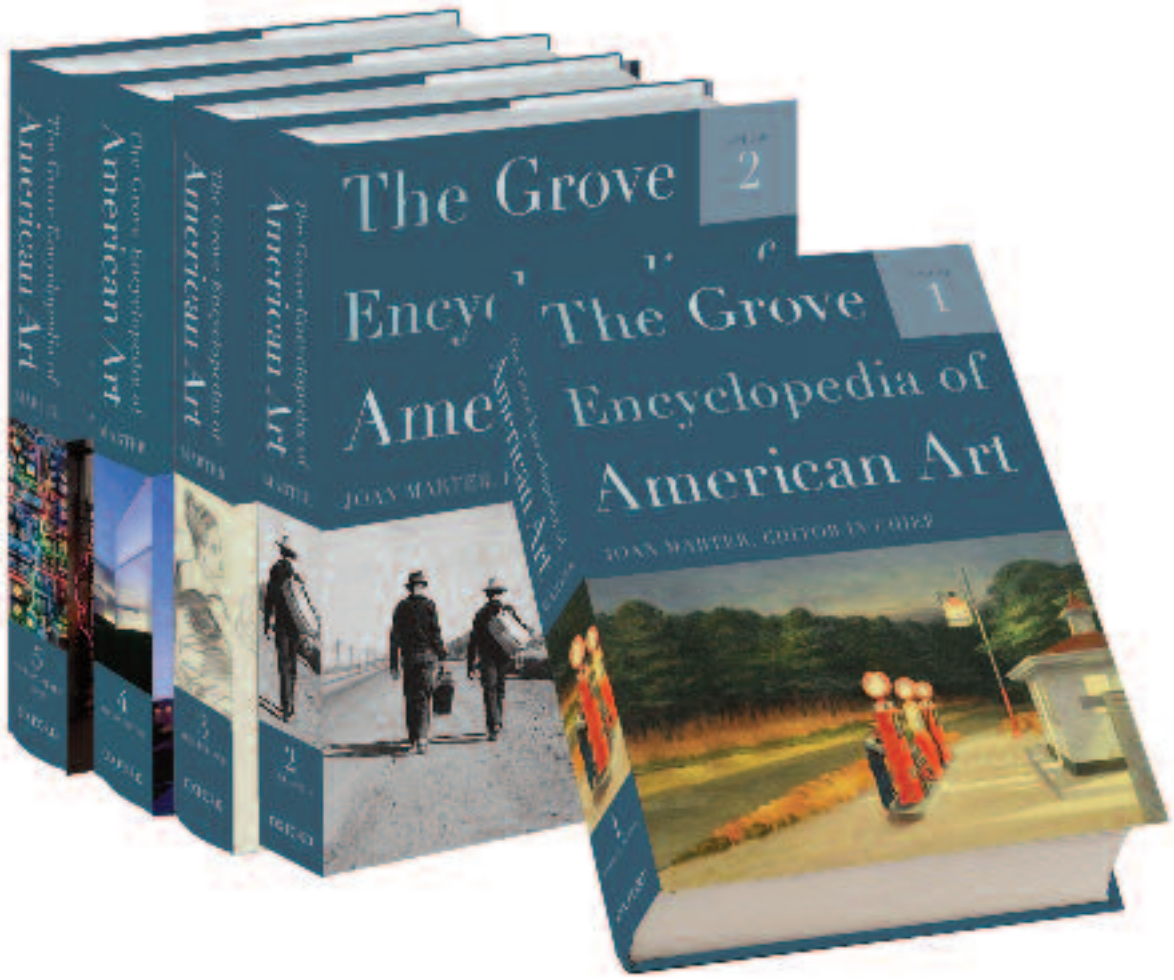
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(on the cover) Michelle Stuart, *Trajectory of Evolutionary Correspondences* (2010), digital photographs, sculptural table: weathered painted metal, cast beeswax top, seed-filled wax containers, horned toad (short horned lizard), 67 1/2" x 115 1/2" (88 pieces, 8" x 10"), table: approx. 35 1/4" x 17" x 13 1/4". © Michelle Stuart. Courtesy the artist and Leslie Tokonow Artworks + Projects.

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Woman's Art Journal

SPRING / SUMMER 2011 VOLUME 32, NUMBER 1

2 **PARALLEL PERSPECTIVES**
By Joan Marter and Margaret Barlow

PORTRAITS, ISSUES AND INSIGHTS

3 CosMology and TransforMaTion in The Work of MiChelle sTuarT
By Christine Filippone

13 MiMi sMiTh: fashioning arT and life
By Susan Earle

22 JaneT CulBerTson: The ToxiC Wilderness
By Joyce Beckenstein

30 Magdalena aBakanoWiCz and developMenT of The figure in posTWar polish sCulpTure
By Aneta Biesiadecka

39 alina szapoCznikoW and her sCulpTure of plasTiC iMperManenCe
By Amy Chmielewski

REVIEWS

48 ***Nancy Spero: The Work*** By Christopher lyon
Nancy Spero: Codex Nancy Spero edited by roel arkesteijn
Nancy Spero: Torture of Women By diana nemiroff and elaine scarry
Nancy Spero: Dissidances By nancy spero, *et al.*
Reviewed by Deborah Frizzell

52 ***Unsettled Visions: Contemporary Asian American Artists and the Social Imaginary*** By Margo Machida
Reviewed by Alexandra Chang

53 ***Eva Hesse Spectres 1960*** edited by e. luanne Mckinnon
Eva Hesse: Longing, Belonging and Displacement By vanessa Corby
Reviewed by Rachel Epp Buller

55 ***Angels of Anarchy: Women Artists and Surrealism*** edited by patricia allmer
Reviewed by Robert Belton

57 ***Surreal Friends, Leonora Carrington, Remedios Varo and Kati Horna*** By stefan van raay, *et al.*
Reviewed by Pamela H. Simpson

59 ***Imagining la Chica Moderna*** By Joanne hershfield
Becoming Modern, Becoming Tradition By adriana zavala
Reviewed by Alison Fraunhar

61 ***Dada's Women*** By ruth hemus
Reviewed by Melissa Johnson

63 ***Child of the Fire: Mary Edmonia Lewis and the Problem of Art History's Black and Indian Subject*** By kirsten pai Buick
Reviewed by Jennifer Wingate

65 ***Mrs. Delany and Her Circle*** edited by Mark laird and alicia Weisberg-roberts
Reviewed by Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell

67 **SHORT TAKES**
Reviewed by Mary C. Simpson, Nina Gara Bozicnik and Vittorio Colaizzi

articles in this issue of *WAJ* are timelier than we could have imagined. We knew that Janet Culbertson's paintings about environmental disasters were immediately relevant to the oil spill caused by Bp and others in the g ulf of Mexico. But then the tragic events in Japan brought new attention by the international community to another of Culbertson's themes: the serious and multifaceted dangers from nuclear reactors. a s the threat of radiation and nuclear fallout extends throughout Japan and far into the pacific o cean, works addressing the presence of such imminent peril by Culbertson and Mimi smith, another artist in this issue, assume enhanced significance.

l ongtime activist Culbertson has depicted oil-covered birds from the exxon-valdez disaster, threatened wildlife from the g alapagos islands, and the ravishing of our landscape by industrial waste. h er art is devoted to the plight of nature, and especially animals, resulting from careless development of our planet. Joyce Beckenstein describes Culbertson's redefinition of the n orth a merican wilderness as "a surreal place, a terrifying human creation that is scorched, toxic, airless and impenetrable." smith, best known for her 1960s proto-feminist work discussed here by susan e arle, became attuned to radiation threats to families during the 1979 Three-Mile island nuclear mishap, which caused "widespread anxiety about nuclear pollution and people becoming sick in their homes."

o ur cover artist, Michelle stuart, is an environmental activist who takes her cues from native peoples in considering how contemporary cultures can live in harmony with the e arth. h er concern and identification with the forces of nature have led stuart to document her personal journey, including explorations of natural sites on several continents. a uthor Christine f ilippone describes how "stuart's evocation of other times and places served to open new, separate conceptual spaces from whose distance she could critically examine her own."

a rticles on two polish sculptors offer new insights into portrayals of the human figure by artists who experienced firsthand the horrors of World War ii and the subsequent political repression and upheavals. Better known of the two is our fourth living artist, Magdalena a bakanowicz, whose sculptural groups grace public sites around the world. a lthough a bakanowicz has not acknowledged any connection to her polish contemporaries, a neta Biesiadecka here explores how "her style…grew out of the postwar expressionistic sculpture developed by polish artists of the same generation with whom a bakanowicz shared these experiences."

o ne of these "polish contemporaries" was a lina szapocznikow, a h olocaust survivor who eventually emigrated to f rance, where she worked (until her untimely death from cancer) in a surrealist-inspired style of fragmentation of the female body. h er disturbing, but always provocative images will soon be the subject of a major exhibition at the Museum of Modern a rt in n ew york. szapocznikow (like Mimi smith) made works in the 1960s using "new materials more often associated with the lightheartedness of pop art than with weighty ontological reflection," writes a my Chmielewski. a lso like smith, szapocznikow "would demonstrate, over the following decade, what many feminist artists after her came to discover as well: that elements of pop art can enable serious explorations of human identity, and that existential inquiry need not take the form of expressionism or abstraction."

a lthough the book review subjects cover several centuries and continents, most concern contemporary a merican art, although with wide-ranging perspectives. n ancy spero's life and art are celebrated in four books that together give an overview of the complexity inherent in this artist's many decades of creative work. The most comprehensive of these studies, by Christopher l yon, "may set a new standard for the critical survey of an artist's work," writes reviewer d eborah f rizzell. Three catalogues of significant recent exhibitions highlight different aspects of this multifaceted artist: *Codex Spero* features writings and interviews taken over her long career; *Torture of Women* focuses on a single major work; and *Dissidances* overviews the reconfigurations of complex concepts that kept her work always fresh and vital.

a nother feminist icon, e va h esse, is the subject of two new books reviewed here by r achel e pp Buller. a n exhibition catalogue offers insights into the personal and artistic responses evidenced by a group of "spectre" paintings the artist completed in 1960, while a more substantive volume, subtitled *Longing, Belonging and Displacement*, re-evaluates the imagery found in h esse's early work and takes issue with some of the critical writing on the artist.

Margo Machida's examination of contemporary a sian-a merican artists' very personal explorations of their multiple histories, communities, connections, and identities is reviewed by a lexandra Chang. More than a century earlier, the sculptor e dmonia l ewis also struggled with her "otherness" in u .s. society, as discussed in *Child of Fire: Mary Edmonia Lewis and the Problem of Art History's Black and Indian Subject*. a uthor k irsten pai Buick probes this artist's "experiences to give us a more nuanced understanding of the cultural forces that helped shaped l ewis's art," writes reviewer Jennifer Wingate.

Two books on competing images of l atin a merican women in the first half of the twentieth century present "a fascinating contestation between representation and reality, national vs. international pictorial language, performance vs. lived life," writes reviewer a lison f raunhar.

o ne of two British exhibition catalogues celebrates the friendship forged in Mexico City after World War ii by three expatriates: painters l eonora Carrington and r emedios v aro and photographer k ati h orna. r eviewer pamela simpson describes it as "the story of how that friendship and their new host country enabled them to find their mature voices as surrealist artists." The second volume, *Angels of Anarchy*, seeks to redefine an expanded grouping of women working in the surrealist manner as "not merely muses to male artists," but as artists whose "works deserve to be understood as autonomous creations," writes reviewer r obert Belton. similarly, *Dada's Women* positions the work of e mmy h ennings, sophie Taeuber-a rp, h annah h öch and suzanne d uchamp within the avant-garde d ada movement.

f inally, k imberly Chrisman-Campbell reviews an exhibition catalogue on Mrs. d elany, the very prolific painter-designer-paper cutter, whose gender and choice of media blocked her rise above the status of "amateur" in eighteenth-century e ngland.

The environmental themes that run through the articles in this journal are provocative as well as timely, and we are pleased to be presenting them at this fortuitous moment.

Joan Marter and Margaret Barlow, co-editors

Cosmology and Transformation in the Work of Michelle Stuart

By Christine Filippone

> The web of time… the strands of which approach one another, bifurcate, intersect or ignore each other through the centuries—embrace every possibility.
>
> —Jorge Luis Borges, *The Garden of Forking Paths*

> "Sailor ... why are we taking this voyage?" He answered "it is to show the things of this place ... cities built in white limestone with temples hiding idols below deep jungle vines ... the ships that shape passages across the sea fixed by stars and hope."
>
> —Michelle Stuart, *Voyages*

For the creation of her frottage drawings, handmade books, earthworks and installations conceived from the late 1960s to the mid-1980s, Michelle Stuart travelled extensively, visiting indigenous and Pre-Columbian sites throughout the Pacific and the Americas, inspired by the travel of Enlightenment Age explorers. As records of the sites she visited, and of her journeys, she collected stones, pebbles and soil, experimental materials she then incorporated into her work. Recurring themes for the artist include time (both historic and geologic), ecology, and natural biology, all of which may be united under the rubric of cosmology, which, broadly construed, encompasses the origin, structure and evolution of the universe, particularly space, time, causality, and freedom and the role of the individual. Sky charts in the form of stone alignments, constellation maps, and renderings of the night sky figure prominently in Stuart's work as means used by both Western and indigenous cultures to situate self within the universe and, as noted in the epigraph, to augur more hopeful futures. Her exploratory impulse, nurtured during the height of the Cold War and the burgeoning feminist movement, suggests a feminist revision of the patriarchal narrative of the Enlightenment pathfinder, who, as British navigator James Cook professed, sought to go "farther than any man has been before me, but as far as I think it is possible for a man to go."[1] The artist's poetic evocations of the primordial earth and the cosmos undermined the dominance inherent in discovery for discovery's sake that pits Western over indigenous, and instead questioned the perceived primitivism of indigenous cultures, which, as Stuart revealed, developed equally complex philosophical and abstract conceptual systems, denoting a common impulse to understand the universe and humankind's place within it. In her cosmological works, she scrutinized the Western embrace of scientific exploration as a means to order and control, while simultaneously internalizing that impulse in her own voyages through time and space, investigating origins and alternative paths for self and society. This essay examines the development of Stuart's use of charts and maps, often manifested as grids, as a means to reference the constrictive rationalization of Cold War society, and subject it to critique by evoking alternative cosmologies (ways of being in the world), often indigenous, that suggested more flexible possibilities.

Stuart's evocation of other times and places served to open new, separate conceptual spaces from whose distance she could critically examine her own. Freely moving through time and space—from the beginnings of universe, earth and biological life, to the era of Enlightenment exploration—Stuart undermined rigid temporal and spatial boundaries born of an Enlightenment Age science that reached its apogee during the first decades of the Cold War, when Stuart matured. Thus, the Age of Enlightenment became for Stuart, at times, a distinct reference to the past, but more often a place-holder for her own time, one characterized by contemporary critics, from Herbert Marcuse to Lewis Mumford, as the culmination of the rigidity and rationalization of the scientific age. Her investigation of agrarian, Neolithic peoples, whose lands and cultures were dominated or assimilated by the West, suggests a critique of scientific rationalism, and at the same time, a reimagining of its tactics, as she, an individual and a woman, appropriated bits and pieces of these lands (a clear violation of the environmentalist's rule, "leave what you find") for her own creative, poetic, and decidedly unscientific purposes.

Stuart's conjuring of cultures altered by contact with the West was an imaginative and critical strategy common among feminist utopian art created in the wake of the women's movement.[2] Political theorist Lucy Sargisson characterizes the function of feminist utopian works as a challenge to existing society, often offering a political critique of patriarchal culture, a subversion of categories and a deconstruction of power roles. Sargisson asserts that temporal or spatial displacement, the creation of other worlds in time or space, is an important strategy of estrangement which permits one to criticize the present.[3] These worlds, Sargisson explains, "play speculative, meditative or critical roles rather than instructing as to the

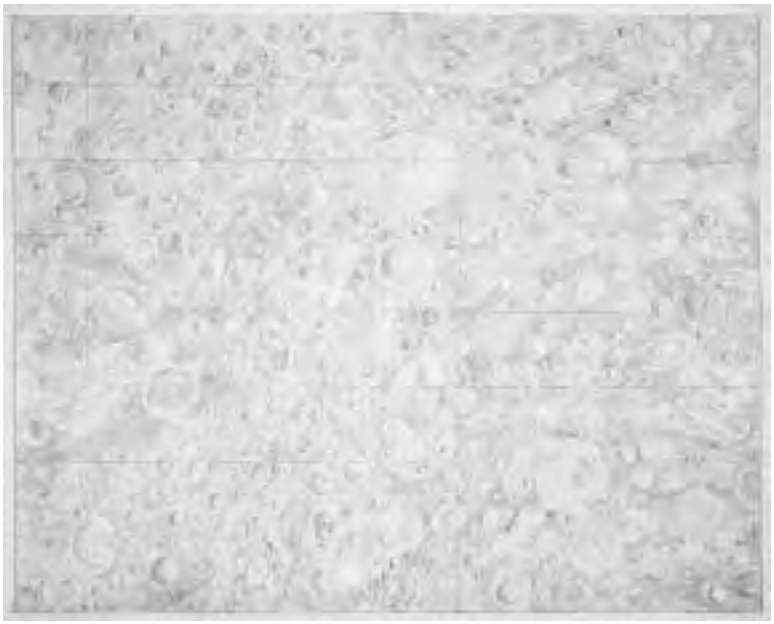


Fig. 1. Michelle Stuart, *Moon 4* (1969), pencil on paper, 15 1/4" x 19".
© Michelle Stuart. Courtesy the artist and Leslie Tokonow Artworks + Projects.

creation of a perfect world."[4] Feminist utopianism rejects perfect-world utopias, historically associated with modernism,[5] and instead emphasizes flexibility, process, and change.[6] Cultural critic Frederic Jameson also argues that utopias and utopianism are valuable at the very least for making us aware of our ideological imprisonment.[7] Stuart's works, on the surface, seem to retain the deeply rooted notion that exploration, discovery, and mapping are valued emblems of scientific progress; yet her poetic, metaphoric frottages, handmade books, and land works, reliant on the vagaries of unpredictable materials, undermine notions of control implicit in the modern scientific paradigm of Western culture.[8] In accord with historian Jackson Lears's assertion that chance is part of an artistic "protest against an over-organized society,"[9] Stuart's work called into question the prominence of rationalism viewed by many contemporary cultural critics as the basis of a patriarchal Cold War society.[10] Stuart's incorporation of star charts suggested a means to reshape what must have seemed to a woman artist maturing in the late 1960s a proscribed, constrictive, and immutable future.[11]

Stuart's consistent use of compositional grids, natural materials and organic textured surfaces has been variously contextualized by many commentators within contemporaneous movements, including Conceptual Art, Earth Art, Land Art, Post-Minimalism and Feminist art.[12] Lucy Lippard noted the "clear relationship between the female body and Mother Earth in her paper pieces, not only in their physicality, the rhythmic rubbing of the working process, but in the tactile surface that results."[13] Stuart's hanging wall scrolls demand a phenomenological response from the viewer, who must physically navigate the work, akin to Robert Morris's felt pieces. The artist's books and frottage drawings reference Land Art in their use of natural materials, but also in their relationship to site, establishing a dialectical relationship similar to that of Robert Smithson's non-sites of the late 1960s. Indeed, Stuart's dialectic extended beyond the gallery and site, often creating very specific relationships between the cultural past and present. Commenting on her rendering of Polynesian pictographs of cows and bison, part of her print series titled Navigating Coincidence: Reflecting on the Voyages of Captain James Cook, Stuart explained, "I went to Hawaii, I studied the Polynesian pictographs on rock there.... I wanted to evoke those drawings, to juxtapose Cook with the culture of the Hawaiian people."[14] Rather than "a re-romanticization of the earth—a resurrection of the sublime through an invocation of ancient cultures," as identified by Stephen Westfall,[15] I would suggest that Stuart investigated specific cultures that, while appealing for a seemingly more direct relationship with the earth, offer a distinct temporal space that enabled examination of her own. By juxtaposing these cultures to her own, she offered them to the viewer for dialectic consideration. Illuminating the artist's strategy is the cultural context from which her earliest works derive: the midst of the space race, a quest for national prestige packaged as an opportunity for scientific exploration and discovery.

Stuart's early works evinced a deeply rooted fascination with scientific discovery and the exploration of uncharted frontiers that would persist in her oeuvre. In the late 1960s, she completed a series of drawings based on recent NASA photographs of the lunar surface, including *Moon #4* (1969; Fig.1), a highly detailed, realistic rendering of the craterous surface marked by an array of attenuated, ovoid forms interspersed with meandering furrows, recalling all-over Abstract Expressionist painting as well as microcosmic cell cultures. These works, and I would argue much of Stuart's subsequent production, reflected the Cold War fascination with space flight that defined her generation. The quest for the moon, set in motion by the competition with the Soviets, was launched by President Kennedy in 1961, and accomplished on July 20, 1969. The equation of the Apollo program with colonial acquisition and Enlightenment exploration was made clear by President Kennedy,

> We set sail on this new sea because there is new knowledge to be gained, and new rights to be won, and they must be won and used for the progress of all people… Many years ago the great British explorer George Mallory, who was to die on Mount Everest, was asked why did he want to climb it. He said, "Because it is there." Well, space is there, and we're going to climb it, and the moon and the planets are there, and new hopes for knowledge and peace are there.[16]

Kennedy compared the quest for the moon with both a maiden sea voyage and the summit of the highest mountain, undertaken for the sake of knowledge, adventure, and conquest. Fascination with the new frontier of space in the 1960s revived the traditional Western narrative of exploration, an interest of Stuart's throughout her career. Stuart shared with me the impulse behind these drawings.

> Because I'm fascinated by—first of all, I love explorers. I love to read the first people, you know, when they're seeing the world for the first time—a different world. A world that they don't know. I mean, it's hard to do these days. Everybody's been everywhere. But there was a time when the world was an amazing place. That may have provoked the moon drawings.[17]

Her delicate moon drawings are essentially topographic studies superimposed by a grid—a device, common to conceptual art of the 1960s, that recurs in her work throughout her career. Some scholars have discussed the role of the grid in Stuart's work as a means of imposing order, thus referencing the scientific impulse to systematize a chaotic world.[18] The grid was often used in early modern star charts to simplify one's reading of the nighttime sky. Its use in her work should be read as a referent to the map as a marker of place, but also as a critique of that Enlightenment impulse, suggesting that the imposition of order on the complexities of nature is a futile endeavor. In *Mare 15* (1972; Fig. 2), eight gridded lunar drawings are contained within fifteen wooden boxes, arranged serially on the wall. The rigidity of the formal grid within each box, and in the overall composition, is undermined by the fluidity of the drawings and by tumbling dark strings, roughly four to ten inches long, which project from the surface and fall gently down, pulled by gravity. Interest in the moon for Stuart was also linked to her strongly held belief in place as a biological determinant, as the most important means of shaping individuals and cultures:

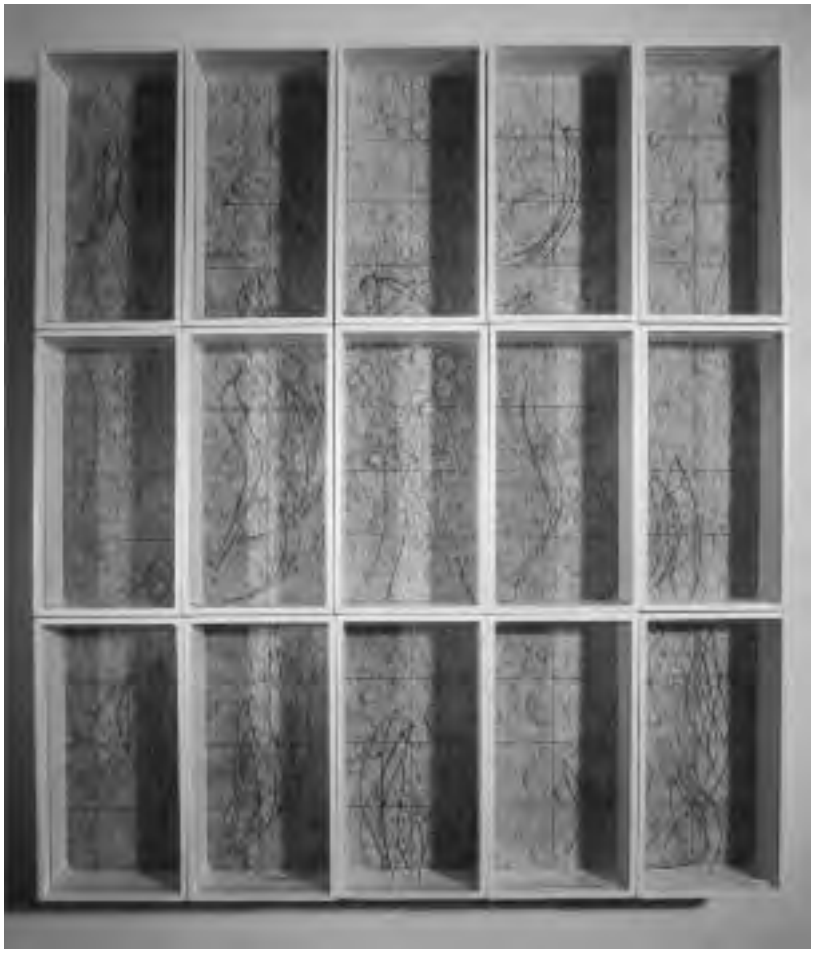


Fig. 2. Michelle Stuart, *Mare 15* (1972), diazo print of moon drawing on paper, red string, sectioned wooden box painted white, with glass window, 25 1/4" x 22 1/4". © Michelle Stuart. Courtesy the artist and Leslie Tokonow Artworks + Projects.

> I was really interested in these magnetic forces that came from the moon. Some of those early pieces from the 60s/early 70s, where string came out of drawings of the surface of the moon, were about magnetic forces that influenced us. I think that we are not only determined by our heredity, but, we're determined by forces. People are determined by place. And they're very determined by place. They're *very* determined by place.[19]

For Stuart the grid or, alternatively, the map, continues to hold special allure as a tool for evoking a sense of place, from which endemic natural forces help to define the individual.[20] While her grids and maps direct us to specific spaces, they also convey a sense of time: "It's the depiction of the passage of time that is the most salient characteristic of my vision… [T]hat started out with an interest in what is visible about time in nature."[21] Time and space are the coordinates she uses to examine both personal and cultural roots.

Stuart's strongly held belief in the importance of place is closely tied to a search for self, beginning with her ancestral origins. Westfall has indicated that charting and mapping were a preoccupation of Stuart's since her childhood in Los Angeles, when she was regaled by the expedition and emigration stories of her ancestors.[22] Her maternal relatives journeyed to the African continent, France, and Russia, and her paternal relatives traveled from England, Scotland and Ireland to the South Pacific; her mother emigrated to the U.S. from Switzerland and her father from Australia. As a child, Stuart would listen to stories of her parents' travels and adventures and then locate their destinations on a map.[23] She commented, "There was a big map over the dining room table when I was growing up and my father and mother would refer to it and talk about places and what they were like, because they had both traveled all over the world."[24] Her father, at one time a land surveyor for the Department of Water and Power, took Stuart on many of his business trips, further fostering her love of land and travel.[25] After formal art training at Chouinard Art Institute in Los Angeles (1951-52), Stuart secured a position with an engineering and architecture firm in Los Angeles doing work for the Army Corps of Engineers as a topographical drafter.[26] Stuart's use of maps and grids was connected to her search for her own personal identity: "I must have grown up thinking I was such a mixture of things. I mean, I'm really a mongrel, you know. All of northern Europe lies in these veins. My parents were immigrants. They were



Fig. 3. Michelle Stuart, *Passages: Mesa Verde 15* (1977-79), earth, photographs, Mesa Verde, CO, HMP, photographs, scroll 108" x 59"; stacks 12" x 11" each; photographs 14" x 17" each. © Michelle Stuart. Courtesy of the artist and Leslie Tokonow Artworks + Projects.

from vastly different cultures, I mean totally different."[27] Stuart's cartographic work was itself a means to travel; she undertook the position in order to finance a trip to Mexico. The artist's early searches for her own cultural roots awakened in her an interest in other cultures and a concern for the social conditions of others.

Stuart's broader social concerns were inspired by acts of injustice, prompting her to critically examine the causes for unequal treatment and seek redress. In Mexico, Stuart worked with muralist Diego Rivera, whom she admired for his gift as a draftsman coupled with his social consciousness. She explained to me: "I was attracted by somebody that was able to do political work and still be a good artist. There's so few of those people, and I was very attracted to that, because I was political in the sense of being for the downtrodden."[28] Stuart's concern for social injustice arose in large part from the plight of the Mexican farm workers, some of whom she painted early in her career. As a member of a girls club in junior high school, she would travel to downtown L.A. to care for the children of working mothers, many of whom were Mexican. She said, "My first little attempts when I was painting were farm workers."[29] Similar concerns later prompted Stuart's involvement in the Feminist Art Movement in the early 1970s, when she co-founded the feminist journal *Heresies* with Joyce Kozloff. She described the origin of *Heresies*: "Joyce Kozloff and I thought of it over the washing machine. We thought about a school and we thought about a magazine. I was for the magazine. We thought we better get some other people involved to broaden the spectrum. So she invited me, I invited Lucy [Lippard]. We invited people we knew to discuss this, and that's how it happened."[30] Here again, Stuart's strong belief in social justice led her to search for alternatives to a society that failed to treat its members equally and with dignity.

By the early 1970s, the artist adopted the role of explorer, historically reserved for men, visiting sites, often indigenous, still seeking origins of place and identity, and creating works that functioned as a record of the site and of her presence there. At first she made graphite frottage over materials gathered from these sites, creating a tonally rich textured impression of rock or sand placed under the paper. Rather than the artist's intellect or hand, the earth itself determined the composition: "I chose a spot and I accepted whatever came up. So there's also a kind of randomness that [always] interested me too."[31] The all-over random indentations, caused by the chunks of earth underneath, thus incorporate an element of chance that undermines the direct imposition of control that is the mark of the scientific age and its Cold War iteration—the strident insertion of a flag on the moon (or a minimalist cube in a gallery)—to claim the site for one's own. Stuart's visit to a site, her careful study of its history, and her process of incorporating its elements into her work all had a transformative effect upon her, just as she, through manipulation of those materials (not to mention her removal of them), enacted a subtle change upon the site. She wrote about her encounter with the Southwest landscape: "When I traveled through that vast space dreaming about beginnings I was shaping and being shaped by my landscape."[32]

One of the first artists to utilize her own handmade paper as a medium in the early 1970s, Stuart also made books reflecting a similar engagement with place. For these works, she embedded organic materials from sites visited into the paper, which became colored by the soil, producing intaglio-like impressions in the paper. She tied the books with cords of hand-woven natural fibers and often incorporated feathers or bones, also obtained from the site, creating an intimate record of the site's history that, as indicated by the tightly wound string, was too vast to be divulged by the typewritten page. She began to title the works for the site from whence the materials came, such as *Passages: Mesa Verde* (1977-79; Fig. 3), which includes not only handmade books, but also a large frottage drawing and photographs of the site taken by the artist. Stuart was enamored with nineteenth century landscape photographs, particularly those by Timothy O'Sullivan, which documented the site as well as the photographer's presence there. The inclusion of photographs taken by the artist was a logical conceptual extension of her connection of self to place. Stuart noted in a contemporaneous interview, "I would put my





Fig. 4 (left). Michelle Stuart, *High Falls* (1975-76), rock indentations and graphite from site (High Falls, NY) on muslin-mounted rag paper,131" x 61". © Michelle Stuart. Courtesy the artist and Leslie Tokonow Artworks + Projects.

Fig. 5 (top). Michelle Stuart, *Niagara River Gorge Path Relocated* (1975), red Queenston Shale from gorge site, 460 'x 62". Temporary land work along the Niagara River at Artpark, Lewiston, NY. © Michelle Stuart.

own history into the book, and the history of the geological site I was working with—I would put earth from the site into the paper pulp itself, and that would be the coloration of the paper. Did the paper attract me because it comes from the earth and returns to it? Sure."[33] Her own history was recorded in both her visit to the site and her hand selection of the organic materials, but also in the very physical process used to create her works.

Stuart incorporated her own body into the large scroll drawings through an often arduous creative process, physically kneading the materials into the surface of the paper.[34] The artist's painstaking, repetitive movements, implemented over weeks and months, provided only incidental direction for the materials. In works like *High Falls* (1975-76; Fig. 4) Stuart collected earth from geological sites, breaking down the rocks and pounding them into the surface of long scrolls (131" x 61") of rag paper mounted on muslin, leaving an imprinted memory of those objects. After physically working the materials into a section of the paper, she rolled it and moved to the next section, leaving a sculptural memory of the gathered paper. She then rubbed the powdered remnants of the crushed rock and earth into the rag paper and polished it with the surface of her hand, sometimes adding graphite powder to further burnish the surface, creating a lustrous sheen. The artist's process ensured that the paper retained the memory of her physical process; once installed, the richly textured paper, sculpted into folds, cascaded in voluminous rolls down the surface of the wall and out onto the floor.

Stuart carried the concepts of site and mutual transformation still further in her scroll *Niagara River Gorge*



Fig. 6. Michelle Stuart, *Sheep's Milk and the Cosmos* (1999), wall piece: beeswax, pigments, canvas mounted panels; sculpture: stone, wood, wax; wall 62" x 62"; table 15 1/2" x 14" x 71 3/4". © Michelle Stuart. Courtesy the artist.



Fig. 7. Michelle Stuart, *Stone Alignments/Solstice Cairns* (1979), permanent land work, 3200 boulders, varying sizes from Hood River starting at foot of Mt. Hood, overall 1000' x 800' approx, circle 100', four cairns 5' high. Rowena Plateau, Commissioned by Portland Center for the Visual Arts. © Michelle Stuart.

Path Relocated (1975; Fig. 5), installed at Artpark, near Niagara Falls, a work that, as Lippard noted, references the immensity of nineteenth century landscape painting.[35] Sheets of muslin-backed rag paper, infused with organic materials from the site, were sewn together and extended 460 feet down the cliff face, the path of the original falls 12,000 years ago.[36] The form of the massive scroll, undulating down the surface of the precipitous rock plateau, was determined by the earth strata over which it flowed into the river gorge, linking earth with water. The materials modified the paper with which they were fused, while the superimposition of the scroll on the land temporarily altered the appearance of the site and ultimately its geologic composition. Stuart intended for the paper to disintegrate in situ, thereby completing the correspondence between work and site and manifesting the passage of time, explaining that "its union with the land again would evoke the perception of time and with it our awareness of the continual flow of nature's process."[37] By choosing the original location of the falls, recognized for their primordial power, Stuart foregrounded the concept of transformation over time—from origin to the artist's present to the future—fostered by place, but also modifiable by human intervention.

Fascinated with the origins of the earth, Stuart also undertook journeys in search of her own biological beginnings, a process culminating in the work *Sheep's Milk and the Cosmos* (1999; Fig. 6). This work is a record of her successful search for her paternal ancestors in New Zealand, a country whose coasts first were mapped by Captain Cook, seeking to document the transit of Venus across the sun. Inspired by a book of poems left by her father after he passed away, Stuart travelled to New Zealand in the mid-1980s and again in the 1990s in search of an address marked in pale sepia, almost indistinguishably, on the book's cover. Her search led her to a town down the coast of North Island, where she discovered in a small district museum the names of her paternal grandparents and great grandparents. The museum curator revealed that Stuart's was one of five families who established the town. Knowledgeable in local lore, the curator directed Stuart to her grandmother's grave, which was located by an Anglican Church near a sheep pasture overlooking Bream Bay—originally named by Cook. Finally, at twilight, just as the sheep were returning, Stuart located the graves of her grandmother and great grandmother by, appropriately, making rubbings of the eroded, nearly illegible gravestone markings.[38] This singular moment of discovery is recorded in *Sheep's Milk and the Cosmos.* The installation consists of a bench, a simple, low, rectangular granite slab that represents her great grandmother's headstone. On the bench rest five dark brown beeswax bowls, each cradling a waxen ram's head immersed in white sheep's milk. Encompassing the ensemble are twenty-five gridded encaustic paintings representing the night sky seen overhead by the artist upon discovery of her great-grandmother's grave. The painting is modulated, black and nebulous around the edges, like the Milky Way itself, and stippled with white stars. Joseph Ruzicka has noted that the vessels of milk represent the mammalian life force, the liquid essence that permits regeneration, the survival over millennia.[39] As in her moon drawings, depictions of the heavens for Stuart represent, at once: a compelling and formative force exerted on the individual and on the cultural imagination; the passage of epochal time, as planetary bodies undergo negligible change on a human scale; and a means to chart one's present position and future trajectory. The philosopher Edward Casey has noted that charts in Stuart's work suggest a sense of "…emergent and intangible possibility. As aids to navigation, they tell us where we *might* go, and only rarely where we *must* go."[40] The work records a rite of passage, Stuart's search for her own formative origins, her reclamation of her past and present, and a forecast of where she is headed. She embarked on her own voyage, similar to Cook's, but utilizing her own star charts to illuminate her course.

