this way we can begin to extend our publication to speak for many feminists who have not been well represented so far.

As you pointed out, however, it is HERESIES' responsibility to continue to print work by and about minority women (including Third World women, lesbian women, etc.) in each issue to avoid tokenism.

We hope this information and your letter will encourage a greater effort on the part of both HERESIES editorial collectives and Third World women to enter into an exchange.

HERESIES is planning to publish an issue on Black, Spanish-American, American Indian and other Third World women to be edited by Third World women. As with all HERESIES issues, the concept, content and design are to be decided solely by its editors. The issue, No. 8, is to be published in January 1979. Any Third World woman in the New York area who is interested in working on this should contact HERESIES *immediately* so that the core editorial group can form. Write us or call (212) 431-9060.

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