

THE EFFECT OF THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT ON PAINTING AND
SCULPTURE IN EUROPE AND AMERICA AFTER 1945.

An extended essay

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"WOMEN'S LIB HAS WON THE BATTLE OF PERSUASION. NOW
COMES THE ERA OF ASSESSMENT, WHEN THE PRACTICAL RULES
MUST BE WORKED OUT."

FAIR LADY MAY 1981

LIZ BURNET MID-REVOLUTION REPORT

"WHEN THE INFINITE SERVITUDE OF WOMEN SHALL HAVE ENDED,
SHE WILL BE ABLE TO LIVE BY AND FOR HERSELF; MAN -
HITHERTO ABOMINABLE - WILL GIVE HER FREEDOM, AND SHE
TOO WILL BE A POET."

EXCERPT FROM A LETTER BY
RIMBAUD.

PREFACE

My investigation of women artists and their status in society today as a result of the feminist movement, revealed issues which, I felt, were multifaceted. This necessitated an exploration of many aspects in order to arrive at a fairly satisfactory conclusion as to whether the revolt and the aggression on the part of the feminists had borne any fruit, either generally in everyday life, or artistically.

It has proved most stimulating and informative. I think that the need to assess oneself as a woman, working within a male-dominated creative environment is a very necessary process and one which has been most beneficial to me.

The subsequent research revealed that a radical, thematic change had occurred within the feminist movement at the start of the Eighties; a fact of which, till recently, I was largely unaware.

What I discovered was that the militant, feminist approach of the Sixties and Seventies had given way to a more realistic involvement brought on partly by the economic recession and the effects as well of earlier feminist movements, leading to a relaxation on the part of the younger generation. The Violence had faded. Hard times curbed the excesses of the movement and took it along the road to practicality.

Dovetailed to this and seeming to run concurrently was the phenomenon of the demise of the Modern Art Movement.

These changes described were not only artistic and feminist, but cut right across the board, involving all facets of life. To take one as an example, the political with conservatism reinstating itself in America not merely as an alternative but as a worthwhile direction in itself. Other issues included the sociological, historical, biological, and cultural; all closely interwoven and therefore requiring some generalisations at times.

Previous to becoming involved with my topic, I had been reacting to pre-conceived ideas laid on me as a student in the Sixties and Seventies - a militant, aggressive approach acquired as a protective shield, to deal with the masculine environment which denigrated in varying degrees mine and fellow female artists work, sometimes overtly, sometimes subconsciously. This discrimination, is usually denied as ever having existed by the men involved. It shows a lack of awareness of what, we, as female art students, were subjected to. This is one of the main reasons why I undertook this subject; partly out of interest and perhaps partly as some sort of catharsis.

INTRODUCTION

If one looks at the female writers of the late Nineteenth Century and early Twentieth Century, one can see the initial stirrings of the struggle to achieve equality for women. These early women writers struggled under far more adverse conditions than today, to throw off the smothering effects of their patriarchally dominated environment. One cannot imagine anything worse than being a free spirit and creative being trying to exist within those shackling, Victorian confines of the Nineteenth Century.

The active demand for political rights started about 1830 and from then on more and more of the male imposed restrictions on women's lives were challenged. They demanded the right to own property, to speak publicly, to divorce, to receive higher education, to enter more of the professions to control their own earnings, to practise contraception, to have some authority in relation to their children and finally to vote.

It was the female writers of the Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries who were articulating the feelings of women caught between old values and new aspirations. They were challenging male culture and male assumptions about "women's place" expressing these ideas in their literature.

There were great women's crusades in the latter half of the Nineteenth Century. At last women were organising, writing, speaking, painting,

sculpturing and pushing into all the professions. Elizabeth Cady Stanton in America, a famous early feminist, realised that women's clothing cramped her in the same way that she was cramped by female role. Here once again clothing is indicative, to a degree, of the amount of emancipation experienced by women.

Some of these tenacious women were Mary Wollstonecraft, Emma Goldman and Virginia Woolf. They continuously challenged and criticised the institutions of marriage, patriarchal family, and religion; laying the groundwork for the more vociferous, activist women who were to follow.

Despite the numerous restrictions imposed, many creative women while working within the prevailing aesthetic modes of their time, managed to express through their fiction the opinions they held on their limited environments.

Jane Austen describes in her novels the lives of women of her time whose movements were so dominated and circumscribed by the men around them.

George Eliot's women also battled against the restraints imposed by the patriarchally dominant society of the time, as did Charlotte Brontë's female characters rebel. In Edith Wharton's work, women are crushed by male dominance.

In the case of Emily Dickinson who worked in isolation and never had her poems published during her lifetime, she gave up and learnt to do without the recognition needed for creativity to flourish, adopting an attitude of indifference towards public acclaim. Luckily she refused to compromise her private standards of poetic method in order to satisfy the demands of literary convention of the time personified by Higgenson, a mediocre male poet, who acted as her mentor and critic. Most of his criticism was disparaging and condescending so how she had the heart to continue in isolation, escapes me. A lesser person would, merely, have given up.

All these courageous women of history who accomplished anything, did so, in the face of great prejudice, rejection and discrimination. Not only did they have to resort to subterfuge in order to get their work published at all, for example writing under masculine pseudonyms, but to satisfy their creative urges, many were forced to rebel against the confines of the patriarchally dominating, domestic situation, finding out that at that time the two were generally irreconcilable.

Being a woman in those times meant that one's ability to function as a normal, human being was severely curtailed. She could not exist as an individual in her own right having the same freedom of choice that a man had. Her role was prescribed and precious little deviation was allowed.

Those women who managed to exist independently (generally with a private

income of some sort) fared best while those who did not strike out found their lives revolving around some dominant male figure, often to the detriment of their own validity and creative existence. Today we reap the benefit of the struggles of these women.

It is only now that society is learning to accept with tolerance, alternate life styles which do not automatically incorporate marriage and children as the pivot. The conflicts that arose in the past should now ease.

Although much progress was made during the Nineteenth Century the "female role" continued to dictate women's lives due to the absence of the feminist revolution from recorded history. In other words they had nothing to refer to in black and white. The culture as it existed then merely reinforced these feelings of helplessness and inferiority.

Women's work was not viewed as a coherent body of information. This made it powerless to convey the new values it contained, leaving us with the legacy of freedom the Nineteenth Century feminists provided but without the necessary redefinitions that the art and literature of women described. This meant that despite the sociological advances women were unable to change their self-images.

This masculine presence was throughout history a most dominant, all-pervading force. Up to and including the Nineteenth Century the male

figure was "father, artist, teacher" then into the Twentieth Century came a new combination of artist, lover, husband. This Twentieth Century approach introduced new emotional complexities, the pull between desire and duty.

There is evidence, reading through the biographies of woman painters turn-of-the-century onwards, that too close an involvement on an emotional level with men, stunted their growth as artists. They were generally unable to assert themselves as individuals in their own right, accepting meekly the passive role considered the norm. Coupled with and allied to this was the lack of recognition and appreciation from immediate family or the general public so necessary to a healthy creativity.

To look at a few:-

Dora Carrington built her life around the men in her life. She saw being a serious artist only as kind of alternative, something to do, should the relationship fail. The men she loved and lived with after her breach with Mark Gertler cared little for painting. It did not occur to Lytton Strachey or to Ralph Partridge that her painting should be put first.

Marie Laurencin said:-

"Love interests me more than painting."¹

1. Petersen, K and W. Women Artists: Recognition and Reappraisal from the Early Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century .p.31.

Gabriele Münter:-

"I held to Kandinsky. I gave myself no worth next to him.
He was a holy man"¹

Paula Modersohn-Becker and Sonia Delauney were also self-efacing to the detriment of their own images.

This patriarchally dominant culture of the Nineteenth Century was unusually heavily slanted towards the masculine viewpoint. In History the principle of patriarchy was always countered by the opposing principle of matriarchy. The two acting in conjunction with each other to produce a constructively regenerative, instead of destructive environment.

Eric Neumann - a disciple of Jung - puts it succinctly in his introduction to "The Great Mother" written in 1952.

"... This problem of the feminine has equal importance for the psychologist of culture, who realises that the peril of present-day mankind springs in large part from the one-sidedly patriarchal development of the male intellectual consciousness, which is no longer kept in balance by the matriarchal world of the psyche."²

Virginia Woolf agreed, saying that the subjugation of women was both cause and symptom of a fundamental imbalance in society. She argued

1. Peterson, K and W. Women Artists: Recognition and Reappraisal from the Early Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century .p.42.
2. Rich, A. On Lies Secrets and Silence. Selected Prose 1966-1978 .p.61.

for a feminine sensibility similar to that of the ancient matriarchal cultures.

But the patriarchy has come into question in another way as the natural order of things. Much research is being done and was done in the past on the primacy of matriarchal societies which subsequently disappeared due to their historical obliteration by the subsequent patriarchally controlled records. For example Elaine Morgan in her book "The Descent of Women", argues very convincingly that women actually invented pottery.

Implicit in this feminist notion of a matriarchal origin of civilisation is the assumption that women are and need be in no way hampered by child-bearing and nurturing from governing, inventing, establishing religion and creating works of art.