The sky chart was an important tool used by Stuart to conjure the priorities and accomplishments of indigenous and Pre-Columbian cultures and juxtapose them with her own. The land work *Stone Alignments/Solstice Cairns, 1979* (Fig. 7 and Pl. 1) and her Nazca Lines series of 1981-82, created to track the heavens, prompt consideration of the pervasive need to comprehend one's place on the earth and envisage one's destiny. *Stone Alignments/Solstice Cairns* was built on the Rowena Plateau above the Columbia River Gorge in Oregon. Similar to the Neolithic stone alignments that it references, Stuart's cairns marked the sunrise and sunset on June 21, 1979,



Fig. 8. Michelle Stuart, *Nazca Lines Chart Book* (1982), laminated handmade paper, earth and graphite, overall 11 1/4" x 31" x 2 1/4". © Michelle Stuart. Courtesy the artist and Leslie Tokonow Artworks + Projects.

the summer solstice in the northern hemisphere and the winter solstice in the southern hemisphere. To create the work, the artist arranged 3,400 stones (13 tons of rock) in a radial pattern, six lines emanating from a central cairn at equal angles, circumscribed by a stone circle 100 feet in diameter. At the terminus of three of the radials, were small stone circles.[41] Completing the remaining three radials, which extended beyond the circle, were additional cairns built from round stones Stuart found in the river at the base of Mount Hood forty miles south.[42] The stones were chosen in part to connote the ritual passage of time. The artist explained in a poetic text intended to accompany the work that the stones were meant "both to contrast with the dark indigenous basalt and to bring the mountain to the river … a form of ritual passage … the transition of spring to summer … marked by water." The site itself embodied transition for the indigenous people that once dwelled there: "the place where the sun meets the rain."[43] Referencing the early nineteenth century Lewis and Clark expedition to the Pacific Coast, Stuart also recalled in her text that the land's end of the Oregon Trail and the subsequent raft journey undertaken by Lewis and Clark had begun somewhere between the Hood River and the city of Dalles. Underneath the artist's central cairn, she buried rocks from Native American sites, "stones from Guatemala, New Jersey, Scandinavia and England," along with the Taoist poems of Han Shan of the Tang Dynasty and one by Rudyard Kipling.[44] These rocks, procured and relocated by the artist, are referents of the geographical locations and indigenous cultures from whence they came. Stuart recounted in her exhibition text: "Solstice…this cycle in time patterned by time … rocks … records from native American sites are buried under the central cairn … a poem by Han-Shan … a line from Kipling's Song to Mithras the Sun God … 'many roads thou hath fashioned: all of them lead to the light.'"[45] The artist's reference to many roads leading to the light poetically suggests many

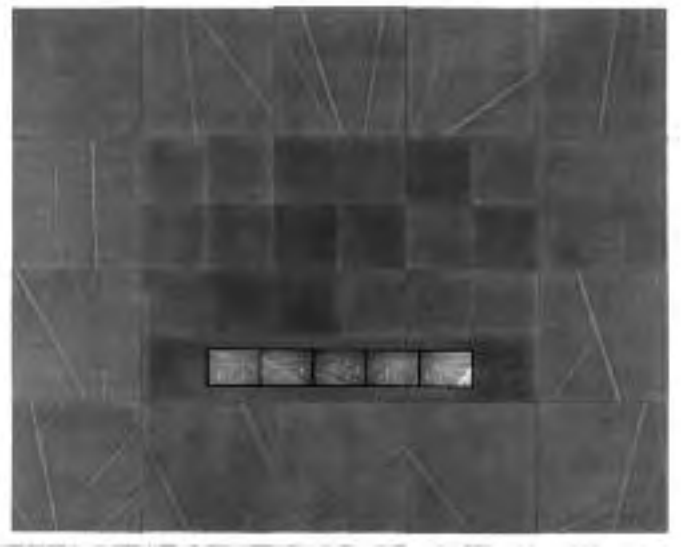


Fig. 9. Michelle Stuart, *Nazca Series: Southern Hemisphere Star Chart II* (1981), earth from site, black and white photographs, graphite, mounted on rag paper, 32" x 40". © Michelle Stuart. Courtesy the artist and Leslie Tokonow Artworks + Projects.

possible paths to an optimistic future evoked by the trajectories of all of the indigenous cultures alluded to in the work, all truncated in the name of Western exploration and conquest. Using the sun and moon as guiding forces, *Stone Alignments/ Solstice Cairns* juxtaposed the antecedent Native American cultures with the artist's contemporary moment, June 21, 1979, when she marked the solstice. The passage of time, evident in her early frottage drawings, here becomes more specific—marking particular cultural and historical references.

In her Nazca series, Stuart incorporated elements at once place-specific and time- transcendent, including the abstract lines carved by the ancient people native to the Nazca region. *Nazca Lines Star Chart* (1981-82; Pl. 2), *Nazca Lines Southern Hemisphere Constellation Chart Correlation* (1981; Pl. 3), *Nazca Lines Chart Book* (1982; Fig. 8), and *Nazca Series: Southern Hemisphere Star Chart II* (1981; Fig. 9), all resulted from her very

powerful encounter with the famed Nazca site, located in the desert between the towns of Nazca and Palpa on the Pampas de Jumana in southeastern Peru. The four works were conceived as related: all contain the same line pattern, adapted by the artist from those etched into the surface of the Nazca plain nearly two millennia ago. The abstract pattern, which the artist believed derived from star charts, comprises trapezoids, palimpsests, and intersecting diagonals, as well as contour lines incised arrow-straight for miles across valley floors, hills and crevices.[46]

Nazca Lines Star Chart (Pl. 2) bears the imprint of the artist's own adaptation of the Nazca Lines, consisting of three triangular shapes, like the legs of a compass, intersecting one another, and superimposed by polygonal shapes entering from the lower right at a dramatic diagonal. To create this expansive (10′ x 14′) work, Stuart first etched lines with a very thin new pencil into 12″ x 12″ sheets of heavy rag paper backed with muslin. Avoiding the incised lines, she then rubbed earth from the site, richly translucent from quartz in the soil, so vigorously into the surface of the paper that her hands began to bleed. The paper became abraded from the rubbing so that the earth literally amalgamated with the paper, synthesizing the two materials, as well as the artist's blood. She then assembled the 12″ x 12″ sheets into groups of four attached to 24″ x 24″ archival board and compiled these together to form the final piece composed in her familiar Cartesian grid, connoting the imposition of scientific order on a much older, less rigid, more poetic means of charting the universe utilizing the natural earth as substrate.

Nazca Lines Southern Hemisphere Constellation Chart Correlation (Pl. 3) again employs the artist's adaptation of the Nazca Lines in an integrated series of drawings that recreates the process by which the people of the Nazca developed their cosmology. The work consists of three separate drawings on semi-transparent vellum overlaid so that each drawing visually relates to the others. The most graphic of the three drawings contains Stuart's pattern of the Nazca Lines, identical to those in *Nazca Lines Star Chart***.** Discernable through this top layer is the second drawing depicting in pale gray the stars that populate the skies of the southern hemisphere viewable from the Nazca plateau. The third drawing contains geometric shapes rendered in red that, when overlaid with the southern stars, form constellations. The red contours connecting the stars to one another also serve to relate these distant balls of plasma, once known to the people of the Nazca Plateau, to the abstract patterns they carved into the desert floor. The red shapes of Stuart's southern constellations intersect with her Nazca lines, forming an abstract, visual relationship between the heavens and the indigenous earthwork. Thus, these three abstract drawings together form a star chart, conceptually related to *Nazca Lines Star Chart*, which integrates the map of the cosmos with soil from the site. These two works evoke a culture native to that soil, one that charted the heavens to define its relationship to the skies and what they portended. According to the artist, the earth drawing *Nazca Lines Star Chart* and *Nazca Lines Southern Hemisphere Constellation Chart Correlation* "are an edition philosophically—the big one needs the little one to function… They walk together."[47] The smaller drawing that includes the southern constellations is the referent for the earth drawing: the Nazca Lines refer to southern skies and are incomplete without them.

Also depicting the boundlessness of the heavens is *Nazca Lines Chart Book* (Fig. 8), but here in a tripartite form akin to an altar piece and rendered as a book, thus revealing the Western impulse to contain and rationalize all knowledge of the universe. By rendering the charted stars as a book, Stuart pointed to the folly of restricting to finite form the infinity of information they contain. The pale gray surface of the central section suggests an open book bisected by a spine revealing two pages depicting the now familiar Nazca lines. The covers of the flanking books reveal the southern stars emanating from a bituminous sky. All three rectangular pieces are made of laminated paper, which the artist treated as a woodblock; using a sharp woodsman's blade, she repeatedly carved slits into the edges to create the appearance of pages. The book, however, is closed, because, as the artist explained, within the book is the secret of the lines, which nobody knows.[48] The book conceals a mystery that has not yet been solved by modern, rational means.

Created by a process similar to *Nazca Lines Star Chart*, the lines of Stuart's *Nazca Series: Southern Hemisphere Star Chart II* (Fig. 9) were first etched into the paper and rubbed with earth, and then assembled into grid form; but this work also contains a modern means of documenting place.[49] The etched outer squares surround a smaller, much darker, interior quadrangle, also comprising paper fused with earth from the site; and inlaid toward the bottom center of this smaller field are five aerial photographs of the site taken by the artist from an airplane. The reprisal of the use of photographs seen in *Passages: Mesa Verde*, here much more integrated, introduces yet another means of knowing, of recording the world that specifically references modernity. The photographs force an abrupt collision between this distant cultural past, referenced literally by the soil and symbolically by pattern, and the present day. Like *Stone Alignments/Solstice Cairns*, which pointedly documented the artist's presence during the 1979 solstice, the photographs contained in *Southern Hemisphere Star Chart II* also mark a specific but passing moment experienced by the artist. Just as the earth from the site, fused with the paper, provides evidence of place as well as the artist's process, the photographs achieve a similar end. Each photograph is an interruption—one moment isolated from millennia, capturing a past record of the southern skies, the Nazca Lines, in a contemporary document.

In the Nazca series, Stuart compared two cultures in their impulse to chart and record. Like later Western explorers, once dominant cultures like Inca, Maya, and the people of the Nazca sought to map their skies, creating sophisticated astronomical observatories and star charts, impressive accomplishments that did not in themselves enable these cultures to endure. Such a reading challenges notions of scientific progress and American exceptionalism, questioning the belief that modern American culture is permanent and inviolable. These works are critical of domination inherent in

scientific exploration, with its emphasis on charting, mapping, and thereby controlling, a process which served to destroy or assimilate the cultural identity of many indigenous populations located, mapped, and ultimately controlled. Creating correspondences between cultures begs the question of Western superiority. The unpredictable ways in which cultures meld, and the sparks elicited from their convergence, suggests that the grinding, mechanistic nature of technological society need not endure, and that alternative, more inclusive futures may, in fact, prevail.

Stuart's newest work *Trajectory of Evolutionary Correspondences* (2010; front cover) retains the photograph as scientific record and the grid as a reference to the imposition of order, and yet it reverses course from the heavens to delve into the microcosm of biological life. The work includes photographs taken from scientific treatises as well as the artist's own pictures capturing the transformation of life in a sequence marking the passage of time on an evolutionary scale. The vessels, similar to the autobiographical wax vessels in *Sheep's Milk and the Cosmos*, suggest origins. Life force for the artist, whether emanating from earth or sky, shapes life, from the vastness of the Nazca Plateau to the microcosm of the insect.

Stuart's interest in the depiction of time derived in part from the fiction of writer Jorge Luis Borges, whose short stories dealing with nonlinear conceptions of time and the preponderance of information proliferating into infinity were of great interest to the artist.[50] For example, in Borges's short story *The Garden of Forking Paths*, a Chinese nobleman purports to build a great labyrinth in which all men would become lost. Presumed to have died before completing the structure, he left only a set of manuscripts of inconsistent and circumlocutory narrative. In the preface to the first of these he wrote, "I leave to the various futures (not to all) my garden of forking paths,"[51] revealing that the manuscript *was* the labyrinth, and the forking paths occurred in time, not in space. Borges's story suggests that when we make a choice, we do not limit our possibilities, but instead we choose all futures simultaneously and move forward in each timeline, creating many diverse futures, which themselves fork and proliferate. The notion of a limitless open future undermines the closed and circumscribed nature of Cold War society,[52] and is common in feminist utopian works, which are by nature open-ended, resisting closed, perfect-world utopias. Feminist utopianism, a historical response to the constriction and rigidity of Cold War society, is rooted in the idea that the classic, previsualized, perfect-world utopias historically determined by men are in fact a nightmare for women. Modeling her explorations on the scientific investigations of an earlier era, Stuart embarked on voyages seeking the origins of self and cultural identity, and the transformation of both through the process of discovery. These works, which revealed the transformative role of natural forces endemic to place operating over geologic time, subverted the closely held Western idea that the imposition of scientific control would play a lasting role in shaping individual or culture. In her sound track to her 1981 installation *Correspondences*, evoking the cultural correspondences between Mayan culture and her own, Stuart commented on the freedom of the traveler whose quest is without boundary:

> Who is the traveler … the traveler is whomever we decide … we give the traveler his identity … he goes where we imagine because the traveler is within … we impose our territory on the map of the traveler … when correspondences are made the passage is insured. The traveler, then … is the sailor…he embodies the dreamer beneath the white eye of night…the sea's horizon is the awesome edge of the unproven beyond … without boundary…the sailor …the most fateful of men … traveler by moon as well as sun in a voyage dawning with caprice … the vessel … his vessel … drawing a nebulous line across water … the form of which is erased by the act itself.[53]

In these feminist utopian works, Stuart embodied the explorer, at once internalizing the impulse for conquest, which serves to close boundaries, and subjecting it to critical examination by presenting alternative cosmologies, new conceptual spaces, allowing artist and viewer to imagine new paths for self and society. •

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Notes

1. James Shepherd Cook, *Captain Cook's Journal: First Voyage Round the World* (Forgotten Books, 2008), 331.
2. Lucy Sargisson, *Contemporary Feminist Utopianism*, *Women and Politics* (London & New York: Routledge, 1996). Sargisson developed her theory of feminist utopianism after close analysis of numerous literary works by women authors written in the 1970s and 1980s.
3. Ibid., 46.
4. Ibid., 20.
5. Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London & New York: Verso, 2005), xi. Jameson wrote that this concept of utopia "betrayed a will to uniformity and the ideal purity of a perfect system that always had to be imposed by force on its imperfect, reluctant subjects." Jameson asserted that during the Cold War utopia had become a synonym for Stalinism.
6. Lucy Sargisson encouraged a notion of utopianism that imagined an achievable goal, but one rooted in the process itself. Sargisson's theory of feminist utopianism relies heavily on Ernst Bloch's notion of utopia as process articulated in his three volume opus *The Principle of Hope*, originally published in 1959 as *The Principle of Utopia*. Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*. 3 vols. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986). Bloch summarized the functions of utopia as follows: "protest against the status quo; the anticipation of the possibilities of radical change"; and the insistence on their realization, found in Alain Martineau and Herbert Marcuse, *Herbert Marcuse's Utopia* (Montreal: Harvest House, 1986), 81.
7. Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, ii.
8. Gerrit Henry, "Michelle Stuart: Navigating Coincidence," *Print Collector's Newsletter*, vol. 13, no. 6 (Jan.-Feb., 1988), 195. Henry discusses the importance of chance in Stuart's artistic process.

9. Jackson Lears, "Out of Control: Art and Accident in a Managerial Age," in Joan Marter, ed., *Off Limits: Rutgers University and the Avant-Garde, 1957-1963* (Newark: Newark Museum, and New Brunswick & London: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1999), 49.
10. The critique of mechanism or technological rationalism in Western, and especially American society is essentially the primary topic of each of the following books: Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 1964; Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man,* 1964; Lewis Mumford, *The Myth of the Machine*,1967; Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture*, 1969.
11. Christine Filippone, "Science, Technology and Utopias in the Work of Contemporary Women Artists," (Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University, 2009). I argued that Sargisson's feminist utopianism, heretofore applied only to literary works of the 1970s and 1980s, was equally applicable to visual art of this period; also that these feminist utopias criticize associations of perfect-world utopias with technological and scientific progress, and re-imagine these forms of knowledge and practice that historically excluded women, as integral to a new, less-restrictive social order in which both genders contribute equally to an ongoing process that works to change the present rather than program a future.
12. See for example, Susan Heineman, Review, *Artforum*, vol. 13, no.10 (Summer, 1975): 74-75; Susan Stoops, "Michelle Stuart: A Personal Archaeology," i, vol. 14, no. 2 (Winter, 1994): 18; Stephen Westfall, "Melancholy Mapping," *Art in America* (Feb. 1987): 107; April Kingsley, Review, *Art in America*, vol. 62, no. 3 (1974): 111.
13. Lucy Lippard, "A New Landscape Art," *MS.* (April, 1977). Reproduced in "Michelle Stuart's Reading in Time," *Michelle Stuart: The Elements 1973-79* (New York: Fawbush Gallery, 1992), n.p.
14. Henry, "Michelle Stuart: Navigating Coincidence," 195.
15. Westfall, "Melancholy Mapping," 107.
16. President John F. Kennedy, "Address at Rice University on the Nation's Space Effort, Houston, TX. Sept. 12, 1962. http://www.jfklibrary.org/Historical+Resources/Archives/Reference+Desk/Speeches/JFK/003POF03SpaceEffort09121962.htm. (Accessed August 13, 2010)
17. Interview with the artist, New York, NY, April 30, 2008.
18. Stoops, "Michelle Stuart: A Personal Archaeology," 19. Stoops discusses the role of the grid in Stuart's work as a means of applying a unifying law or order.
19. Interview with the artist, New York, NY, April 30, 2008.
20. Carey Lovelace, "Michelle Stuart's Silent Gardens," *Arts Magazine*, vol. 63, no. 1 (Sept. 1988): 78. Lovelace comments that Stuart "was interested in the moon not only as a symbol, but as something exerting invisible forces on our lives."
21. Ibid.
22. Westfall, "Melancholy Mapping," 106-07. Henry has also suggested in reference to her 1988 suite of prints Navigating Coincidences, that her use of the grid was a means to "intensify the cartographic illusion." Henry, "Michelle Stuart: Navigating Coincidence," 195.
23. Stoops, "Michelle Stuart: A Personal Archaeology," 17.
24. Corinne Robins, "Michelle Stuart: The Mapping of Myth and Time," *Arts Magazine*, 51.4 (Dec. 1976): 83.
25. Many authors have indicated that Stuart's father was an engineer. Stuart corrected the record in our interview. Her father was a businessman who, having lost his import-export business during the Depression, subsequently secured a position with the Department of Water and Power, surveying the acquisition of land for electricity and water. He was also a soldier who served in three wars, including WWII, in which he served as a colonel. Unpublished interview with the artist, New York, NY, April 30, 2008.
26. Stoops, "Michelle Stuart: A Personal Archaeology," 17. Stoops has noted that her work as a cartographer might have activated her subsequent use of map forms or grids.
27. Interview with the artist, New York, NY, April 30, 2008.
28. Ibid. Stuart also noted that her interest in social justice may have been inspired by Ben Shahn's *Sacco and Vanzetti* series. She recounted, "I got very interested in what I thought was an injustice."
29. Interview with the artist, New York, NY, April 30, 2008.
30. Ibid. Joyce Kozloff relates the origins of *Heresies* similarly. "Transcript of Interview with Joyce Kozloff," Interviewed by Lynn Hershman, May 14, 2006.New York, NY. Stanford Digital Collections. http://lib.stanford.edu/women-art-revolution/transcript-interview-joyce-kozloff. (Accessed August 7, 2010.)
31. Frederick Ted Castle, "To Reify the Earth," in *Voyages* (Syracuse, NY: Everson Museum of Art, 1985), 62.
32. Stoops, "Michelle Stuart: A Personal Archaeology," 20.
33. Gerrit Henry, "Paper in Transition," Print Collector's Newsletter, vol. 10, no. 3, (July-August, 1979): 85.
34. Lovelace, "Michelle Stuart's Silent Gardens," 78. Lovelace comments on the corollary between the theme of time and the laborious creation process involved in Stuart's work.
35. Lippard, "Michelle Stuart's Reading in Time," n.p.
36. Lawrence Alloway, "Michelle Stuart," in *Voyages* (Syracuse, NY: Everson Museum of Art, 1985), 50.
37. Michelle Stuart, in Sharon Edelman, ed., *Artpark: The Program in Visual Arts* (Lewiston, NY: Artpark, 1976), 122.
38. Interview with the artist, New York, NY, April 30, 2008.
39. Joseph Ruzicka, "Essential Light: The Skies of Michelle Stuart," *Art in America*, 88.6 (June 2000): 86.
40. Edward Casey, *Earth Mapping: Artists Reshaping Landscape* (London and Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2005), 69.
41. Alloway asserts that *Solstice Cairns* was linear in conception. See Alloway, "Michelle Stuart," 52. Stuart created what she believed to be an abstract, probably mathematical diagram, a record of the thinking of indigenous culture.
42. Mount Hood is located 60 miles from Mount St. Helens, which erupted calamitously less than one year after *Stone Alignments* was completed.
43. Michelle Stuart, "Then," in *Voyages* (Syracuse, NY: Everson Museum of Art, 1985), 14,
44. Tom Sandqvist, "Stratas in Time," *Voyages* (Syracuse, NY: Everson Museum of Art, 1985), 58.
45. Stuart, "Then," 14.
46. Alloway, "Michelle Stuart," 52.
47. Telephone conversation with the artist, August 21, 2010.
48. Ibid.
49. Ibid. This work, at one time stored in a building that flooded, is no longer extant.
50. Interview with the artist, New York, NY, April 30, 2008.
51. Jorge Luis Borges, *Jorge Luis Borges: Labyrinths & Other Writings*, ed. Donald A. Yates, (New York: New Directions, 1964), 26.
52. Paul Edwards, *The Closed World: Computers and the Politics of Discourse in Cold War America*, *Inside Technology*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996).
53. Michelle Stuart, Script for stereo audio sound track of Correspondences, in *Voyages* (Syracuse, NY: Everson Museum of Art, 1985), 17.

Mimi Smith
Fashioning Art and Life

By Susan Earle

Like a fierce but soft-spoken warrior who reveals our foibles rather than causing us harm, artist Mimi Smith (b. 1942) has spent more than four decades creating objects that interrogate the pressing social and political concerns of our time, from women's work and social conformity to nuclear holocaust, without flinching, and with a focused gaze. From her pioneering signature clothing sculptures to installations, artist books, and readings from the evening news, Mimi Smith uses what is around her in both intimate and prescient ways, connecting our daily lives to the important, difficult and sometimes life-threatening issues of our era. But despite the exquisite clarity of her work's incisive merging of form and concept, her art has not always been adequately understood.



Fig. 1. Mimi Smith, *Steel Wool Peignoir* (1966), steel wool, nylon, lace, wood hanger, 59" x 26" x 8". Spencer Museum of Art, the University of Kansas, Lawrence. Photo: Oren Slor.

Smith came of age as an artist in the mid-1960s, amidst a tumult of social upheaval and an outpouring of art in new formats. Smith was a feminist artist *avant la lettre*, ahead of her time. She did not shy away from the topical or thematic, but rather, pushed the envelope to include the domestic sphere and the personal. A pioneer among the women (and later some men) who incorporated everyday life and sometimes autobiography into their work, Smith dealt with the stuff of life, like weddings and pregnancy, at a time when these topics were all but taboo in the art world. Autobiography was off limits for serious artists, especially women artists, before the upheaval and re-thinking brought on by the feminist art movement in the 1970s.

This article will consider various aspects of Mimi Smith's creative output. Then as now, her own life and world events inform her production, often furnishing the subject matter as well as the materials of the work that she makes. The feminist basis of her thinking makes her work important, engaged, and multi-faceted; and rather than marginalizing her output, it has broadened its scope. She has also sustained investigative commentary on media and technology, addressing our cultural forms and technological shifts in ways that utilize those very formats while also questioning them and their effects on society. By including not only clothing but also televisions and computers, she has integrated topic with medium, often employing the medium itself as the topic.[1]

Growing up in Milton, Massachusetts, Smith learned to sew from her grandmother.[2] She loved the period costumes rooms at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, which she visited while taking Saturday art classes at the Boston Museum School. At Massachusetts College of Art, she majored in painting and earned her BFA in 1963, making abstract still-life and figure paintings. She viewed this early training as "a very conventional art education that was craft centered in all of the different art medias." Smith eventually would put this training to use in her clothing works. After graduation, she moved to New York City (where she still lives), and entered the MFA program at Rutgers University in New Jersey.[3]

Landing at Rutgers was fortunate for Smith, as the program, which had recently been home to Allan Kaprow and his Happenings, encouraged big ideas and the use of non-art materials. Smith studied with the Fluxus and Conceptual artist Robert Watts and Minimalist sculptor Robert Morris, and at one point tried to learn welding.[4] Among her friends there were students Joan Snyder, Jackie Winsor, and Keith Sonnier.[5] In this creative, avant-garde environment, Smith began adding fabric to her abstract paintings. She found the "anything is possible" ethos at Rutgers very stimulating, and she was particularly inspired by the many lectures they all attended given by thinkers such as Buckminster Fuller, James



Fig. 2. Mimi Smith, *Girdle* (1966), Rubber bath mats, elastic, ribbon, wood hanger, 58" x 18" x 8". Courtesy the artist and Anna Kustera Gallery. Photo: Mimi Smith.



Fig. 3. Mimi Smith, *The Wedding* (1966), plastics, fabric, glass bottle, paper doilies, 12' x 12' x 12'. Installed at Rutgers University, NJ. Photo: Mimi Smith.

Lee Byers, and Marshall McLuhan. By the end of her degree program, clothing had become both the subject and form of Smith's art—before either Watts or Morris started to work with fabric.[6] The conceptual framework that Smith developed was aided by her experience in the program.

In 1964, the language of feminist art had not yet been articulated and the concepts hardly formed. Her art, therefore, was born not out of feminist ideology but from her personal journey as a serious art student. As she began working with clothing, she was also constructing a theoretical framework for presenting clothing as sculpture. The works she would create, "based on a sculptural idea and an actual object,"[7] were well ahead of their time. Those who saw her 1966 work *Steel Wool Peignoir* (Fig. 1 and Pl. 4) were hardly prepared to absorb it. In the 1970s, the sculpture was adopted by savvy feminist critics, artists, and art historians. Feminists, including critic Lucy R. Lippard and artist Miriam Schapiro, included slides of the work in lectures they presented at various colleges and museums across the country, helping to spawn a following for the work and a dialogue surrounding it. *Peignoir* was not exhibited publicly until 1979.[8]

Steel Wool Peignoir had a brilliant concept and flawless execution. Made of sheer pink nylon and eggshell lace edged with thick bands of steel wool, *Peignoir* is political, poignant, and humorous. Smith used mass-produced materials that were also personal. Its boudoir elegance is undone by the clear association of the steel wool not with a fantasy wife but with the drudgery of house work. From a flimsy nightgown, the peignoir has been transformed into a protective garment, a kind of armor for the bedroom, cleverly employing an industrial material that was designed for domestic use. To Smith herself, the piece signified the realities of marriage in contrast to its illusions.[9] *Steel Wool Peignoir* became her signature work.

Although *Peignoir*'s humor is darker and more visceral, the sculpture employs some of the levity of Pop art, which was still going strong in 1966. Like other Pop artists such as Andy

Warhol, Smith both utilized and critiqued images at once, imparting a poker-face quality to their work as a result. But Smith went beyond Warhol; not just appropriating media images or advertising icons, Smith instead re-made the image into an object whose surprising materials and odd pairings still jolt. Transcending the cool flatness of Pop Art, she asks viewers to imagine their own bodies inhabiting her clothing pieces and the ideas that they convey. Stretching beyond Pop, *Peignoir* reverberates into other realms that are both familiar and strange. As Smith herself later stated, "The peignoir… resembles some sort of robot-like monster."[10]

The robot-like quality of *Steel Wool Peignoir* functions on a number of levels, including metaphoric consideration of violence toward women. The ability of the work to address this topic so powerfully was underscored by the inclusion more than a decade later of *Peignoir* and Smith's *Girdle* (1966; Fig. 2) in the 1978 *Heresies* special issue on women and violence. In her accompanying text, Smith wrote: "There is cruelty in the peignoir in the fact that the steel wool is very deceptive. It was sewed to look like fur. One doesn't notice the danger until one gets close."[11]

Through its blatant yet subtle juxtaposition of sheer pink nylon chiffon and lace with abrasive steel wool, *Steel Wool Peignoir* explores the strange reality of women's lives. It symbolically confronts some of the contradictions that women constantly face, along with problems raised by what Nancy Spector has called the "psychosexual dimensions of fashion"—something many critics have failed to perceive in Smith's work.[12] It is at once the dressing to attract and the armor that may be needed to fend off a suitor in the bedroom. Its merging of object and idea is part of its success and what makes it an enduring work of art. Prescient when it was made in 1966, *Peignoir* anticipated important social and artistic developments.

Lucy Lippard described *Steel Wool Peignoir* in her book *The Pink Glass Swan*: "This proto-feminist sculpture is a witty commentary on women's work on a double level—sexual and domestic. Smith predicted the feminist artist's fascination with clothing as an extension of the body and the life—a device that flourished throughout the seventies, was revived in the late eighties, and is still going strong."[13]

In 2000, *Steel Wool Peignoir* found a home at the Spencer Museum of Art at the University of Kansas, where visitors are consistently drawn to it. Its place in history often confounds viewers, who are surprised to learn it was made in the 1960s, as it still looks so fresh (although a recent group of students thought the sculpture dated to "the Middle Ages"). Also interesting is that many visitors do not know what a peignoir is. This item of women's clothing, popular from the 1930s through 1960s, is not in their vocabulary. (If slinky peignoirs are no longer broadly recognized, it suggests that some progress has been achieved in the realm of gender parity.)

Smith used industrially produced materials aimed at the domestic domain in other works of the period. *Girdle*, made of rubber bath mats, is another non-functional piece of clothing that serves as sculptural object as well as visual metaphor. Along with her wildly distorted, super-skinny *Model Dress* (1965), this work suggests that women should not be forced to



Fig. 4. Mimi Smith, *Maternity Dress* (1966), plastic, vinyl, zipper, screws, wood hanger, 45" x 20" x 9". Collection RISD Museum, Providence, RI. Photo: Oren Slor.

reshape their bodies to be attractive to others (men), and that they will not achieve happiness through clothes. Smith described the girdle—like the peignoir, no longer in fashion—as "[o]ne of the most frightening items of clothing that I can imagine … an uncomfortable torture. It doesn't let a woman breathe. It sticks to her like an octopus. It doesn't let air in or out."[14] Like *Peignoir*, Smith's *Girdle* poked fun at some of the extreme fashions that women were subjected to in their everyday lives in our culture.[15]

Peignoir and *Girdle* were created in 1966, the same year as Smith's MFA thesis exhibition at Rutgers, an exhibition that, especially for a graduate student, made a significant statement. Comprising a single work, *The Wedding* (Fig. 3), the



Fig. 5. Mimi Smith, *Bedroom* (1973), *Bed* (right) and *Bureau with Mirror and Sconces* (left), knotted thread, tape measures hung on wall, *Bed* 72" x 60", *Bureau with Mirror* 77" x 47". As installed at ICA, Philadelphia, 1994. Courtesy the artist and Anna Kustera Gallery, New York. Photo: Mimi Smith.

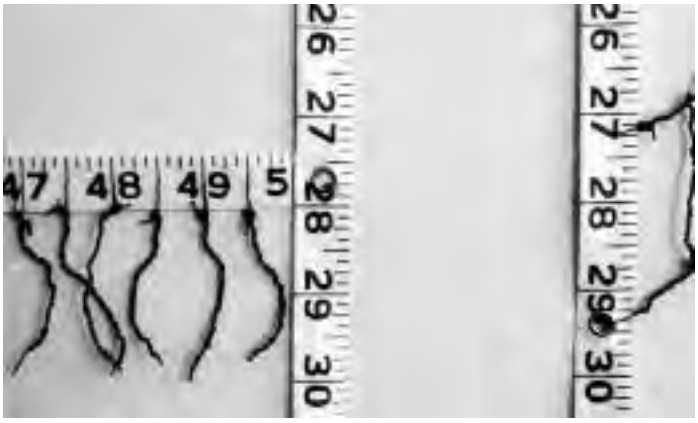


Fig. 6. Mimi Smith, detail of *Bed* (1973). Photo: Mimi Smith.

show was an installation consisting of a 12-foot square plastic cube that could not be entered. Hung with sheets of vinyl plastic floor to ceiling, the box had satin fabric on the floor and contained items including a see-through dress on a white dress form and a 30-foot-long wedding train created from plastic carpet runners, doilies, and plastic lace tablecloths (the train still exists). Smith used plastic in several works around that time, including her 1965 *Recycle Coat* (Pl. 5), wearable art made of plastic product wrappers with bottle cap fasteners. Also in *The Wedding* box was a hanging bouquet with plastic flowers and a veil, all with notably long trains. When Smith herself was married a few years earlier at City Hall, she did not wear a wedding gown, and she says that perhaps this installation represented her own wedding, symbolizing the role that weddings play in American girlhood. (Her thesis project anticipates *Womanhouse* of 1972, which included a wedding dress.) She wanted to signify that a wedding is just one day in a woman's life, in contrast with the realities of marriage that will follow. The wedding itself becomes frozen in time: a memory in a plastic box.[16]

Smith, then, was quietly creating her own revolution—with understatement and subtlety—with these and other critical works, like *Maternity Dress* of 1966 (Fig. 4), described by Ingrid Schaffner as "a sci-fi vision of woman as test tube or 'gro-box'" with "a plastic observation window."[17] Her clothing art put Smith squarely in the avant-garde. Although Smith believed that these works were based on a simple idea that everyone would understand, she often found herself having to explain them. In the heyday of Pop, Minimalism, and Conceptual art, in the 1960s and early 1970s, Smith's work did not fit neatly into any category.

The feminist art movement, beginning in the 1970s, would promote some of the ideas Smith had been articulating, such as breaking down male-dominated hierarchies and allowing other voices including one's own. In a broader way, the feminist art movement sought to question the whole formation of canons and to shift the discipline of art history to a different level, whereby we would rethink and renegotiate the terms by which the hierarchy of art had been defined. Smith continued to address issues of protection, social conformity, and symbolic identifications with power, addressing new subjects as her life evolved in new directions.

Moving out from the realm of clothing but still using non-art materials associated with the personal and domestic realms, Smith created a series of wall drawings made with knotted thread and measuring tape in the early 1970s. When her family moved from New York to Cleveland (for her husband to take a new job) in 1973, Smith found herself at home with two young children. She made the most of this isolated time by adapting industrially produced materials associated with

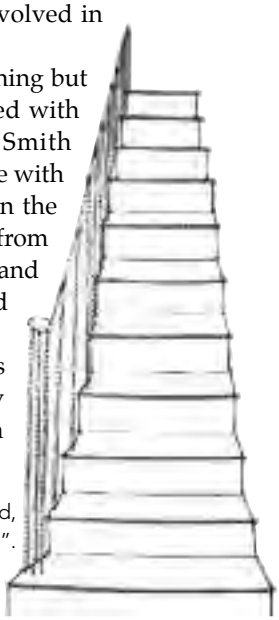


Fig. 7. Mimi Smith, Stairs (1974), knotted thread, tape measures hung on wall, 105" x 48". Collection of the Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University. Photo: Mimi Smith.



Fig. 8. Mimi Smith, *Five Windows* (1975), 5 drawings: pencils, crayons, inks, on paper and plastic, 120" x 60" installed at 112 Greene Street, NYC. Photo: Mimi Smith.

the domestic sphere to "draw" every room and object in her house. Made to scale, these knotted thread drawings systematically outlined the furniture and rooms in her house. In *Bedroom* (1973; Fig. 5), the bed is portrayed like a perspective drawing, receding back in space, as is the bureau adjacent to it. Using wooden rulers or soft measuring tapes and sewing thread—the materials at hand around the house—she made "process drawings using the process of my life," says Smith. The process of making the pieces was repetitive and obsessive because she felt like she had become a machine in her house, at home with the children and a house full of furniture. These room-sized installations, with their ghost-like outlines, low-art materials, and grand sense of scale, are still fresh. When she exhibited *Bedroom* in 1973 at the New Gallery in Cleveland, she was the only woman in their group exhibition granted space for "an installation."

The knotted thread works are compelling, not only for their whimsical beauty but also because they relate in fascinating ways to the avant-garde trends of their time. The form of the thread drawings exactly mimics the process by which they were made, connecting them to other works such as the process-driven line paintings of Agnes Martin and the quirkier, post-Minimal sculptures of Eva Hesse. The art critic Roberta Smith described the way Smith's knotted thread pieces "combine elements of high Conceptualism with instant accessibility and a feminist viewpoint" as they "sparkle with light and wit and all the charm of children's drawings…."[18] The measuring tape and knots of thread, with squiggles of densely knotted thread dangling at the base of the bed to mimic the blanket fringe (Fig. 6), make art out of sewing stuff and women's work. At the same time they convey her sense of confinement, they offer a new perspective on household spaces, as in *Stairs* (1973; Fig. 7).[19] The domestic simplicity of the thread offers a critique of macho bravado, but the aesthetic of Minimalism engaged Smith's imagination, as it did for other women who followed in her footsteps.[20]

Smith expanded these ideas by making drawings with words: turning the knotted thread into flowing letters that form lines, and the lines made of words into objects such as television sets and windows. Based on works such as *The Wedding* and *Bedroom*, Smith developed a reputation as an installation artist to some degree.[21] In 1975, for an installation titled *Five Windows* (Fig. 8), she outlined the windows in the distinctive gallery space at 112 Greene Street in New York over paper and plastic coverings. The window drawings were made entirely out of hand-written phrases, like "Please open the window, I'm going to faint" and "Don't go outside, it's dirty outside." The drawings were accompanied by audio tapes of her reading the words in the drawings.

This use of written messages led to Smith's taking on such other real-life topics as the pervasiveness of television and the language of computers. Smith made drawings based on television news, some of which lined part of a



Fig. 9. Mimi Smith, *House with Clouds* (1980), 4 drawings, pencils, inks, oil stick on paper 2 television drawings inside, colored pencil, ink on paper 20" x 27" each; 5 cloud drawings 60" x 60" each, 3 audio tapes; house: 120" x 72" x 72". Re-installation at Anna Kustera Gallery, 2006.

room installation, *Good Morning Class*, at P.S.1 in New York in 1979. Smith was also adding audio around the drawings, and sometimes performing the works in spaces around the city. At Franklin Furnace and other performance spaces, for example, she did readings from the evening news. For these multi-media events, the artist read her text-drawings aloud, with tape-recorders playing Smith's comments, and sometimes one of her television drawings hanging on the wall behind her. Audience members watched the evening news on a TV with no sound while listening to Smith read old news scripts. These performances provided a subtle critique of both the events reported and the fact that TV news, even then, was invading private spaces and furnishing an unwitting soundtrack to



Fig. 10. Mimi Smith, *October 1, 1981* (1982), four acrylic paint and ink paintings on silk, audiotape, each 88" x 106". *Art Lobby* project, Chase Manhattan Plaza, New York. Photo: Mimi Smith.



Fig. 11. Mimi Smith, *Slave Ready: Corporate* (1991-93), suit: pinstripe fabric, steel wool, aluminum hanger; painting: acrylic, pencil, on canvas; clock: acrylic, computer prints on clock; 50" x 60" x 6". Courtesy the artist and Anna Kustera Gallery. Photo: Mimi Smith.

people's lives. Rather than devising her own script, Smith read aloud one made from the actual evening news, while also interjecting some of her own news along with exhortations such as "Pay Attention" or "Get Up." One interviewer, Joan Arbeiter, said to Smith, "your real medium is the media itself." [22]

Other works conveyed her concerns about safety for our families and in our home environments.[23] In two large drawing-based installations, *House with Clouds* (1980; Fig. 9) and *Home Sweet Home* (1982), words again help form the image and the object. *House with Clouds* was inspired by the Three-Mile Island nuclear reactor mishap that caused widespread anxiety about nuclear pollution and people becoming sick in their homes. The drawings form a squarish paper house; a television news drawing is in the window; multiple audio tapes play different voices exhorting listeners to keep dangerous substances from their homes, mimicking the barrage of noise and information of television news; and cloud-shaped drawings on the walls behind the house spell out "dirty air." In *Home Sweet Home*, the window is blocked off with an X, suggesting that our homes may no longer be our havens in the case of large-scale disaster or a nuclear nightmare. Smith's artist book *This is a Test* (1983) also addresses fears and concerns about nuclear holocaust.[24]

In 1982, Smith was invited to create an installation for the highly visible, street-level lobby of Chase Manhattan Bank's headquarters in New York City, titled *October 1, 1981* (Fig. 10). (Jenny Holzer and several other artists also participated in this project to exhibit work in several Manhattan office buildings.) Smith's four large paintings of hand-written transcriptions of television news were arrayed across a large glass entrance nearly 100 feet long. After drawing criticism, she was asked to re-arrange the drawings to produce a less coherent narrative and critique. According to critic Kate Linker, bank officials from the public relations department asked that the works be moved to a less prominent location, as they thought that people passing by were "reading them too much."[25]

Smith describes the Chase project:

> My installation *October 1, 1981* was part of a group show called *Art Lobby*, 4 installations by 4 artists all in bank lobbies during February 1982. Chase complained about my piece and Marine Midland [Bank] complained about Jenny Holzer's piece; I think she was out of town and they may have taken her piece down. The show was sponsored by the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council and curated by Jacki Apple. My installation consisted of 4 large acrylic paintings on silk that were hung in the windows of the lobby of Chase Manhattan Plaza and an audiotape that was placed in the corners along the wall of the paintings. The subject of the paintings and the audiotape was the October 1, 1981 news broadcast combined with a second track of phrases about money that I overheard in the surrounding neighborhood including the lobby and the NY Stock Exchange. October 1st is the start of the federal fiscal year and the news was full of budget cutbacks, etc. The phrases which were also on the painting panels said things like: Money Money Money, The Dow is down, My husband said to me you work for the landlord, I need more money, and info from the Stock Exchange tour.
>
> The bank initially complained about the audiotape because although the volume was set like 2 people talking, the acoustics of the building made the sound seem much louder. It was the stock exchange tour phrases that they objected to. I had to exchange the places of the red and silver paintings and put the audio on headphones during the show. The day before the last



Fig. 12. Mimi Smith, *Timelines: Undershirts* (2004-05), pencil, watercolor, acrylic on board, 18" x 142" overall. *Timelines: Underpants*, (2000-02), pencil and acrylic on board, 20" x 109" overall. Courtesy the artist and Anna Kustera Gallery. Photo: Mimi Smith.



Fig. 13. Mimi Smith, *Camouflage Maternity Dress* (2004), camouflage fabric, plastic dome, screws, hanger, 47" x 22" x 9". Courtesy the artist and Anna Kustera Gallery. Photo: Mimi Smith.

> day of the show the FALN bombed Chase and a number of other places, the Stock Exchange, Merrill Lynch, and my work was damaged.[26]

Investigating another aspect of how we measure our lives and the objects that populate our offices and homes, Smith created a series of clocks. Minus the audio of the performance works, the clock pieces, like *Women's work is never done* (1985) and *Don't Turn Back* (1985; Pl. 6) employ words and phrases to address timely issues like AIDS, women's work, and poverty. They convey the idea of time being considered, but they are also functional objects. With its mantra, "Don't Turn Back the Hands of Time. Protect Women's Right to Choose," *Don't Turn Back* remains relevant as politicians continue to erode this right granted to women in 1973 by Roe v. Wade. The round-face clocks project a strong presence with the text encircling and within the numbers that mark the hours in each day.

Responding to the burgeoning number of striving women in the workplace, Smith's wall installation *Slave Ready: Corporate*



Fig. 14. Mimi Smith, *Flower* (2010), pink camouflage fabric, metal hanger, plastic wire, cage fasteners, 36.5" x 16" x 16". Courtesy Anna Kustera Gallery, New York. Photo: Mimi Smith.

(1991-93; Fig. 11) incorporates a clock and a recasting of the peignoir into daytime wear. A framed early computer error message intones "Slave Ready" beside a steel-wool-edged women's pinstripe business suit, resonant of the "dress for success" style de rigueur for women seeking professional recognition in the workplace. Here the clock resonates with the message, "Just a minute, please" (a typical receptionist's response as she relays a phone call to her boss). The odd, computer-language use of the word "slave" was not understood by many of the women who saw this piece, and some who did not perceive Smith's ironic meaning were bothered by it. This work relies heavily on the computer user-message, which was highly coded, apparently for inaccessibility. Smith was pointing out how strange and violent was the language that early computers employed. In this piercing work, which Ingrid Shaffner has called "the 'corporate' peignoir," one could surmise "that hewing to the career path is as misguided as following the mommy track."[27]

In a 2004 catalogue essay, the art critic Joseph Jacobs called Smith's work representational.[28] However, her work goes far beyond being representational, as what she is creating is not objects in the traditional sense. Rather, she combines conceptual work with "images" or forms that we recognize to create something powerful and unusual. Her series of clothing pieces called Protector Against Illness uses these objects to address concerns about various health risks. *Protector Against Illness: Red Tamoxifen Bra* (1997; Pl. 7.) consists of a red bra that hangs elegantly on a padded, luxury hanger, as if displayed in a high-end intimate apparel shop. Viewers soon realize that delicately placed within the black embroidered patterns are

pills taken by breast cancer victims, as if wearing such a bra could protect a wearer from getting cancer in the first place.[29]

Smith's *Timelines* installations (1999-2005; Fig. 12) combine her primary media: drawing and clothing. Very personal works, they track an unseen aspect of the aging process in a dramatic form that is systematic and clear-eyed. The Underpants and Undershirts series of drawings depict the most personal items of clothing, those that are not normally seen by anyone but the wearer. Each series narrates a life through what is worn over time. Such imaging of personal textile items and pieces of clothing systematizes something that most of us take for granted, and objectifies it by using pencil on paper, eschewing the intimacy of cloth. The drawings reveal the stages in a person's life in an objectified way, allowing us to examine how these most intimate forms of clothing intersect with phases of our lives, from childhood through old age, healthy and not, from jogging and nursing bras to mastectomy bras. This is systematic "imaging" that is timely in a broad cultural context that relates to our increasingly close connections to the internet and various electronic social media platforms. These electronic venues lend new focus to the imaging of people's lives in ways that were unimaginable even twenty years ago. The internet has leveled images so that they become available to all, equivalent, fungible, there for the taking and for universal consumption. It is as if nothing is original but instead exists only in digital, infinitely replicable form. A work of art is no longer a painting or a sculpture but an "image" like all other images––a snapshot to be posted on one's "Facebook" page.

What concerned Smith as a young artist now has ramifications for her children's and future generations. Like her mod *Maternity Dress* of 1966, Smith's *Camouflage Maternity Dress* (2004; Fig. 13) still features a see-through pod for a growing baby. Once again, it is a time of war, but unlike in the Vietnam war which was underway in 1966, women now fight side by side with the men. Here is a wry comment on gender and war, and the ways that clothing constructs both. The militaristic look of this sculpture suggests a war machine in which babies cannot be made without significant logistical and social problems. The idea of a pregnant soldier once bordered on the farcical, but this camouflage dress conveys the wearer's position as someone in the military. Clothing can be understood as an extension of the body, sitting on our skin and flesh; but it is also coded, related to real life.

When Smith made the *Steel Wool Peignoir*, clothing as sculpture was a new idea, taking the ready-made concept from Marcel Duchamp and others, but shifting it into a much more personal realm. The clothing sculpture that Smith developed was deadpan but also white hot in its refusal to ignore tough personal and political issues. Her work has always faced those issues head-on, using the language of post-minimal and conceptual art. She makes images of sorts—an object, an altered ready-made, a sculpture. According to the artist, the clothing pieces were based on the theory that people had more experience looking at clothes than at sculpture. More important, these feminist works addressed the shared experience of being female in society.[30]

In a new take on her earlier theme of protecting children and families, Smith's *Flower* (2010; Fig. 14) comprises a pink camouflage child's dress floating inside a kind of garden cage. Smith said: "After we bought our place upstate I noticed that people would plant and grow and tend to the most beautiful flowers and then build a cage around them to protect them from the animals. I thought that is what we do to our children, maybe daughters specifically and on some level to everything."[31] In works like this Mimi Smith continues to challenge the ways that we think about art, clothing, craft, modernist hierarchies, and conveying political messages through visual art.

Judith Tannenbaum argued that Smith's motivation derives not from a cultural critique but instead from "her need to transform her personal experience … into unique objects with which others can identify."[32] Clearly, Smith anticipated the clothing art by artists such as Jana Sterbak, Beverly Semmes, Maureen Connor, and more recently that of Nick Cave and Mark Newport. Moreover, Mimi Smith merges feminism with an approach to the whole person, which is also part of the broad scope of what has become the feminist project since she began making art in the 1960s. Working with clothing as sculpture and proposing this new medium as a radical idea for art in many ways, she has been addressing feminist issues as they have evolved over four decades. Within this framework, she addresses politics, the media, and health and human safety concerns. As an early computer artist, she interrogated the role of television and computers in our lives, including the strange language of computer error messages. She exemplifies the creator of feminist methodologies helping to transform the art world and the world we inhabit by articulating powerful critiques of a male world in which male power still predominates. •

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Notes

The author wishes to thank Mimi Smith for her exceptional generosity and assistance with this article.

1. Mimi Smith's work has been the subject of many exhibitions including a retrospective at the Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania in 1994, organized by Judith Tannenbaum; one-person shows at Anna Kustera Gallery in New York in 1997 and 2010; and group exhibitions in New York, Los Angeles, England, and Wales, including "Art with Conscience" (1995-96), "Addressing the Century: 100 Years of Art and Fashion" in London and Germany (1998-99), "Artworkers" (2000) in Cornwall, England, and "*WACK!* Art and the Feminist Revolution" (2007). Plans are currently underway for a major retrospective exhibition and catalogue to present Smith's work at the Newark Museum in 2013.
2. Mimi Smith's grandmother taught her to sew on an old treadle sewing machine. Her grandmother, Sarah Lyman Bayard, did "piecework" and worked in a sweatshop making men's suits, once calling a suit she had just made a work of art. Mimi Smith, "Dialogue with Mimi Smith," interview with Saralyn Reece Hardy, *Spencer Museum of Art Newsletter* (Fall 2010): 4. See also Smith's

reminiscences of her grandmother's "exhibitions" of family photographs in *Heresies, A Feminist Publication on Art and Politics,* 6:4, (Winter 1978): 87. (Hereafter, *Heresies*)

3. Smith first enrolled at Rutgers in the fall of 1963, but became ill and postponed starting the program. She returned in the fall of 1964, at which time she began to work with Robert Watts. Mimi Smith, email conversation with the author, February 2011. Unless otherwise indicated, all subsequent quotes from the artist were told to the author over the course of many conversations between 2000 and 2011 or contained in emails during January and February 2011.
4. Smith says she kept fainting in the welding classes, so she never really learned welding as she had hoped; conversation with the author, Lawrence, Kansas, April 2010. Among the other artists who taught at or attended Rutgers/Douglass around this time or earlier were Geoffrey Hendricks, George Segal, Robert Whitman, Lucas Samaras, and Roy Lichtenstein.
5. The MFA program at Rutgers has been featured in exhibitions and publications in recent years, including Joan M. Marter, ed., *Off Limits: Rutgers University and the Avant-Garde, 1957-1963* (Newark, N. J.: Newark Museum; New Brunswick, N. J: Rutgers University Press, 1999), and Ferris Olin, ed., *Artists on the Edge: Douglas College and the Rutgers MFA* (New Brunswick, NJ, 2005). The Douglass Library at Rutgers also developed a series of exhibitions and catalogues to showcase the work of women, including many who were graduates of the program. Founded by artist Joan Snyder in 1971 and still ongoing, it is now called the Mary H. Dana Women Artists Series. Mimi Smith was included in "Women Artists, year 8: 1978-79."
6. Smith acknowledges both mentors among others, saying that "the combination of Bob Watts's Fluxus, where you could do anything, and Robert Morris's intellectualism was really what determined my work, I think." Mimi Smith, interview with Joan Arbeiter in 1988, in Beryl Smith, Joan Arbeiter, and Sally Shearer Swenson, *Lives and Works: Talks with Women Artists*, vol. 2 (Lanham, MD, and London: Scarecrow Press, 1996), 162. See also Jessica Evans, "Mimi Smith," in Ferris Olin, ed., *Artists on the Edge: Douglass College and the Rutgers MFA*, 37-41.
7. Her early paintings include an abstract still-life from 1962 with a lively sense of color and brushwork, and a large reclining female nude.
8. *Steel Wool Peignoir* was first shown in 1979 in a solo show titled "Sculpture/Drawings 1966/1978" at Rutgers in the Douglass Library *Women Artists Series*. Later it was shown in two group shows, "Regalia" (1980-81) at the Henry Street Settlement, and "The Rag Trade" (1983), curated by Saul Ostrow at InterArt Center; and two solo shows, "Steel Wool Politics" (1994), curated by Judith Tannenbaum at ICA, and "A 30 Year Survey" (1997) at Anna Kustera Gallery. Later on she was careful about lending the work after experiences in which her art was damaged during travel. Email from Smith to the author, January 2011.
9. There is an extensive bibliography on *Steel Wool Peignoir*, including a master's thesis, and many discussions in books and articles over the past thirty years. See for example, Rachel Eileen Wright, "Inside-Out: Mimi Smith's *Steel Wool Peignoir*" (MA thesis, Univ. of Texas at Austin, 1998).
10. Mimi Smith, in *Heresies*, 6:2 (Summer 1978): 36.
11. Ibid. Smith's text was placed on a page in the journal opposite a story on female circumcision and genital mutilation.
12. The quoted phrase is from Nancy Spector, "Freudian 'Slips': Dressing the Ambiguous Body," in the exhibition catalogue for *Art/Fashion* (New York: Guggenheim Museum Soho, 1997), in which Spector incorrectly states that "women artists working with clothes during the early and mid-seventies did not rigorously explore the psychological and psychosexual dimensions of fashion…" because "the discursive vocabulary for such a feminist inquiry had yet to be formulated." Quoted in Jane Harris, "Clothing Art: Mimi Smith and the Fabric of Time," *PAJ* [Performing Arts Journal], 20.3 (1998): 36. Such a statement ignores Smith's accomplishments in the mid 1960s.
13. Lucy R. Lippard, *The Pink Glass Swan: Selected Essays on Feminist Art* (New York: New Press, 1995), 19. Lippard also argues here that Jana Sterbak's 1980s meat dresses echo Smith's *Peignoir*.
14. Mimi Smith, on "Girdle," in *Heresies,* 6:2 (Summer 1978): 36.
15. As with many of Smith's clothing pieces, *Girdle* anticipates later works by younger artists. There have been a number of recent exhibitions that focus on clothing. See, for example, Nina Felshin's "Empty Dress: Clothing as Surrogate in Recent Art" (1993) (New York, Independent Curators International). Smith's work has not always been included in these.
16. Mimi Smith graciously provided details about the *Wedding* installation (and about many other works discussed in this article). Emails and phone calls with the author, January- February 2011.
17. Ingrid Schaffner, "Mimi Smith, Anna Kustera Gallery" *Artforum*, vol. 36, no. 1 (Sept. 1997): 128-29. Helen Molesworth calls *Maternity Dress* "a silver-vinyl micro-mini worthy of Edie Sedgwick" in her review of the exhibition at Anna Kustera, in *frieze*, no. 46.
18. Roberta Smith, "Mimi Smith, 'Knotted Thread' Works from the 60's and 70's," *The New York Times*, Friday, January 15, 1999.
19. Smith's *Stairs* was included in the recent touring exhibition "*WACK!* Art and the Feminist Revolution" (2007).
20. See, for example, Lynn Zelevansky, *Sense and Sensibility: Women Artists and Minimalism in the Nineties,* exhibition catalogue (New York, Museum of Modern Art, 1994).
21. Joseph Jacobs mentions this idea in his essay "Mimi Smith: An Art with Conscience" in *Mimi Smith, Selected Works 1965-1999* (Mahwah, NJ: Berrie Center, Ramapo College of New Jersey, 2004), 11.
22. Arbeiter interview in *Lives and Works*, 178.
23. I would argue that we still live with so many threats in our homes and in the world, in part because objection to those threats has been marginalized as a feminine concern.
24. See Mimi Smith, *This is a Test* (New York: Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1983). This artist's book, for which Smith received. a grant from the New York State Council on the Arts, culminates the antinuclear theme that she had pursued in several artist books. Using the phrase and concept "this is a test," this book tells the story of five fictitious nuclear bomb blasts and what happens to five cities around the world; Smith, Arbeiter interview in Lives *and Works*, 173. Smith's related nuclear holocaust work, *Bless This House,* was included in Nina Felshin's 1984 exhibition "Disarming Images: Art for Nuclear Disarmament" and the catalogue.
25. According to Kate Linker, Review, *Artforum* (May 1982): 82.
26. Mimi Smith, email to the author, February 2011. On Feb. 28, 1982, FALN (Fuerzas Armadas de Liberacion Nacional) bombed several locations in the Wall Street financial district.
27. Shaffner, "Mimi Smith, Anna Kustera Gallery," 128-29.
28. Jacobs, "Mimi Smith: An Art with Conscience" in *Mimi Smith, Selected Works 1965-1999*, 11.
29. Smith also created a black bra in this series which has been exhibited and reproduced more than the red one shown here. This one was exhibited in the 30-Year Survey of Smith's work at Anna Kustera Gallery in 1997.
30. Mimi Smith, in Nina Felshin, "Women's Work: A Lineage, 1966-94," *Art Journal* 54:1 (Spring 1995): 72.
31. Mimi Smith, email to the author, February 2011.
32. Judith Tannenbaum, "Mimi Smith: Quiet Radical," in *Mimi Smith: Steel Wool Politics* (Philadelphia: Institute of Contemporary Art, Univ. of Pennsylvania, 1994), 14.

Janet Culbertson
The Toxic Wilderness

By Joyce Beckenstein



Fig. 1. Janet Culbertson, *Oil Shrouded Bird* (1962) (from Elegy to Nature Series), drawing on rag, mixed media, acrylic, 22" x 28". Photo: Douglas Kaften.

To commemorate the Bicentennial, *Art in America* dedicated its January–February 1976 edition to the history of the American landscape. A number of articles in that issue described the genre, from paintings of the Hudson River School to photographs along Route 66 and beyond, as caught in the crosshairs of wilderness and progress. But America, in a partying mood in 1976, was dancing on the tip of a dangerously toxic wasteland. Few artists or art critics back then fully grasped the profound ecological issues confronting the nation on its two-hundredth birthday. Janet Culbertson was among those who did.

So did some environmentalists and scientists. In 1962, Rachel Carson blew the whistle on chemical companies that were polluting and upsetting the balance of nature. Her momentous book, *The Silent Spring*, put a global face on environmental sabotage and the price we would pay for it. In 1964, Clarence Morris, a law professor at the University of Pennsylvania advocating for nature's legal rights, suggested anti-pollution measures to curb the human impact on the environment.[1] Finally, Wisconsin Senator Gaylord Nelson made it a political issue that resulted in the 1970 National Environmental Protection Act and the designation of April 22 as Earth Day. Culbertson saw these signs of environmental Armageddon as a call to arms.

Long before the mass media began to regale us with relentless images of rivers bubbling chemical sludge and vistas blurred by noxious soot, Culbertson was creating works that re-imagined the American landscape as an uninhabitable wilderness.

Janet Culbertson (b. 1932) grew up in Greensburg, Pennsylvania. She loved nature, canoed through the Allegheny Mountains, and raised baby owls and released them into the wild. Even as a child, she had a visceral response to vexing details: something was wrong with that pumpkin-orange stripe snaking from strip mines through the rivers where she fished. She was saddened by the glazed eye of a freshly killed stag jubilantly carried home from the hunt. These sights haunted her. The result, she says: "My sister and I became fanatical environmentalists; my brother became a coal salesman."[2] A feminist who rejected as role models 1950s *Saturday Evening Post* "cover girls" wearing crisp aprons and beaming over hot apple pie, Culbertson received a BFA from Carnegie-Mellon University in 1953. Then, like many young artists, she headed for New York and lived in a cramped Greenwich Village apartment that doubled as her studio. She earned her living as a graphic artist and taught at Pace College. In 1964 she received an MA in art education from New York University.

"Oil Slick is Shroud for Birds," headlined a 1962 *Washington Post* column that pointed a finger at oil companies dumping oil waste into the sea. This warning, an eerie precursor to the 1989 Exxon Valdez tanker episode and the more recent BP disaster, which both wiped out huge swaths of American coastal life and livelihoods, inspired Culbertson's first eco-series, Elegy to Nature. Begun in 1962, these unsettling drawings, including *Oil*

Shrouded Bird (Fig. 1) depict what are now ubiquitous media sightings of strangulated wildlife. They were barely noticed and blandly reviewed when they were exhibited in New York (1967) and Los Angeles (1969).[3] Says Culbertson, "Everyone missed the point completely. Detractors made fun of environmentalists, calling us 'tree-huggers, bird watchers and bleeding hearts.'"

Soon after completing Elegy to Nature, she took a course at The Foundation for Mind Research, which introduced her to Joseph Campbell's monomyth, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1948), a tale of a hero who goes on a quest, overcomes torments, then returns enlightened, with something to share. Culbertson wondered about this archetypical male role model on a testosterone-fueled odyssey. What about women, *their* struggles, *their* journeys?



Fig. 2. Janet Culbertson, *Inbound* (1975), ink and charcoal, 40" x 30". Collection National Museum of Women in the Arts. Photo: Douglas Kaften.



Fig. 3. Janet Culbertson, *Galapagos Tortoise* (1976), ink and charcoal on rag, 96" x 72". Photo: Douglas Kaften.

Her Mythmaker suite of drawings (1973-76) charts the course of a heroine who, as a tiny speck, struggles along a delicate thread in an anthropomorphic universe, its deserts and mountains defined by crevices and folds simulating the primeval cleavages of Mother Earth. These works are well documented by Jenni L. Schlossman in her 1992 article, "Janet Culbertson, Political Landscapes," in which she characterizes one drawing, *Inbound*(1975; Fig. 2), as a "symbol of a woman's struggle to follow her own path through the maze of seemingly insurmountable hurdles presented by male-dominated society."[4]

In 1976, Culbertson left for the Galapagos Islands, a copy of Herman Melville's *The Encantadas (Enchanted Islands)* tucked in her backpack. Her later billboard paintings depicting fields of toxic, pulverized ash were clearly inspired by Melville's descriptions of the islands that "know not autumn, and they know not spring; while already reduced to the lees of fire, ruin itself can work little more upon them."[5] But Melville was not a naturalist. He found the Galapagos tortoises grotesque and relished the way sailors poached them for dinner then gulped the broth in soup bowls made from their shells.

Culbertson describes them: "marching through our campsite, their girth crashing our flimsy tents, fearless because they were protected. One stole my heart and took center stage in my work for several years." She began a series of drawings of the island's creatures (1976; Fig. 3), rendering them on eight-foot mural paper using a burst-ink process to mimic the gritty terrain of a volcanic island. The figures are first sketched in charcoal; white spaces are masked with tape and the surface is sprayed with India ink. The paper is then immersed in water. After it dries, the tape is peeled off and the image is completed in pastel. Culbertson's tortoises are heroic in size and scale; her iguanas are piled high in configurations that look a bit like Escher's positive and negative animal shapes. She squeezes them tight within the margins of her drawing pages to imply their confined exile to a sullen place where, under the careful eye of preservationists, they may be spared extinction.

How little it takes to upset nature's fragile balance. Culbertson takes as her theme degradation and dignity: hailstorms of volcanic spittle battering noble tortoises as they trudge through rocky terrain; global warming frying the forest where a baboon, depicted in *Occupant* (2000), struggles to survive.

Lerner-Heller Gallery, New York, exhibited the Galapagos drawings in 1977, along with landscapes, including *Devil's Crown* (1976; Fig. 4), a massive chunk of rock overpowering a thin slab of volcanic island. A first glance triggers an art historical memory of Frederic Edwin Church's monumental *Iceberg* (1859), an enormous ice monolith standing against a chilly grey sky, surrounded by an undulating blue sea. But Culbertson's speckled boulder rises on the equator, not the Arctic Circle. What appear to be glittering splatters of ice turn out on close viewing to be dollops of blue-footed booby dung. An opaque Milk-of-Magnesia sea merging with a dull blue sky envelops this megalith. Where Church gives us nature sublime, Culbertson gives us nature subjugated.

Lerner-Heller Gallery stopped representing Culbertson soon after this exhibition because, says the artist, "My monomyths were 'too feminist' and my Galapagos works were too big and unframable for the gallery to sell." But some critics understood them. In 1977, Mary Vaughan, writing for *Arts*, insightfully summed up the exhibition: "Janet Culbertson's personal icons are inter-faced with ecological concerns. In the



Fig. 4. Janet Culbertson, *Devils Crown* (1976), acrylic on canvas, 34" x 48". Private Collection. Photo: Douglas Kaften.

paintings, the illusion of the live, beautiful part is … thwarted by its whole, its environment, a prediction of nature's destruction"[6] Beyond such occasional praise, Culbertson's encouragement came from the ranks of protest movements that at that time linked animal and nature rights to a growing number of activist movements whose causes included the Vietnam War, civil rights, feminism and gay rights.

During the 1970s she joined the Sierra Club, Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, and became known as an eco-feminist. In 1980 she wrote to Lucy Lippard, asking her to consider an ecology issue for *Heresies: A Feminist Publication on Art and Politics*. Lippard, who had been thinking along the same lines, culled an editorial collective that included Ana Mendieta, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Michelle Stuart, Christy Rupp Florence Falk, and Culbertson for a 1981 volume, sub-titled *Earth Keeping/Earth Shaking*. The collective editorial statement reads: "If ever there was an area in which the personal and the political merged, this was it. What can women do about the disastrous direction the world is taking?"[7] (They dedicated the issue to two eco-feminists who stood up to corporate America and made a difference: Rachel Carson and Karen Silkwood, the young woman activist who in 1974 exposed the chemical company, Kerr-McGee, for unleashing lethal levels of plutonium in their factories and into the environment. Silkwood died in a suspicious car accident as she was on her way to turn over to the *New York Times* the damning information she had gathered.[8]) Culbertson, in her article, "Ecotage," was also determined to expose polluters. She wrote about guerilla tactics by groups of activists who applied stickers to corporate billboards, reading 'BOYCOTT: This company is a polluter,' actions that soon after inspired her signature billboard paintings.

A number of artists were, by the early 1970s, already documenting the changing American landscape: shopping malls and uninspired tract housing all stitched together by blacktop thruways into the readymade quilt of middle America. Most were photographers, such as William Eggleston, excited by the first images of Earth taken from outer space. In 1967, The National Aeronautics and Space Administration released these pictures, and Vickie Goldberg wrote, "Suddenly, because of the photograph, we had a whole new perspective of our planet—as a small oasis adrift in the universe, fragile and precious, poignantly beautiful but agonizingly lonely."[9]

But few artists—painters or photographers—were focused on the cancer gorging itself on the Earth's core. Culbertson understood that the problem went deeper than tasteless architectural eyesores besotting suburban communities. She wanted her art to warn that human folly in the name of progress was profoundly damaging life on the planet. She didn't dance around her subject, and for many critics and gallerists (such as Lerner-Heller) her early messages may have seemed too direct, too confrontational, better left to print or TV. This attitude may in part explain why Culbertson's voice remained unheard.

But there is more to it. While human intrusion on the landscape has long been a subject for American landscape artists, most of them, from the Hudson River School onward, gave trespassers a sighing pass through the painted forest. The attitude towards the American wild has always been an idiosyncratic mix of dread and greed. The wilderness was a thorn in the Yankee's entrepreneurial side. Roderick Frazier Nash suggests why in his book, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (1967). He discusses the roots of European fear of the wilderness and how it encouraged the rationale for stripping away nature in the name of progress. He notes that early mythology painted a nightmarish existence of wilderness, and that folk traditions of many countries associated wilderness with the supernatural and the monstrous. Eden was a garden, nurtured by humans, and early Christians judged their work to be successful when they had cleared away the wild forests where the pagans held their rites.[10] Centuries later, when Puritans sought the New World's wilderness as a persecution-free haven, they assumed it to be their God-given mission to "make an island of spiritual light in the surrounding darkness…to redeem nature from its wilderness state."[11]

Not until the early nineteenth century, when European Romantics sought to flee the corruption of "civilized cities," was this pit of darkness redefined as divine creation, a sublime sanctuary revered by Transcendental poets such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and William Cullen Bryant. A new sensibility now arose: A chunk of the human soul is lost when wilderness is torn asunder. Transcendental writers influenced the artists of the Hudson River School, who, in documenting the sublime in nature that they had fled Europe to find, were now looking directly at human encroachment on newly hallowed ground. They lamented this, but they did not, could not, wholly turn their backs on what they also perceived to be the workings of Yankee resourcefulness. Besides, the American wilderness stretched endlessly—hope lingered that humankind would not go too far. This ambivalence and how it evolved in American art was on the minds of art historians as they wrote on the occasion of the Bicentennial for the 1976 *Art in America* landscape edition.

"As Thoreau meditates on his use of the axe to make himself a dwelling place in nature, he also mourns lost trees, which he misses like human beings," wrote Barbara Novak in "The

Double-Edged Axe."[12] She characterizes Thomas Cole's *View on the Catskill, Early Autumn* (1837) as an "idealized pastoral rendering."[13] Here, trees and lush shrubbery surrounding two female figures yawn towards the distant Catskill Mountains. Six years later, Cole returned to the site and painted *River in the Catskills* (1843), with "evidence of human depredation and a more realistic style."[14] Trees are now felled, once fecund foliage thinned to scrub, and a man stands by a tree stump eyeing a strip of buildings along the middle ground of the painting. It is as if Cole halted the eye to give the viewer pause, to plead a reconsideration of the march through the heartland of our wilderness.



Fig. 5. Janet Culbertson, *Clear-Cut* (1971-72), oil on canvas, 24" x 42". Photo: Douglas Kaften.

But "progress" was unstoppable. Novak points to Sanford Gifford's *Twilight on Hunter Mountain* (1866,) as a "stump motif in an ambiguous image of the forest defeated by man."[15] His figure stands in the field he has cleared for his cows and the modest home now nestled within the ragged hem of a mountain range. It is a startling statement about the number of trees it took to shelter a family.