Biological motherhood has long been used as a reason for condemning women to a role of powerlessness and subservience in the social order - a powerful tool to use to enforce obedience.

Suzi Gablik, painter and writer comments:-

"From the beginning women face a conflict of roles which by and large men are spared. They are deluded into thinking that dependence and subordination offer in built rewards"¹

1. Hess T. and Baker E. Art and Sexual Politics. Why have there no Great Women Artists .p.41.

These principles of male and female have been split apart and set in antagonism within each of us by a male dominated intellectual and political heritage.

Patriarchal societies often have been dangerous and have encouraged violence. For centuries patriarchy has maintained itself by asking what was good for males, has assumed male norms and values as universal ones, has allowed the differences that is the division of male and female consciousness to become a terrifying dissociation of sensibility.

Adrienne Rich:-

"The idea of woman exists at a strangely primitive level in the male psyche. She remains, for all his psychological self-consciousness, the object-figure on which can be projected all that man does not understand, all that he needs, all that he dreads, in his own experience."¹

This dichotomy of matriarchal versus patriarchal was in the past allowed this spiritually healing pendulum swing, the one replacing the other, when necessary to maintain the delicate balance within a prevailing culture. As stated above, the Nineteenth Century saw the grip of the male element tightening to a stranglehold with the female element being denigrated to an alltime low.

It was only in the Seventies that this imbalance was rationally yet

1. Rich, A. On Lies, Secrets and Silence. Selected Prose 1966-1978 .p.16

passionately explored by the numerous feminist poets and theorists.

Their aims were to consolidate women's position by reassessing, and re-evaluating their cultural, historical and biological roles in the past and the present giving them an identity, a validity of their own - something with which to identify.

A group identity for greater strength, similar in concept to black conscious-raising groups in America. A recorded history to which to refer.

Adrienne Rich:-

"Lack of a sense of continuity historical validation, community has made creativity difficult for women"¹

Numerous studies were undertaken by women theorists both historical and sociological aimed at replacing women in a perhaps new context not previously considered in the hitherto patriarchally dominated system.

Foremost amongst these writers is Adrienne Rich. Her feminist theories written during the Seventies succinctly expresses that decade's attitudes.

1. Rich, A. On Lies, Secrets and Silence. Selected Prose 1966-1978 .p.3

She wrote:-

"Feminism means finally that we renounce our obedience to the fathers and recognise that the world they have described is not the whole world. Masculine ideologies are the creation of masculine subjectivity; they are neither objective nor value-free not inclusively human."¹

She goes on to state:-

"Feminism implies that we recognise fully the inadequacy for us, the distortion of male - created ideologies and that we proceed to think and act out of that recognition."²

At that time she realised that change was in the air and predicted that:-

"The creative energy of patriarchy is fast running out, what remains is its self-generating energy for destruction."³

The desire to assert the femine principle was emerging at last but not only that it was also gaining a foothold. Judy Chicago expressed it well:-

"The female art community provided a context in which I, could explore my "feminine" qualities, not as aspects of

1. Rich, A. On Lies, Secrets and Silence. Selected Prose 1966-1978 .p.12
2. Ibid. p.42.
3. Ibid. p.44

female role, which I always and rightfully rejected, but rather as attributes of my humanity. I was able to see that many of the personality traits that are inculcated into women and then disparaged by male culture (heightened intuition, emotional responsiveness etc.) are actually valuable human abilities, which if developed by both men and women, would greatly improve our society and the relationship between the sexes. Society and the arts can be rejuvenated only by restoring the despised feminine elements to their proper place among the faculties of man"¹

1. Chicago, J. Through the Flower. p.12.

THEMATIC CHANGES IN WOMEN'S MOVEMENT ISSUES DURING THE LAST TWO
DECADES

Progress has been made and changes have occurred when one compares the decades of the Sixties/Seventies and contrasts them with what has evolved now in the Eighties.

Looking at the Sixties one sees that it was a time of conscious-raising, the heady hey-day of the New Feminism in America, later emerging equally spontaneously in Britain.

The American social scientist Betty Friedan was the first to identify modern women's discontent in her book "The Feminine Mystique" published in 1963. She called it the problem without a name. In 1966 she founded the National Organisation for Women (Now) to campaign for equal rights and opportunities.

Radical politics in the Sixties provided an excellent breeding ground for feminism. They realised a new social order was necessary to effect change, not only politically and economically, but in the organisation in the family and in personal relationships. They demanded research into women's history, free contraception, abortion on demand, and for study to be done on alternatives to the nuclear family and to conventional methods of child-rearing. Conscious-raising was the means used to achieve their ends.

Women were at last trying to free themselves from the old constrictions of the past, learning to stand up for themselves and to stop living through men.

D.H. Lawrence has written somewhere:-

"The real trouble about women is that they must always go on trying to adapt themselves to men's theories of women."

The Rhetoric of the feminists was strident during this time. It continued through to the Seventies during which decade many organisations were founded, all aimed at providing equal opportunities for women.

Some major theoretical works were published in the Seventies, starting with "The Female Eunuch" by Germaine Greer in 1970. She produced a new female awareness out of the Sixties fashions for flower-power and free love. It became the emergent women's working document.

In Kate Millets' "Sexual Politics" she stated that the relationship between the sexes was a political one which exploited women, and went on to show how this was reflected in mythology, religion, social mores and particularly in literature.

The reactions of these women was geared towards violent, aggressive overthrow common to all minority groups in the world today. Their common enemy being man with his manipulation of all aspects of women's lives.

Their literature reflected this attitude. It veered between impassioned pleas for equality i.e. acceptance of women as individuals in their own right, and vitriolic attacks on the patriarchal system. Eva Figes's "Patriarchal Attitudes" traced inequality back to the roots of patriarchy. Erica Jong in her book "Fear of Flying" savagely mocked the Freudian psychology which had until then, had such a stranglehold on everyone. "Ms magazine" was founded and flourished. America for the first time realised the commercial potential of the New Feminism and exploited it along traditional capitalist lines. It became a product to be sold like any other. For example through special merchandise and through advertising.

Several other books exploring a variety of directions were also published, but efforts were not only literary. Women were also on the march, demonstrating, shouting and seeking solutions to problems long ignored. The Seventies was a decade of terror and women were for the first time fairly extensively involved on the terrorist front; for example Leila Khaled of The Palestine Liberation Front and Ulrike Meinhof in post-Hitler Germany.

It is interesting to note that fashion expressing as it does the prevailing mores, renders most expressively the general feeling of each particular period in history, capturing in the clothing worn, the essence of contemporary thought. In the case of women, clothes are the visible expression of their aspirations, dreams and fantasies.

The signs which demarcate our status to ourselves and to other people. For example the aggressively masculine dress worn by the Flappers in the Twenties revealed that the Suffragette movement was having some effect.

The Sixties was free form time and for a brief while all taboos were overthrown. A cultural redefinition was taking place eg. the mini skirt de-eroticised the female leg and from then on the trouser revolution took over. In the Seventies severely masculine suits were worn giving a fairly accurate assessment of the degree of emancipation being experienced during that time. Punk Rocker dress was now all pervasive - violent and aggressive. A blending of male and female.

Echoing the same thematic change from the last two decades to the Eighties is the softness of the New Romantics - the pirate look and the Regency look, all originating in Britain, a deliberate turning away from the violence of the Punks.

The Seventies with its quicksilver metamorphoses seemed to prolong a period of cultural confusion and transition when the wilder shores of violence, sex and drug experimentation were explored.

As the roles of men and women were being redefined, feminist protest during the mid-seventies was at its height. A movie made in the late Seventies by the Italian director, Fellini - *La Citta Delle Donne* (In the City of The Women) visually explores this sociological redefinition.

In it the traditional emphasis - male, dominant, strong-female, weak, submissive is through frenzied, poetic expression shown to be in the process of disintegration. Therefore we can visually explore that which, within our society, has already taken place. As Fellini points out:-

"Women are biologically and psychologically totally different from men and yet are permanently struggling to compete with them. During this effort they are bound to be aggressive."¹

He goes on to caution:-

"If this battle does not end, if the boundary lines between man and women aren't smoothed man is going to be undoubtedly brought to nothing"²

Luckily the Eighties dawned and with it a new mood of sanity emerged which has allowed this process of transition to proceed and finally to settle, for better or worse, in some sort of new sociological pattern, yet to be evaluated.

Eventually we have a new appraisal and a sane acceptance of the necessarily diverse roles of male and female within the structure of society, one, not better than the other but co-existing and along with

1. Fellini, "In the Hand of The Women", in Harpers and Queens, December 1980, .p. 46 - 48.
2. Ibid. .p. 46 - 48.

this acceptance, an end to the sexual aggression prevalent for so long in the fight to the death for supremacy. A most destructive force this has been too.

Adrianna Stassinopoulos in her book "The Female Woman" 1973 makes a plea for precisely this fruitful co-existence of male and female, each functioning according to their own capabilities or liabilities as the case might be.

She however, favoured the term, "Emancipation" as opposed to "Liberation" and explained the difference.