A century later, Culbertson points to more unstoppable "progress" in *Clear-Cut* (1971-72; Fig. 5), a painting based on sketches the artist made while visiting the California Redwood Forest. She reports seeing men set up spotlights at night, then cut trees down, as many as they could, before impending legislation put a stop to the carnage. Culbertson presents the stubby remains of amputated redwoods, some clean-shaven across their tops, but most of them jagged, as if some omnipotent force had wrenched them from their trunks. Painted in muted grays and lavenders against a lifeless field of mauves and blues, it clearly shows the handiwork of humanity taking its idea of progress too far.

It is difficult to reconcile Culbertson's redwood vision with Jed Perl's 1976 article, "The Vertical Landscape: In the Redwood Forest Dense." Why, six years after the first Earth Day, on the occasion of the bicentennial, does an art critic assessing the American tradition of landscape painting make only oblique reference to the state of this forest? His focus is instead the proliferation of nineteenth-century redwoods images used as advertisements by a nascent tourist industry. Only parenthetically does he report "nature's majesty reduced to being wards of the state."[16]

Elizabeth Baker, similarly halting in her concern for environmental impact, discusses land art as the quintessentially male endeavors of Michael Heizer, Robert Smithson, and Walter De Maria. These artists, who placed their works in remote sites within the American landscape, created monumental art, but their motives for doing so had little to do with concerns for land preservation. Baker's essay grants these intrusions on nature yet another art historical pass, saying "none of these three artists' works is large enough to have any significant impact on ecology; indeed someday these works, in their capacity as art, may have a preservational effect."[17] This is a sore point for Culbertson, who says she was once rebuffed by Christo when she questioned the efficacy of wrapping land in polypropylene. She has always believed that, in an ecologically endangered environment, anything calling itself land or earth art has some responsibility to prioritize preservation.

Robert Rosenblum was the only essayist contributing to the 1976 volume to mention in his article, "Painting America First," work by a woman artist. Reviewing a traveling exhibition commissioned by the United States Department of the Interior to "freshly document America," he pointed to Ellen Lanyon's acrylic painting *Everglades* (1975), an Audubon-type illustration of a pelican and an alligator, as one example that suggests "styles in America—and American art have barely changed since the 19th century."[18] He then singled out a few artists such as John Clem Clarke and Sidney Goodman, whose themes, similar to Culbertson's, reflect the "ecological, technological and esthetic exceptions that locate us more obviously in the 1970s." He concluded with the plea that, going forward, "the U.S. will give artists the chance to re-examine America and show us what they find."[19]

That is precisely what Culbertson was doing in 1978 as she drove through New Jersey: "I could see the Statue of Liberty beyond an expanse of putrefied earth. It looked like rape." She made sketches, and then put them away because they were "so dark." Nor did she think she had a commercial shot as a woman painting ominous landscapes (she was still signing many of her works Jan or with the initial J to avoid gender bias). Then, in 1980, she nearly lost her life in a terrible car accident and for a time could not paint. When she again picked up her brushes it was with new passion and resolve.

Culbertson's evolving oeuvre re-invents the concept of wilderness in terms of ongoing environmental catastrophe. Her wilderness is a surreal place, a terrifying human creation that is scorched, toxic, airless and impenetrable. She channels this apocalyptic vision through three icons of the modern American landscape: billboards, industrial parks, and highways, landmarks that are recognized visual blights. Imagine driving through a place where everything green is buried beneath concrete and acrid dust. You pass a billboard pitching a destination of verdant forests, where birds sing and



Fig. 6. Janet Culbertson, *Vanishing Gold* (1998), acrylic, pastel, on rag paper, 22" x 30". Collection Hunterdon Museum, Clinton, N.J. Photo: Douglas Kaften.

flowers grow, and you want to head there but it no longer exists. Culbertson evoked this sense of loss in *The First Billboard* (1987; Pl. 8), a painting within a painting that depicts a billboard sunk into rocky ground strewn with manufactured debris. It advertises a vacation spot from better days, where wetlands hug the shore of a dazzling blue river that meanders towards a sun-drenched horizon. But there is no natural dappled light: rather an eerie string of electric fixtures juiced by radiation illuminates this abyss. No cars go by, no noisy kids yell, "Are we there yet?"

"Janet Culbertson's poignant canvases … give nostalgia pause. Could anyone in the 19th century have imagined how far things would go? Can we imagine the future pictured by Culbertson?" asked Lucy Lippard, who references Culbertson's works in her article "Too Much: The Grand Canyon(s)."[20] In this article, published in 2000, she points out that we experience the wonders of nature—the Grand Canyon in particular—mostly from theme parks, snapshots, or through the scripted perspective of tour guides.[21]

This is true. We experience nature as a secondary market; pour "natural" orange juice from plastic containers bearing pictures of real oranges, stab at poly-bags to harvest "organic" produce, and immerse ourselves in "virtual" realities provided by movies, TV, and handheld video games. All of this further alienates us from nature and numbs us into believing that the sky is really not falling.

Culbertson's billboards are apt metaphors for this pre-packaged state of mind, something the science community has long recognized. In 1998, when her works were featured in a one person exhibition at the National Academy of Science, Washington D.C., Fredrica Wechsler, Director of Arts in the Academy, wrote, "She shows us a surreal landscape we dread to see, but one that is alarmingly close to the real thing…a thought provoking experience that surprises with its beauty."[22] *Vanishing Gold, (*1998; Fig. 6), among the works in that show, menacingly recalls the orb of sunlight penetrating a ferociously black cloud in Frederic Edwin Church's *Cotopaxi* (1863). But where Church's clearing skies and reflected light promise a bright tomorrow, Culbertson's sunburst precipitates a lava-like flow of chemical pink, mauve, orange and inky indigo liquids that cascade from the billboard into a lifeless sea.

They are the roads we have seen in Culbertson's billboards, skidded off course onto canvases that define another of this artist's series, Paving America (begun 1992-present). "Could you run that truck over my canvas?" Culbertson asked a road construction worker when she spotted him driving a road-striping vehicle down a local street. He was more than helpful. In fact, in aligning the canvas with the trajectory of the striper, he managed to also etch in the tread marks of his Timberlands, immortalizing the performance element of *Paving America I* (1993; Pl. 9), for the first work of this ongoing cycle.

"From her outpost on Shelter Island, Janet Culbertson has become an environmental bellwether for the erosion of nature, especially as evidenced by the insidious progression of asphalt pavement," noted curator Alicia Longwell when this and other "paving" images were exhibited at the Parrish Art Museum in 2000.[23] Culbertson repeated the yellow stripe motif in later paintings, including *Paving the Planet* (2002), where it hovers like a neon rainbow above a lifeless aerial map of Earth. Other variations on the theme, such as *Paving America V* (2008), depict skeins of merging and looping highways clogged with cars—some miniature toy models, others suggested by flat slap-dashed brushstrokes—all embedded in congealed asphalt, all going nowhere.

Culbertson's environmental works have been exhibited with increasing frequency, almost in sync with the intensity of global concern surrounding eco-catastrophes. In 2003 The Puffin Foundation Ltd., at the invitation of the Cuban government, placed an open call to artists to submit works for an exhibition titled "Toxic Landscapes: Artists Examine the Environment." Culbertson's *Marching Giants (Black Gold* (1997; Fig. 7), one of the first paintings in her Industrial Park series, traveled to Cuba—with the artist—as part of that show. Culbertson had started to paint industrial "parks" after seeing chemical refineries and nuclear reactors. These works riff on what Culbertson refers to as "misinformation" on the part of industry whose blatant appropriation of 'park' insults the notion of nature, carefully and lovingly tended. *Marching Giants* depicts an army of electrical towers robotically advancing towards the viewer through a scrub forest of decimated manufacturing debris. Monochromatic hues ranging from silver-blacks to opaque grays are accented by sprays of red and green iridescent glitter—dazzling metallic

waste biting into what is left of purgatory, where everything, with the exception of these steel executioners, has been electrocuted. A more recent Industrial Park painting, the semi-abstract *Wasteland* (2009; Fig. 8), recalls the New Jersey roadside view that launched the billboard series. A road mimicking the river in that earlier work snakes towards a distant string of smoke stacks. They cough red smoke and spew a shower of glittery acid rain upon two small figures that struggle, as did Culbertson's "Mythmakers," along a road that now has no good place to go.

Sometimes Culbertson laces her grim message with dry wit. In *Toxic Garden* (2001; Pl. 10), she poses a baboon like one of Franz Hal's seventeenth century subjects. Pressed flat against the canvas, he leans into the viewer's space, a succession of ominous nuclear reactors looming in the distance. But this is no *Jolly Toper*, rather a Darwinian cousin, a denizen of the wild, staring humanity down with piercing, angry eyes. "See what you have done," he seems to say.

Culbertson's recent works are denser in texture, more abstract, and especially ominous now that we all live in fear of the next Katrina, corporate oil spill, or E. coli in the family salad. In 2008 The Galería Nacional, San José, Costa Rica, honored Culbertson with a one-person show that included a survey of her billboards and industrial parks. Also on exhibit was a large multi-media painting, *Warming 2* (2008). Collaged with iridescent pigments on rag paper, it portrays a view of Earth from space, but not the familiar blue sphere surrounded by animated swirls of clouds beamed to us by NASA satellites. Culbertson instead depicts Earth reduced to a planet where angry red rivers ooze through chunks of rock and acid dust. When all cools we suspect it will disperse into an empty cosmic sea. Culbertson's combinations of sparkly surfaces and deadly places make odd bedfellows of form and content. She knows that what repels compels: biomorphic-shaped globs of oil slicking toward beaches are stimulating to look at; so are wrack lines of debris glistening in the ebbing tide. Visually these contrasts create the tension between idea and medium that artists struggle to create. In commercial photography it leads to a familiar string of eye-stopping images—black veiled vistas of Los Angeles, tin cans and plastic afloat in crystalline waters—with shock value that lasts the flip of a page.

Janet Goleas, curator of the permanent collection for the Islip Art Museum on Long Island, organized Culbertson's most recent solo exhibition "Insights: Janet Culbertson, Future Tense" (2010). She selected mostly abstract works for the show, no less severe in their commentaries about planet Earth than the artist's representational works. They include *Who Killed Cock Robin* (2001) with its tire tread zipping across a flat, crimson field, and *Sunburst* (2009; Pl. 11), an exquisite new abstract crowded with painted chips of silvered wood accented by glittering pools of yellows and green pigment. Goleas commented on the artist's seamless synthesis of animated brilliant surface with the specter of global death: "Her works have an incredible handle on perspective; they suck you in with dazzle and sparkle, then ricochet to get a somber message across. It's quite shocking when you fall into her world."[24]



Fig. 7. Janet Culbertson, *Marching Giants (Black Gold)* (1997), oil, iridescent pigments on rag paper, 22" x 30". Collection Nassau County Museum. Photo: Douglas Kaften.



Fig. 8. Janet Culbertson, *Wasteland* (2009), oil, iridescent pigments, rag paper, 22" x 30". Photo: Janet Culbertson.

Culbertson, now an artist for almost five decades, confidently goes where her brush, her emotions, and her responses to environmental issues lead her. She's reflective when asked about her shift towards abstraction:

> I'm not sure why I became less representational. In the beginning I felt no one was getting "it," so the *First Billboard* is very clear-cut. As an artist you need to do different things to make it more interesting. My style is looser, my eye more critical. I can't pin it down, but I am enjoying the change in process, saying more with less realism, saying more with lush texture.

The multi-media works Culbertson has made since 2008 illustrate the stylistic evolution of an artist immersed in the artistic process but never losing her grip on her environmental mission. Her works continue to be uncannily prescient. The



Fig. 9. Janet Culbertson, *Oil Rig* (2008), oil, collage, iridescent pigments, rag paper, 30"x 22". Photo: Janet Culbertson.



Fig. 10 . Janet Culbertson, *Exxon Valdez* (previously *Billboard Seal in Oil*) (2010), oil, collage, iridescent pigments, canvas, 26" x 34". Photo: Janet Culbertson.



Fig. 11. Janet Culbertson, *BP Oil Spill* (2010), oil, iridescent pigments, on canvas, 34" x 48". Photo: Janet Culbertson.

orange flame spewing black soot in *Oil Rig (*2008; Fig. 9), for example, suggests the 2010 BP disaster in the Gulf of Mexico, but was based on a forty-year history of "occurrences" that, she says "…are less known because the industry was not obligated to disclose them."

Oil Rig recalls *Marching Giants*, but here, instead of an advancing procession of towers, a single steely spire presses against the surface, its legs sunk into a sea of black sludge. Metal splinters fly through the air, and one can only faintly discern the outlines of a former "industrial park" fading against a silver metallic sky. Culbertson "painted" the rig using a tangle of collaged paper strips doused with black paint, oozed from the tube. Iridescent pigment and sparkling glitter, suggesting fall-out from a devastating inferno, create a beautiful foil for a ghastly truth.

Although the title *Exxon Valdez* (2010; Fig. 10), refers to the Alaska tanker spill in 1989, its date references the recent BP episode, indicating her frustration and exasperation. Culbertson recycles her iconic billboard, here standing atop a hill, thick with debris made from torn rag paper. A baby seal—an image taken from an old *National Geographic* magazine, worked over with pigment and collaged onto the billboard form—is no longer safe. Except for red ooze trickling within the crevices of the mottled landscape, the entire surface is monochrome silver. The work exists somewhere between a remote airless universe and its abstraction, a collage of melted, then solidified textures.

"The disasters I've seen since the 60s are evermore in the press… People paid less attention when animals seemed to be the victims … now people are perishing," says Culbertson. *BP Oil Spill* (2010; Fig. 11) an abstract painting directly inspired by the 104-day oil leak into the Gulf of Mexico, alludes to its human toll. Two amorphous shapes suggest heads bobbing in a restless silver sea, thick with clumps of congealed oil. The painting is an homage, not just to the eleven men who died as a result of BP negligence, but to all those who perished in similar disasters.

By no means has Culbertson abandoned vivid color. In *Vanishing Butterflies* (2010; Pl. 12) she reinvents her billboard theme as almost pure color abstraction. It recalls the brilliant sky in *Vanishing Gold*. But now, even the billboards are disintegrating. One large frame floats in the background like a suspended flat screen TV. It generates flashing rays of

turquoise, green, cobalt blue, and red-orange light that zap a foreground signboard. A butterfly decomposes on its frame, hemorrhaging gorgeous color.

"We've substituted for nature," says Culbertson. The colors in *Vanishing Butterflies* are more the hues one gets from contrast—tint-brightness menus on remote control devices; they can never, despite our fidgeting with adjustments—approximate nature's palette.

Eco-art has gone through many changes since Culbertson embraced the genre as a young artist-activist. "Younger artists are taking a different focus, going into the landscape, doing conceptual projects…important things. If I was younger, I might be out there with them," says the artist. "But I have to paint: I like the brush, the smell of turp. This is where I belong."

Culbertson is like the heroine she imagined when she inked her *Mythmaker* series in the 1960s. She saw something very wrong. It made her unhappy and angry. So she took a journey through art to learn more and then give something back. Eco-artists who are today rolling up their sleeves to make Earth a better place can trace their roots to her efforts. While Culbertson did not provide the eco-solutions of today's artist-scientists, with her prescient works she offered a different kind of gift: that of understanding the nature of the problem. In so doing she embedded a yellow brick road into American landscape painting. •

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Magdalena Abakanowicz

And Development of the Figure in Postwar Polish Sculpture

By Aneta Biesiadecka

The early postwar years in Poland were characterized by an intense search for new aesthetics. The Second World War brought an end to both the Constructivists' faith in science and technology and the Neoclassical heroism that had dominated the early twentieth century; these failed ideals could not express the postwar reality. Out of the resulting variety of trends and styles emerged two divergent directions: one characterized by abstraction and the study of geometric form, and the other focused on organic form and the expression of emotions. The latter trend, referred to here as expressive sculpture, remained a major style for the next twenty years. Its main characteristic was the inclusion of lowly and crude materials that emphasized the object's organic qualities. A common subject in expressive sculpture was the human figure, typically portrayed as emaciated and fragile. The creation of expressive sculptures was a direct response to the vivid memories of World War II and everyday life in a destroyed country governed by a totalitarian government. Artists were traumatized by the war-torn past and anxious about the future of living in a state of political turmoil. They expressed the human condition in a pithy manner using the language of synecdoche and abbreviation. In expressive sculpture, emotion became the chief means of communication between the artist and the viewer.



Fig. 1. Magdalena Abakanowicz, *Androgyn III* (1985), burlap, resin, wood, nails, string, 48" x 22" x 63 1/2". Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY.

The sculpture of Magdalena Abakanowicz (b. 1930) is well known for its expressive qualities and concise language. Displayed individually or in groups, her figures are fragmentary, metaphoric, and quasi-abstract. Her use of lowly materials such as hemp and burlap emphasizes their expressive and emotional dimension (Fig. 1). In these works, Abakanowicz recalls a long history of human suffering and the will to survive. Non-Polish audiences often see these qualities of Abakanowicz's style as original and exceptional. For example, Barbara Rose describes her "search for an authentic artistic identity" as "long, painful, lonely and even dangerous." Rose adds that Abakanowicz's "continuing struggle for authenticity led her to reject conventional concepts of beauty, order, and harmony and to invent an alternative set of values."[1] The artist herself encourages such interpretations, as she often emphasizes her originality and strongly objects to any attempts at situating her within artistic movements. In Poland, however, Abakanowicz is viewed neither as a pioneer of the stylistic aspects of the expressive sculpture, nor as its sole proponent. To shed some light on Abakanowicz's place among Polish postwar artists, it is instructive to relate her art to the figurative sculpture being produced in early postwar Poland. Her style, a response to the war and to life in the decades that followed in Communist Poland, grew out of the postwar expressionistic sculpture developed by Polish artists of the same generation with whom Abakanowicz shared these experiences.

From the 1950s to the 1970s, a number of Polish sculptors chose to depict the human body as unheroic, fragmented, and victimized.[2] While expressive art works by major sculptors could often be seen in galleries, those works which were deemed too dissident by Poland's oppressive government were shown in alternative artistic spaces such as churches or even basements of private residences. Abakanowicz, with her interest in creative activity, would likely have been familiar with the developments of expressive sculpture.[3] In the 1960s, after producing several woven pieces, she sought to work with a medium that would be more highly regarded, and in 1973, with the creation of *Wheel and Rope,* Abakanowicz abandoned weaving. The expressive trend developed by her contemporaries in the late 1950s and 1960s, derived from the shared experiences of their generation, likely resonated with her and influenced her artistic development.

Although Abakanowicz expresses herself in a manner similar to artists of her generation, the artist vehemently denies her affiliation with any artistic trends and rejects the notion that she drew inspiration from any sources but herself. In a 2009 interview, Abakanowicz claimed that her vision is not affected by artists, artistic trends, or her environment. She acknowledged being aware of others' artistic productions, but stated that her art is her own creation and that it always has been a pure product of her own ingenuity, uninfluenced by external factors, even her outside interests in science, technology, and mythology. In her own words: "Although I am interested in any human creativity, it does not have anything in common with my art, which is my language, my confession to myself, my complaint or joy, my expression of admiration over the miracle of existence or existential fear."[4] This powerful statement reveals how Abakanowicz wants her audience to conceive the creation of her art. "My world of imagination," said Abakanowicz, "has its own language which is visible in my art that is not inspired in any direct manner."[5] She also has objected to being placed into any artistic movement. Abakanowicz portrays herself as transcending the world of contemporary art, and even evading the scholarly descriptions of her works, saying, "What I create does not belong to any trend or style."[6] These claims are strong enough to warrant investigation. Are Abakanowicz's works indeed pure and devoid of any outside influences? Or did she find inspiration in the creations of other artists, but deny the fact? In this article I argue for the latter, based on existing scholarship as well as visual evidence of similarities between the works of Abakanowicz and those of her Polish contemporaries.



Fig. 2. Alina Szapocznikow, *Exhumed* (1955), cement and iron splinters, h. 24"



Fig. 4 (above). Magdalena Więcek, *Protest* (1958), cement.



Fig.3. Magdalena Abakanowicz, *Androgyn with Bricks* (1984), cement and brick, back of aluminum and vehicle of steel. Artist's collection.



Fig. 5 (right). Antoni Kenar, *Christ in Meditation* (1958), ceramic.

Joanna Inglot, in her groundbreaking study, *The Figurative Sculpture of Magdalena Abakanowicz: Bodies, Environments, and Myths*, argues that Abakanowicz's art is strongly rooted in the art of postwar Poland. Inglot grounds Abakanowicz's weavings with those of other Polish artists of the time working in that medium. She discusses similarities between Abakanowicz's sculptures and those of Alina Szapocznikow, Jacek Waltoś and Józef Łukomski, pointing out such aspects as the presentation of the unheroic body, the use of lowly materials, and the ceremonial dimension of multifigure arrangements. While Inglot focuses on Abakanowicz's early sculptures, it is also possible to trace the origins of some more recent works, comparing them with particular sculptures by Polish postwar artists. By pointing out similarities, it is possible to conclude that Abakanowicz's sculptures resemble the style of this postwar art, and that, contrary to her statements, might have been influenced by the work of other artists.

Abakanowicz's style draws upon the works of Alina Szapocznikow (1926–73), one of the most celebrated sculptors in Poland.[7] Szapocznikow, a Jewish Holocaust survivor, produced sculptures informed by her own experiences. Pain, decay, and mutilation, both physical and psychological, permeate much of her work. Szapocznikow was a pioneering figure in expressionistic sculpture in postwar Poland, marking the movement's inception with her sculpture *Exhumed* (1955; Fig. 2).[8] Partial and inexplicit, the bronze-cast figure is a remnant of a human being. Through its unrefined, irregular, scarred surface, and its lack of limbs and hunched posture, Szapocznikow expresses the effects of physical and psychological torture on the body as it endures extreme levels of pain.

Abakanowicz's Androgyns (Figs. 1 and 3) share many characteristics with *Exhumed*. All emphasize the rugged, coarse surface and have similar sitting poses that draw attention to their prominent, curved backs. The lack of arms and the





Fig. 6 (left). Alfred Wiśniewski, *Niobe* (1961), bronze, National Museum of Warsaw.

Fig. 7 (right). Jacek Waltoś, *Waiting* (1966), cement, 39" x 30" x 16 1/2". Institute of Art, Polish Academy of Science.





Fig. 8 (left). Magdalena Abakanowicz, *Seated Figure* (1974-9), burlap and resin, 41" x 20" x 26", Sydney Lewis Collection, Richmond, VA.

Fig. 9 (right). Jacek Waltoś, *Alone* (1969), epoxide resin.

abstracted forms contribute to their dramatic appearance. The unparalleled emotional charge and the magnetic quality of Szapocznikow's sculptures prefigure Abakanowicz's experiments with body casting and the creation of figures endowed with similar psychological tension.

Protest (Fig. 4), made in 1958 by the Polish sculptor Magdalena Więcek (1924-2008), is another direct expression of extreme suffering. The figure, contorted in a paroxysm of pain, with amputated limbs that expose a decaying surface covered with scars and scabs as well as fresh wounds, seems to be screaming in agony. Such emphasis given to the fragmented body is similar to the later use of synecdoche in Abakanowicz's works, where the partial body is expressive of the entire biological organism and the metaphysical self.

Antoni Kenar's ceramic sculpture *Christ in Meditation* (Fig. 5), also from 1958, is another prominent example of the use of psychological expression. Rather than distorted in a tortuous twist, this figure is instead silent and lost in contemplation. The religious dimension of the work might suggest that Christ is pondering the ephemeral nature of human existence, while the medium of ceramics accentuates this transitory state. Kenar strove to "create forms about people" as opposed to realistic representations of the figure.[9] The emotions and psyche transform the surface and form; and affected by such alterations, the body becomes a language through which the artist is able to reach the viewer. Likewise, the surface and form of Abakanowicz's figures are similarly expressive of their psychological states and convey the sculptor's message through the language of emotions.

As the experiences of the past and the desire to live in the present undeniably provoked postwar artists to strip the human figure of anachronistic monumentalism, they sought to portray humans as unidealized, flawed, and weak. "I should like to perpetuate in sculpted form the shape and character of my contemporaries," said sculptor Alfred Wiśniewski, "with emphasis on man's personal dignity, but without Baroque pathos...."[10] Wiśniewski, an artist of the older generation (1916-2011), also articulates the plight of humans in the contemporary world. His figures, like *Niobe* (1961; Fig. 6), convey the psychological and biological challenges of survival in the impoverished wreckage of postwar Communist Poland.

Abakanowicz's sculptures are in direct dialogue with those of Jacek Waltoś (b. 1938), whose works share similar shell-like forms and themes of despair. Waltoś, one of the youngest artists to explore postwar expressive tendencies, often worked with the themes of absence, abandonment, and loss,[11] examining the most dramatic aspects of human life such as love, death, longing, hope, and disenchantment. With its concavity, ruggedness, and austerity, Waltoś's *Waiting* (Fig. 7), created in 1966, consisting of an imprint of a female body pressed onto a block of cement, is a precursor to Abakanowicz's hollow figures, for example, the shell-like structure of her earliest seated figures made from burlap and resin (1974-79; Fig. 8). The abstracted shape of the human silhouette in *Waiting* evokes the same anxiety and non-literal quality of Abakanowicz's figures. The negative space, a simple imprint, represents the absence of a body. As Waltoś



Fig. 10. Jacek Waltoś, *Waiting Phaedra* (1974), epoxide resin.



Fig. 11. Magdalena Abakanowicz, *Untitled* (1983), aluminium, 71" x 24" x 14". Collection of the artist.



Fig. 12. Magdalena Abakanowicz, *Big Figures* (2004), bronze, 20 figures, 102" x 31" x 43". Private Collection, San Francisco.

articulated abandonment and incompleteness by the physical lack of material as represented by concavity, so Abakanowicz expresses these feelings by creating similar rigid, frontal, shell-like structures that lack corporeality.

The later creations of Abakanowicz, especially those molded in various metals, share the qualities of Waltoś's works from the late 1960s and early 1970s, when he introduced and developed the formal conception of the hollowed shape. *Alone* (Fig. 9), created in 1969 from epoxide resin, is one of his most expressive sculptures, full of tension and emotion. The mass split in half implies only a trace of a figure, its limbs and body parts vaguely delineated and appearing as if they are melting into an indistinguishable aggregate. This haunting image presents a solitary figure in need of contact with others. Lethargic and passive, the physical body alters with time, signifying the artist's decaying hope. *Alone* is a transitory figure, leading to his *Waiting Phaedra* (1974; Fig. 10).[12] Here again, Waltoś comments on the passage of time; the figure of Phaedra is just an imprint, a shell left by an absent body. The irregular, coarse surface of the hollow figure as well as the distinct sharp edges that trace the cast's silhouette seem to be reincarnated, more geometrically, a decade later in Abakanowicz's first metal figures (1983; Fig. 11).

The possible influence of her Polish contemporaries also can be traced in Abakanowicz's numerous group environments, such as her 2006 installation *Agora* (Pl. 13), comprising 106 oversized figures, placed in Chicago's Grant Park, in close proximity to works by great twentieth-century modernists such as Picasso, Calder, Chagall, Dubuffet and Miró.[13] From afar, the figures coalesce to look like a reddish-brown mass sharply delineated against the cityscape or, from another viewpoint, a background of trees. (Covered with a red patina to protect against corrosion, the mass is slowly turning brown as oxidation occurs.) The headless and armless figures are frontal casts, each weighing c. 1650 pounds and standing nine feet tall, symbols of the absent body—an imprint, armor, or shell. Though similar in form, they vary in color, texture, and pattern, thereby making each unique and distinguishable. For Abakanowicz, human beings are inextricably related to nature. In her works, the figures seem to morph into trees, animals, or rocks. The figures of *Agora*, in the artist's words, "are emerging from the soil. They are organic and suggest where we belong."[14]

Incoherent and disorganized, the *Agora* figures are led by their large flat feet in random directions. Yet, caught in motion, like in a photograph, they stand paralyzed in their positions. The dense population of metal shells evokes contrary feelings. Abakanowicz's respect for the natural world is expressed through her fear of ecological harm caused by mindless human activity. "The figures in my work speak metaphorically about the overpopulated planet," she says, "[and] about the danger of brainless masses worshipping on



Fig. 13. Magdalena Abakanowicz, *Unrecognized* (2002), iron, 112 figures, 83" x 28" x 38". Cytadela Park, Pozna .



Fig. 14. Józef Łukomski, *Passing Away* (1970-72), bronze, 21 figures, 70" x 86" x 31".

command or hating on command, and about solitude in multitude."[15] Walking through the mass, the viewer feels wary of the cold, solid, and unbreakable iron statues. Their sharp edges threaten, but the viewer may find temporary safety behind one of the towering figures, protected by their armor. Pressed into the cast, the viewer could become one with the imprint, a member of the crowd, possibly conjuring a childhood memory of hiding inside or behind an old tree. Abakanowicz describes her "human figures [as] not literal ... [They] suggest the similarity between the tree trunk and the human trunk, and the bark fallen off a tree, or the rags fallen off a mummy. They also suggest similarities between all of nature's creatures."[16] In fact, the texture of the rough, weathered cast resembles tree bark, and so the chaotic crowd transforms into a still forest.

Abakanowicz says she chose "*Agora"* as a title "because it carries many metaphorical meanings which we can feel through our imagination, but which we do not need to verbalize."[17] In ancient Greece, the *agora* was an open area in the city where people assembled to discuss contemporary issues, urgent problems, and philosophical ideas. In this way, Abakanowicz, a witness to the social and political changes of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, invites others to participate in a modern-day *agora*.[18]

For Abakanowicz, art is a universal and ineffable language by which she conveys her experiences and views to a global audience.[19] The fall of Communism in 1989 and the cultural transformations that followed entirely altered daily life in Poland. With the sudden influx of goods, and the emergence of Western-style media and advertising, Poles adopted a Western-style consumerist culture. The fall of the oppressive regime also meant the fall of the structure that so many Polish citizens had always known: confusion displaced military order.

Barbara Rose observes that this paradigm shift is reflected in Abakanowicz's art.[20] She notes, for example, that during the Communist regime the figures in her crowd installations were unified. Organized into rows, they stand at attention and face the same direction. In contrast, the figures within crowd sculptures produced after 1989 are dispersed and uncontrolled. No longer stationary, the figures are presented with one leg in front of the other, as if caught in motion. *Agora*, *Big Figures* (2004; Fig. 12) and *Unrecognized* (2002; Fig. 13) illustrate how Abakanowicz's portrayal of crowds reflected the new socio-political climate. Large, strong, masculine figures are set in motion, and most, like *Agora* and *Unrecognized*, move in various directions. Aimless and erratic, they are slaves no more. Yet, despite being free, they are not yet able think for themselves. The crowd is made up of robots, zombies, or nomads, aimlessly traversing their new reality.[21]

The spiritual dimension of Abakanowicz's sculptures was anticipated by Józef Łukomski (1920 – 96), who also started his



Fig. 15. Józef Łukomski, *Hominem Quero* (1972), clothing hardened with emulsion, Center for Polish Sculpture, Orońsko.



Fig. 16. Karol Broniatowski, *Menace* (1970), newsprint covered with emulsion and varnish.



Fig. 17. Karol Broniatowski, Arrangement from Venice Biennale (1972), newsprint covered with emulsion and varnish.

career as a fiber artist. One of the first Polish artists to explore the idea of multi-figure installations,[22] Łukomski's pieces, such as *Passing Away* (1970-72; Fig. 14) and *Hominem Quero II* (1972; Fig. 15), may actually have inspired Abakanowicz's figurative crowds. In *Passing Away,* tall, elongated characters, hollow inside the clothing that defines them, loom over the surrounding space. Strong, unyielding, and expressive, these bronze sculptures might have inspired Abakanowicz's experimentation with this material later in her career. Closer to the ordinary burlap, resin, and sisal of Abakanowicz's early crowd sculptures, the hollow figures of *Hominem Quero II*, each over 106 inches high, are constructed out of discarded clothing that the artist sewed together and stiffened with a synthetic emulsion.[23] Like Abakanowicz's shells, these large ghostly, monochromatic assemblages express the fragility of human existence and emphasize man's and woman's corporeality.

Most important in Abakanowicz's development of crowds, however, seem to be the works of Karol Broniatowski (b. 1945), who early in his career was creating multi-figure environments made up of repeatable forms.[24] His theatrical setups for exhibitions such as *Menace* (1970; Fig. 16) and his composition for the Polish Pavilion at the 1972 Venice Biennale (Fig. 17) are made up of life-size or larger figures suspended from the ceiling or running around the gallery hall. Broniatowski creates his figures out of newsprint saturated with a stiffening substance and covered with a yellowish varnish.[25] Although the artist models the figures after a few sculpted generic exemplars, he endows each with individual features that make it distinguishable from others in the crowd.

Abakanowicz's process is very similar: her crowd environments (the earliest appearing in the 1980s) also are modeled after a sculpted figure. Then, before casting, she alters the texture of each figure with a cloth placed on the model in various ways. In fact, the similarity between Abakanowicz's and Broniatowski's environments is so striking that they can be described using almost the same words. For example, Janusz Bogucki's wrote of *Menace*: "a crowd of numbered creatures, anonymous in their alikeness, like statistical persons, a crowd running as frightened people do, but at the same time menacing in its blind push.... There is in *Menace* something of ...[a] vision of a nameless human mass ...."[26] Although Broniatowki often shows the crowd in panicked movement, in works like *Crowd* (1973; Fig. 18), he explores the same theme of individuals in a mass that Abakanowicz often does in her much more static groupings (consider, however, the dynamism in Abakanowicz's *Dancing Figures* [2000; Fig. 19]).

Like Broniatowski, Abakanowicz's works concern events of both the past and present. For example, *Menace* recalls the events of September of 1939, when Nazi Germany attacked Poland, while *Forced Landing* describes contemporary life.[27] Abakanowicz refers to specific events of the war in *Puellae* (1992; Pl. 14), while other works express the universal plight of humankind today.[28] As noted earlier, the evolution of Abakanowicz's crowds also reflects the changing socio-political and cultural climate, starting as ordered and static and later becoming incoherent and wandering.

Based on these numerous stylistic, technical, and cultural similarities between Abakanowicz's sculptures and those of other Polish postwar artists, I assert that Abakanowicz should be considered a participant in and an active continuator of the expressive tradition—even long after it reached the height of its popularity. Significantly, however, Abakanowicz is the only Polish postwar expressive artist known to the contemporary international art world. What, then, are the reasons for her celebrity status in the international art scene compared to the relative obscurity of her peers?



Fig. 18. Karol Broniatowski, *Crowd* (1973), newsprint covered with emulsion and varnish.



Fig. 19. Magdalena Abakanowicz, *Dancing Figures* (2000), burlap and resin, 8 figures, 60" x 60" x 20".

Both Broniatowski (1972) and Abakanowicz (1980) presented successful environments at Venice Biennales and won international acclaim.[29] But for Abakanowicz, the world-wide recognition also catalyzed the explosion of her career. Why did Abakanowicz enjoy such permanent international success, while Broniatowski as well as other expressive sculptors struggled? The simple answer is that he—like many other Polish postwar artists—was openly critical of the Communist regime while Abakanowicz was not. Their criticism was often expressed by participating in oppositional exhibitions organized in private spaces or churches. It was most fervent during the 1980s, when the Communists introduced martial law and initiated numerous repressive policies.[30] While artists such as Waltoś, Broniatowski and Łukomski frequented these events and exhibited numerous critical works, Abakanowicz's name is recorded in only two such exhibitions. The first took place in a Gdansk church in 1981, where she sent one of the burlap backs imprisoned in a wooden cage.[31] Abakanowicz's participation in this exhibition, however, carried no risk, as at that time the Solidarity movement was at the peak of its popularity and artists were enjoying a large degree of freedom.[32] Her second such appearance was in an exhibition of contemporary tapestries where Abakanowicz exhibited her completely apolitical weavings.[33] Later, she proudly presented these two, allegedly critical, gestures as proof of her participation in the heroic fight against the regime.[34]

After the introduction of martial law in Poland in 1981, Abakanowicz's silence about the political situation became even more pronounced. The dramatic events in her home country—total closure of the borders, the imposed curfew, and censorship of telephone and mail communications—did not mobilize the artist to openly criticize the regime. Moreover, during that time Abakanowicz was able, like no other artist, to travel to the United States in order to prepare her solo exhibition in Chicago.[35] In fact, Abakanowicz spent most of the early 1980s abroad.[36]

Abakanowicz's silence undoubtedly helped her to secure her symbiotic relationship with the Communist government.[37] No less beneficial, most likely, was her friendship with Artur Starewicz, a former Polish ambassador in Britain and a high official of the KC PZPR (Central Committee of the Polish United Worker's Party). In fact, one of Starewicz's friends, the former minister of Art and Culture Józef Tejchma, admitted in the interview with Joanna Inglot that he had helped Abakanowicz with obtaining travel permits, arranging the transport of her works, and finding better housing.[38] It comes as no surprise then that in the 1980s Abakanowicz consistently presented her work as related to global issues as opposed to being critically illustrative of the current events in Poland.[39] It was such an interpretation, however, that secured her a place on the international art scene.[40] Recognizing the expectations of Western audiences, after the fall of the Eastern Block, when she could no longer depend on help from the Communists, Abakan-owicz started to interpret her works as critical of the regime, a change that strengthened her position in the West.

In Poland, Abakanowicz's reputation, especially among artistic circles was weaker, as she did not participate in any oppositional initiatives or government boycotts inspired by her fellow artists.[41] In fact, in an effort to enhance perceptions of her, in an interview with Elżbieta Dzikowska she presented the Polish audience with a novel interpretation of her sculptures. She stated that her "art speaks about experiences known only to us [Poles], isolated behind the Iron Curtain."[42] In focusing specifically on conveying life in Communist Poland, Abakanowicz appears to have been trying to relate to (and appease?) her domestic audience. However, this calls into question her earlier remarks in which she emphasizes that her sculpture represents the universal human experience.

As stated earlier, Abakanowicz has rejected attempts at contextualization of her art within any specific trend. She consistently separates herself from Polish postwar art, does not comment on the works of her compatriots, and insists that her art flows only from herself, uninfluenced by any outside sources. Contrary to her belief that "there is nothing to follow in art, because art that follows is not art," the similarities between her sculptures and those of her compatriots suggest that she indeed found inspiration in the works of the postwar avant-garde.[43]

Such denial of any outside inspiration appears related to Abakanowicz's strong desire to gain international recognition, also setting aside the political stance that limited the appeal of her Polish expressive contemporaries. This is not to diminish her extraordinary accomplishments, as she struggled enormously to establish connections with Western critics, organize exhibitions, and produce an astounding number of major works.[44] She also takes a personal role in each installation, supervising nearly all of her exhibitions, making each a distinctive environment.

The existence of an active and focused Polish postwar artistic scene did not go unnoticed by Abakanowicz. The cultural identity of these artists and their experiences of the war and the years that followed allowed a unified expressive aesthetic to cohere, beginning in the late 1950s up to the early 1970s. By the time Abakanowicz abandoned weaving and redefined herself as a sculptor in the 1970s, the expressionistic figurative aesthetic in sculpture was already well-established. Consciously or not, she recalled these images of Polish postwar sculpture years later in her own creations. She embraced this art of the fifties, sixties, and seventies and then transformed it to describe the universal experiences of human life, claiming it as totally original.

This article does not seek to compromise the greatness of Abakanowicz's art and the importance of her contributions to contemporary developments in sculpture, but rather calls for clarification of her grounding in twentieth-century Polish sculpture. Perhaps some acknowledgment on her part of the achievements of these Polish postwar artists could have altered the course of their virtual erasure from the annals of art history outside of Poland. Instead, Abakanowicz's story and its uncritical reception continue to produce unfair statements. As recently as 2009, Angela Vettese stated that "although respected, recognized and called on to teach at the Academy of Fine Arts [in Poznań], Magdalena Abakanowicz had no one with whom to form a group or even just exchange ideas and views."[45]

This brief summary of the Polish postwar artistic milieu serves to illustrate Abakanowicz's likely roots in the sculptural works of a group of artists whose search for a creative expression responded to their unique time and place. More importantly, though, such claims as that of Vettese continue to deny any context for Abakanowicz's sculptures as they overlook completely the vibrant,thought-provoking artistic models her Polish postwar peers provided. Moreover, these examples strongly suggest that Abakanowicz might have borrowed and transformed both forms and themes from sculptors such as Szapocznikow, Krasiński, Waltoś and Broniatowski, whose expressive style was well established before she abandoned weaving and produced her first sculptures. •

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NOTES

1. Barbara Rose, *Magdalena Abakanowicz* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 8.
2. See Joanna Inglot, *The Figurative Sculpture of Magdalena Abakanowicz: Bodies, Environments, and Myths* (Berkeley, CA: Univ. of California Press, 2004), 73.
3. Ibid.
4. Magdalena Abakanowicz, conversation with the author, in Polish, on August 3, 2009, in Warsaw, Poland; "...chociaż interesuje mnie wszelka kreatywność ludzka. Nie ma ona nic wspólnego z moją sztuką będącą moim językiem, moim wyznaniem przed samą sobą, moją skargą czy radością, wurazem zachwytu nad cudem egzystencji czy strachem egzystencjalnym."
5. Ibid.: "Mój świat wyobraźni ma swój język który widać w mojej sztuce nie inspirowanej w żaden bezpośredni sposób."
6. Elżbieta Dzikowska, *Polscy Artyści w Sztuce Świata: Rozmowy Elżbiety Dzikowskiej* (Polish Artists in World Art) (Rosikon Press, 2005): 10; "...to, co tworzę, nie należy do żadnego kierunku."
7. Inglot, *The Figurative Sculpture of Magdalena Abakanowicz*, 81. Also, see in this issue Amy Chmielewski, "Alina Szapocznikow and Her Sculpture of Plastic Impermanence," pages 39-47.
8. Andrzej Osęka and Wojciech Skrodzki, *Contemporary Polish Sculpture* (Warsaw: Arkady, 1977), 8.
9. Jadwiga Jarnuszkiewicz, *Modern Sculpture in Poland,* (Warsaw: Polonia Publishing House, 1958). n.p.
10. Hanna Kotkowska-Bareja's, *Polish Contemporary Sculpture,* (Warsaw: Interpress Publishers, 1974), 134.
11. Osęka and Skrodzki, *Contemporary Polish Sculpture*, 42.
12. In Greek mythology, Phaedra was a daughter of Minos and Pasiphaë, the wife of Theseus. There exist numerous versions of the most famous story in which she plays a major role. One of these versions says that Phaedra fell in love with Theseus's son, Hippolytus (borne by another woman). When he rejected her, Phaedra told Theseus that Hippolytus had raped her. Trusting her story, Theseus, in an act of revenge, killed his son, whereas Phaedra, out of despair, committed suicide. In the end Theseus learnt the truth through Artemis.
13. Mary Jane Jacob, "Making *Agora* Public," in *Magdalena Abakanowicz: Agora*, ed. Magdalena Abakanowicz (Chicago: Richard Grey Gallery, 2008).
14. Robert Ayers, "The AI Interview: Magdalena Abakanowicz," Artinfo.com, January 17, 2007.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Magdalena Abakanowicz, *Fate and Art: Monologue,* (Milan: Skira, 2008), 224.
19. Magdalena Abakanowicz, conversation with the author, August 3, 2009.
20. Barbara Rose, "Magdalena Abakanowicz: Artist as Shaman," in *Magdalena Abakanowicz: Nierozpoznani / Unrecognized*, ed. Danuta Wróblewska (Pozna : Hotel Sztuki, 2002), 18.
21. Ibid.

22. Inglot, *The Figurative Sculpture of Magdalena Abakanowicz*, 87.
23. Ibid.
24. Osęka and Skrodzki, *Contemporary Polish Sculpture*, 37.
25. Ibid., 36
26. Ibid., 37.
27. Ibid.
28. Abakanowicz states that *Puellae* was inspired by a story she heard as a child. *Puellae* symbolizes the Polish blond and blue-eyed children that were transported to Germany to become Aryans. During the cold night in a wagon the children froze to death. and their bodies split like icicles when the doors were opened; See Abakanowicz, *Fate and Art: Monologue,* 73.
29. Osęka and Skrodzki, *Contemporary Polish Sculpture*, 37.
30. Martial law was introduced on December 13, 1981, and lasted until July 22, 1983. Repression in the case of the arts resulted, for example, in banning most of the associations and artistic collectives; see Aleksander Wojciechowski, *Czas Smutku, Czas Nadziei: Sztuka niezależna lat osiemdziesiątych* (Time of Sadness, Time of Hope: The independent art of the 1980s) (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1992), 8.
31. Inglot, *The Figurative Sculpture of Magdalena Abakanowicz*, 97.
32. Ibid. Solidarity was the first trade union not controlled by the government in the Communist Poland. It was founded at the Gdańsk shipyard in 1980. Throughout the 1980s it constituted a major anti-Communist organization in Poland, which eventually led to its fall in 1989. The Communist party attempted to destroy the union, especially during the period of martial law; however, it did not succeed and was eventually forced to negotiate.
33. The group exhibition titled *Contemporary Textiles and the Bible* took place in Warsaw Archdiocese's Museum in February 1984; see Wojciechowski, *Czas Smutku, Czas Nadziei: Sztuka niezależna lat osiemdziesiątych,* 127.
34. Inglot, *The Figurative Sculpture of Magdalena Abakanowicz*, 97.
35. Mary Jane Jacob, in "Making *Agora* Public," recounts that Abakanowicz travelled to the United States during the most tumultuous time of the 1980s in order to prepare her exhibition in Chicago.
36. Inglot, *The Figurative Sculpture of Magdalena Abakanowicz*, 97.
37. Leslie Milofsky, "Magdalena Abakanowicz," *Feminist Studies* 13, no. 2 (1987): 363.
38. See Inglot, *The Figurative Sculpture of Magdalena Abakanowicz*, 97, fn 40.
39. For example, see Hunter Drohojowska, "Magical Mystery Tours," *Art News* 84 (September 1984): 112. Abakanowicz says: "...I'm not illustrating. I speak only in a metaphoric way. It's larger, about men in general. In every country something is happening - here, in Italy, in South America. Everywhere there is a conflict between men, society and government. If I talk about problems, it's global."
40. Inglot, *The Figurative Sculpture of Magdalena Abakanowicz*, 118.
41. Ibid., 97.
42. Elżbieta Dzikowska, Polscy Artyści w Sztuce Świata, 10; "Moja sztuka mówi o doświadczeniach znanych tylko nam, samotnym za żelazną kurtyną."
43 Hunter Drohojowska, "Magical Mystery Tours," Art News 85, (September 1985): 112-3.
44. Inglot, *The Figurative Sculpture of Magdalena Abakanowicz*, 118.
45. Angela Vettese, "Space to Experience," in *Magdalena Abakanowicz: Space to Experience,* eds. Elena Bajetta and Silvia Carmignani (Milan: Fondazione Arnaldo Pomodoro, 2009), 44.

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Alina Szapocznikow

And Her Sculpture of Plastic Impermanence

By Amy Chmielewski

> "All I am able to produce is ungainly objects… I try to preserve the fleeting moments of life in the transparent polyester; I try to preserve [life's] paradoxes and its entire absurdity…. I am convinced that in spite of all the symptoms of impermanence, the human body is the most sensitive and in fact the only source of all kinds of joy, pain, and truth."
>
> *–Alina Szapocznikow*[1]

The sculptor Alina Szapocznikow (1926-73) has long been regarded in her native Poland as one of the most significant female artists of the postwar era. During her brief but prolific career as a sculptor and graphic artist, Szapocznikow experimented with several of the main artistic movements of postwar Europe, as did many of her compatriots. Yet the formal vocabulary she developed in the 1960s stands apart from that of her Polish contemporaries and invites comparison to the work of such major feminist artists as Louise Bourgeois (1911-2010) and Hannah Wilke (1940-93). With the eroticized and fragmented female body as its primary subject, Szapocznikow's sculpture presages the concerns of feminist and body-oriented artists active in the years following her death from cancer at age 46. She was also a pioneer in the use of new materials, creating casts of her own body with polyester and polyurethane just as these materials were beginning to expand the possibilities of sculptural technique.

Despite her relevance to the study of feminist and body art, Szapocznikow has until recently received scant critical attention in the West and virtually none in the United States. She garnered the support of a few prominent critics during her lifetime—most notably her first husband Ryszard Stanisławski[2] in Poland and Pierre Restany in France—but her introduction to international audiences occurred only recently, more than thirty years after her death. At Documenta 12, Szapocznikow was represented by her Photosculptures of 1971 (Fig. 1): a series of twenty black-and-white photographs featuring chewing gum masticated and manipulated into a variety of biomorphic shapes. Small, colorful polyester casts of lips and breasts from her Desserts series (1970-71; Pl. 11) were also showcased at the 2007 Frieze Art Fair. And, near the end of that year, two retrospectives at galleries in Cologne and New York offered a more thorough representation of the artist's work in a variety of sculptural and graphic media.[3] In 2010, MoMA purchased seven of Szapocznikow's drawings—an unmistakable sign that her art had captured the attention of the American art elite.[4]



Fig. 1. Alina Szapocznikow, *Photosculptures* (detail) (1971; 2007 edition), 20 B&W photographs on Baryte paper, 1 collage with text, cassette. Each 9 1/2" x 11 3/4". © The Estate of Alina Szapocznikow-Piotr Stanisławski. Courtesy of: Broadway 1602, New York.

Szapocznikow's sudden reappearance on the contemporary art scene is made all the more curious by her absence from the history of postwar European art, at least as it has been constructed in Western Europe and North America. The artist's Polish nationality—and the somewhat erroneous notion that artists from Communist countries remained necessarily sequestered behind the Iron Curtain—cannot adequately explain the dearth of recognition of her work.[5] In fact, Szapocznikow spent the last ten years of her life in Paris, where she realized her most innovative projects and associated



Fig. 2 Alina Szapocznikow, *Monument to Polish-Russian Friendship (1953-54)*, bronze, dimensions unknown (over life-sized). Photo: Ryszard Stanisławski. © The Estate of Alina Szapocznikow-Piotr Stanislawski.

with a number of critics and artists, not least of all Restany, the Nouveaux Réalistes, and Annette Messager (b. 1943).

Rather, it seems that Szapocznikow's untimely death preceded, by at least a few years, the development of critical methods that could best engage with her art. The current resurgence of interest in feminist art—and attendant efforts to widen the scope of feminist scholarship beyond a Western-oriented framework—provides an ideal opportunity to investigate how, in the years directly preceding the advent of feminist art, one woman examined corporeal experience, informed not by postmodern theories of identity and gender but by experimentations with sculptural technique and representation of her own body.

This text traces Szapocznikow's career as a sculptor, beginning with her early figurative work of the 1950s, somewhat delimited by Socialist Realist restrictions in Poland. It then focuses on her repudiation of the static, heroic figurativism of Socialist Realism and her espousal of self-casting and use of plastic materials in the 1960s. Throughout the following decade, Szapocznikow would continue to plumb the formal and psychic possibilities of the female body, creating an oeuvre that reconfigures the imagery of her artistic predecessors, especially the Surrealists, as much as it foreshadows, often with uncanny precision, the work of contemporary feminist artists. In merging its subject of inquiry—the artist's own body—with the processes of its creation, Szapocznikow's work explores embodiment as a destabilizing and even alienating condition, thus laying critical ground that would not receive the sustained attention of art historians until after the artist's death.

Szapocznikow came of age during the Second World War, and her passage into adulthood was indelibly marked by the eradication of Poland's Jewish population. She was born in Kalisz in 1926 and, as the daughter of two Jewish doctors, benefited from a relatively privileged upbringing until the Nazi invasion in 1939. Along with her mother, with whom she remained throughout the war, Szapocznikow survived internment in the Jewish ghetto in Łodz, and then in Bergen-Belsen and Theresienstadt. Little information exists about this period in her life, but it is known that both mother and daughter were put to work in the camps' infirmaries. When Theresienstadt was liberated, the eighteen-year-old Szapocznikow did not return home, instead pursuing a fine arts education in Prague and Paris.[6] Although throughout her lifetime the artist avoided speaking openly about her experiences during the war or their influence on her art, references to these traumas can be inferred in much of her work, especially her brutalized forms of the late 1950s and the sculptures she created during her struggle with cancer.

During her studies abroad, Szapocznikow developed a talent for sensitively rendering the human, and particularly the female, body. But upon returning to Poland in 1951, she was forced to adapt her choice of subject in conformity with Communist decrees, which dictated that art subserve the propagandistic needs of the state.[7] The enforcement of Socialist Realism in Poland—albeit relatively brief and significantly less restraining than in other countries, most notably the Soviet Union—had a profound impact upon Szapocznikow's work, and one that was not entirely negative. The doctrine restricted artists' choice of subject matter and style, yet it also provided opportunities for major public commissions and imbued art with a specific social function at a time when its role in the rebuilding of Poland might have seemed ambiguous.

Wishing to gain recognition in her early career, Szapocznikow had little choice but to comply with the doctrine, and she participated in several state-sponsored competitions. Her works from this period, such as a monument to Russian-Polish friendship (1953-54; Fig. 2) featuring two rigidly embracing soldiers, not only depart in formal terms from Szapocznikow's early work, but also valorize figures in part responsible for the decimation of the Polish population and particularly its Jewish minority. While it may be difficult to reconcile Szapocznikow's cultural identity with her espousal of Soviet propaganda, some of her sketches present a markedly "unofficial" approach to Socialist-endorsed subjects. Even as she conformed, outwardly, to the guidelines of the state, Szapocznikow's personal vision clearly lay elsewhere. By the following decade, her work would come to express nothing less than a total negation of the Socialist Realist aesthetic.

Stalin's death initiated the "Thaw" of the mid-1950s, marked by a gradual return of expressive freedom. Freed from the constraints of prescribed subjects and style, Polish artists

reasserted their interest in Surrealism, a subject of much fascination before the war, and avidly investigated "the 'forbidden' Paris of existentialist anxiety" coupled with "the liberating gestures of Tachism."[8] Szapocznikow's sculptures of this period demonstrate her participation in the general movement to reclaim formal and thematic approaches prohibited by Socialist Realist doctrine. During the mid-to-late 1950s, she began her first prolonged explorations of expressionistic and abstract form; but rather than repudiate her earlier interest in figurative subject matter, the young sculptor investigated a wide range of stylistic possibilities and frequently merged elements of figuration and abstraction. Sculptures such as *Mary Magdalene* (1957-58; Fig. 3) exemplify Szapocznikow's fascination with the expressive qualities of materials and their ability to evoke the human body. This depiction of Mary Magdalene as a penitent features distorted, limb-like protrusions and a tiny upward-looking head. In its reference to a female figure associated with abject sexuality (prostitution), as well as death (Christ's crucifixion), the work might be seen as an early manifestation of themes that would later come to dominate Szapocznikow's sculpture.



Fig. 3. Alina Szapocznikow, *Mary Magdalene* (1957-58), plaster and iron fillings, h. 68". Muzeum Narodowe, Warsaw. Photo: T. Zółowska-Huszcza. © The Estate of Alina Szapocznikow-Piotr Stanislawski.

Mary Magdalene also indicates Germaine Richier (1902-59) as an evident point of reference.[9] During her studies at the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris, Szapocznikow could not have failed to encounter works by Richier, who was widely considered one of the foremost French sculptors of her time.[10] Szapocznikow's approach to sculpture during the Thaw period recalls Richier's innovative approach to organic form, her resituating of the human figure within a richly imagined universe of spontaneous metamorphosis, as is demonstrated by parallels between Szapocznikow's quasi-human figures and works by Richier such as *L'homme-forêt* of 1945-46. Yet, few of Richier's sculptures intimate the extreme pathos of Szapocznikow's tortured forms, evocative—as the critic Pierre Descargues noted—of bone and cartilage, remaining fragments of war-ravaged bodies.[11] A haunting familiarity with human anatomy, undoubtedly gained through Szapocznikow's experiences working in concentration camp hospitals as a teenager, appears in other *art informel*-inspired works like *Dead Bird* (1958-59) and *Head VI* (1961), both somber meditations on corporeal fragility, the latter of which resembles Jean Fautrier's depictions of hostages. In a catalogue for a 1960 Warsaw exhibition, one Polish scholar identified within Szapocznikow's sculptures an "unexpected dissonance" and characterized them as "painfully rent… the expression of hesitation, worry, and terror."[12]

While Szapocznikow's sculptures stand out amidst the Polish art scene of the Thaw and the early 1960s, her approach to the human form during this period was not entirely unique. A similar merging of expressionistic abstraction and figuration can be identified in the work of several of her contemporaries, who were likely influenced by existentialist philosophy and the sculpture of figures like Giacometti and Richier. Various works by Jacek Waltós and Władyslaw Hasior, for example, represent the body as a witness to wartime experiences and postwar memories. Although Szapocznikow's hybrid sculptures of the late 1950s do not explicitly reference Nazi and Communist atrocities, all three artists shared a distinct interest in "nonheroic images of fragmented, scarred and hollowed-out figures," which serve as potent reminders of Poland's recent history and reject the selective amnesia of total abstraction.[13]

Significantly, these figurative works also pose a challenge to Communist conceptualizations of the human body. Socialist Realist art typically situated the individual as either a personification of party ideology or as a cog in the machine of state industry (and women, of course, were no exception: their reproductive capacities offered just another form of production, analogous to farm or factory work, in which they were also encouraged to engage).[14] According to Soviet Communist rhetoric, the human body could attain value solely through its contribution to the state, demonstrated through one's commitment to arduous labor and assumption of a collectivist identity. Szapocznikow's incoherent figures repudiate such a utilitarian ethos of embodiment. Works like *Mary Magdalene* and *Exhumed* (see Fig. 2 on page 31)—in dramatic contrast to the stiff, towering soldiers of 1953—abandon the valorization of labor and militarism to reveal instead the body's tragic fragility. While representations of deformed or fragmented bodies, especially female ones, can pose interpretive difficulties for contemporary viewers, Szapocznikow may have seen fragmentation as a liberating gesture, freeing the body from its ideological baggage and the constraints of an externally imposed identity.

To further her explorations of the fragmented body, in 1962 Szapocznikow created a plaster mold of her own leg, perhaps as an experimental or playful gesture. She cast the leg in bronze two years later. Through this process Szapocznikow discovered an innovative approach to figurative sculpture, directly derived from real bodies yet as far from traditional realism as the abstract art popular in Thaw-period Poland. Many of Szapocznikow's pieces of the mid-to-late 1960s, like



Fig. 4. Alina Szapocznikow, *Striding Lips* (1966), patinated bronze, 7 1/2" x 14" x 10". Photo: IRSA Fine Art. © The Estate of Alina Szapocznikow- Piotr Stanisławski.

Leg, represent isolated yet intact body parts, but they diverge from her tormented figures of the previous decade in situating the body primarily as a site of dark sensual fantasy rather than of wartime atrocity. Nonetheless, allusions to corporal disintegration still pervade several of these works, evoking the horrors Szapocznikow had witnessed under Nazi rule as one whose body marked her as an undesirable 'other.'

Throughout the remaining ten years of her life and career, Szapocznikow continued to probe embodiment even while incorporating new materials more often associated with the lightheartedness of Pop art than with weighty ontological reflection. In fact, she would demonstrate, over the following decade, what many feminist artists after her came to discover as well: that elements of Pop art can enable serious explorations of human identity, and that existential inquiry need not take the form of expressionism or abstraction.

She relocated permanently to Paris in 1963, although she had frequent contact with Polish colleagues and made regular trips "back east."[15] By the middle of the decade, the prominence of *informel* painting in Paris had waned, while assemblage and Pop took over as the quintessential aesthetics of the 1960s. Never one to ignore the activities of her contemporaries, Szapocznikow became acquainted with the Nouveaux Réalistes and their critic-spokesman Pierre Restany, who may have encouraged her to experiment more freely with subjects and materials. Restany opposed the insulated aestheticism of *art informel* and championed a movement that would interrogate, not ignore, the material realities of postwar European culture, increasingly marked by the rise of modern consumer culture. Although Szapocznikow never exhibited with the group—which had lost much of its initial coherence by the time she arrived in Paris—Restany was a regular visitor to her home and studio.[16] And although Yves Klein, perhaps the most iconic artist associated with the movement, died shortly before Szapocznikow's arrival, she certainly would have been familiar with his approach to the human and specifically female body as both subject and tool of artistic creation, exemplified by his Anthropométries and a series of blue-toned body casts he executed around 1960.

With its focus on the body instead of on consumer objects, Klein's work differed significantly from that of his fellow Nouveaux Réalistes and shares certain affinities with Szapocznikow's. She too posited the physical self at the center of the "new realist" vision and explored objecthood not through mass-produced goods, but by objectifying the human form. In the mid-1960s, Szapocznikow extended the investigations commenced by her leg sculpture, creating multiple casts of her own anatomy, with a distinct preference for erotically charged parts. She initially created these works in traditional materials, but soon enhanced her increasingly inventive language of bodily forms with the use of industrial plastics. The bronze Striding Lips series of 1966 emphasizes, through isolation and multiplication, the formal properties of a fragment of the artist's own body (Fig. 4).[17] Like much of her work from this period, *Striding Lips* is both jocular and creepy. The suggestion of body parts sprouting from the ground hints at the macabre; yet Szapocznikow's playful arrangement of forms and their whimsical resemblance to fantastical flowers prevents the piece from making an overwhelmingly disturbing impression. Restany duly noted that in comparison to her earlier, more abstract pieces, Szapocznikow's work of this period had "lost something of its dramatic and poignant expressivity to attain an indefinable quality of detachment, a strange serenity in humor."[18]

Fascinated by the possibilities of new materials even as she was working in plaster and bronze, Szapocznikow created several more sets of lips in polyester during the same year. She then fitted some with electric wiring to create works that merge the categories of high art and fashionable design (Pl. 15). Doubling as lamps, these garishly glowing lip sculptures explicitly tease the viewer in their capacity to be "turned on," a double-entendre also expressed by the French verb *allumer*. They seem to celebrate the miniskirt-sporting, sexually liberated woman of the 1960s—the actress Julie Christie even commissioned a lamp cast from her own anatomy.[19] Szapocznikow also fashioned somewhat racier breast lamps, with nipples aflame. If male artists of the early twentieth century and particularly the Surrealists imagined themselves threatened by an artificially plastic, mechanized female sexuality—as incarnated by Hans Bellmer's dolls and Picabia's spark plug 'girl'—the lip and breast lamps reduce such fears to brilliant design and benign humor. Rather than alienate female eros, Szapocznikow domesticates it, bringing just a touch of the red-light district into the home.

As Szapocznikow's repertoire of fantasy-driven forms expanded, she found the range of materials available to her insufficient for the realization of her most innovative concepts. According to her son, Piotr Stanisławski, who as a teenager began to assist his mother in the studio, Szapocznikow

solicited the advice of specialists at a chemicals company near Paris to assist her in devising plastic materials central to her development of new sculptural techniques.[20] Through such collaboration, the sculptor first began to work with polyurethane foam, a liquid plastic that could be poured into molds or that hardens to form an amorphous mass when allowed to expand freely. This discovery led to a particularly witty marriage of form and matter in her Belly-Cushions (1968; Pl. 16), a series of pillow-sized foam stomachs replete with Rubenesque folds. Szapocznikow conceived of the Bellies, like the lamps, as chic domestic furnishings, sexy conversation pieces that could nonetheless fulfill a utilitarian function.

Although Szapocznikow's clever representations of the female form represented a unique vision among the art scene of late-1960s Paris, she was certainly not the only sculptor to have developed a taste for industrial plastics or to have found them particularly suitable for representing the human body. Artists associated with Nouveau Réalisme had long been engaged in experiments with nontraditional materials, including César, who in 1965 enlarged a cast of his own thumb in pink plastic and one year later repeated the process to create a gigantic polyester breast. He also performed a series of Happenings featuring expanding polyurethane foam.[21] But despite similarities in their approaches and techniques, Szapocznikow's representations of female anatomy differ markedly from César's *Thumb* and *Breast*, which evoke a traditionally masculine ethos of domination over the body, albeit in a playful and consciously tongue-in-cheek manner. (At least one critic commented upon the phallic implications of his enlarged, upright digit.[22]) Nor does Szapocznikow's work bear much formal similarity to Niki de Saint-Phalle's (1930-2002) buxom Nanas, which the latter first forged in polyester in 1968.[23]

In fact, while comparing Szapocznikow's work to that of her contemporaries may illuminate some avenues of creative exchange, her most significant artistic influences likely preceded her by a generation or more. Until the emergence of feminist art in mid-1970s France—which Szapocznikow would not live to witness—male artists and particularly the Surrealists overwhelmingly monopolized visual and literary representations of gender and sexuality. Many artists of Szapocznikow's generation, including the Nouveaux Réalistes, who also engaged with such themes, did so in part through a renewal of surrealist imagery. Given her education in postwar Prague, known as the surrealist capital of Eastern Europe, and in Paris, and given the popularity of Surrealism in Thaw-period Poland, Szapocznikow must have been acutely aware of representations of the eroticized female figure within the avant-garde.[24] As a student, she arrived in Paris too late to have seen the 1947 Galerie Maeght surrealist exhibition. But she likely encountered reports of its highlights, including Duchamp's *Prière de toucher* (1947), a precedent for her lamps and for a series of disembodied breast sculptures she created around 1970, as well as for César's *Breast*.[25] Details of the hyper-erotic 1959 EROS exhibition—featuring Bellmer's doll and a pseudo-cannibal feast designed by Meret Oppenheim (1913-85)—would certainly have reached a Poland eager for contact with the cultural capital of Western Europe.[26]

Because the several women artists and writers associated with the surrealist movement generally remained at its periphery, we can be less certain whether Szapocznikow was familiar with their work. These artists were generally not as well known as their male counterparts, but over the past decade their work has been reassessed and recognized as a significant precursor to body-oriented and feminist art practices of the 1970s and after.[27] Most women artists associated with the surrealist movement, like their male contemporaries, adopted the female body as a primary motif in their work. However, female artists tended to approach the body differently than men, as a locus of embodied experience rather than a passive signifier of various symbolic identities. In referencing the clichéd feminine roles dominant within surrealist discourse—the *femme-enfant*, the mystic, the muse, the mother—female figures in the paintings of Dorothea Tanning (b. 1910), Leonora Carrington (b. 1917), and Remedios Varo (1908-63) refuse fixed symbolic identities through engagement in a constant process of metamorphosis or disintegration.[28] For these artists, and for Szapocznikow, such representations of the "unstable," asymmetrical" and even "grotesque" female body are at once imaginatively playful and riddled with anxiety.[29] Yet, whether they positioned the body as a source of pleasure or of fear—or, more likely, as some of both—these artists endowed their representations of the female body with an agency that their male contemporaries had denied it.

In addressing female sexuality, most women artists eschewed the explicit Sadeian preoccupations of mainstream surrealism, as Whitney Chadwick has pointed out. Male surrealists often approached sex with a sense of almost pornographic candor; women surrealists typically alluded to the topic in subtler ways. The Czech artist Toyen (1902-80), however, represented a notable exception to this generality, as did Léonor Fini (1907-96), who occasionally exhibited with the group.[30] During her studies in postwar Prague and in Paris, where Toyen settled in 1947, Szapocznikow likely would have encountered Toyen's work, perhaps taking note of her use of sexual imagery as a form of political resistance.[31] Depictions of female eroticism—whereby the woman serves as the active subject, rather than passive object, of sexual desire—gradually infiltrated the male-dominated sphere of literature as well, as a few notable women writers[32] began to explore transgressive territory previously mapped by the likes of Georges Bataille. Through these artists and writers, Szapocznikow may have witnessed a reorientation of sexual imagery, discovering opportunities for pleasure and empowerment even in the shadow of abject eroticism.[33]

Szapocznikow's erotically oriented sculpture therefore appeared during an epoch in which women's self-authored accounts of their own bodily experiences, sexual or otherwise, were becoming increasingly visible. In this context, it may not seem a far leap to consider her work, as well as the work of the aforementioned women artists, as "feminist"—at least in effect, if not in intent. However, aligning Szapocznikow's art with feminism ascribes to the sculptor a political outlook that she may not have adopted and enables misinterpretation of



Fig. 5. Alina Szapocznikow, *Tumeur* (1969) polyester, B/W photograph: self-portrait of Alina Szapocznikow, wall mount, 5" x 8" x 7". Photo: Adam Reich. © The Estate of Alina Szapocznikow-Piotr Stanisławski. Courtesy: Broadway 1602, New York.

the historical and biographical contexts of its creation. An incipient feminist movement did exist in 1960s France, when the country witnessed growing support for women's sexual liberation, leading to legalization of birth control in 1967 and a general bolstering of women's rights within the family structure.[34] But feminism did not gain significant visibility in the visual arts or literature until the following decade. The publication of women's art journals, such as *Les Sorcières* and *Femme/Art*, for example, occurred in the years following Szapocznikow's death, as did the rise of *écriture féminine*.[35] And in Poland, feminist groups (not including Communist women's organizations) emerged as long as a decade after the artist's death.[36] Furthermore, Szapocznikow viewed herself not as a *female* artist, but as an artist *tout court*. She did not publicly express any specific interest in creating an intentionally feminist art, notwithstanding her choice of subject matter.[37] If her Striding Lips sculptures seem to reference *écriture féminine*, situating women's corporeal experience as a multiplicity of expressions embodied by the many lips, such an allusion could have been only coincidental.

It is perhaps more accurate to think of Szapocznikow's work as "proto-feminist": engaged in a destabilizing of the female body and its attendant cultural meanings, but lacking any systematic articulation of feminist goals. Indeed, in its emphasis upon the female reproductive organs, the most potent signifiers of sexual difference, her sculpture brilliantly anticipated the strategies that French feminist artists and writers would employ in the mid-1970s and after. Her work developed an even more explicitly self-reflective character during the final few years of her life, dovetailing with feminist writers' efforts to reclaim the female body by detailing their own personal erotic and physiological experiences. The increasingly autobiographical focus of Szapocznikow's late work, though, had less to do with the emergence of a fledgling feminism than with the onset of her terminal illness. Near the end of 1968, Szapocznikow was admitted to the oncology ward of a hospital near Paris, and she was diagnosed with breast cancer a few months later.[38] The disease would spread relentlessly over the following years and result in her death from bone cancer in 1973. Without abandoning her interest in the female form, the artist began to alter her investigations of human anatomy around 1968 to address the illness's effects upon her body.

Some works from this period directly represent cancerous growth, as evidenced by her Tumeurs (Tumors) (1969; Fig. 5), a series of sculptures created from crumpled newspapers, photographs, and gauze enclosed by translucent layers of yellowish polyester resin. Lacking bases or pedestals, the Tumors were intended to be "scattered on the floor" like clumps of tissue recently excised from an ill body and discarded.[39] In their combination of representative photographs (in some cases, self-portraits) and shapeless masses of plastic, the Tumors indicate Szapocznikow's drastic refiguring of the hybrid *informel* aesthetic characterized by her works of around 1960, such as the Heads series. The artist's scientific knowledge of human anatomy, her experiences as a firsthand witness to violence and illness during her internment and forced employment at Bergen-Belsen and Theresienstadt, once again becomes apparent in her sculptural forms.

Other works engage the same erotic imagery Szapocznikow had been developing for several years, only now colored with palpably darker overtones. For example, the Desserts series (Pl. 17) features plastic molds of lips and breasts, heaped upon glassware like scoops of exotically flavored ice cream. Though this series offers a provocative riposte to male artists' use of food imagery—in particular to the *Tableaux-Pièges* of Nouveau Réaliste Daniel Spoerri, and to Claes Oldenberg's plaster food sculptures—the Desserts take on a more disturbing dimension in the context of the artist's illness.[40] Offering breasts as an object of consumption, even of cannibalism, Szapocznikow clearly alludes to cancer's consumption of her own body.