"Emancipation insists on equal status for distinctively female roles. Liberation demands the abolition of any such distinctive roles: the achievement of equality through identical patterns of behaviour. Emancipation means the removal of all barriers to female opportunities - it does not mean compelling women into male roles by devaluing female ones."¹

This reflects the two approaches one the Liberation movement which flourished in the Transitional period of the Sixties and Seventies and the other the Emancipation which has now gained credence due to the prevailing climate of the Eighties. The aims are basically the same; it is merely a question of emphasis.

1. Stassinopoulos, A. The Female Woman .p. 54

Now the Eighties have dawned and with it a new spirit has emerged. A calmer approach to life is evident when compared with the hysteria of the Seventies, which is especially conducive to the restructuring of social and artistic philosophies and institutions.

An attitude has surfaced in which society is sanely trying to re-evaluate and re-assess issues in order to regain some sense of order and stability. A desire to return to grassroots and hence some basic form of security. Some fundamental ideas are being redefined such as what constitutes happiness, equality or liberty and at what cost to the individual, are these abstractions achieved.

If the spirit of the Sixties was instant, everything, especially gratification in all its forms, then the Seventies expressed a dot-eat-dog morality with a spirit of the "rip-off". Every aspect of the evil in man was explored, a hedonist approach which went as far as it possibly could and found that it could go no further. The atmosphere now in the Eighties seems to me to be one of total exhaustion of spirit in every sphere of our lives, both culturally and politically.

There now exists, after the frenzy of the Seventies, a desire for a reasonable, realistic approach to life, no more to indulge in the superficialities of excessive rhetoric so symptomatic of the past decade.

In America one sees it politically - "the good guys are back in town". A return to traditional values, not back to Victorian morality but to the basic goodness in human nature. Reagan has got off to a good start. A strange feeling of optimism pervaded America when the Republicans came to power. A tolerance, a desire to see things in an unbiased fashion, a desire to forgive and forget, to start afresh in a climate of hope.

It again being reflected in the approach to clothing for women - an acceptance of her role as a working member of society with equal status to that of man - a co-existence - yet retaining her essential femininity and as clothing has always been a perfect barometer of existing mores maybe for the first time a sane acceptance of the woman in society as an individual in her own right deserving of respect and dignity.

The youth of America are feeling this exhaustion too, a disillusionment with life as it existed, is sending them back to face the harsh realities of their environment and lifestyles and make do as best they can under the circumstances, with a new straight forward approach to life. The routine of life has resurfaced as valid.

This new state of affairs left a great void, a bewilderment and sense of anticlimax. It came as a shock to realise suddenly one day, entrenched as one was in old routes, that change had suddenly irrevocably occurred and that this necessitated a change in oneself and one's outlook

- affecting both artistic and feminist issues.

The natural aggression against patriarchal dominance, ingested and retained by me over the past two decades had become so ingrained that the sudden kaleidoscopic settling into place of the new order caught me somewhat off guard. It required a re-evaluation of all the old concepts and a re-thinking of the issues involved.

The white-hot problems of the Narcissistic Seventies, feminist and others, had cooled off, and in some cases almost totally evaporated, leaving us with the realisation that, as women, now was the time to consolidate the ground already gained, not total equality but sufficient to warrant a temporary cessation of hostilities and to try to deal more constructively with the realities of life.

The above was due to the economic recession which world-wide had made its mark, forcing people, generally, into a more practical outlook on life. No one today can afford the happy idealism and liberal attitudes of the Seventies. These flourished because of society being so affluent and hence capable of supporting it.

Allied to the above, was the forcing of women, through economic necessity into the job market. This gave an added boost to feminism as more women lived a high profile existence and so became, collectively, a more viable, potent force in society.

In Britain the Sex Discrimination Act and the Equal Pay Act had made it illegal to discriminate against anyone on the grounds of their sex at work or pay them less if they were women. A major step forward.

FEMINIST ART IN THE SEVENTIES

"Feminist art, art that grows out of female experiences, is not just some little style or movement. It's a matter of redefining the whole relationship between art and society, of altering the way we see ourselves and the world"¹

The thematic changes that occurred sociologically from the Seventies to the Eighties were paralleled by the artistic ones. The same gradual transition was effected from expressive and radical rhetoric to low-key practicality.

Feminism questioned all belief systems, Modernism among them. Happily the ebbing of the Modern Art movement coincided with the rise of the women's movement and dovetailing with it, the new constructivist, figurative art evolved.

The aims of the feminist artists of the early Seventies was radical change not only socially but also artistically. They wanted to change society and force it to re-evaluate the position of women as it stood then and also to re-examine their worth as creative beings within the system - with their own particular part to play, different though it might be to that of the male. Unfortunately women at that time

1. Chicago, J. Through The Flower .p.12

were afraid of being different to men, so they constantly questioned the validity of this alternate female route.

As Lucy Lippard Noted:-

"I was accustomed to male artists coming on with a veneer of self-confidence, jargon, articulation of formal problems, in other words, 'knowing what they were doing'"¹

On the other hand women were:-

"... confused, unsure of themselves, much more vulnerable, but at the same time far more willing to open themselves and their work to personal and associative readings on the part of the viewer, willing to participate in the sharing of their art, their experience, their lives."²

From this stemmed the guilt and self-doubt that creative women experienced a most debilitating factor to cope with when it is coupled with the process of creating, itself not easy. Feminism made women look hard at self-denigration and attempt to substitute it for a kinder attitude towards the self. As Linda Nochlin pointed out in the early Seventies:-

"Even in the case of outstanding artists, the voice of the feminine mystique with its potpourri of ambivalent

1. Lippard, L. From the Center. Feminist Essays on Woman's Art .p.5

2. Ibid. .p.7

narcissism and internalised guilt subtly dilutes and subverts that total inner confidence, that absolute certitude and self-determination (moral and aesthetic) demanded by the highest and most innovative work in art."¹

A new definition was demanded. Not only of what constituted a work of art in general but a re-evaluation of female art in particular. In the process they aimed to validate aesthetically this so-called "feminine art" largely scorned previously, as not being "great art" and prove to the world that despite it differing from the masculine norm it could yet attain levels of greatness and mediocrity just as with all art produced.

This necessitated a major reorientation of thought processes and concepts as they had existed for so long. In the process they challenged, the masculine concept of "greatness" in art and whether in its present form at that time, it was actually desirable.

This was extremely difficult; not only to break away from, but also as Lucy Lippard found in her attempts to analyse and categorise the women's movement in art, to pinpoint and validate constructively.

She found:-

"Much women's art, forged in isolation, is deprived

1. Hess, T and Baker E. Art and Sexual Politics. Why have there been no Great Women Artists. .p.34

not only of a historical context, but also of that dialogue with other recent art that makes it possible to categorise or discuss in regard to public interrelationships, not that the women were'nt aware all that time of the artworld art, so much as those men were not aware of their art."¹

Society was so used to the anti-content tradition of the past decade that they found it difficult to comprehend a feminist art with different values. Luckily the climate was changing.

"Fortunately the 60's had contributed certain cultural pre-dispositions useful for the development of a woman's art: an affinity for small scale, intimacy and respect for living things - and a turning away from monumental scale, martial spirit and the worship of technology; a greater concern for self-fulfillment and non-western forms of enlightenment - and a rejection of paternalism, chauvinism and arrogance towards the third world."

"For the first time women are leading not following."²

Modern art had continued along a reductionist, technologically orientated course, becoming in the process minimalist and sometimes totally depersonalised. It was against this dehumanisation that the feminists

1. Lippard, L. From the Center. Feminist Essays on Women's Art. .p.75

2. Larson, K. Art News, October 1980 .p.18

were rebelling. They wanted the right to reintroduce the human content once again - equating it with the feminist approach to art. Then too, they felt that, much life had been eliminated from the art being made. A certain technologically orientated formalism had replaced the personal. The feminist artists wanted to bridge this gap between the personal and the impersonal world.

This they set out to do in a flamboyant and extravagant manner both in their subject matter and approach, which by virtue of its devastating frank introversion became an embarrassment which could eventually not be ignored any longer. It had to be taken seriously by society in the end and in the process became effective.

Thus much of the early creative work of the feminists was politically orientated. That political - artistic relationship affected the art produced.

Harmony Hammond comments:-

"If art and life are connected and if one is a feminist then one must be a feminist artist - that is, one must make art that reflects a political consciousness of what it means to be a woman in a patriarchal culture."¹

Much of the art produced in the name of the feminist cause was

1. Glueck, G. "Women Artists 80", in Art News, October 1980 .p.36

oversimplified in its message - too much so to actually exist as works of art. A didactic literal approach which put the political viewpoint before that of the artistic, so while it was certainly effective in the revolutionary cause, it could not also attain artistic greatness at the same time. Although, at times, I think this was the intention.

However some very talented female artists used the shock tactics whether of an image, installation or performance for a period of time eventually overcoming the limitations imposed by a political art and continuing into more artistic fusions of feminism and art.

Performance art was one of the initial avenues of political expression explored by the feminists. Being by its nature, politically orientated, its intention was to shock society into an awareness of the individual - in particular the creative women and her problems experienced in dealing with the status quo as it existed then. They were after all a minority group, if not in actual numbers then in aspirations. A strange anomaly.

Performance art was used as a means to liberate the moribund and repetitive art scene by unleashing passionate, emotional responses in people. It mentioned the unmentionable and forced direct reactions by the individual viewer. A cathartic ritual.