Much of Szapocznikow's work objectifies the female body, but both the Desserts and the Tumors more radically cast the artist's own body as other, existing outside of and even in opposition to her self. Although Julia Kristeva would not theorize abjection until nearly a decade after Szapocznikow's death, these series evidence the artist's confrontation with what Kristeva describes as "the border of [one's] condition as a living being."[41] Through these works, Szapocznikow makes visible her struggle to negotiate the boundaries between her self and the illness which threatens her very existence—boundaries that, in the case of cancer, are particularly porous, since the cancerous body is not invaded by disease but instead destroys itself.

For Kristeva, abjection is not simply a reaction to an actual event—the unexpected viewing of a corpse, for example, or the feeling of nausea, to cite a less dramatic example. Abjection is

also a necessary condition of human embodiment, a "safeguard": at the same time that it threatens our existence, it also serves to define the space that we as living creatures can inhabit.[42] Through works like the Tumors and Desserts, Szapocznikow too explored the abjection of illness as both an immediate situation and a more general circumscribing of embodiment. The artist's struggle with cancer was by no means metaphorical, of course, yet she was entirely aware of illness's significative powers.

In the Desserts and in another contemporaneous work, *Krużlowa* (ca.1971; Pl. 18), Szapocznikow situates cancer as indicative of the human experience more broadly, and of the female body's reproductive capacity in particular. If the Desserts pun on the breast as a source of nourishment, *Krużlowa* references the same body part to undermine notions of idealized motherhood, giving form to Szapocznikow's struggle with the constraints of femininity as a physically determined state. It is worth noting that when Szapocznikow underwent her first operative treatment for cancer in 1969, she was no stranger to serious illness or to its damaging effects on a woman's reproductive system: a life-threatening case of tuberculosis she had contracted in her early twenties left the artist unable to bear children.[43] And, because Szapocznikow avoided speaking about her experiences during the war, one can only speculate on the atrocities that she might have observed working in the extermination camp hospitals, or as to whether she was aware of Nazi "medical" experimentations on camp prisoners, among them forced sterilization. The pain not only of cancer, but of various and unspeakable bodily traumas Szapocznikow had witnessed throughout her lifetime, reverberates in many of her final works.



Fig. 6. Alina Szapocznikow, *Herbarium XIV (Piotr's Head)* (1972) polyester resin, wood with polychrome, 19 1/3" x 15 3/4". Muzeum Narodowe, Krakow. Photo: J. Sabara. © The Estate of Alina Szapocznikow-Piotr Stanisławski.

Krużlowa consists of an asymmetrical mass of breasts and photographs of doll faces encased within clear polyester resin. Its multiplicity of globular forms, which could signify the nourishment and fecundity associated with a young mother's body, also marks a clear reference to the proliferation of malignant cells within Szapocznikow's mammary glands. Moreover, the doll faces bear an uncanny resemblance to Renaissance depictions of the young Virgin, sharing the characteristic angular nose, prominent forehead, small lips, and almond-shaped eyes.[44] The work thus alludes to the centrality of the mother figure within Polish culture, which has traditionally revered the mythologized Polish Mother as its primary signifier of religious and patriotic values. As a Jewish woman, Szapocznikow may have felt a particular ambivalence toward Polish notions of idealized womanhood, based in large part on popular Marian Catholicism, and her struggles with illness would only complicate such feelings.[45] *Krużlowa* is more aggressive than other works, such as the Desserts, in repudiating normative notions of the female—and specifically, the maternal—body, presenting it as a treacherous entity whose growth and regeneration promise death just as surely as life.

Yet Szapocznikow was herself a mother, having adopted a son with her first husband in 1952, and another of her final sculptural series—the Herbaria, created in 1971 and 1972 (Fig. 6)—addresses maternity in a remarkably different manner. Here, motherhood is revealed as an emotional, not a physical, state, for the intimate bond between parent and child surpasses the material realm. Szapocznikow first created a polyester mold of her entire body in 1971 and subsequently used the technique to complete several molds of her son and studio assistant, Piotr, who was only twenty years old at the time of his mother's death. Covering his skin with a thin layer of plaster followed by polyester resin, she removed the plastic and flattened it to create a translucent rendering of her son's body, evocative of delicately preserved leaves or flowers.

Direct imprints of Piotr's body, the Herbaria function as indexical markers for the presence of mother and son, while nevertheless revealing the impending fate of their permanent separation. The series' austere and deflated molds recall variously death masks, medical specimens, or the flayed skin of martyrs and Holocaust victims. But, above all, the Herbaria testify to the sculptor's tragic desire to preserve "the flesh of her flesh."[46] Unlike much of Szapocznikow's late work, the Herbaria molds represent a body that is not fragmented, but that instead has been emptied of its internal substance. The central motif of Szapocznikow's entire body of work eludes this most haunting of series, leaving only a fragile shell to indicate its absence.

Over the three and a half decades since Szapocznikow's death, art historians in Poland have continued to acknowledge

her achievements: she has received mention in almost every publication on postwar Polish art and has been the subject of several retrospectives in her native country. These exhibitions, however, went largely unnoticed by art historians and critics to the west, and a posthumous presentation of her Tumors and Herbaria at the Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris mounted shortly after her death failed to bolster Szapocznikow's reputation in France.[47] Since then, a number of Polish women artists concerned with issues of embodiment and sexuality have emerged on the international scene: Magdalena Abakanowicz (b. 1930), a contemporary of Szapocznikow, Zofia Kulik (b. 1947), and Katarzyna Kozyra (b. 1963) most recently. Kozyra's work in particular calls attention to the gendered body as a significant and highly contested point of inquiry in Polish art—and also in Polish society more generally, at a moment when the often-conservative values of Eastern Europe complicate its aspirations to European integration.

Given the marked parallels between Szapocznikow's work and that of several contemporary feminist artists, the lack of attention that she has received beyond her country of origin is surprising. She is a slippery figure, one who does not fit neatly into art-historical categories yet who clearly partakes in so many of them. Her relation to feminism is particularly difficult to pin down, and her reduction of the female body to fragmented, objectified erogenous zones presents a definite challenge to contemporary viewers, who have come to recognize the limitations of potentially essentializing representations of anatomy. Yet, despite—or because of—the critical difficulties it presents, Szapocznikow's work merits the serious evaluation it failed to receive from critics of her generation. Today's viewer, more accustomed to body-oriented art practices, may be better able to understand the challenges posed by Szapocznikow's explorations of corporeal experience. •

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Notes

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1. Untitled preface to *Alina Szapocznikow: Rysunki i rzezby:Zatrzymac zycie/Drawings and Sculptures: Capturing Life*, ed. Jozef Grabski, trans. Maja Lavergne *et al.* (Krakow/ Warsaw: IRSA Publishing, 2004), n.p.
2. Stanisławski was one of the most significant Polish art critics of the latter half of the twentieth century and served as director of Poland's premier modern art museum, the Muzeum Sztuki in Łodz, from 1966 to 1991. Krzysztof Jurecki, "Ryszard Stanislawski," *Leonardo Electronic Almanac* 10, no. 2 (February 2002), http://leoalmanac.org/ journal/Vol_10/lea_v10_n02.txt (accessed August 11, 2008).
3. At the Galerie Gisela Capitain in Cologne from June to August 2007 and at Broadway 1602 in New York from November 2007 to January 2008.
4. "MoMA, The Collection, Alina Szapocznikow (Polish, 1926-1973)," accessed January 30, 2011, http://www.moma.org/ collection/ artist.php?artist_id=34124. Szapocznikow's work was also included in an exhibition at MoMA that same year, "Mind and Matter: Alternative Abstractions, 1940s to Now."
5. Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius explains in "Paris Behind the Iron Curtain": "Despite the supposed impenetrability of the Iron Curtain, a steady exchange between Paris and Eastern Europe took place from 1946 onwards. A plethora of exhibitions traveled in both directions; periodicals and catalogues were privately circulated; artists and critics, sponsored by cultural and political bodies, traveled both West and East." In *Paris: Capital of the Arts*, ed. Sarah Wilson (London: Royal Academy of the Arts, 2002), 250.
6. "Kalendarium/Chronology," in Grabski, ed., *Alina Szapocznikow,* 293-97.
7. My translation. "…devenir compréhensible pour les masses et inspire par les masses." In 1947, the Polish government declared that, in accordance with Soviet policy, all art must promote Communism and "be legible to the masses and inspired by the masses." This declaration was more strictly enforced two years later, in 1949, when Socialist Realism was applied to all domains of creative expression. For an analysis of the period, see Ryszard Stanisławski, "Réalisme socialiste et avant-garde," in *Les Années 50*, ed. Daniel Abadie (Paris: Centre Pompidou, 1988), 204-09.
8. Murawska-Muthesius, in "Paris Behind the Iron Curtain," 250, 257-59.
9. Pierre Restany also noted the formal affinities between Richier and Szapocznikow in the catalog text for the 1959 Biennale de Paris. *Première Biennale de Paris: manifestation biennale et internationale des jeunes artistes du 2 au 25 octobre 1959* (Paris: Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris, 1959), 27.
10. Sarah Wilson, "Germaine Richier: disquieting matriarch," *Sculpture Journal* 15 (2005): 51, 54.
11. Pierre Descargues, "Remembering Alina," in *Alina Szapocznikow, 1926 – 1973* (Warsaw: Galeria Sztuki Współczesnej Zacheta, 1998), 33.
12. My translation. "Ses premières oeuvres—doulouresement déchirées… sont l'expression d'héstitation, d'inquiétude et de terreur." Aleksander Wojciechowski, untitled preface to *Alina Szapocznikow* (Warsaw: Galeria 'Krzyew Koło,' 1960), n.p.
13. Joanna Inglot, *The Figurative Sculpture of Magdalena Abakanowicz* (Berkeley, London: Univ. of California Press, 2004), 73-74. See also in this issue Aneta Biesiadecka, "Magdalena Abakanowicz and the Development of the Figure in Postwar Polish Sculpture," pages 30-38.
14. For information on attitudes towards women following the Russian Revolution, see Karen Offen, *European Feminisms, 1700-1950* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 2000), 264-72. For information on women's roles and responsibilities in postwar Communist Poland, see Jolanta Plakwicz, "Poland," in *Superwomen and the Double Burden*, ed. Chris Corrin (London: Scarlet Press, 1992), 78-81.
15. Piotr Stanisławski, in discussion with the author, May 2006.
16. Ibid. Restany also authored several essays on Szapocznikow, appearing primarily in her exhibition literature.
17. Ibid.
18. My translation. "Au fur et à mésure que la sculpture s'humanisait sous l'empire de la directe référence anatomique, elle perdait de son expressivité dramatique et poignante pour atteindre à une indéfinissable qualité du détachement, une étrange sérénité dans l'humour." Restany, untitled essay in *Alina Szapocznikow* (Paris: Galerie Florence Houston-Brown, 1967), n.p.
19. Piotr Stanisławski, in discussion with the author, May 2006; "Alina Szapocznikow – a chronology of her life and work," in *Alina Szapocznikow, 1926 – 1973*, 128.

20. Stanisławski recalls accompanying his mother to the company, Rhone-Poulenc, and helping her mix the plastics in the studio: "[Quand j'avais] vers 15, 16 ans… ma mère a voulu m'inclure un peu dans ses processus… c'était moi qui faisait toujours les mélanges de mousse [en polyurethane]… et qui coulait après la mousse." In conversation with the author, May and June 2006.
21. Restany, *César* (Paris: Editions la Différence, 1988), 336.
22. Among the critics who commented on similarities between César's and Szapocznikow's work were Restany and Giuseppe Marchiori. However, the fact that César's *Breast* was cast from the body of a stripper while Szapocznikow sculpted from her own body and those of friends illustrates the markedly divergent nature of their works. The latter artist's work of mid-to-late 1960s might be seen as a series of collaborative investigations of female sexuality, whereas the former's clearly originates in an appropriative male gaze—one that willingly conflates the trades of sex worker and artist's model and attests, however jokingly, to male desire rather than female experience. Marchiori, untitled essay in *Alina Szapocznikow* (Brussels: Gallerie Cogeime, 1968), n.p.; Restany, *César,* 79.
23. Interestingly, in 1968 Niki de Saint-Phalle also created a number of sculptures of the fragmented female body; featuring titles like *Lips* and *Bust*, these pieces were shown at a Paris gallery during the same year. Niki de Saint-Phalle, *Niki de Saint-Phalle: Catalogue Raisonné 1949-2000* (Lausanne: Acatos, 2001), 216-27.
24. Wlodzimier Nowaczyk, "The Tropes of Modernity," in *Odwilz, Sztuka Ok. 1956 R. (The Thaw, Art around 1956)*, trans. Elzbieta and Marek Wilczynscy (Poznan: Muzeum Narodowe w Poznaniu/Galeria Sztuki Wspolczesnej, 1996), 269; Murawska-Muthesius, 252.
25. "Kalendarium/Chronology," 296; Alyce Mahon, *Surrealism and the Politics of Eros* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005), 120.
26. Ibid. (Mahon), 154-66.
27. See in particular Whitney Chadwick, "An Infinite Play of Empty Mirrors: Women, Surrealism, and Self-Representation," in *Mirror Images*, ed. Whitney Chadwick (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998), 3-35.
28. Ibid., 8-13.
29. Madeleine Cottenet-Haye, "The Body Subversive: Corporeal Imagery in Carrington, Prassinos and Mansour," in *Surrealism and Women*, ed. Mary Ann Caws et al. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 92.
30. Whitney Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1985), 107.
31. Ibid., 115-17.
32. See for example, Pauline Réage, *The Story of O*, trans. Sabine d'Estrée (New York: Grove Press, 1966) and Joyce Mansour, *Essential Poems and Writings of Joyce Mansour*, trans. Serge Gavronsky (Boston: Black Widow Press, 2008).
33. Interestingly, both Toyen and Fini configured sadomasochistic imagery partially in response to texts: Toyen illustrated Sade's *Justine* in 1944 and Fini's sketches accompanied the 1968 edition of *The Story of O.*, Chadwick, *Women Artists,* 107; Jennifer Thatcher, "Menace à trois: the art of Leonor Fini, Niki de Saint-Phalle and Annette Messager in the context of 1970s French feminism" (M.A. diss., Courtauld Inst. of Art, Univ. of London, 1998), 14-16.
34. For information on French legislation on reproductive rights, see "Introduction II," *New French Feminisms*, eds. Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (New York: Shocken Books, 1980), 17, 23-26.
35. Although a group of women artists called La Spirale formed in France the year before Szapocznikow's death, its intentions were less political than creative. *Les Sorcières* was first published in 1976 and *Femme/Art* the following year. Hélène Cixous first employed the term 'écriture féminine' in her 1975 essay 'Le rire de la méduse.' Armelle Leturcq, "Transmission, Transition, Feminism and Art in France, 1970-1997" in *Vraiment: féminisme et art* (Grenoble: Magasin—Centre national d'art contemporain de Grenoble, 1997), 74; Thatcher, 5, 8.
36. Although a very few Polish women were active in international feminist organizations before WWII, women's rights under Communist rule were largely subsumed by broader concerns about workers' and citizens' rights. Offen, *European Feminisms, 1700-1950*, 341-44. Elzbieta Matynia, "Finding a Voice: Women in Postcommunist Central Europe," in *The Challenge of Local Feminisms*, ed. Amrita Basu (Boulder: Westview, 1995), 374, 385.
37. The artist's son confirmed his mother's lack of interest in feminism in conversation with the author, May 2006.
38. "Kalendarium/Chronology," 331-32.
39. Restany, "Alina Szapocznikow: the eternal language of the body," in *Alina Szapocznikow, 1926 – 1973*, 27.
40. In 1964, Oldenburg spent several months in Europe and had a show at the Ileana Sonnabend Gallery in Paris, featuring his plaster food sculptures. Barbara Rose, *Claes Oldenburg* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1970), 94.
41. Kristeva specifically relates the abject to bodily waste, filth, and, ultimately, the human corpse. Excised tumors would clearly partake in this category: "A wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay, does not *signify* death. In the presence of signified death—a flat encephalograph, for instance—I would understand, react, or accept. No, as in true theatre, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being." *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia Univ.Press, 1982), 3.
42. Ibid, 2.
43. "Kalendarium/Chronology," 299-301, 305, 332.
44. This work, along with one of Szapocznikow's Herbarium sculptures, is in the collection of the Pallottine order of Catholic priests and brothers in Paris, thus attesting to the religious imagery of the work.
45. Matynia, 397; Elzbieta Oleksy, "Women's pictures and the politics of resistance in Poland," *Nora* 12: 3 (2004): 163.
46. Restany, "Eternal Language of the Body," 123.
47. Anda Rottenberg characterized the Paris exhibition, mounted in spring of 1973, as follows: "when Suzanne Pagé organized a posthumous exhibition at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris […it] fell on stony ground. The autotelic and linguistic references within the sphere of interest of seventies' artists did not concord with the carnality and dramatism of the artist's work. An album, designed by Roman Cieślewicz, was never published. A new generation grew up before art started dealing with the human body." Rottenberg, untitled introduction in *Alina Szapocznikow, 1926 – 1973*, n.p.

Nancy Spero: The Work

by Christopher Lyon
Prestel, 2010

Nancy Spero: Codex Nancy Spero

edited by Roel Arkesteijn
Roma, 2008.

Nancy Spero: Torture of Women

by Diana Nemiroff and Elaine Scarry
Siglio, 2010

Nancy Spero: Dissidances

by Nancy Spero, Mignon Nixon, Helene Cixous, and Benjamin Buchloh
Museu d'art Contemporani de Barcelona and Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, 2009

Reviewed by Deborah Frizzell

> "It's my art that stands for me, you see? ... It's my art."
> *Nancy Spero* (Lyon, 316)

Nancy Spero was 83 when she died on October 18, 2009. Her passing took a passionate, visionary, and indomitable artistic presence from the world. In a career that spanned sixty years, Spero's radical image/text conjunctions, her groundbreaking aesthetic approach, innovative graphic techniques and formats, and the political and feminist themes she pioneered inspired generations of younger artists. Combining her cross-cultural hybrid figures with text fragments in her signature scroll works on paper and wall paintings, the artist engaged, by transcription and metaphor, the extremes of human experience from the horrific to the transcendent. Spero allied her working processes and formats with an activist orientation and an ongoing questioning of the characteristics and formation of memory and representation, particularly the representation of women. Both her work and her life argue for a socially dynamic, open-ended trajectory as an integral part of public discourse via aesthetic form, allowing for the possibility of redemptive encounters. Spero changed the very terms in which we discuss painting as well as its functioning in the world. As Christopher Lyon points out in his remarkable monograph on Spero, this was one of the paradoxes of her project: a desire that her work be recognized within the canon of art history, while seeking this recognition *on her own terms* in order to critique and subvert the privileged viewpoint. Four recently published books on Nancy Spero's work testify to her vital and courageous role as a pivotal artist of the second half of the twentieth century who, nevertheless, chose to speak assertively from the margins.[1]

Christopher Lyon's comprehensive study of the artist's oeuvre, *Nancy Spero: The Work,* may set a new standard for the critical survey of an artist's work. He has seamlessly integrated careful scholarship using a variety of methodologies, interpretative sensitivity, and cultural range, with sumptuous presentations of the artist's unconventionally formatted, difficult-to-photograph work. The book's physical presence is bold and visually stunning. Two gatefolds reveal four consecutive pages offering spreads of *Notes in Time* (1979), and *Artemis, Acrobats, Divas, and Dancers* (2001), Spero's 2001 mosaic created for New York City's Lincoln Center/66th Street Subway Station. Hundreds of close-up, high-resolution digital images pieced together create the impression that one is viewing these works complete. Many works were newly photographed, and layouts maintain relative scale, so that one revels in a sense of Spero's radical approach to composition, central to her artistic thought. Lyon weaves a rich narrative of his subject's life and artistic persona in the art worlds of postwar Chicago, Paris, and New York, shared with her husband, the painter Leon Golub (1922-2004), and their three sons. Ten years in the making, Lyon's text draws from primary sources and countless conversations with his subject, Golub, and their peers. His aim to place Spero's art into history is a mirrored reflection of a goal shared by both Spero and Golub: to put history into art (Lyon, 7).

Lyon's close examination of Spero's oeuvre is organized into seven chapters that follow the work's chronological development. At the outset, he outlines Spero's dynamic artistic principles, decisive elements which emerged from her earliest works and which he traces in their interrelated permutations throughout her career. Lyon explores Spero's primary centrifugal outward orientation and impulsion as in *La Renommée* (2000; Fig. 1), linking this formal expression with her artistic personality as it evolved, highlighting her uniqueness:

> We may contrast her [Spero's] orientation with the "centripetal" impulse of an artist like Louise Bourgeois, who might be said to make her deeply autobiographical art while looking over her shoulder at her past. Spero instead made her art while craning her neck to see around the next curve of our future. (Lyon, 11)

Lyon pays particular attention to Spero's reiterative theme of doubling, calling it "the mother concept of her art, embracing her psyche, process and techniques, and philosophy" (Lyon, 12). Spero's "doubling" appears in her Black Paris Paintings (1958-64) and reappears in her scrolls as an idiosyncratic, nonlinear pictorial representation of time as synchronic. Writes Lyon:

> Gertrude Stein's concept of a "continuous present," coined to describe her technique of flattening out temporal distinctions and creating the impression that action is occurring in a perpetual now, was connected by Spero to the Jungian notion of eternal presence, familiar to her from Erich Neumann's *The Great Mother*. The phrases are compressed by Spero as "continual presence," a *visual* translation of Stein's and Jung's temporal concept that recognizes women's unceasing physical presence in time. (Lyon, 12)

Finally, Lyon outlines and follows the evolution of Spero's conceptual mode of presenting the figure as "aspective," a term coined by Egyptologist Emma Brunner Traut. This approach to space that does not use the representation of three-dimensionality through perspective emerged as "Spero adopted medieval and Egyptian models of composition and presentation of her figures, starting with the *War Series* and the *Codex Artaud* and

coming fully into its own in the friezes and hangings she created from the mid-1970s on and in some of the installations that conclude her career." (Lyon, 12)

While a number of scholars have explored the influences of the Bayeux Tapestry on Spero's scrolls, Lyon's research reveals that earlier, while a student at Art Institute of Chicago (1945-49), she first saw several panels from another tapestry, *Apocalypse of Angers* (1373-87), commissioned by Louis I, Duke of Anjou, for his castle at Angers. Lyon discusses Spero's fascination with the tapestry's continuous horizontal format (13" x 17'), figure-ground spatial relationships, and the deployment of a complex symbolic language to represent the apocalyptic visions of St. John on the island of Patmos. He shows how the multi-headed dragons and ferocious, fire-breathing creatures directly informed Spero's War Series, such as *Pilot—Eagle—Skull* (1968), embodying a visceral symbolism exorcising the obscenity of the Vietnam War while suggesting on a personal level the artist's own conflicting inner demons. Among the intriguing theoretical models Lyon employs to examine the artist's Black Paris Paintings, especially the Lovers series, is philosopher Gilles Deleuze's use of the biological metaphor of the embryo to discuss "the production of differences as the continuous matter of differentiation and connection."[2] This aptly suggests both reproduction and individuation, a merging and splitting in the creative process, grounded in gender. Lyon subtly extends this metaphor to the Black Paris Paintings as manifesting Spero's artistic personality during this period (when she was raising three sons and sharing her artistic life with Golub). He describes an artist "engaged in performing a nuanced and poignant interior drama in which a female and a male figure act out a process of coming together creatively as partners, individuating themselves, and producing 'sketches,' embryonic forms, that will eventually gain independent life as artworks" (Lyon 66).

The bulk of Lyon's exacting analysis and interpretation focuses on Spero's monumental scroll works on paper shown at A.I.R. Gallery (the pioneering women's cooperative cofounded by Spero) between 1973 and 1981, including *Codex Artaud* (shown 1973), *The Hours of the Night* and *Torture in Chile* (shown 1974), *Torture of Women* (shown 1976), *Notes in Time on Women* (shown 1979), and *The First Language* (shown 1981). It was during this intensely creative period that Spero codified the majestic frieze and hanging formats of her signature works, bravely chose to focus solely on the female figure as protagonist, and made significant contributions to the postwar art world. Among Lyon's many incisive suggestions for further research on Spero is a comparison of *Codex Artaud* and *Notes in Time* with ambitious works of American epic poetry of the twentieth century such as William Carlos Williams's *Paterson* and Ezra Pound's *Cantos*.

In his last chapter, "Théâtres de memoires," Lyon acknowledges the importance of Spero's wall painting installations (1988-2010)[3]: "Spero's deployment of her figures in actual architectural spaces should be understood as not simply an innovative variation on her previous work, but an extension of a fundamental idea informing her art—that it is an act both of witnessing and remembrance" (Lyon, 272). One of Lyon's most penetrating and poignant discussions of these works melds the themes of theater and memory with a form of self-portraiture. He describes Spero's process in *Hommage to Ana Mendieta* for the Whitney Biennial (1993) and at the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum (2004), for which she used

> her own body as a brush and performed the version of *Body Tracks* [Mendieta's 1982 performance at Franklin Furnace which Spero attended] in which the hands are spread apart at the top of the sheet but then converge as they descend. The interpretation of these works is ambiguous. Mendieta's tragic death reinforces the reading of a falling figure; but seen as a *painting*, and not the residue of a performance, the hands equally can be read as reaching upward in yearning or in supplication… Spero's own hands become the focus of the complex of meanings borne by these images: among them, art making as an activity on which life depends, victimhood, and spiritual yearning. (Lyon, 277)



Fig. 1. Nancy Spero, *La Renommée* (2000), 24 1/2" x 20 1/4". Cut-and-pasted handprinted paper and handprinting on paper. © Estate of Nancy Spero.

Analyzing the nature of language and visual representation was central to Spero's polemical oeuvre from her early years as a student in Chicago. Besides combining text fragments and images in her work, Spero also wrote throughout her career; her words often clarifying her motives and processes, and revealing the layers of meaning in her work. All four books under review integrate these abundant writings by Spero with art historical analysis. Roel Arkesteijn began collaborating with Spero in 2006, perusing her archives to collect primary documents: interview transcripts, hand-typed statements, photographs, reading annotations, and correspondence. The resulting compendium, *Codex Spero: Nancy Spero-Selected Writings & Interviews 1950-2008,* was published to coincide with the 2008 exhibition "Spero Speaks," curated by Arkesteijn at De Appel Arts Centre, Amsterdam. This handsome publication collages Spero's words,

photographs, and images to synchronize thematically with her development as an artist. Writings are organized in three chapters: "The Existential Years: 1926-1965," "The Angry Years: 1966-1980," and "Jouissance: 1981-2008." However, by eschewing a strict chronology, Arkesteijn mimics the artist's "cannibalization" of her own works and re-presents her words, paired with her art, to uncover synchronic slices of her themes. Spero's voice is at once sharp, pithy, witty, oblique, concise, and explosive. Although this thematic presentation of material is artful, some readers may find it confusing, especially without an index. Arkesteijn's penultimate section, "Spero's Alphabet of Hieroglyphs," presents for the first time a chronological inventory of thumbnail-size prints of the artist's "cast of characters," including some 434 figures developed over decades and transferred onto printing plates of zinc and polymer. Arkesteijn shows the evolution of Spero's "hieroglyphs" and includes her descriptive captions. This section only demonstrates how much additional research needs to be done on the origins and permutations of Spero's hybrid figures; the artist deployed them as linguistic signs (as critic Lawrence Alloway first noted), mediating between artist and viewer, altering their meanings depending on orientation, printing, and context, as in the Tarot cards Spero studied early in her career. While Arkesteijn's anthology is an invaluable addition to the Spero literature, the reader should remember that he excerpts from interviews and does not include all; most notably absent are Jo Anna Isaak's significant 1995 interviews with Spero and transcripts from Irene Sosa's thirteen documentary films (1989-2004) on the artist.

Rather than opting for an encyclopedic approach to the artist's work, *Nancy Spero: Torture of Women* offers an intimate, intense focus on one definitive work. The book is enriched by the inclusion of cross-disciplinary texts: juxtaposing art historical analysis by Diana Nemiroff, a work of fiction based on hidden histories by Luisa Valenzuela, and aesthetic/literary theory via excerpts from Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain: The Making & Unmaking of the World* (1985). Siglio Press's unique square format presents Spero's entire 125-foot painted, hand-printed and collaged paper scroll, *Torture of Women* (1976), in nearly 100 pages of detailed close-ups and extended views. First installed at A.I.R. Gallery, Spero's scroll is translated from an architecturally scaled experience into a book-size/reading encounter; the public nature of the extended broadside becomes a private journal of individual stories of torture culled from newspapers and other sources. The book format seems apt to parallel the artist's fractured and highly fluid points of view, the private spaces of personal testimony paired with cross-cultural mythic and contemporary figures, the spaces of silence and psychological trauma; one may enter the book at any point and move around. What no book format can possibly capture, however, is the scroll's uncontainable outward trajectory, its physical context of architectural space-as-ground, and its inimitable form of address unfurled at eye-level within the viewer's path.

Illuminating the process and themes embedded in Spero's scroll, Nemiroff offers an eloquent exegesis.[4] The former senior curator of contemporary art at the National Gallery of Canada, where the artist's scroll resides, she analyzes Spero's challenging project to inscribe the voices of the tortured and disappeared: "How to make the obscenity of torture visible without becoming obscene is the paradox Spero must address, and thus it is text that serves both as a vehicle of communication and a visual presence in this work, while figurative images are scarce" (*Torture,* 114). Nemiroff subtly interprets the aesthetic choices and paradoxes of Spero's dual role as an artist living in the present and as a documentarian of history: as

> an act of witnessing, in which ritual is a key element. Ritual is present in Spero's copying—almost like a medieval scribe in her fashion—the testimony of the women who lived to tell of the horrors to which they had been subjected and the reports of those who had died under torture. Through the repetition of their names and words she [the artist] imaginatively enters and recreates the destroyed world of the tortured. This ritual element is re-enacted when we, in our turn, walk along the panels of *Torture of Women*, reading and re-reading the words she has inscribed. (*Torture,* 123).

The performative, ritual element is reinforced in Argentine writer Luisa Valenzuela's short story, "Symmetries," in which distorted mirror images, or doubles, infiltrate each other in a brilliant but terrifying narrative of the psychological effects of torture on victims and perpetrators alike. Valenzuela, who experienced her country's "Dirty War" in



the 1970s, echoes Spero's means and revelations in her prose.

The exhibition catalogue *Nancy Spero: Dissidances* was published in conjunction with a retrospective exhibition that traveled through Spain during 2008 and 2009.[5] The curators, Manuel J. Borja-Villel and Rosario Peiró, premised their vision of a Spero retrospective on the theme of "a compendium of diverse writings" (*Dissidances,* 11) rooted in the discursive and performative paradigm of an intertextual project. Their approach was informed by the experimental poetics of Stéphane Mallarmé, his championing of *Ut Pictura Poesis* (As is painting, so is poetry), emphasizing the common goals of poetry and painting, and his essays employing the dancer as metaphor (published in *Crayonne au Theatre* in 1888). While this conceptual framework applied well for many of Spero's scrolls, their single narrow theoretical approach had limitations, precluding the inclusion of such key works as the Lovers series of paintings on canvas, and works such as *The Hours of the Night* (1974) that signaled Spero's overarching artistic program shift from a book paradigm to an expressive theatrical paradigm. Although the exhibition included a re-vision of the wall painting *Let the Priests Tremble* (1998), the hand-printed on silk *A Cycle in Time* (1995) and Spero's three-dimensional installation *Maypole/Take No Prisoners*, the absence of a contextual overview of Spero's later projects—in which she moved her images directly onto the walls of museums and public spaces—makes for a truncated overall conception of Spero's oeuvre.

Hélène Cixous's magisterial prose piece, "Spero's Dissidances," written especially for the retrospective, is a highlight of the catalogue, serving as a creative tribute from the French feminist theorist to a kindred spirit of equal ambition and stature.[6] Spero's French was fluent and she gloried in Cixous's puns and hybrid portmanteau words, such as the mongrel title *Dissidances,* blending "dissent" and "dances," which combines two basic elements of Spero's oeuvre. Recognizing Spero's original formal and conceptual achievement, incorporating time into visual art as poetry, Cixous declares the artist "A poet in painting" (*Dissidances,* 131). Spero probably encountered Cixous's essays while working on *Notes in Time*.[7] She transformed Cixous's concept of *l'écriture féminine* (feminine writing) within her own practices and meanings, telling an interviewer: "The French feminists are talking 'l'écriture féminine,' and I am trying 'la peinture féminine.'"[8]

Mignon Nixon adds a feminist psychoanalytical reading of the artist's works from the late-1950s until *Codex Artaud,* through which Spero ironically found her voice. Nixon's essay, "Book of Tongues," posits a familiar trajectory linking Freud's "logic of hysteria" within Spero's apotropaic images and curses as interrogating agents of mythic representations of the pathologically feminine, transforming these within ecstatic and gestural movement.[9]

Each of these books makes a particular contribution to Spero scholarship. Christopher Lyon's monograph is a commanding narrative which presents a comprehensive survey and in-depth formal and iconographical analysis, critical and theoretical frames of reference, and fresh approaches to examining her art and her place in the history of twentieth century art. His book is the definitive sourcebook on her work and life, and a catalyst toward future scholarship. Arkesteijn's anthology, a "collage" of Spero's voices from interviews and writings, gathers together archival material otherwise unavailable to most readers. *Torture of Women* focuses on a major scroll work, brings the reader into intimate contact with Spero's retelling of women's history and a selection of cross-disciplinary interpretive essays. And finally, Cixous's brilliant prose performance composed in a rhythmic dance with the artist's exhilarating "la peinture féminine" is the highlight of *Dissidances*. These books enrich earlier Spero scholarship and testify to the artist's legacy, distinguishing her as one of the twentieth century's most gifted and courageous artists. •

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Notes

1. Spero is egregiously absent from The Museum of Modern Art's new publication, *Modern Women: Women Artists at the Museum of Modern Art* (2010), despite the fact that MoMA owns a major work by the artist, *Notes in Time* (1979). Nancy Spero's mini-retrospective at the Centre Pompidou, Paris (Oct. 13, 2010-Jan. 10, 2011), had no plans to travel to the U.S.
2. Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (London: Continuum, 2008), 249.
3. See Deborah Frizzell, "Nancy Spero's Installations and Institutional Incursions, 1987–2001: Dialogues within the Museum, and Elsewhere" (PhD diss., City University of New York, 2004); see also Frizzell, "Nancy Spero's Museum Incursions: Isis on the Threshold," *Woman's Art Journal* vol. 27, no. 2 (2006): 24–32.
4. Her essay "Fourteen Meditations on Nancy Spero's Torture of Women" was first published in Susan Harris's *Nancy Spero: Weighing the Heart Against a Feather of Truth*, (Santiago de Compostela, Spain: Centro Galego de Arte Contemporanea, 2004), 141–71, and in 2005 earned Nemiroff a prestigious award from the Association of Art Museum Curators for the best article on a work in a permanent collection.
5. After opening at the Museu d'art Contemporani de Barcelona, it traveled to the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, and the Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo, Seville. Despite her frail health, Spero visited the exhibition in Madrid.
6. English translation by Laurent Milesi.
7. Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture & Society* 1, no. 4 (1976). Spero quotes from articles that appeared in *Signs* in 1977 in *Notes in Time.*
8. "Defying the Death Machine: An Interview with Nicole Jolicoeur and Nell Tenhaaf, 1985," in Arkesteijn, *Codex Spero,* 12.
9. Mignon Nixon, "Spero's Curses," *October* 122 (Fall 2007): 3-30. The modern art historical precedent for Spero's "tongues," harking back to the artist's earlier painting on canvas, *Homage to New York, I Do Not Challenge* (1958), is Natalia Goncharova's lithographic cover design for *A Game in Hell* (1912), a narrative poem written by Russian Futurists Velimir Khlebnikov and Alexei Kruchenykh, describing a card game between devils and sinners in Hell; Goncharova's devil on the cover blasphemously alludes to icons of Christ.