It was a mixture of narrative, visual and conceptual aesthetics bonded

together to produce a performance on stage. Dada for the Seventies.

Body art with words and as such was especially suited to the needs of the emergent, feminist artists at the time. They could, through performance, show the bigotted attitudes of the masculine world towards the female and at the same time through visual expression of suffering bond women together in order to function more effectively as a group.

Female emotional and autobiographical concerns traditionally heavily cloaked and suppressed were dramatically visually exposed and with it emerged the anger so long seething below the surface of the female psyche. In Performance art women frankly confronted themselves as sexual beings.

Its great benefit was in the fact that it thoroughly expressed the "disposable" notion of society - it did not have to be good enough to last. As such, it was to a certain extent, symptomatic of the turbulent, transitional period of conflicting emotions characteristic of the Seventies.

As Joan Jonas one of the more famous exponents of performance art said:-

"Performance suggested itself to a number of artists as a possible new format, a bastard child perhaps, but one whose lack of definition offered easy entry and an escape from the weight of history"

It removed the heavy emphasis of the "serious" and allowed a certain freedom of creative expression to emerge, acting also as a counter to the devastating loss of energy that attacked the American nation in the early Seventies.

It arose as a reaction to the hypercritical approaches to painting and sculpture symptomatic of the time and was used as a form of expressive escape.

"Performance seemed to allow a reinsertion of the self, a chance to dramatise the artist in action."

(Joan Jonas)¹

Joan Jonas is now considered a major exponent of this art form. She combines personal symbolism with verbal and visual theoretical presentations created to disturb, annoy or arouse some emotional participation. Through it she confronts her own feelings of rage and exploitation. The essence of these performances seemed to be pagan ritual with total emphasis on the artist's emotional self-expression. For example in one piece Joan Jonas merely gazed into a mirror for an hour, while being held aloft on a litter. In another she covered herself with blood during a birth sequence. These were meant to induce "gut" reactions from the audience cutting through the psuedo hyprocrisy they felt to be all pervading at the time. For example Organic Honey's Vertical Roll now preserved on video for posterity.

1. Junker, H. Joan Jonas: The Mirror Staged, in Art in America, February 1981, .p.37

Many female artists used it merely as a means to an end, passing on to other avenues of creative expression once they had exhausted the potential of the performance art. For example Judy Chicago, Miriam Schapiro, Barbara Zucker, Susan Williams.

This political consciousness only came fully into play during the last decade when women realised the need for collective action and that it actually could have some effect.

They banded together in self-supportive groups, acting militantly, in defiance of the masculine controlled art world. Women became involved on all levels, for example, polemics, protests, publications, the establishment of women's groups, programs and spaces, the mounting of women's exhibitions, the exploration of feminist consciousness and imagery. All aimed at giving them a much needed morale-lifting and the confidence to demand their rights as individuals. As one woman put it, she was going to make what she wanted to and the world would have to find a place for it. Women were becoming the leaders for the first time.

An exhibition "Women artists 1550 - 1950", the first major collection of female work ever to be held was organised by Linda Nochlin at the Brooklyn Museum in New York in 1977. It was a much needed historical survey and gave feminist art groups even greater confidence to continue.

Before this, a very important aspect of the feminist art programs was

the assistance and support gained from the increasing amount of feminist orientated, critical writing, now readily available for the first time in magazines and books. This gave an increasing sense of self-worth to women, hitherto so isolated. These books and essays clarified women's position for them.

Apart from these critical literary contributions there was the writings that concentrated on the historical aspects of the role of women in the Fine Arts. A re-writing of art history in order to answer the question so prevalent in the Seventies. Why have there been no great women artists?

Linda Nochlin answered the question in an essay in the book "Art and Sexual Politics." There have been great female painters in the past but the structure of society as it was then allowed them no leeway to exist as individuals and to assert their individuality talented though they might be. The historical research undertaken has proved the existence of many previously unknown female painters and sculptors, for example, Anne Vallayer - Coster (French) 1744 - 1818, Maria van Oosterwyck (Dutch 1630 - 1693), Alice Trumbull Mason (American 1904 - 1971).

Numerous other publications have appeared but the latest most definitive work on this subject was Germaine Greer's "The Obstacle Race" which instead of attempting to analyse those things in women's history that

have interfered with their creative expression merely documented in a rather dull manner an accumulation of dates, précis of careers, lists of canvases of women painters of the past. The book is about the failure, by no means gender determined to get beyond talent and competence.

Nevertheless the value of this book and others like it lies in the historical framework it supplies within which women can work. They need to identify with the creative women from the past, to use their achievements to extend their own.

Greer concluded that the enemies of promise lie less in the external forces of life than in those things common to both sexes; flaws of character, of will, of desire, though these things are, as she emphasised culturally accentuated in women through their fear of competition, fear of going it alone, fear of not pleasing men or of meeting man-made standards.

In other words, they suffer through their indoctrination of "female" values in a male-dominated culture. These having been inculcated in them to induce and maintain a position of subordination.

Emotionalism at the expense of rationalisation. Greer comments:-

"Obstacles are only obstacles to creativity if they are internalised; it is the uniquely internalised nature of women's oppression which causes wasteful inner

conflicts and drains the energy which might have gone into creative work."

These "female values" had to be reconsidered and this could only be done by a much stronger influence exerted by women in educational institutions. In other words an emphasis placed on the teaching of female values, by women to women. An environment which created a female context to which the creative women could constructively relate to.

Thus along with the artistic efforts being made to restructure the system went the strong belief that grassroot changes were necessary in the patriarchally dominated art institutions.

Militants in the movement were pushing for education in feminist principles. In 1970 in Fresno, Judy Chicago developed the first feminist art curriculum. In 1977 she joined forces with Miriam Schapiro, painter and collagist, to form a fully fledged feminist art program at the big Disney backed California Institute of The Arts in Valencia - an attempt to provide "education for women by women, about women" via conscious-raising techniques, collaborative projects and the re-thinking of art and social history from a feminist perspective.

She initiated a very necessary revolution in the female art world, adopting an aggressive, outspoken stance taking up the cudgels on

behalf of all women attempting to form them into a coherent whole to serve as a base from which to proceed. Also in 1970 in America the Ad Hoc Committee of Women Artists came into being demanding more representation for women in the annual exhibitions at the Whitney Museum. From then on confrontation increased, and from it sprang many women's groups. This leading to the first of the all-women art exhibitions - women exhibitors chosen by women. The criticism levelled at these all women art exhibitions was that the isolationism created was the wrong sort but I can imagine their very useful function at the time being morale building.

Collectives flourished throughout America, female spaces where women artists could gather together to gain support from each other in friendly congenial atmospheres. Chicago was one of the most influential feminist artists of the Seventies who together with other American women artists managed by sheer tenacity and perseverance to effect a totally new environment within which the creative women could operate.

It was largely due to her efforts that a redefinition of art and society took place. Applying herself practically to the problem, she attempted change by introducing female conscious-raising groups at college level, using theatrical means plus group activity to break down preconceived notions held by women, in order to bind them together.

A group of female art students were gathered together and encouraged

to act assertively and to be productive creatively. Their work dealt with and revealed some aspect of their experiences as women. They used the content of their lives as the basis of their art and that apparently stimulated the production of a great deal of work, away from the negative effects of a male-dominated environment. The effects of which I can corroborate having experienced them myself, at first hand as a female painting student in the Sixties. We were tolerated as being a necessary evil to make up numbers but the implication was always there, that, no matter how talented we were in the short term we could never attain the levels necessary for greatness. Unlike our sometimes inferior male colleagues who were given every encouragement flourishing confidently in the belief of their own validity as great artists of the future.

This belief that women were not capable of major creations had a long lasting detrimental effect on the work of my own and several of my female associates.

As Adrienne Rich puts it:-

"I would like to list some of the ways in which we destroy ourselves. Self-trivialisation is one. Believing the lie that women are not capable of major creations not taking ourselves or our work seriously always finding the needs of others more demanding than our own."¹

1. Rich, A. On Lies, Secrets and Silence. Selected Prose. 1966 - 1978 .p.35

"If my needs, values, and interests differed from male artists who were invested in the values of the culture, then it was up to me to help develop a community that was relevant to me and other women artists."¹

Chicago initiated the idea that the form of art itself would have to be different if it was to communicate a female point of view. Building a solid alternative for women in art for the first time in history.

"Womenhouse" 1972 was the result. A monumental collaborative effort. The conversion of a seedy Los Angeles house into a fantasy environment that reflected a free-floating feminist consciousness. The house was hired and each room made individually into an installation each presenting some artistic statement on women's lives at that time.

Although it has left few aesthetic traces it gave these women a chance to do art without involving the masculine judgement. Some of the installations were Robin Weltsch's "Kitchen" which had breastlike eggs attached to walls and ceiling. "Leah's room" portrayed the pain of aging: A woman sat examining her face in the mirror in front of a Victorian dressing table.

1. Chicago, J. Through The Flower. .p.42.

Female artists questioned radically the idea that art had to be stylistically innovative and also at the same time whether the existing forms of art were actually adequate for the ideas of women. Allied to this was their aim to redefine the term "serious art" (hitherto totally masculine in concept) and "non-serious" (anything that was decorative or sensual was immediately relegated to the derisive term feminine, having little, if any, artistic worth).

In the process of rebelling women made subject matter legitimate again, not only for themselves, but also for men.

"Narcissism - the close focus on self - was a woman's problem for Freud, but feminism has transformed it into a source of strength."¹

As a result a female art has emerged with its own images pertaining solely to itself, a reaction to the neutralised image previously considered the norm.

Female art was opposing not styles and forms but ideologies in the attempt to forge a potential female culture. One of the avenues has been that of sexual or erotic imagery from a female point of view. Hannah Wilke specialises in these soft vaginal shapes repetitively moulded and distributed on a surface. Louise Bourgeois in her sculptures used breast-phallus protrusions, fingerlike growths,

1. Rich, A. On Lies Secrets and Silence. Selected Prose. 1966 - 1978 .p.101

rounded cylinders with various vertical or horizontal emphasis. She always refused to acknowledge the sexual aspects of her work, always insisting that the eroticism was completely unconscious. Figuration is her springboard which together with a literal imagination forms the basis of her very sensual images and surfaces, for example, the knife-woman ("Femme Couteau 1969 - 1970") a wrapped and folded marble blade with delicate pudenda exposed. Eunice Golden: "Landscape" a painting which handles a subject often handled in the past by men. See illustrations for a comparative viewpoint!

Realistic conceptions of the female experience, for example, birth, motherhood, rape, household imagery, windows, menstruation, autobiography and portraits of friends also figure prominently as subject matter for women. Windows, particularly, are often used as images symbolising the world beyond the closeted environment that the female has, in the past, always been forced to inhabit that is the freedom within confinement. Alternatively windows can also symbolise their use as barriers or protectors to women confined within a space.

Following on to these realistic conceptions are the abstractisms deriving from the same sources. These symbols include images of veiling, confinement, enclosures, pressures, barriers, constrictions as well as of growth, unwinding, unfolding and sensuous surfaces.

Jan Butterfield in an article in "Art News" criticised these images:-

"Much of the imagery hailed as 'feminine' - transparency, veiling, centering, openings, bags, protrusions, grids, repetition of elements, sensuality, coloration is a learned and limited imagery. It often becomes too personal, and in many cases simply does not allow a full spectrum of expression to women artists"¹

Under the term sensuality may be placed the "decorative" so long ignored as incapable of attaining universality. This had to be redefined. Towards this end the feminist artist applied themselves. Breaking away from formalist art meant including references to handwork, embroidery, tile decoration, peasant design: in other words, art not made by male, white Europeans.

Traditional craft-orientated techniques favoured by female artists such as quilting, appliqué, weaving, stitching were always in the past ignored as not "great art." In the Seventies these crafts were taken up in a militant fashion by the feminist artists and aggressively combined with female imagery in order to make their statements. They were determined to find a link between materials and meanings.

Miriam Schapiro changed from geometric abstractions to dense, emotionally rich collage paintings (she calls them femmages) based on women's garb (quilts or komonos) and layered with glitter, gold brocades, lace and

1. Butterfield, J. Art News, February 1981 .p.22

swaths of fabric. The trend in the past was always for the female artist to suppress these elements within her and aspire to the impersonal, bland, supposedly conceptual statements normally made by the male artist.

When eventually the situation was rationalised, at last, they realised that there was no need for this dichotomy within the creative female personality. The natural pull towards the decorative so long suppressed (and the guilt experienced when capitulating and indulging oneself in the expression of the decorative) was allowed full rein.

A large part of the female insecurity and lack of confidence arose from this indoctrination at educational level that the only norm was the masculine. Hence the paranoid guilt at one's own vision being wrong, inferior - therefore not "great art" and worthless.

I have been involved instinctively in the "decorative" art of appliqué for some time finding out that operating in two separate spheres (the one being painting) gave fresh insights to both. A symbiotic relationship that I felt to be beneficial. However, I have always been advised, to give up the useless craftwork and concentrate more on the serious side of painting by my fellow male artists. This I have always refused to do but secretly, until now, felt guilty at "wasting" my time.

Today many artists, especially in America, quite a few of them men,

are making use of the decorative, combining painting with collage and making assemblages. Together with fabrics are used sequins and beads giving a rich oriental effect. In the past oriental effects were definitely reduced to the level of decadent. Amongst the men making use of these techniques are Zakanitz, George Ingarman and Alan Shields.

Judy Chicago in her book "Through The Flower" traces her development as a creative woman within a male-dominated environment. She has written a very moving account on the inter-relationship between feminism and female art and about how she tried to change the traditional concepts. She discusses her struggles and her attempts to cope with the system.

Initially, coming from a liberal home which gave her every encouragement she proceeded to the outside world where she soon discovered all the drawbacks involved, vastly different to what she had been led to expect. She then resorted to studio isolation which many female painters have done in the past rather than suffer the degradation of indifference.

Another avenue of retreat was the painting of what she calls "neutralised" pictures i.e. devoid of any emotional feminine content. Paintings that would be accepted by the male art community while those she really wanted to were either hidden or destroyed.

"I had, in trying to make myself into an artist who was taken seriously in a male-dominated art community, submerged the very aspects of myself that would make my work intelligible."¹

1. Chicago, J. Through The Flower .p.23

As said previously, depersonalised, minimalist art was the masculine norm and women were forced to comply or become submerged. Most found the concepts and images that were universally acceptable as "serious art" unacceptable to their own psyches. I can remember my own feelings of guilt whenever I painted something relevant to myself which went against the masculine norm. Constantly suppressing her desire to use overt female symbols, she finally came full circle realising that she would have to find a way to integrate her experience as a woman with her art and find a means of expressing creatively rather than hiding her real feelings.

She chronicles all the undignified, ego-destroying condescension encountered on all levels which led her eventually to try to create this female art community. Her aim was the establishment of an alternative structure that would allow women to take control of the entire art making process. Not only that, but she decided that the form of art itself would have to be different if it was to communicate a female point of view.

Society had to accept a new order. Women were, at last, prepared to fight to effect these changes. The political was forced to combine with the artistic.

Eventually in 1979 after six years' work Judy Chicago's co-operative installation, "The Dinner Party" was opened at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 1979. A major work of art it was one of the most

ambitious pieces of sculpture attempted by a female artist. It successfully integrates the political, feminist values with the artistic. Combining sculpture, ceramics, China painting, needlework and the history of women through Western civilisation. It was a collaborative effort on the part of many people. It consists of an open-centered huge triangle set on a white raised platform of triangular tiles which are crisscrossed by 999 names of women from the mythical past to the present. On the surface of the triangle are place settings a ceramic plate with the abstracted image of the artist represented, her name on a runner and embroideries that run along the inside of the table and offers a contrasting image to that of the frontal view of runners and plates.

"The dinner party is unique in having as one of its immediate goals the education and training of women to take command - not only of the project, but by extension, of their own work and lives."¹

Chicago herself said of the piece:-

"I made the piece as a work of art ... it is not about politics but there are political implications."²

Eventually we have arrived at some semblance of new order. To assess it we should look at the state of art as it exists at the moment.

1. Lippard, L. Art in America, April, 1980 .pp. 52 - 54

2. Ibid. pp. 52 - 54

Art now in the Eighties like everything else, has been subject to drastic reappraisal. It has had to adapt. The Sixties was a decade of movements, Op, Pop, Colour-field, minimalism to name a few. The Seventies went even further - every kind of art was allowed to co-exist and flourish. During this period there arose the realisation with some shock that Modernism which had existed for over a hundred years in Europe and America was over and in the process of becoming a period style. By 1979 the concept of the Avant-Garde had gone.

The revolutionary function of art was gone. Everything and anything new, was now accepted, without the customary revolt by the very middle-class against which it was meant to revolt. The ideal - social renewal by cultural challenge was now dead.

The idea of the cultural avant-garde did not exist before 1800. It was fostered by the rise of the European bourgeoisie and its liberal beliefs. The salon encouraged a ferment of artistic variety within which an avant-garde could flourish. The middle class was always initially, the enemy, then audience for this art, usually a generation behind. This trend lasted until 1970 when everything "new and novel" was accepted without question as being "art". The "newness" of a work of art became one of the conditions of its acceptability.

This does not mean to say that all Modernism has ceased forthwith. It will continue to affect our culture for sometime but definitely the dynamic is gone and it is slowly receding into history. Something

new is in the air. Reassessment of the situation is necessary now. In time with this new approach to painting was the British Royal Academy's winter exhibition which opened at the beginning of this year "Painting - a new spirit". It was an attempt to start afresh and to isolate the qualities that looked healthy and promising in today's painting. Figurative and non-figurative were mixed together - no more the emphasis on "modern for moderns sake" to the detriment of meaning. The cult book "Zen and The Art of Motorcycle Maintenance" placed great emphasis on the concept of quality. America, too, is exhibiting a certain self-discipline in the new recognition of quality. This attitude is springing from the youth themselves. They are revolting against the anti-cultural attitudes, the lack of discrimination and of excellence which has characterized a vanguard that stood for moral and political laxity. They are against anarchy intellectual slovenliness, lack of craft, skill and tastelessness.