Unsettled Visions: Contemporary Asian American Artists and the Social Imaginary

By Margo Machida
Duke University Press, 2008

Reviewed by Alexandra Chang

This ambitious volume condenses a history of Asian American art from its roots in the 1970s while covering the continuity of a centuries-old history of Western Orientalism and the stereotyping of Asians. Margo Machida examines the lives and works of ten contemporary artists, five men and five women, whose art forms a dialogue with the socially constructed formation of Asians in the popular imaginary of the West.

The five women in focus are installation artists Tomie Arai (b. 1949), Kristine Aono (b. 1960), and Yong Soon Min (b. 1953); photographer Hanh Thi Pham (b. 1954); and printmaker Zarina Hashmi (b. 1937). The five male artists are Pipo Nguyen-duy, Ming Fay, Marlon Fuentes, Allan de Souza, and Y. David Chung. Within the larger global schema of multiple Asian diasporas and diverse themes discussed are three overarching themes under which the artists are grouped; these are reflected in the chapter headings: "Othering," "Trauma, Social Memory, and Art," and "Migration, Mixing, and Place." Machida acknowledges what she terms "a poetics of positionalities" (1) of the Asian American artist, concentrating on the sometimes overlapping thematizing tropes of post-colonial re-appropriation, community and agency, border crossings, and art and trauma.

Machida looks at several avenues of connectivity throughout their art: community, trauma, and collective memory. Both Arai and Min work across Asian diasporic communities (Arai also creates works with African American and Native American communities). Arai grew up in ethnically diverse New York City and worked during the time of the civil rights movement. Machida underlines the importance of these early influences on Arai's view of a "third world" urban culture in which Asian Americans figured, writing: "That awareness, in turn, has moved her to find common cause in the histories and present-day struggles of other minoritized communities, engendering the coalitionist orientation that often informs her work" (101).

Says Arai: "The life I've lived has been an American one. Yet we are victims of everybody else's reality about Asians….We have to re-create a more positive reality, specific to the experience of an Asian being in America" (101). In her print installation *At the Heart of This Narrative Lies A Human Life* (1991), for example, the central image is a portrait of the mother of the late poet Frances Chung surrounded by prints representing negative stereotypes pulled from anti-Chinese propaganda including archival images of "The Chinese Coolie" and "The Chinese Question." Machida writes that for the artist, the portrait projects "a kind of power, or dignity, or sense of self … [that] would balance against the imagery that seems to float around her" (106).

Machida investigates the works of Kristine Aono, Yong Soon Min, and Hanh Thi Pham within the frameworks of trauma, social memory, and art as applied to their experiences with U.S. history regarding World War II and the wars in Korea and Vietnam. She explains that as a third-generation Japanese American, Aono, is attempting to reconstruct a buried history of the internment, which her parents experienced but did not discuss with her generation. For *Relics from Camp* (1996; Fig. 1), the artist invited people to contribute items from their camp experience which she incorporated into her work, placing them on the dirt she collected from the camp sites along with other artifacts found there.

Aono's art installations foreground the narratives imbued in everyday objects, which obtain a unique aspect of "magnified import, both by association with the stately environments in which they often are displayed and by being accorded the status of hallowed cultural and historical artifacts" (136). While *Relics from Camp* is an ephemeral, site-specific installation, Machida suggests



Fig. 1. Kristine Aono, *Relics from Camp* (detail) (1996), installation with cloth, sand and various objects, dimensions variable. Japanese American National Museum, Los Angeles. Courtesy the artist. Photo: Norman Sugimoto.

that it can "be created, maintained, and preserved through the conscious volition of individuals who actively seek to remember in the company of like-minded others" (148).

Yong Soon Min also seeks to personalize traumatic events from the dominant narrative through alternative histories. In *DMZ Xing* (1994), Min's installation included images and histories from Vietnamese-, Cambodian-, Laotian-, Hmong-, and other Asian-American immigrant communities. A circular enclosure, lit harshly, created a physically uncomfortable experience for the viewer. Around the interior, pillars made from photographs and glass etched with texts expressed some of the collected oral histories. Min thus connected the post-war experiences of the Southeast Asian diaspora, seeking to re-remember in an open-ended manner.

Vietnamese refugee Hanh Thi Pham relives aspects of a history that many would hope to silence. Her tableaux vivant series made in collaboration with California sculptor Richard Turner, *Along the Street of Knives* (1985), brings war relationships into an intimate realm. Machida writes:

> Pham's use of privately staged enactments, whose participants come to function as living witnesses to the traumatic experiences of the Vietnamese, can be understood as the artist's means of putting a human face on a national catastrophe—even as she seeks to externalize and discharge outrage

> toward those she holds responsible for the turmoil and pain visited on her people. (174-75)

In *Forever Avenging*, for example, Pham poses as both witness and participant in the mock shooting of Turner, who imitates the iconic execution of a Vietcong soldier, and *Interrogation & Avenge* contains superimposed images of the artists alternately hanging upside down and being drowned in a tub of water. For Machida, these works create a space for dialogue for both the artist and community, as the artists are "engaged in a process that contributes significantly to the production of historical memory" (187).

Machida draws from the transmigrations and cultural crosscurrents created by the movements of these diasporic artists. She cites the intersection of the domestic space and migration present in the work of Indian artist Zarina Hashmi, whose series, The House at Aligarh, was influenced by memories of her home and courtyard in India. Hashmi created The House with Four Walls series after a visit to Pakistan, where she witnessed Muslim women wearing the full *char-diwari* coverings in public, according to Orthodox Islamic teachings "that instruct women to stay covered and within the walls of their home" (218). Another of Hashmi's series, titled those cities blotted into the wilderness (2003), maps out cities such as Baghdad, Sarajevo, Kabul, and New York in black woodblock prints, demarcating the territories in which "her coreligionists in Asian and European nations (and territories aspiring to nationhood) [are] ravaged by conflicts whose ultimate resolution still remains largely unknown" (225). Throughout the book, Machida argues against the notion of what some critics have come to believe as a homogenizing quality of the categorization of Asian American art, citing the diversity and multiplicity inherent in the construction if taken to imply a space of cultural crossings, multiple positionalities and transmigrations. The last chapters of the book run through a long list of artists in addition to the ten on which the book focuses, providing both a window into the diversity of the field as well as the abundance of artists participating in the dialogue and the themes explored in *Unsettled Visions*. This solid and remarkable volume should be essential reading for those interested in critical race theory and visual cultures, and is sure to encourage further study of these artists. ●

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Eva Hesse Spectres 1960

edited by E. Luanne McKinnon
Yale University Press and University of New Mexico Art Museum, 2010

Eva Hesse: Longing, Belonging and Displacement

by Vanessa Corby
I.B. Tauris, 2010

Reviewed by Rachel Epp Buller

In 1976, Lucy Lippard published what is still the go-to monograph on Eva Hesse, deftly blending biography with critical inquiry into Hesse's body of sculptures, drawings, and paintings.[1] In two recently published books, scholars continue to engage with Lippard's writing and build upon her discussion of the influence of both biography and psychoanalysis in Hesse's work; yet each writer significantly narrows the visual focus. Ignoring for the most part her better-known sculptural and installation work, the authors each select a small part of Hesse's two-dimensional oeuvre for extended study, investigating early works that they perceive to have been dismissed by Lippard and other scholars. E. Luanne McKinnon's edition of collected essays brings together four scholars to examine a group of twenty-one oil paintings, all produced in a single year and unified through their inclusion of one or more spectral figures. Vanessa Corby specifies even further, devoting her attention to two of Hesse's drawings and providing extended analysis of their production, reception, and cultural-historical contexts.

Eva Hesse Spectres 1960 accomp-anied an exhibition of the same name[2] highlighting paintings that were never before exhibited as a cohesive grouping and have been largely overlooked in scholarly assessments of Hesse's work. Unusual for Hesse's oeuvre in part for their inclusion of figuration, the so-called "spectre" paintings feature single, paired, and grouped figures and exhibit such expressive painterly qualities that Helen Molesworth reads them as ambitious responses to the paintings of Willem de Kooning. In her essay, "Me, You, Us: Eva Hesse's Early Paintings," Molesworth further interprets the paintings as explorations of the self and of relationships, in a way that rejected the hard-edged art of her contemporaries: "While Minimalism and Conceptual art would work through mathematical, linguistic, or industrial systems, […] Hesse chose to pursue the systems of human relations" (*Spectres*,18). McKinnon similarly understands the paintings as introspective examinations and employs Hesse's journal entries and biographical details as explication. In an interesting formal analysis, titled "Eva's Eva," McKinnon posits that all of the perceived self-portraits in the group appear to be sightless, which she connects to the traumatic events of Hesse's early life: "…by recreating a self or imaginary selves that would not see, or vaguely saw with one eye or through damaged eyes, if at all, Hesse was symbolically working through her fears in order to protect herself from recurring and debilitating anxieties" (*Spectres*, 38-39).

Elisabeth Bronfen devotes her essay, "The Spectral Bride and Her Uncanny Double," to a single untitled painting from the series (1960; Fig. 1), one that appears to feature a veiled bride with a hooded, ghostly apparition. Connecting both the painting and the larger series to Mary Shelley's gothic melding of bride



Fig. 1. Eva Hesse, *No title* (1960), oil on canvas, 49 1/4" x 49 1/4". Ursula Hauser Collection, Switzerland.

and corpse, Bronfen notes the relational tension of the scene and presents a variety of possible biographical and psychological readings. Louise Milne, in "An Instrument in the Shape of a Woman: The Real Nonsense of Eva Hesse," delves further into a psychoanalytic interpretation of the larger series. She proposes that in the "spectre" paintings, Hesse develops "a sort of visual argument about the nature of the self and consciousness. We can thus regard Hesse's single and double avatars as investigations into the dream-culture of herself and her contemporaries" (*Spectres*, 56). Peppered with quotes from Hesse's contemporaries and from psychoanalysts, Milne's fragmented text draws on both the tenets of Freudian dream interpretation and the artist's journal entries in order to frame the paintings as "visual interfaces for the unconscious" (*Spectres*,63).

The physical and theoretical heft of Vanessa Corby's volume stands in stark contrast to McKinnon's small exhibition catalogue with its short, accessible essays. From the outset, with a preface by Griselda Pollock that frames the Encounters book series as a uniting of transdisciplinary approaches "circulating in the expanded field of the image" (xviii), it becomes apparent that the images themselves are not the primary focus. Or more accurately, the images are one focus among many, providing the impetus for aesthetic, historical, cultural, biographical, and psychoanalytic readings to revolve around them. Corby understands the art as much more than just the image—"I argue that to approach Hesse's drawings via a set of encounters enables this text to put the *work* of art first, to read anew the circumstances of each drawing's production, reception and circulation within the discourse written for this artist" (Corby, 2)—which can result in many pages of tangential discussions that sometimes risk losing the images entirely.

Corby's study emerges from an initial encounter with one of Hesse's gouache drawings, *No title* (1961), seen only in reproduction during her art student days. She later saw the drawing in person and encountered a second gouache drawing, *No title* (1960-61), which together became the basis for her book. In the first chapter, Corby writes animatedly about her aesthetic experience of Hesse's gouaches, with eloquent paragraphs devoted to the formal qualities and facture of the drawings. Like McKinnon and other scholars, Corby takes issue with Lippard's assessment of Hesse's early work. Most specifically, as Lippard and others place the early works in a continuum that leads to the later sculptures, Corby hopes to disengage the drawings and allow them to stand on their own.

In the second chapter, Corby provides a state-of-the-research assessment and further critiques previous scholarship as she seeks to situate Hesse's drawings in appropriate contexts of production, reception, and history. While Lippard connected Hesse's work to the Feminist Art Movement, Corby argues that Lippard "retrospectively read Hesse's artwork from a cognisance that the artist could not possess" (Corby, 44), particularly with regard to the early drawings. Corby analyzes the transcript of Hesse's extended interview with Cindy Nemser, unearthing the original, unedited transcript for further clarification, and suggests that while both Nemser and Lippard relied heavily on biography, both did so in selective ways.[3] Throughout the volume, Corby re-examines the possible influence of Hesse's Jewish identity and her background as a Holocaust survivor. She does not look to the Holocaust trauma to "explain" Hesse's work. Rather, Corby reinscribes the importance of the Holocaust both in Hesse's self-definition and in the reception of her work. In extended discussions, Corby maps out how Holocaust survivors who came to the United States felt urged to repress their experiences and hide the real horrors from an American public unwilling to hear about them. After examining the unedited interview transcript, Corby argues that the repression of Holocaust trauma in the United States was contextually important to the reception of Hesse and her work, seen specifically as Nemser and/or her editor eliminated most Holocaust discussion from the final published piece. Culturally influencing Hesse's own identity and self-awareness, Corby suggests that the filmic version of *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1959) as well as the capture and testimony of Adolf Otto Eichmann in 1960 would have underscored Hesse's understanding of herself as a survivor of horrific trauma.

Pursuing another contextual avenue, Corby investigates Hesse's complex relationship with her mother and the traumas of her parents' divorce, father's remarriage, and mother's suicide. Corby argues for a much greater influence of Hesse's life traumas than previously recognized as she merges a lengthy discussion of Freud and the Oedipus complex with biographical history. Relying in part on the *Tagebücher* that Hesse's parents kept for her, Corby delineates the fear and anxiety that were ever-present in the young Hesse's life. Rampant anti-Semitism permeated Hesse's earliest years (she was born in 1936), while at age three she and her sister were "abandoned" by their parents when put on the *Kindertransport* to Holland. Reunited some months later, Hesse and her family then endured the trauma of beginning anew as immigrants in the United States, their refugee status made possible by family members who later perished in the concentration

camps. Corby lays the groundwork in historical and biographical events for psychoanalytic discussion that recurs throughout the book. Drawing on the French psychoanalyst André Green's "Dead Mother Complex," for example, Corby further explicates Hesse's troubled relationship with a mother who was absent both psychologically, through mental illness, and physically, first through separation, then through divorce and, finally, suicide.

In the end, Corby returns to the gouache drawings themselves, having offered a psychoanalytical framework of mourning and trauma in addition to detailed historical and cultural contexts for the works' production and reception. In a fascinating possible parallel, what Corby terms a "part-connection," she uncovers significant formal similarities between *No title* (1960–61) and Jacques-Louis David's *The Dead Marat* (1793). Corby surmises that the figuration in Hesse's drawing began as a tracing of David's *Marat*, which she suggests can be construed "as a symptom of the work of mourning played out in the artist's present" (171). Given that the ten-year old Eva and her sister were not even told of their mother's death, and that the larger cultural traumas of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust were repressed experiences, Corby argues that Hesse's unresolved losses became, for her, present-day traumas that significantly influenced her artistic production. She does not claim that Hesse's art is *about* the Holocaust, or *about* the loss of her mother: "Rather to argue for the production of *No title* (1960/61) and *No title* (1960) as contingent upon the creative transformation of particular cultural and historical events is to question *what it is to make art after the Holocaust?"* (Corby, 203).

Both inquiries provide valuable new insights into the work of Eva Hesse. Although geared toward very different audiences, each draws attention to works previously overlooked and considers them on their own and from multiple vantage points, rather than always in relation to Hesse's later sculptures and installations. On a physical level, each volume contains excellent reproductions; Corby's, however, suffers from quite a few typographical errors within the text. While Corby's transdisciplinary approach can at times seem to stray far off topic, she ultimately unites the disparate threads of historical context, cultural trauma, psychoanalysis, personal identity and loss, and artistic development to argue for their relevance in understanding not just the work of art but the entire labor of art. ●

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Notes

1. Lucy R. Lippard, *Eva Hesse* (NY: New York Univ. Press, 1976).
2. The exhibition opened at the Hammer Museum (Sept. 25, 2010 - Jan. 2, 2011) before moving to the University of New Mexico Art Museum, Albuquerque (March 26 - July 22, 2011).
3. Cindy Nemser, "An Interview with Eva Hesse," *Artforum* (May 1970).

Angels of Anarchy: Women Artists and Surrealism

Edited by Patricia Allmer
Prestel and Manchester Art Gallery, 2009

Reviewed by Robert Belton

Published on the occasion of an exhibition of the same name at the Manchester Art Gallery in late 2009,[1] this catalogue is filled with high quality reproductions of a thorough selection of works by women working in a Surrealist manner. Some of the artists included were connected directly to the Surrealist movement by one or another relationship with a card-carrying Surrealist male—like Elisa Breton, Leonora Carrington, Nusch Eluard, Lee Miller, Kay Sage, and Dorothea Tanning—whereas others reflected Surrealist subject and styles from a greater distance in both space and time—like Frida Kahlo, Remedios Varo and, from even farther afield, Penny Slinger and Francesca Woodman. The result is an impressive survey of a wide range of subject positions regarding Surrealism and women that is not constrained to the historical moment of the movement as defined by such imperious figures as André Breton.

The book includes a number of useful essays by seven contributors, but what will draw readers to pull it off the shelf again and again is its 141 full-page, high quality illustrations of the works in the exhibition, along with 51 smaller reproductions accompanying important points in the essays. Many of these works are rarely seen, but some of them richly deserve to be much better known. In addition to those of the aforementioned artists, there are works by Marion Adams, Eileen Agar—from one of whose more well known works (*Angel of Anarchy*, 1936-40; Fig. 1) the title is taken—Lola Alvarez Bravo, Rachel Baes, Emmy Bridgewater, Claude Cahun, Ithell Colquhoun, Josette Exandier,



Fig. 1. Eileen Agar, *Angel of Anarchy* (1936-40), textiles over plaster and mixed media, 20 1/2" x 12 1/2" x 13 1/4". Tate Gallery, London. Presented by Friends of the Tate Gallery.

Léonor Fini, Jane Graverol, Valentine Hugo, Dora Maar, Emila Medková, Meret Oppenheim, Grace Pailthorpe, Mimi Parent, Valentine Penrose, Edith Rimmington, Eva Švankmajerová, and Toyen. There are also a few interesting documentary photographs and a selection of exquisite-corpse drawings featuring collaborations between male and female artists.

Many of the works are standard oneiric Surrealist paintings of the sort more famously practiced by Salvador Dalí and René Magritte, but there are also collages, drawings, objects, and photographs (both manipulated and "straight"). A few of the works seem heavily derivative of one or another predecessor—like Jane Graverol of Magritte or Valentine Penrose of Max Ernst—but for the most part the examples are inventive and original, sometimes intriguing and sometimes off-putting. The Kahlo selections are not the most compelling examples of her work, but she is so well represented elsewhere that it hardly matters. In contrast, there are some real showstoppers in Mimi Parent, whose two examples are both from the 1990s, and, perhaps predictably, Claude Cahun, for her gender-bending take on Duchampian performativity.

Gender issues are, of course, at the heart of this exhibition and book, and the essays explore them from a variety of perspectives. Editor Patricia Allmer sets the tone in "Of Fallen Angels and Angels of Anarchy," drawing attention to previous scholarly contributors both direct—for example, Dawn Ades, Mary Ann Caws, Gwen Raaberg—and indirect—including Gilles Deleuze, Luce Irigaray, and Griselda Pollock. Her purpose is to point out that the women artists were not merely muses to male artists, and that their works deserve to be understood as autonomous creations, albeit often informed by common influences. Where the works will most clearly differ from those of the Surrealist males will be in self-representations, for obvious reasons, and in women's representations of each other, at which point a number of interpretative pathways open up that have to do with differences in human sexuality. As a result, the first of five categories Allmer employs to organize her thoughts is "Portrait and Self-Portrait." She follows with "Landscape," "Interior," "Still-life," and "Fantasy." The last four serve as a useful taxonomy of subject matter, perhaps, but the works' Surrealist polysemy inevitably drives them to escape compression into a single category, a fact Allmer acknowledges in a remark that "the artworks in these sections explode the categories from within" (15). Nonetheless, it is interesting to read, for example, about Oppenheim's celebrated *Object (Déjeuner en fourrure)* (1936) or Lee Miller's disturbing photograph of an amputated breast (c. 1929) as meditations on the still-life tradition. Under "Landscape" we find works that reveal sexual imagery hidden in nature and landforms—Colquhoun's *Scylla* (1938) and *Tree Anatomy* (1942) are explicitly phallic and vaginal, respectively—while "Interior" includes doorways (as in Varo's *Insomnia* [1947]), hallways and staircases (as in Tanning's *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* [1943]), and beds (as in Švankmajerová's *Bed* [1976]). In the latter a white bedcovering is folded back to reveal a pink interior suggestive of labia in a way that seems to have less in common with domestic interiors than with sexual double entendres, like Slinger's *Read My Lips* (1973), a photocollage in which two mouths surround female genitalia in a kind of visual-semantic pun.

To some extent the remaining essays follow the categories introduced by Allmer. Mary Ann Caws offers an essay on the women who photographed themselves and others in their practice, especially Cahun, Maar and Miller. There are not many new observations here, but the essay is an interesting reminder that the artists were often each other's subjects, indicating less reliance on the trope of muse and more on sheer friendship. Roger Cardinal's meditation on the "Landscape" category begins with the mystery of unusual and sacred places, which he sees as a "natural surreality" that artists like Agar and Miller could exploit through mimicry (39), and ends with a provocative question as to whether "the female sensibility is more inclined to envisage the sacred as a plenitude, in contrast to a male prospect of tragic yearning and a desperate vacuum" (44). It would have been interesting to follow that up.

Katharine Conley very capably describes the "Interior" category, concluding that those women artists who used house imagery did so to tread a liminal space between safety and uneasiness, between "both the creative potential in a house's ordinariness and its most stifling propensities" (53). Alyce Mahon explores "Still-Life" with particular emphasis on Oppenheim and Kahlo—for example, linking the latter to the Spanish tradition—but she also provides a few passing remarks of interest concerning Cahun, Parent, and Woodman (whose *From the three kinds of melon in four kinds of light series* [1975-78] seems more of a commentary on Kahlo's *Still Life with Watermelons* (1953) than on "male surrealists' framing of woman," as the author remarks (62).

Georgiana M. M. Colvile departs from Allmer's categories (unless she intends her essay as a subset of "Fantasy") with a summary of animal representations in women's art. The predictable standouts here are Carrington, Fini and Rimmington, but there are additional allusions to Bridgwater and Penrose. The final essay also departs from Allmer's taxonomy with a useful commentary on the Czech women Surrealists Toyen and the much less known Medková and Švankmajerová. Indeed, some of the least familiar material appears in this section. The book also includes a full list of the works in the exhibition, biographies of the artists and essayists, and a selected bibliography.

Since one of the goals of the exhibition and book is to show that women's Surrealism cannot be constrained by the historical circumstances of "classic," i.e., Bretonian/Parisian, Surrealism, I find it slightly regrettable that there are several artists who are never included in such surveys who might well have been. One such is the Hungarian-born Canadian Susana Wald, some of whose paintings are reminiscent of Kay Sage's. Canadian P. K. Page's later paintings are arguably inspired by Surrealism, and she deserves greater international attention outside of

her home country. Australian Joy Hester's work is less obviously Surrealist, but she is often mentioned in the context of the movement's influence on Australian modernism, especially the Angry Penguins group. As far as gaps are concerned, since one of Breton's strategies was to identify important Surrealist predecessors, I wonder if a similar strategy might be to point out Surrealist women artists *avant-la-lettre*. I would offer for readers' consideration Hannah Maynard (1834–1918) of Victoria, BC, Canada, who exploited double exposures and other trick effects to create bizarre photographic self-portraits that read as a kind of Surrealist-Victorian spiritualism. Maynard's approach is clearly related to the Victorian-era photocollages recently lionized by a major exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, but the latter are merely quaint in comparison with Maynard's proto-surrealist, existential yearning.[2]

Despite these quibbles, the book is well worth seeking out. It's reasonably thorough and a very handsome addition to any reader's collection of books on women and modern art, gender studies, and the like. ●

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Notes

1. The exhibition ran from Sept. 26, 2009 to Jan. 10, 2010.
2. Organized by the Art Institute of Chicago's associate curator of photography, Elizabeth Siegel, "Playing with Pictures: The Art of Victorian Photocollage" ran from Feb. 2, to May 9, 2010, in the Met's Howard Gilman Gallery and from June 5 to Sept. 5, 2010, at the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto.

Surreal Friends, Leonora Carrington, Remedios Varo and Kati Horna

By Stefan van Raay, Joanna Moorhead and Teresa Arcq
Lund Humphries and Pallant House Gallery, 2010

Reviewed by Pamela H. Simpson



Fig. 1. Leonora Carrington, *The House Opposite (La Maison En Face)* (1945), tempera on panel, 13" x 32 1/4". Edward James Foundation, UK.

Over the last few years, a number of exhibits and biographical studies have brought increasing attention to the surrealists Leonora Carrington and Remedios Varo, but someone looking at the title of this book might ask, "Who is Horna?" The answer is that she was a photographer, a close friend and a collaborator with the other two women. All were expatriates in Mexico City, having fled the horrors of World War II, and it was there that they formed their "surreal friendship."

Written to accompany a 2010 exhibit, the book is a well-illustrated collection of essays that offers a fascinating look at how friendship helped these three women build new lives in the New World. It is also the story of how that friendship and their new host country enabled them to find their mature voices as surrealist artists.

Carrington is perhaps the best known of the three. Born in 1917, she is the only one still living and her interviews with the authors contributed greatly to this volume. She also is, ironically, better known in Mexico and the United States than in her native Great Britain, something the organizers hope this exhibit will help to change. It opened last June at the Pallant House Gallery in Chichester, England, before moving on in September to the Sainsbury Center for the Visual Arts at East Anglia University in Norwich, where it closed in December.

Carrington grew up in a repressive, upper crust, Anglo-Irish family that was horrified by her rebelliousness. After being expelled from several boarding schools, she was finally permitted to study art in London; but much to her family's dismay, she not only championed the new surrealist art, she met and fell in love with one of its leaders, Max Ernst. Escaping to Paris with him in 1937, she plunged into the heady, avant-garde artistic circles that included Picasso, Dalí, Breton, Duchamp, and Miró, among others. Very pretty, charming, highly intelligent and clearly talented, she made the most of it before war intervened. Ernst was interred; she fled to Spain where she had an emotional breakdown and was briefly committed to a mental hospital where she suffered even worse horrors. Her parents hired people to track her down and force her return, but with the help of a Mexican diplomat, she escaped again. The diplomat, Renato Leduc, married her and used his status to secure their departure papers; but while they waited passage, they were embarrassed to find among their fellow refugees Ernst and his new lover, Peggy Guggenheim. It worked out cordially enough in the end, and Guggenheim even included Carrington in several exhibits at her Art of This Century Gallery once they were all in New York.

In 1943, Carrington and Leduc left for Mexico City where she has remained to this day.

Remedios Varo (1908-63) was born in Spain to much more supportive parents. Her father, an engineer, was particularly encouraging of Varo's studies. In art school (the same one Dalí attended), she discovered surrealism; later she married a fellow student and made her way to Barcelona, where she met the well-known surrealist poet Benjamin Péret. Shedding the first husband, she followed Péret to Paris and she too was thrust into the center of the surrealist art world. Both Varo and Carrington were, to some extent, "*femmes-enfants*" to their much older and well-established partners, Ernst and Péret. Women were more often thought of as "muses" than as creators in André Breton's male-dominated circle. But these were happy, exciting times, that is, until the war came. Both Varo and Péret were briefly imprisoned; they escaped to Mexico in 1941.

Kati Horna (1912-2000) was born Katerine Deutsch, in Hungary, child of well-off upper-middle-class Jewish parents. She studied photography because her mother thought she ought to have a means of making her own living; but like the others, she was also caught up in the avant-garde of her day and arrived in Paris in 1933. One of her childhood friends, Robert Capa, the well-known photographer, was already there. Another was Chiki Weisz who managed Capa's studio at the time. When the Spanish Civil War broke out, both she and Capa covered it as photojournalists. While Capa may have briefly been a lover, it was in Spain that she would meet her life-long companion, José Horna. He was serving as a map maker for the Republican side. When the Nationalists captured him, she daringly helped him escape and they returned to Paris; but without papers they feared his arrest, so they threw themselves on the mercy of the Mexican Embassy. Mexican policy at the time was very supportive for those who had fought on the Republican side, so in 1939 they sailed to Mexico.

By 1943, then, all three women and their companions were not only in Mexico City, they also were living in the same neighborhood. The expatriate community was small and closely-knit. Varo and Carrington had previously met in Paris; Chiki Weisz, Horna's friend, was a connection for all three. When he and Carrington married in 1946, it cemented the relationships. Eventually they would all live within a stone's throw of each other.

In her essay, "Surreal Friends," Joanna Moorhead (a journalist who is also a relative of Carrington's) lays out the basis for that friendship. Separated from their European families, they formed a new, extended one. Daily visits to each other's houses, helping with children, sharing in discussions and outings, they built a close relationship that often centered on their kitchens. "Domesticity seemed to free the Surreal Friends," says Moorhead, in contrast to what it meant to many women (76). Safe in Mexico and free of the stifling mores they had grown up with, the three friends shaped marriage and motherhood to their advantage. It was a creative inspiration, not a limiting burden. Carrington thought the years of caring for her two young sons were among her most productive. All three women loved cooking and found in their exploration of recipes the same sort of alchemy they found in their art.

Moorhead is quick to point out that part of their success was that all three eventually had supportive companions. Benjamin Péret returned to France after the war, but Varo found a new partner in Walter Gruen, a man who would devote his life to caring for her and promoting her work. In Paris the women had been "muses" to the surrealists, but in Mexico they found their own voices.

The sources for their art were many. Some came from life experiences such as Carrington's grandmother's Celtic tales; others came from their shared intellectual interests in alchemy, witchcraft, magic, and the occult. Curator Teresa Arcq compares the work of Carrington and Varo in her essay, noting that while it is similar, Varo's is more linear, geometric, and based on an academic technique, while Carrington's is more painterly and freer in form. Both loved early Renaissance painting and the work of Bosch, but both transformed their sources into minutely detailed, fantastical creations that had their own individual character. Quoting Carrington's biographer, Susan Aberth, Arcq reminds us that the kitchen, a frequent subject in the artists' work (Fig. 1) as well as a place for their daily gatherings, also was historically a site for magical practices in many cultures.

In 1963, the friendship suffered a terrible blow when first José Horna and then Varo died unexpectedly. They were only in their fifties and the survivors, Kati Horna, Carrington, Weisz, and Gruen were devastated by grief. But it also drew them closer together and Carrington and Horna began collaborating on a series of projects.

Another friend and supporter for the group was the eccentric Englishman Edward James. Sharon-Michi Kusunoki, curator of his collection, contributes a chapter on the rich correspondence that survives between Carrington and James. He was very important to her as a patron and helped arrange her 1948 exhibit at the Pierre Matisse Gallery in New York. Many of the Carrington paintings in British museums today came through James's collection.

Carrington and Varo were part of Mexico's avant-garde, and with the feminist movement's rediscovery of women artists their reputations have continued to grow. But Horna was never as well known, partly because she rejected publicity and refused to exhibit. She was a professional photographer doing magazine work and teaching to earn her living, and not even her daughter knew about the surrealist montages Horna had been creating since the 1930s. It was not until after her death that this rich cache came to light. This exhibit was one of the first opportunities for the public to discover the photographs. Some are of Carrington, posing with home-made masks and costumes; some are bizarre portraits such as the man in the zebra costume playing the violin; others are collages and montages from the Spanish Civil War.

It is clear that these three women forged a lasting bond in Mexico that helped them find their own artistic identities. It is a story and a body of

work that is only now becoming available to a wider audience thanks to impressive publications such as this. Well-written and lavishly illustrated, the book's only limitation is that it is too short. It introduces the subject, but leaves you longing for more. •

Pamela H. Simpson, a Professor of Art History at Washington and Lee University, is a long-time reviewer for *WAJ*. Her book, *Icons of Abundance: The History of Corn Palaces, Crop Art, and Butter Sculpture, 1870-1930,* will be published in 2012.

Imagining la Chica Moderna

by Joanne Hershfield
Duke University Press, 2008

Becoming Modern, Becoming Tradition

By Adriana Zavala
Penn State Press, 2010

Reviewed by Alison Fraunhar

Under the heavy hand of state patriarchy that has characterized Latin American political and social life since the Conquest (at least), women have played a role more symbolic than self-actualized, often relegated to the sphere of representation within the constricted binary of virgin/whore. Women in Latin America were, historically, seldom acknowledged as autonomous agents, in charge of creating and performing their own identities. Racialized, classed, sexualized, women have been recruited to serve variously as signs of nation, of nature, of either sexual licentiousness or purity, and as bulwarks of family and tradition. These figurations, however limiting, have lent themselves very handily to the production of powerful and enduring icons: consider Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, Malantzin, also known as *la Malinche*, Evita, Carmen Miranda, and Frida Kahlo.

Scholars have been working to overcome this essentializing view of Latin American women since Jean Franco's groundbreaking publication *Plotting Women* (1989). Often focusing (as do the essays in *Plotting Women)* on women as cultural producers, literary scholars and art historians have made substantial strides in remediating the elision of women as citizens and cultural producers in the historical record. Recent scholarly methodologies such as visual culture have facilitated the analysis of visual systems ranging from fine art to advertising, and yielded valuable insight into the semiotics of images and representations of women across a range of media. Two recent entries into the discursive field of Latin America visual culture, *Imagining la Chica Moderna* by Joanne Hershfield and *Becoming Modern, Becoming Tradition* by Adriana Zavala, take different approaches to analyze the representation of women in modern Mexico during the decades bookending the Mexican Revolution (1910-20). Both projects move beyond the reiteration of iconicity to show how visual culture worked to visualize and recruit Mexican women into regimes of modernity as subjects, producers, consumers, and symbols.

In *Imagining la Chica Moderna,* rather than choosing emblematic figures through which to map out debates about national, gendered and racialized identities, Hershfield deploys depictions of women that circulated in popular visual culture—newspapers, film, and periodicals—to theorize how the understanding and representation of modernity, gender, and class contributed to (and contested) visions of national identity. This far-reaching and lively project seeks to unpack mediated and performative strategies through which modern Mexican (female) identity is formed and visualized: fashion, work (both in and outside of the home), and in the popular media. Hershfield frames her analysis of burgeoning female subjectivity through issues of class, race, and geography: which women dress as flappers, and which as *chinas poblanas* (folkloric rural peasant girls), and when and why; who works in a modern office as a secretary, who as a *vendedora* or street-vendor, and who in the agricultural sector. Hershfield historicizes these subject positions, so that we see how they are produced and populated as constructions of modernity. Instead of focusing on individuals who



Fig. 1. Cover, *Revista de Revistas*, May 24, 1924. Courtesy Nettie Lee Bension Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin.

exemplify these occupations, she looks at representations of them, constructing an idealized "modern girl" along lines of class, race, and, to a certain extent, urban/rural location.

Both Hershfield and Zavala concentrate their analyses on types of modern feminine identity in Mexico, focusing on the opposition between the *china poblana* and other popular types and the modern, international flapper style eagerly adopted by modern young women in Mexico (1924; Fig. 1). In *Becoming Modern Becoming Tradition*, Zavala complicates what has often been too easily registered as a simplistic and reductive opposition by demonstrating the dynamic movement between the two poles, showing how these positions—mutually reinforcing as well as unstable and porous—were carefully constructed. To do this, she analyzes the representation (and in some cases, self-representation) of women in painting, literature, cinema, and the popular press, demonstrating how constructions of femininity fulfilled nationalist, modernist, and subjective criteria. These rep-

resentations reveal the imbrication of race and class produced and categorized through cultural and political institutions controlled by white, bourgeois Euro-Mexicans.

Zavala considers the story of Maria Bibiana Uriarte, a rural indigenous girl who won the daily newspaper *El Universal*'s national beauty contest for indigenous women, "*La India Bonita*" in 1921. The case of "*La India Bonita*" has been much studied as a popular iteration of the revolutionary campaign to nationalize *mestiza* (mixed European and indigenous) identity and "*la raza cosmica*" (the cosmic race) as exemplars of unique Mexican identity. Zavala's analysis goes beyond face value to reveal the gap between representation and reality: that while *mestizaje* may have been the official face of post-revolutionary Mexico, power and control of discourse remained firmly in Euro-Mexican hands. Uriarte and Frida Kahlo appear on the spectrum of modern Mexican identity as if in a binary composed of oppositions: rural/urban, bourgeois/peasant, educated/uneducated, European/indigenous. Zavala shows not only how each of these identities was constructed, but also how they served patriarchal nationalist agendas: "*La India Bonita*" (not, as Zavala points out, Bibiana Uriarte as a person) did so by embodying an idealized indigenous purity for the popular press, and Kahlo did so by embodying the conflicted space of Mexican female agency, produced and performed at the intersection of gender and race, motherhood and *mexicanidad* (Mexicanness), issues with which Kahlo is indelibly identified.