This spirit of self-discipline integrity and respect is the new spirit of the Eighties and we are seeing it as usual, first in art. The new film Raiders of The Lost Ark directed by Steven Spielberg represents the filmworld's contribution to the new spirit of quality.

"The simple craftsmanship, evident throughout, the attention to detail, puts the viewer in mind of an almost vanished habit of meticulous moviemaking."

Richard Schickel.¹

1. Schickel, R. Time Magazine, June 15, 1981 pp. 21 - 22

Delacroix defined art as nature seen through a temperament. The duty of the artist is to be capable of synthesizing history and combining it with an additional element that is the artists personal contribution, and thereby making something of value - a work of art.

People were realising that the basic problems in art remain the same whatever the affiliation i.e. how to use the materials available in order to make a object or image.

The direction in which art in the Eighties was going followed the other ideological trends. Sincerity at all costs with the concept of "artist as individual" returning. In other words, the artist, the materials, and the work of art produced forming a cohesive triangle. The return of the mystery developing the symbols created by each unique individual reflecting not only the times but also the personality involved.

CRITICISMS AND CONCLUSIONS

Adrienne Rich

"Whatever the forms it may take, the process of women's repossession of ourselves is irreversable. Within and without academe, the rise in women's expectations has gone far beyond the middle class and has released an incalculable new energy - not merely for changing institutions but for human re-definition, not merely for equal rights but for a new kind of being."¹

"Amid the shifting perceptions and ambiguities of the art world the last decade has succeeded in giving women artists a stirring new sense of themselves and their potential."²

Grace Glueck

Reviewer & Cultural News Reporter
for the "New York Times" and other
publications.

During the years since the 1981 publication of Betty Friedan's "The

1. Rich, A. On Lies, Secrets and Silence. Selected Prose. 1966 - 1978 .p.10
2. Glueck, G. Art News, October 1980 .p.21

Feminine Mystique" much has been written on all aspects of women's liberation and since the mid-sixties an overwhelming amount of research has gone into defining the role of women in art both the past and today.

A large portion of the blame for the lack of representation in the past is placed on the shoulders of the male historians who consistently refused to acknowledge the validity of the female artists' efforts - whether innovative or merely eclectic. Many eclectic male painters on the other hand were given status in the history books.

Lucy Lippard comments:-

"I recognise now the seeds of feminism in my revolt against Clement Greenberg's Patronization of Artists against the imposition of the taste of one class on everybody, against the notion that if you don't like so-and-so's work for the 'right' reasons, you can't like it at all, as well as against the 'masterpiece' syndrome, the 'Three Great Artists' syndrome and so forth. I was opposed to all these male authority figures not because they were male, however, but because they were authorities."¹

The blame for conditions as they stood then could be ascribed to the male historian for not being able to fairly assess female art, an art

1. Lippard, L. From the Center. Feminist Essays on Women's Art .p.33

institutions for not providing equal opportunities for women and educational systems for emphasising biased, conservative male/female roles and finally, on women themselves for not taking sooner, with more determination what has been rightfully their's all along.

Investigating women's art and role in society helped me see my own circumstances and frustration as an artist, less as a personal failure than a social and political dilemma that could only be solved by a fundamental change in the nature of society and coupled with it the change in attitude towards female creative efforts.

The feminists of the last two decades accomplished much in a short space of time. The situation today is very different to what it was then. The Eighties have introduced a new order. Hopefully the changes made will remain as a permanent feature of our lives. A sensible co-existence of male and female each supportive towards the other forming a coherent whole.

Reassessment of the situation as it stands today has been reassuring and is coupled with a tremendous sense of relief. One can now get down to the business of living and creating to the best of one's ability without these constant external pressures of whether one, as a woman, is actually capable of it or not. Women must finally rid themselves of this tremendous load of guilt they have been carrying for so long.

Unfortunately women, have still not reached a position of genuine equality although we are on our way there. The "White Paper on Equality for Women" of September 1974 passed in Britain put an official seal on women's emancipation. It was a clear undertaking on the part of the Establishment to accept the principle of sex equality.

The general concensus of opinion of leading female artists questioned on their degree of equality experienced is that, while some equality in the art world does exist, and that some progress has been made on a wide variety of fronts, total equality is still to be striven for. They feel that the fight should continue unlike the younger generation of female artists, the ones who are at the present up and coming. They have inherited the ground already gained by the older generation of feminist artists. Somewhat blasé they tend to take for granted the degree of equality they enjoy at the moment by no means parity but definately partial. With this they seem relatively content.

Militancy has therefore declined because of the progress made so far and also because of the effects of the economic recession already mentioned. People are struggling to exist financially with not much time, strength or money left over for "causes". The recession has forced a realisitc approach to life which excludes the altruistic support of ideals and the extraneous rhetoric accompanying them. Carrying this through to creativity they seem to want to get on with the job of making art and to forget about politics.

The older generation however, definitely feel that the fight should continue until total equality is achieved.

Germaine Greer interviewed recently had this to say as regards progress:-

"It's much, much more than I would have hoped for, because all I see is that we are going to die in the struggle, it won't be won by the time we die ...

Marcuse the philosopher, said recently that he thought the Women's Liberation Movement was the most radical movement of his time. He's absolutely right, so you can't expect enormous changes, immediately. It's hard enough to make changes within the individual, let alone the changes which will affect the nature of every institution. I'm still passionately interested but my interest takes much more the form of being terrified by false roads and phoney struggles."¹

One only has to look at the financial level to realise the lack of true parity. A women's work of art is still worth only half that of a man in the general marketplace. Also as regards the teaching profession equality has been mainly cosmetic and parity a goal still not achieved. It is necessary for women to fill these educational posts in order to propagate a feminist viewpoint.

Avis Berman in the October 1980 issue of "Art News" tackled the question:

1. Hobbs, L. "Germaine Greer Now" in Over 21, August 1981 .pp. 22 - 23



52/.....

Has progress been made in the position of women in the Art World in America since the Seventies? She questioned prominent women artists from all over America and asked them to what degree the women's movement had influenced their art.

She used the categories of museum recognition, gallery representation and educational opportunities coming to the same conclusions that I did. That while conditions are better, parity is still an imachieved goal.

Some comments from those women interviewed were:-

Nell Blaine: painter of the New York School:-

"Women are still thought of as second-rate, and that's our main obstacle."¹

Miriam Schapiro: co-founder of the Feminist Art Program at the California Institute of the Arts:-

"We're getting changes, not tremendous ones, but changes nonetheless, and we have to acknowledge them."²

She continues that history of art books still do not mention women artists, and believes that feminist activism must continue for at

1. Berman, A. Art News, October 1980 .p.16

2. Ibid. .p.16

least another quarter of a century before parity is achieved.

Judy Chicago: Her name is synonymous with feminist art and has concentrated on organic feminine imagery and motifs since the late Sixties.

"Ten years ago there was no space for me as an artist. There was huge resistance to my femaleness, to understanding that female experience and imagery are valid subject matter for art. Now more women are showing but female art is still resisted"

"White male values prevail as the universal experience and are maintained as such by the museums."¹

Faith Ringgold: a black feminist painter who since the Sixties has also been involved in soft sculpture.

"The biggest improvement for women artists is that they now feel free to do their work, to experiment, to create kinds of imagery that may be peculiar to women."²

She makes another point:-

"Women still have to learn self-definition and self-determination. Women have to be responsible to other women instead of giving the men everything they have.

1. Berman, A. Art News, October 1980, .p.17

2. Ibid. .p.18

Women are still too used to helping men."¹

Linda Nochlin writing in the early Seventies said:-

"The impact of the Women's Movement has already made itself felt in the art world in a variety of significant ways; it is predictable that in the Seventies, women, freed from the demands of traditionally feminine roles and the compulsion to react against them by adopting equally stereo-typed masculine stances, or perhaps operating in an area of creative tensions generated by the very consciousness of opposing options, will play an increasingly dominant role in the shaping of art."

Kay Larson "Art News" Oct. 1980³

The feminist revolution was instrumental in creating a sympathetic environment within which a creative woman could work without being subjected to those external pressures from society so long a detrimental part of their lives. Today for the first time women are leading not following. They have begun to define what they want society and art to be. In the process, not displacing men, but opening up new freedoms for everyone. Much has been accomplished in a very short space of time. We are now seeing the effects of the

1. Berman, A. Art News, October 1980 .p.18

2. Larson, K. Art News, October 1980 .p.43

insights acquired during the past two decades starting to be integrated into women's lives. They demanded a feminist art system operating within a feminist environment fully realising that under no circumstances could the existing conditions foster comprehension of female art. The conditions being the formal anticontent tradition imposed by the masculine orientated culture so long in control.

The feminists realised that for women painters or sculptors to succeed they would have to reach a state of confidence in which all external conflicts were resolved and the energy usually devoted to fighting for their rights channelled, instead, into their art.

Apart from this they also felt that female art had to be different to that of the male if it was to establish its own identity. Not only different but it had to be accepted as valid and worthwhile by society. A concurrent stream of female consciousness had to operate and persevere in its pursuit of these ideals in order to produce an alternate female culture which would be solid enough to act as a balance to the existing male culture.

There now exists a stream of artistic consciousness which is female in derivation and lies parallel to that of the masculine. It has its own unique set of symbols and philosophy. Subject matter is totally expressive of the feminine approach and relevant to their present life style.

Its origins were revolutionary. Therefore, the female art produced was politically-feminist orientated, emphasising direct confrontation hereby shocking society into an awareness of conditions as they stood then. This was necessary to effect change.

Yet the obvious drawback to the above was that much crude literal art was produced in the name of feminist freedoms. Unfortunately trying to be didactic and creative at the same time has led, in the hands of lesser talents, to oversimplification with the resultant bad art produced. Lacking subtlety the message was first political then creative.

Linda Nochlin - professor of Art History at Vassar College expressed her criticisms:-

"The problem lies not so much with the feminists concept of what femininity in art is, but rather with a misconception of what art is, with the naive idea that art is the direct, personal expression of individual, emotional expression - a translation of personal life into visual terms. Yet art is almost never that; great art certainly never. The making of art involves a self-consistent language of form, more or less dependent upon, or free from given temporally defined conventions, schemata, or systems of notation, which have to be learned or worked out through

study, apprenticeship or a long period of individual experimentation."¹

Now much of the early brashness is gone and many artists working today have managed to transcend the obvious showing in their work a refined use of feminist symbols and subject matter. Another criticism levelled against this female orientated route was that of separatism leading to an isolation which was counter-productive.

One should assess the validity of the female art movement as it now stands - as a separate entity; but I feel, this should be left to the art historians of the future. We are still too closely involved to make serious value judgements.

Not everyone believes that feminism has had a good influence on art. Some feel that it has seriously undermined artistic standards. This is irrelevant at the present moment.

The world is changing and for the better. We women, as creative beings are being accorded an increased respect. The younger generation following should reap the full benefit of the changing order. Changes have definitely been effected both in the artistic and social spheres

1. Hess, T. and Baker, E. Art and Sexual Politics. Why have there been no Great Women Artists? .p.42

of women's lives which are hopefully permanent. Whichever way the indecisive peripheral issues might be resolved one thing is certain:- Women's art exists, has been already vastly influential, is gaining momentum steadily, has had far-reaching consequences, is being taken seriously for the first time and can never again be erased either from memory or recorded history.

Finally we have arrived at the realisation both in art and life that a return to the source is of vital importance not via the media but via, the self. An honest, sincere reappraisal to begin again at the beginning.

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Fig 1. "Chinese Theater" by Charmion von Wiegand
1956 Collage



Fig 2. "Soho Women Artists" by May Stevens



Fig 3. "Landscape No 160" by Eunice Golden 1972
Acrylic on paper.



Fig 4. "Landscape No 2" A Masculine South African
version of the above.



Fig 5. "Self Portrait 1965/66" by Louise Bourgeois
Wood and Cement

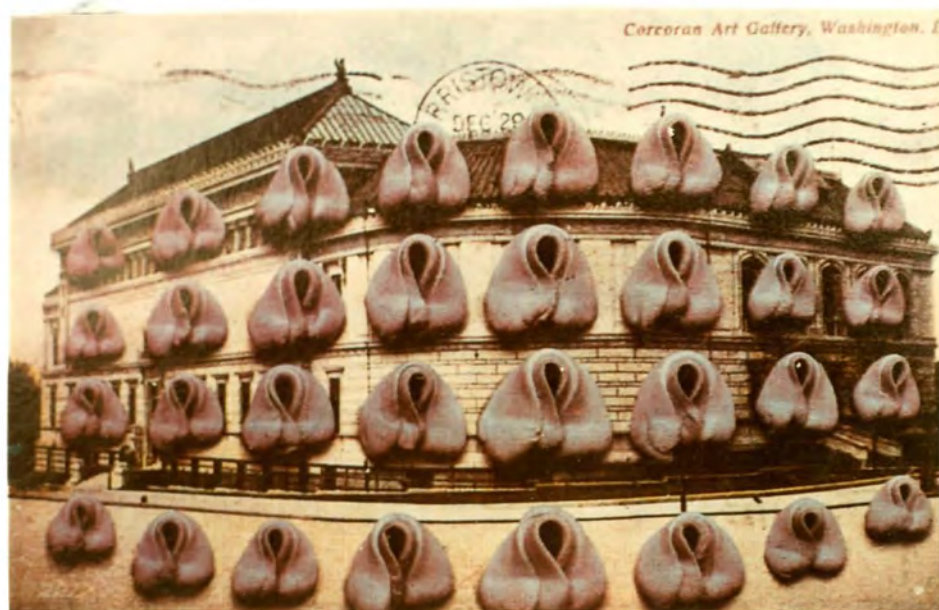


Fig 6. "Corcoran Museum" by Hannah Wilke 1976



Fig 7. "Le Trani Episode" by Louise Bourgeois 1971
Latex over plaster



Fig 8. "Femme Couteau" 1969/70 by Louise Bourgeois
Polished Marble

Fig 9. Faith Ringgold



Fig 10. "Moma and Nana"
A soft Sculpture
by Faith
Ringgold





Fig 11. "Caucasian Carpet" 1980 by Joyce Kozloff's Coloring Book Series.



Fig 12. "Emma Lottie and the Era Club. Preventing The Enslavement of Women by Pimps." 1979 by Kendall Shaw
Beads & Sequins on canvas

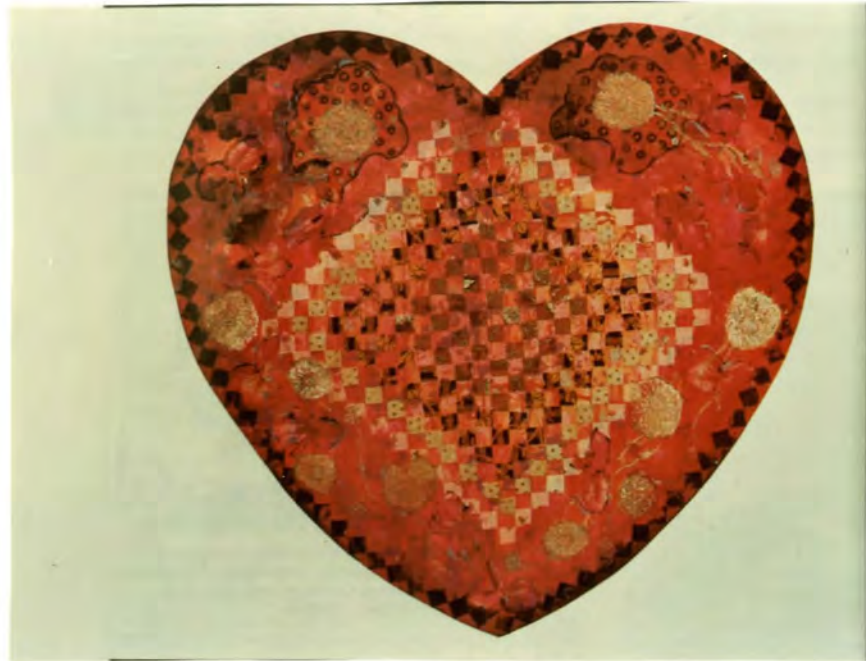


Fig 13. "Queen of Hearts no 1" 1979 by Miriam Schapiro
Mixed media on paper



Fig 14. "Sojourner Truth" by Judy Chicago
plate from The Dinner Party Installation



Fig 15. "George Sand" from The Reincarnation Triptych 1973 by Judy Chicago. Oil on Canvas



Fig 16. "Untitled" 1970 by Cynthia Carlson

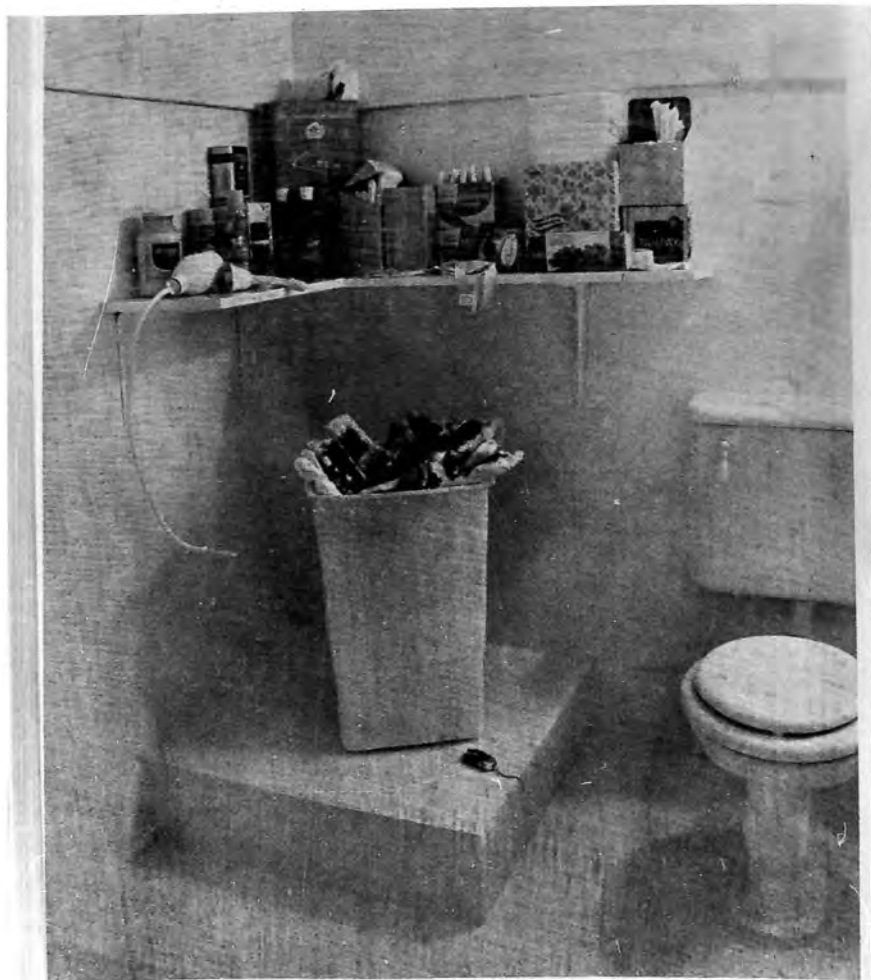


Fig 17. "Menstruation Bathroom" Installation by Judy Chicago



Fig 18. Judy Chicago

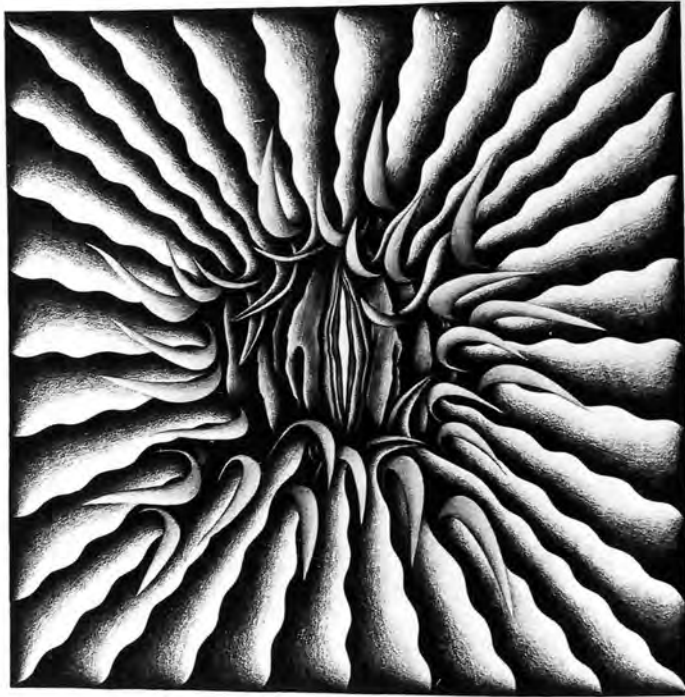


Fig 19. "Female Rejection Drawing" from The Rejection Quintet 1974 by Judy Chicago. Coloured pencil on paper.

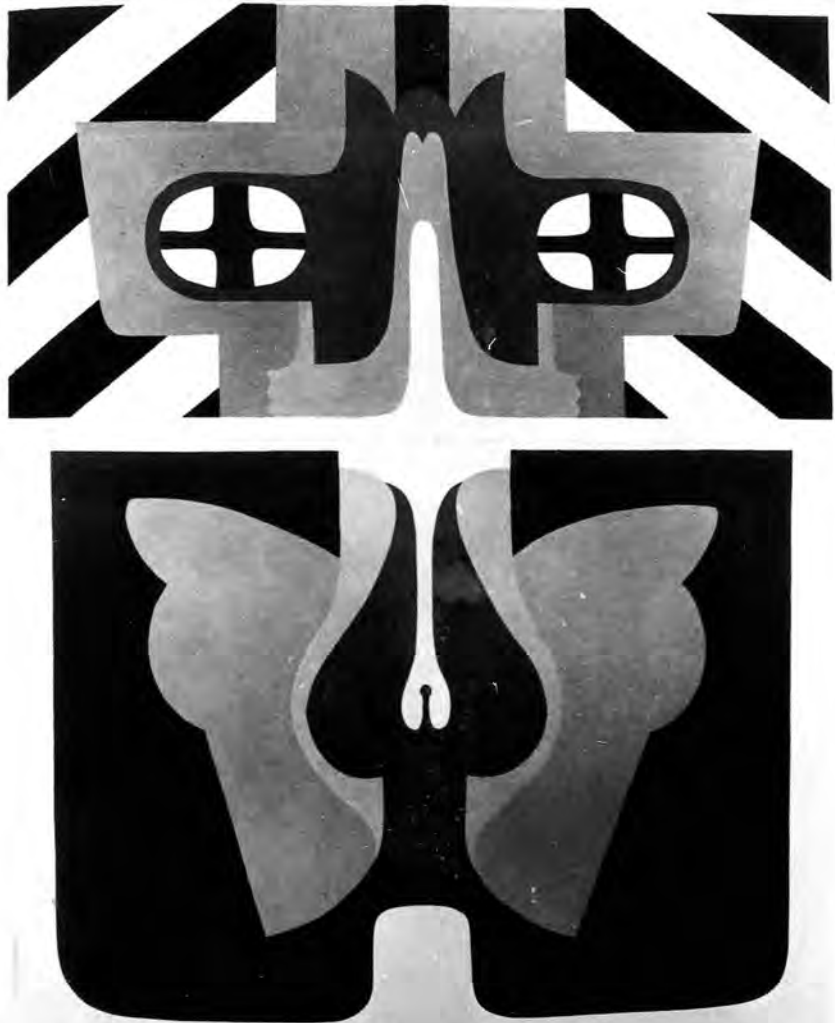


Fig 20. "Flight" 1963 by Judy Chicago. Acrylic on Masonite.



Fig 21. "Kitchen" by Robin Weltsch's from Womenhouse 1972



Fig 22. "The Dining Room" from Womenhouse 1972



Fig 23. "Leah's Room" from Womenhouse 1972



Fig 24. "Raising Firebird Energy" by Mary Beth Edelson. 1978



Fig 25. "Let It All Hang Out" by Judy Chicago. 1973.
Acrylic on Canvas.



Fig 26. "Sappho plate" from The Dinner Party. 1979 by
Judy Chicago. China paint on porcelain.



Fig 27. "Heritage Floor" Dinner Party workers painting the names on the porcelain tile.



Fig 28. Judy Chicago and Leonard Skura carving a plate



Fig 29. "Sacajawea" place setting for The Dinner Party



Fig 30. "Mary Wollstonecraft" from the Dinner Party. Place setting seen from the back.



Fig 31. "Artemisia Gentileschi" Place setting from The Dinner Party

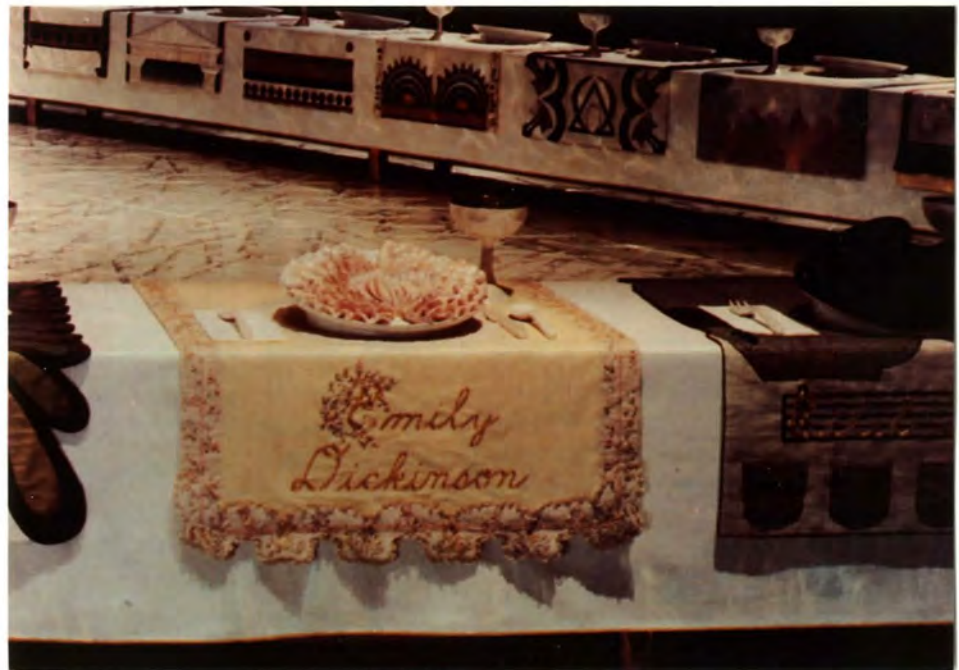


Fig 32. "Emily Dickinson" Place setting from The Dinner Party



Fig 33. View along one side of the triangular table with the Virginia Woolf setting in the foreground. From the Dinner Party.



Fig 34. Two more place settings from The Dinner Party



Fig 35. "Hatshepsut Plate" from the Dinner Party.
China paint on porcelain.



Fig 36. "Boadaceia Plate" from the Dinner Party.
China paint on porcelain.



Fig 37. Embroidered table runner for Petronilla de Meath from The Dinner Party



Fig 38. Embroidered table runner for Susan B. Anthony from The Dinner Party.