As the unavoidable 'zero point' in the archive of modern Mexican female identity, both Hershfield and Zavala reckon with Kahlo's well-known appropriation of the *Tehuana* costume, and they do this as a means to engage larger cultural discourses. Kahlo is customarily understood to have adopted this style as a way of proclaiming her specific Mexican identity in preference to the Parisian-influenced cosmopolitan style more popular among bourgeois intellectuals and artists at the time, as both a sign of her embrace of *mexicanidad* and a way of standing out. However, Hershfield and Zavala both note that by the late nineteenth century, well before Kahlo identified with the Tehuana persona in the 1930s, fashionable (white, bourgeois) Mexican women were photographed dressed in *Tehuana*, *china poblana* and other 'exotic' (i.e., indigenous) costumes. In addition to Kahlo's performance of traditional Mexican femininity, Zavala also considers Kahlo's cross-dressing in photographs and self-portraits as well as a photograph (featured on the book's cover) of Kahlo dressed in a contemporary short dress and silk stockings to foreground her identity play.

Zavala rejects the mythology of Kahlo's self-fashioning as simultaneously an expression of a unique individual sensibility and as a metonym of Mexican feminine identity. She notes that Kahlo's contemporary (but evidently not her friend), the artist Maria Izquierdo, posed for photographs, as did Kahlo, in both *Tehuana* and modern clothes. Comparing the two women artists teases out a fascinating contestation between representation and reality, national vs. international pictorial language, performance vs. lived life. For example, during her lifetime, Izquierdo enjoyed greater prominence as an artist than did Kahlo, although this renown was supplanted by Kahlo's burgeoning reputation in later decades. But Izquierdo was an artist who lived rather than represented modern Mexican femininity: she was a divorced mother of three children who supported herself from her artwork. She was a member of the *Contemporaneos*, a group of important Mexican artists who have been overshadowed in the historical record by the more overtly political artists of the revolution, especially the artists affiliated with the Mexican mural movement. Zavala's discussion of the more subjective and abstract aesthetics and interest in international artistic developments shared by the *Contemporaneos* offers a corrective counter-narrative to the dominant story of Mexican modern art. While artists of both movements were intensely interested in Mexican cultural identity, the *Contemporaneos* rejected the realist doctrine of the Mexican Renaissance, producing works whose sense of cultural identity was rooted in the artists' exploration of subjectivity and perception rather than in the deployment of explicit signifiers of the nation.

Hershfield takes up the relation between fashion and discourses of modernity in Mexican culture, showing how class and race determined modes of dress, hairstyles, and public behavior. It was considered quite advanced, shocking even, for young bourgeois women to cut their hair and wear short dresses (a style known as "*flapperista*"); but it was out of the question for *mestiza*, indigenous, and working women who were expected to embody traditions of Mexican femininity, to do so. Although she discusses advertising as a pervasive mechanism for the interpellation of women (across lines of race and class) into modern Mexican society, Hershfield rejects the notion that women in modern Mexico were merely passive consumers and locates agency and pleasure in the self-fashioning of identity.

Becoming Modern and *Imagining la Chica Moderna* diverge in several respects. While *Becoming Modern* closely analyzes and reframes narratives of Mexican art history, *Imagining la Chica Moderna* does not address fine art, but instead discusses modern domesticity through the analysis of popular periodicals and advertising. Both devote chapters to the central place of cinema in the national (and international) visual imaginary. Hershfield discusses the trope of the tragic/erotic *mestiza* in the 1931 Mexican film *Santa* as what she calls a privileged site of modernity; *Santa* naturalizes the trajectory of the journey of the young *mestiza*—from rural/innocent to urban/corrupted. Zavala problematizes the indigenization of actress Dolores Del Rio in the eponymous film classic *Maria Candelaria* (1943). Zavala parses this white actress portraying the native girl—a task complicated by the iconicity of both film and star, and the film narrative that flaunts an epistemological gap between the "real" Maria Candelaria (an Indian girl of eighteen) and the image of her painted by the film's narrator, a white painter (and performed by a white actress in her early forties). The incommensurability of indigeneity with the modernizing national project haunts both films.

Each of these studies benefits from recent methodological interventions that allow the authors to make links across media and interrogate cultural narratives of identity, revealing the complicated network of relations that produced and normalized the representation of women in post-revolutionary Mexico. Zavala and Hershfield's interests overlap and diverge, as they analyze cultural production ranging from newspapers, postcards and popular cinema to modernist photography and painting to construct and position their subjects: white, bourgeois, *mestiza*, indigenous and working women.

Although these books deal with overlapping issues in modernity and the construction of female identity in Mexico, their methodologies, objects and sources differ in ways that underscore disciplinary difference. Zavala situates *Becoming Modern* within the field of art history, and a substantial part of the book is dedicated to rigorous analysis of the representation and self-representation of women in fine art supported by abundant color and black and white plates. *Imagining la chica moderna* is a work of cultural studies that deploys the methods of visual culture in the analysis of advertising and editorial images published in the popular press. Both books draw extensively from primary sources and advance original readings, and make significant contributions to the expanded field of visual study through their rich use of a range of media. They each seek to tease out profound cultural meanings embedded in images and their particular contribution is to combine creative approaches to archival material with theoretical rigor, yielding fresh perspectives that will surely prove to be models of scholarship for years to come. •

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Dada's Women

by Ruth Hemus
Yale University Press, 2009

Reviewed by Melissa Johnson

Five women who participated in the Dada movement (1916-22) in three of its European centers are the focus of *Dada's Women*. Author Ruth Hemus devotes a chapter to each: Emmy Hennings and Sophie Taeuber in Zurich, Hannah Höch in Berlin, and Suzanne Duchamp and Céline Arnauld in Paris. She positions both Hennings and Taeuber as performing "Dada bodies" (24-30, 63-70). Hennings, who played a major role in establishing the Cabaret Voltaire, was an actress, singer, dancer, and published author of expressionist poetry and prose during the ten years before she arrived in Zurich with Hugo Ball in 1915. Hemus examines Taeuber's photographic self-portraits with her Dada dolls, the marionettes she made in 1918, as well as her activities as an expressionist avant-garde dancer. Hemus's discussion of Höch's photomontages, collages, and Dada dolls focuses on their political content and representations of women. The chapter on Duchamp discusses the aesthetic and conceptual concerns she shared with other artists, her paintings and collages with word-image plays, and her collaborations with her husband, Jean Crotti, which led to the creation of the "Tabu Dada" movement. Finally, Hemus introduces to an English-speaking audience the poetry and prose of Arnauld, a heretofore unknown French female Dadaist. While Hemus here presents a richly detailed account of these women's Dadaist activities, some notable shortcomings frustrated this reader.

One of Hemus's complaints is that past discussions of women Dadaists have focused too much on biographical aspects to the detriment of their work, and she cites Hennings as a prime example. Hemus situates Hennings as a performer of the bohemian avant-garde whose work subverted the bourgeois mentality of the early twentieth century. Writing about a nun's costume Hennings wore for a 1912 performance, Hemus stresses the radical effect this would have had on an audience. In her desire to move away from biography, she misses an opportunity to account for the complexity that biography can bring to interpretation when she fails to mention that Hennings and Ball left Dada in 1917, turning from the radical avant-garde to Catholicism, to which Hennings had converted in 1911.[1] Instead of investigating how this might have influenced her playing this role, Hemus remarks on how Hennings altered the traditional costume of a nun (27). Hennings, like Taeuber, Höch, Duchamp, and Arnauld, was caught up in a complicated navigation of women's roles in the early twentieth century. This was certainly the case for Höch, who sat on the cusp of the Wilhelmine and Weimar eras, and did not give up her bourgeois upbringing entirely but found a way to position herself within Dada yet work



Fig. 1. Suzanne Duchamp, *Le Readymade malheureux de Marcel* (*Marcel's Unhappy Ready-made*) (1920), oil on canvas, 31 7/8" x 23 5/8".

outside of it, too.[2] Hennings, in contrast, was unsuccessful in resolving her Bohemian lifestyle with her Catholic desires and made a complete break with Dada. As Hemus's desire to steer clear of biography prevents her from analyzing aspects of Hennings, I suggest that this applies to the other women in this study, thereby also preventing her from fully acknowledging the complexity of their roles as artists in the Dada movement.

The chapters on Duchamp and Arnauld are by far the best, providing close and illuminating readings of both women's work. Hemus discusses Duchamp's paintings and collages as works that demonstrate a witty repartee between word and image and shows how Duchamp held her own against the work of her brother, Marcel. Hemus's descriptions of her role in his "Bottle-Drying Rack Ready-Made" (1914) and the exchange manifest through the production of Marcel's "Unhappy Ready-Made" (1919) and Suzanne's piece made in response, "Marcel's Unhappy Ready-Made (1920; Fig. 1) demonstrate Suzanne's significant role in the idea and creation of the Readymade. Likewise, Hemus's account of Arnauld's writings, which were well known by Dadaists at the time, also succeeds in making visible the work by a woman who has been all but invisible in the historical accounts of Dada.

Höch is a well known woman Dadaist for whom a large body of scholarship already exists, and Hemus offers little new information, but she does include some misinformation, for example, stating that Höch's relationship with Til Brugman lasted three years, when in fact it lasted nine. More important, however, Hemus has ignored the work of other scholars on the breadth of Höch's oeuvre, such as Maria Makela, who seeks to "disentangle Höch from the knot of Dada"[3] by demonstrating that while Dada was important to Höch, it was not the only activity in which she was involved from 1918 to 1922. Makela and other scholars have written on Höch's handicraft designs and publications on that topic.[4] While Hemus does discuss at length several of Höch's collages that incorporate handicraft materials and Höch's work for the Ullstein Verlag creating handicraft and fashion designs, she neither discusses the designs nor her role in that practice. A greater acknowledgement of this recent scholarship would have allowed Hemus to engage in a discussion with other Höch scholars and to emphasize, as they have, the paradoxical role in which Höch found herself placed in relation to her male Dadaist colleagues.

By attempting to align her account with Linda Nochlin's 1971 essay, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists,"[5] Hemus opens up a Pandora's box: Asking, "Why have there been no great women Dadaists?," Hemus then asks: "*Were* there women Dadaists?"—a disingenuous question, as it has long been known among scholars that women were involved with that movement.[6] It is also well known that the men who dominated the movement generally gave these women short shrift in their historical accounts, and that subsequent scholars used these accounts to write their histories.

As feminist and gender theory and studies have evolved, Dada's historical narrative has changed to account for the participation of women. Granted, with the exception of Höch, the extent of the participation of these women is not generally well known. So, how would one go about writing a more comprehensive history of women's participation in Dada today? Given the difficulties of Dada, one might look to Griselda Pollock's call for a "polylogue," rather than separate accounts for female and male artists.[7] While the 2005 Dada exhibition and catalogue edited by Leah Dickerman goes further than any other in presenting an integrated history of Dada,[8] equal representation of Dadaist women alongside the men has yet to be achieved.

What I would propose is a call to shift the terms by which these women are discussed. Rather than begin, as Hemus does, with a recitation of the negative remarks made by male Dadaists about these women, what would happen if an account of the women Dadaists began and was structured differently: focusing on their own accounts and a discussion of their work and activities? This is not a call to eliminate any mention of the misogynistic attitudes held toward these women, but to examine these women Dadaists through their own work and to acknowledge the difficult position these women sometimes had with respect to their male colleagues. It would be a celebration of how these women navigated their way through the "mess" of Dada on their own terms.[9] Given these reservations, *Dada's Women* helps to sow the seeds for a more complex and sophisticated history of these women and the many other women who participated in the movement.

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Notes

1. Hubert van den Berg recounts Hennings's first conversion and her expressed wish to become a nun. See his "The Star of the Cabaret Voltaire: The Other Life of Emmy Hennings," in, Karl Riha, ed. *The History of Dada: Dada Zurich: A Clown's Game from Nothing* (New York: G. K. Hall, 1996), 78-79.
2. For a discussion of this, see my "Weimar Cultural Production: Visual Pleasure and Radical Critique in the Work of Hannah Höch," eds., Paula Birnbaum and Anna Navakov, *Essays on Women's Artistic and Cultural Contributions 1919-1939* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2009), 67-81.
3. Maria Makela, "By Design: The Early Work of Hannah Höch in Context," in Peter Boswell and Maria Makela, eds. *The Photomontages of Hannah Höch* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1996), 49.
4. Höch's designs appeared from 1916 to 1921 in Alexandre Koch's journal, *Stickerei- und Spitzen-Rundschau* [Embroidery and Lace Review]; see ibid., also Bettina Schaske, "Schnitt-muster der Kunst," in Ralf Burmeister, ed., *Hannah Höch: Aller Anfang ist DADA!* (Berlinische Galerie, Hatje Cantz, 2007); and Kay Klein Kallos, "A Woman's Revolution: The Relationship Between Design and the Avant-Garde in the Work of Hannah Höch, 1912-1922" (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Wisconsin, Madison, 1994).
5. Nochlin, Linda, "Why have there been no great women artists," (1971), in *Women, art, and power, and other essays*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1988).

6. See for example, Thomas F. Rugh, "Emmy Hennings and the Emergence of Zurich Dada," in *WAJ*, vol. 2, no. 1 (Spring-Summer, 1981): 1-6.
7. Griselda Pollock, *Differencing the canon: feminist desire and the writing of art's histories*. (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).
8. *Dada: Zurich, Berlin, Hannover, Cologne, New York, Paris*, ed. Leah Dickerman. (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art and New York: D.A.P., 2005).
9. Maud Lavin, "The mess of history or the unclean Hannah Höch," in *Inside the visible: an elliptical traverse of 20th century art: in, or, and from the feminine*. ed. Catherine de Zegher (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996.)

Child of the Fire: Mary Edmonia Lewis and the Problem of Art History's Black and Indian Subject

By Kirsten Pai Buick
Duke University Press, 2010

Reviewed by Jennifer Wingate

The opening line of this book on the American neoclassical sculptor Edmonia Lewis echoes the passion of *The Godfather*'s opening scene. "I believe in art history," writes author Kirsten Pai Buick.[1] She believes it can make a difference and believes in its tools and methods. Her dedication has wrought an illuminating study of Lewis's ideal sculpture and its relationship to the dominant ideologies of the cults of sentiment and true womanhood in nineteenth-century America. Taking the allusion further, her dedication also demands an unflinching reappraisal of the discipline and how it has failed. Anyone who believes in art history as Buick does should read this book.

Buick explains in her preface that *Child of the Fire: Mary Edmonia Lewis and the Problem of Art History's Black and Indian Subject* is really two books in one. One examines Lewis's career and offers a thematic discussion of the extant body of her ideal sculptures created in Rome between 1866 and 1876. The second is a "verbalization of the ongoing dialogue [Buick] had with art history while studying Lewis and more generally while studying 'American' and African American art historiography" (xiv). By devoting the first section of each chapter to an analysis of how art history has approached (and failed) the African American subject, Buick's interpretations are not fully disclosed until the second half of each chapter in which she addresses specific works in Lewis's oeuvre. The juxtaposition between these two art histories—one irresponsible and one responsive—underscores the importance of Buick's contextual approach.

Art history has been unresponsive, Buick contends, to the complexity of Lewis's agency. Her book's title pays homage to Ralph Waldo Emerson's declaration that we are all creatures of context or "children of the fire." Buick takes art historians to task for interpreting art made by African Americans as illustrations of their makers' fixed identities. Instructive examples of this phenomenon are two 1990s texts by Joseph D. Ketner and David Lubin about the landscape artist Robert S. Duncanson. Neither study adequately situates Duncanson's work in relation to nineteenth-century American landscape painting, but Buick finds Lubin's interpretation to be the more troublesome of the two. His reading of Duncanson's *lack* of black subjects as the artist's denial of blackness and desire to pass for white is symptomatic, Buick writes, of "the need for race to be visible, coherent, and legible at all levels of culture but especially in works of art" (41).

The "problem" of Buick's subtitle thus has multiple meanings. Methodologically speaking, the author invokes art historian Michael Baxandall by treating objects as "solutions to problems in situations."[2] She attempts to solve the problems of how Lewis's sculptures came into being and of how art histories are constructed (32). Art history, she writes, has a "Negro Problem" (and an "Indian Problem" and a "Woman Question"). Here the author takes abolitionist Frederick Douglass's rhetorical lead by challenging the discipline's framing of race and gender as problems. In this framework, art history always expects African Americans (and Native Americans and women) to affirm their difference from a normalized notion of whiteness (and maleness) (32). These problems, Buick illustrates, are alive and well in the twenty-first-century.



Fig. 1. Edmonia Lewis, *Forever Free* (*The Morning of Liberty*) (1867), marble, 41 1/4" x 22" x 17". Howard University Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C..

Buick lays the groundwork for her study with an overview of Lewis's career, which she is careful to distinguish from the artist's biography. Buick confirms that family support, opportunities at Oberlin College, in Boston, and in Rome, and good timing were all critical elements in Lewis's career. She also probes these experiences to give us a more nuanced understanding of the cultural forces that helped shape Lewis's art. Buick reminds us of what educational parity meant at the time. Most women at Oberlin studied in the Young Ladies' Department where they were trained for the duties of the domestic sphere. Lewis's behavior

ultimately did not conform to the College's expectations of female propriety, and an incident of misbehavior resulted in a trial, expulsion, and a violent attack in which Lewis was left for dead. Yet Buick suggests that the artist's four years at Oberlin played a formative role in impressing upon her the tenets of the cult of true womanhood, and the values instilled by this education would inform her later sculpture.

Buick also tempers the idealized picture art historians have painted of Lewis's Boston years. The timing of the artist's move to Boston in 1864 was fortuitous. Debates over emancipation helped her garner attention and support from abolitionist patrons. Buick compares published reviews of Lewis's sculpture with private letters by the same writers to reveal tensions in those patron/artist relationships. In one letter Lydia Marie Childs defends her decision not to review Lewis's sculpture *Forever Free* (1867; Fig. 1), revealing the pressure abolitionists felt to unconditionally promote African Americans. Buick shows how the conflicts that emerge in these letters allow us to understand "the private machinations behind the public façade of patronage and abolitionism" and that "[e]ach side had something to gain" (18). This last point is important given the many accusations of opportunism that Lewis has borne.

While nineteenth-century commentators viewed Lewis and her sculpture as exotic, later art historians have interpreted them as subversive. Scholars in recent decades, for example, have read the female figure in *Forever Free* as a subtle commentary on the continued struggles of African American women after emancipation. Buick argues that Lewis's sculptural group was not a feminist statement, but rather asserted the solidarity of African American families at the expense of expanded rights for women (55). That the sculpture was presented to the abolitionist minister Reverend Leonard A. Grimes, known for his work in reuniting families broken by slavery, supports this interpretation.

Moreover, the manner in which Lewis chose to depict the women in her ideal sculptures exposes the artist's attempt "to extricate African/American and Native American women from the representational burden of race" (210). Her decision to "whitewash" her female figures, Buick explains, was influenced by the cult of true womanhood in which neither African- nor Native-American women could be considered wholly female (71). As Buick's discussion of Lewis's *The Death of Cleopatra* further illustrates, nineteenth-century audiences read subtle physiognomic clues as signifiers of racial difference. Interestingly, the fallacy of Victorian pseudo sciences is highlighted by contradictory nineteenth-century descriptions of the artist herself, descriptions that Buick shows were used to further their authors' individual agendas (138).

Buick addresses race and sculptural representation in Chapters 3 and 4, which focus on Lewis's Indian works and *The Death of Cleopatra*, respectively. Unlike the monumental *Cleopatra*, many of her ideal works based on Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *Song of Hiawatha* are small and collectible. Buick writes that Lewis "mass-produced" busts of Hiawatha and Minnehaha (117). The paucity of records likely accounts for why the author does not explain what she means by mass-production here, but a fuller discussion of what is known about Lewis's technique and studio practices would be useful. Issues of technique and labor would be equally relevant in the context of *The Death of Cleopatra* (1875), a sculpture that took Lewis four years to make. Its sheer scale (60 x 43 x 33 inches) points to a different kind of ambition at work in the career of the artist, who was reduced to tears of relief when it was selected for display at the Philadelphia Centennial in 1876 (187).

The first part of Chapter 4 finds issue with studies of *The Death of Cleopatra* that fall into the two marginalizing paradigms mentioned above—that which exoticizes Lewis and that which reinvents her as a feminist. Descriptions of Lewis's sculpture by Albert Boime and Judith Wilson are so contradictory that they can only exist to further their authors' respective agendas (as the 19th-century descriptions of Lewis herself did) (134). Buick contends that Lewis's decision to model Cleopatra on coin portraits made during the queen's reign ultimately reflects her understanding of how a "black" Cleopatra would have claimed Cleopatra's sexuality for black women and reaffirmed racialist beliefs in black female pathology (202). Her Cleopatra is dead and therefore free, a final emancipation image that marked a turning point in Lewis's career, after which she turned to religious subjects.

This book is so tantalizing because, as Buick herself concludes, Lewis remains an enigma. After *The Death of Cleopatra* was exhibited in 1876, she slowly disappeared from the correspondence of her Boston patrons and fellow expatriates in Rome. The history of this monumental work itself, rediscovered in the 1980s, would be an interesting epilogue.[3] The book itself is amply illustrated with well-chosen reproductions. Despite the difficulties presented by the lack of archival materials, the quality of this study presents a challenge to art historians to avoid "conversing with stereotype" by doing our cultural and contextual homework. •

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Notes

1. "I believe in America," is the opening line spoken by Amerigo Bonasera in Francis Ford Coppola's 1972 movie. In this scene, Bonasera tells his story while visiting Don Corleone to seek vengeance on the men who beat his daughter.
2. Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Interpretation of Pictures* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1985).
3. Today the sculpture is in the collection of the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington, D.C. After the Philadelphia Centennial ended, the sculpture was placed at a race track in Forest Park, Illinois, at the gravesite of a horse named Cleopatra. For additional information, see the entry in the online Smithsonian Institution Research Information System (SIRIS) database.

Mrs. Delany and Her Circle

edited by Mark Laird and Alicia Weisberg-Roberts
Yale University Press, 2009

Reviewed by Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell

Even a superficial investigation into the life of Mary Delany (1700-88) would spark a very modern debate about the relationship of art and craft, religion and science, amateur and professional, and all the gender politics those labels imply. *Mrs. Delany and Her Circle* is thorough to a fault. The book and the exhibition it accompanied (at the Yale Center for British Art and Sir John Soane's Museum) constitute "the first comprehensive, academic study of her life and the first attempt to present the full range of her work," according to co-editor Alicia Weisberg-Roberts (2). The beautifully illustrated volume cannot be called a catalogue: it is not clear which of the hundreds of objects and images it reproduces were included in the exhibition. Rather, the collection of twelve interdisciplinary essays relentlessly subjects Mrs. Delany to every possible line of scholarly inquiry, making for a tome that teeters between exhaustive and exhausting.

Mary Delany (also known as Mary Granville and Mary Pendarves—she was twice widowed) left "a formidable body of work in the media of oil painting, drawing, plasterwork, shellwork, featherwork, japanning, needlework, paper-cuts, and paper collages" depicting flowers in precise scientific detail, in addition to her voluminous correspondence and an unpublished novella (1). (Unpublished until now, that is—the entire text is included in an appendix.) A prodigy of the scissors, she was a prolific, almost compulsive crafter, and an equally industrious student of the natural sciences. Despite her formidable output, "Mrs. Delany's gender and amateur status" have kept her out of the botanical and artistic canon (2).

Most students of the eighteenth century know Mrs. Delany through her letters, edited and published in 1861 by her great-grandniece, Lady Llanover. She was hardly an objective every-woman. "Plainly Mrs. Delany was unusual in her independence, resources, childlessness, connections, and sheer talent," Amanda Vickery points out (94). Furthermore, she was an enthusiastic participant in political and cultural intrigues. She operated within well established "communities of taste"—most notably the society of her friend and patroness, the Duchess of Portland, who shared her interests in art and botany, with the difference that she had untold riches to spend on them, while Mrs. Delany was blessed with family but not fortune (36).

Clarissa Campbell Orr offers a fascinating through-the-keyhole look at the world of the Georgian courtier, complete with an extensive genealogy outlining Mrs. Delany's dizzying connections. At court "families, not individuals, wielded power" (41). Despite this, birth was not everything: eighteenth-century society was actually relatively fluid, for those who knew how to navigate it. It was Mrs. Delany's greatest—unrealized—ambition to obtain a formal (meaning salaried) office in a royal household: "one of the few jobs available at court for women at the time" (41). In this context, it is understandable why her eventual rise to the role of courtier and confidant to Queen Charlotte actually "represented failure" (40).

Fashion is the thread that unites Mrs. Delany's court career, writings, embroideries, and botanical pursuits; specifically, a court petticoat worn by her, which has been preserved in fragments by her descendants (1740-41; Fig. 1). The naturalistic flowers embroidered on a black ground—an unusual color choice—prefigure Mrs. Delany's later forays into japanning and collage, also featuring realistic flowers against black backgrounds. While all the authors who discuss the petticoat concur that the embroidery is not Mrs. Delany's own work, like most women of her class and generation, she did practice embroidery. But Clare Brown points out that Mrs. Delany's many references to her needlework should be taken as "evidence of industry rather than skill" (73). She had her court clothing embroidered by professionals,



Fig. 1. Mary Pendarves (Delany), Detail of the left half of the front petticoat panel (1740-41), embroidery on satin, 41 3/8" x 69 1/8". Private collection.

although she likely designed many of the patterns herself.

The authors disagree on what hidden meaning, if any, can be found in the petticoat's floral embroidery. Were the blossoms chosen for visual effect, or to signify either loyalty or opposition? It is difficult to believe that a woman with Mrs. Delany's political and sartorial savvy would wear something deliberately ambiguous, or fail to appreciate the symbolic import of her carefully planned attire. As costume historians have long known, Mrs. Delany's letters are a mine of information about eighteenth-century fashion trends. Hannah Greig puts this seemingly idiosyncratic correspondence in the wider context of female (and male) communication. Greig undercuts the belief (as prevalent then as now) that the Hanoverian court was not interested in opulence. Indeed, many of Mrs. Delany's contemporaries also devoted long letters to what was being worn at court, and these firsthand reports constituted "a system of sociopolitical accounting: a means of mapping and monitoring the political climate of court through the unspoken signals of dress" (84). Accounts like Mrs. Delany's

> probably were compiled on the basis of a pre-court showing rather than from what was seen at the crush of the court drawing

> room itself. The care taken to ensure that reliable correspondents would receive information about the clothing worn and then broadcast that information to a broader audience testifies to the cultural significance of court attire to this elite community (89).

This "ongoing preoccupation with court clothing" is indicative of an underlying preoccupation with shifting political sympathies. Court, culture, and religion aligned in the eighteenth century. Natural history was a form of devotional; herbaria and botanical gardens constituted new Edens. (John Edmondston gives a concise and user-friendly explanation of the state of botany in the late eighteenth century.) Mrs. Delany's "sincere religious belief coupled with intellectual culture was exactly compatible with the king and queen," and epitomized the spirit of her age (59). Though Edmondston notes that "she appears to have pursued her botanical studies for no reason other than personal satisfaction," Weisberg-Roberts observes that "Mary's pietism constantly reinforced her engagement with the decorative arts" (188, 4). Female handcrafts like embroidery and shellwork brought nature into the home, bridging the secular and spiritual as well as the interior and exterior.

In 1772, Mrs. Delany mentioned in a letter to her niece—simultaneously modest and boastful—that she had "invented a new way of imitating flowers" (159). The word "imitating" is telling, as the flowers depicted in Mrs. Delany's collages—or "paper mosaicks," as she called them—are identifiable, but not rendered in the exacting detail found in botanical drawings. Mrs. Delany began her collages in 1772, at the age of 73. By 1783, her eyesight had deteriorated to the point that she could no longer continue (212). In that short timespan, she produced roughly 1,000 collages; 24 survive at Yale, 7 at Soane's Museum, and ten volumes at the British Museum. (Clearly it would not be possible to reproduce all the collages; however, one wishes for more than the handful that are included here.) Edmonston observes that "one of the more remarkable aspects of the Delany collages is that some of them feature plants only just introduced to cultivation in England," making them cutting-edge science as well as innovative art (201). Paper conservator Kohleen Reeder unveils Mrs. Delany's working process, recreating her collage technique with period tools. Mrs. Delany worked from live specimens, matching the colors and textures with colored tissue paper. She often cut without drawing, using skills honed over a lifetime of making silhouettes. Some of her collages incorporate hundreds of tiny pieces of paper, and occasionally leaves or flowers as well. Although not a true herbarium containing actual plants, the collages have not lost their color over time, as specimens in herbaria inevitably do. As Lisa Ford explains, the inscriptions on the collages are as revealing as the images, mapping "relationships between Mrs. Delany and her social circle, the great botanical collectors, the scientists and naturalists, and the nurserymen and gardeners of London," as well as patterns of eighteenth-century colonization and exploration (204).

Mrs. Delany seems to have been at her best when working in three dimensions. Her writing and drawing are amateur productions in the modern sense, not the eighteenth-century meaning of "a lover of art." As Kim Sloan notes, her drawing style is "remarkable in that there is little development or improvement" over the course of thirty years. Her drawings were labors of love, personal records of landscapes she visited (124).

Regrettably, the book presents Mrs. Delany's work in roughly chronological order, beginning with her embroidery and ending with the collages for which she is best known. Mrs. Delany herself called her collages her "life's work," and with good reason; they overshadow—and simultaneously illuminate—all that came before. Co-editor Mark Laird identifies "a borrowing of aesthetics among different handicrafts" in the eighteenth century; this is especially true in the case of a multimedia artist like Mrs. Delany, who once compared her shellwork to embroidery stitches. She is a moving target, and the authors seem to run in circles after her, overlapping each other in spite of themselves. (The elaborate chapter titles serve to obscure rather than reveal their content.) It's a frustrating and ultimately futile exercise. For example, in addition to the collages, grottoes are referenced in passing several times throughout the book; however, it's not until the eighth chapter that readers find Janice Neri's authoritative essay on grottoes. Rather than painting a picture of Mrs. Delany's life and times, the essays form a collage. Put together, they give the impression that the whole is not as great as the sum of Mrs. Delany's many parts. ●

Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell is an independent scholar and co-author of *Fashioning Fashion: European Dress in Detail, 1700-1915* (2010).

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Anne Truitt: Perception and Reflection
By Kristen Hileman
Smithsonian Institution, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, 2009

Despite her objections, it is inevitable that Anne Truitt's painted rectilinear structures would be seen within the rubric of Minimalism. However, both Hileman and essayist James Meyer show how Truitt never bought into a reductive formalist discourse, instead infusing her forms with poignant meaning. More properly (because the forms themselves did not exist prior to their meaningfulness) after initial forays into psychology and fiction, Truitt's long-standing interests in the experiences of time, space, and selfhood congealed into highly reduced yet eccentrically colored sculpture. As Hileman puts it, "...Truitt's art emerges as a language or, more rightly, a literature of abstraction uniquely and inextricably linked to life" (43).

Truitt's disinterest in unadorned materiality in favor of the associative and illusionistic properties of color gained her the support of Clement Greenberg—a decidedly mixed blessing. In this context, it is amusing to read the reviews of Donald Judd and Michael Fried, who were confounded by the disconnection between painted areas and physical structure. In Hileman's account, these critics' struggle with a quality that has since become practically *de rigueur*, i.e., the demonstrative refusal of a universally authoritative system, suggests that Truitt may be a model for the practice of abstraction today. However rigorous her formal parameters, she kept her work permeable to a stream of impressions from emotional and intellectual experience.

Meyer explores the mechanisms of Truitt's signification. The titular "Bicycle" in his essay is the vehicle by which the young Anne explored her surroundings of Easton, Maryland, ever mindful of volume, space, and passing time. Drawing upon semiotic theory, Meyer then proposes that the bicycle and, more explicitly, a reflective globe lawn ornament which also figures in the artist's memoirs, serve as examples of synecdoche, or the appearance of an isolated part for a larger whole.

Among the book's many enticing photographs are the late Pith series, for which Truitt cut irregular pieces of canvas and picked at the threads around the perimeters before covering them in thick black acrylic. These seemingly anomalous works in fact affirm Truitt's lifelong intertwining of painting and sculpture. Flat on the page, their dimensionality is difficult to ascertain, but photography is never fair or adequate to sculpture. Suitably, Hileman and Meyer take pains to account for the unpredictable differences from one side to another of Truitt's more signature work.

Both essays are rich in detailed description, along with insights and documentation that will make this book an important resource on Truitt in the future. There is also an extensive chronology, bibliography, and list of exhibitions. •

Reviewed by Vittorio Colaizzi, Assistant Professor of Art History at Winona State University.

String, Felt, Thread: The Hierarchy of Art and Craft in American Art
By Elissa Auther
University of Minnesota Press, 2009

Elissa Auther "tells a story in which there are winners and losers when it comes to recognition and prestige in the field of art" attained by three artist groups exploring the fiber medium during the 1960s and 1970s, when Greenbergian formalism dominated the discourse (xxviii). While the use of fiber was a liability for some, for others fiber's "perceived inferiority" made it, strangely enough, a "highly productive force" forever transforming artistic practices and art world attitudes toward craft (xxix-xxx). Grounded in French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of symbolic capital and the field of cultural production, Chapter 1 examines the ineffective legitimizing strategies used by Sheila Hicks and Claire Zeisler, among other weavers, primarily women and Bauhaus trained, who began working off-loom in the early 1960s to create non-functional, large-scale, and thoroughly abstract sculptural work by braiding, twisting, and knotting natural fibers. After demonstrating that art world gatekeepers either ignored or lukewarmly received exhibitions like *Wall Hangings* (Museum of Modern Art, 1969), Auther frames this rejection by probing the pejorative connotations of the words "decorative" and "craft" in the writings of philosopher Immanuel Kant and art critics, most notably Clement Greenberg. Photographs of individual pieces and rarely seen installation views are used skillfully both here and in Chapter 2, which deftly juxtaposes the fiber artists, who remained peripheral figures in the art world, to the now canonical Process/post minimalist artists, primarily Robert Morris and Eva Hesse. Their more conceptual handling of truly low materials (common rope, industrial felt, etc.) assailed Greenbergian modernism while critiquing the market's treatment of artworks as collectable commodities. Still, as Chapter 3 reveals, needlepoint, quilting, and crochet—in the hands of Judy Chicago, Harmony Hammond, Faith Ringgold, and Miriam Schapiro—transcended both avant-garde preoccupations and simple celebrations of traditional women's handicraft. Their more figurative yet still subversive use of fiber media to explore feminist content broke free of existing hierarchical constructions that reinforced the art world's gendered power dynamics as they narrowly defined artistic media and practices. The Epilogue's sweeping summary of fiber art post-1970 identifies the institutional support, critical acclaim, and marketplace successes now enjoyed by fiber artists Ghada Amer, Anne Wilson, and Charles Le Dray as irrefutable proof of feminism's successful disruption of the craft/art divide. Auther's book is an important scholarly contribution that does much to illuminate and elucidate the connections between three artist groupings not typically thought of as interconnected. Even so, the fate of fiber art's originators seems unresolved. Left unexplained is why they, once liberated

from the yoke of hierarchy—thanks to the radical appropriation and transformation of fiber art by Process/ post minimalist and feminist artists—were unable in their later careers to "simply circumvent" its "historically negative effects" like the others (164). Surely the critical reception and institutional support for these artists became more sympathetic and plentiful in time and some elaboration of these improved conditions would have proved her point more conclusively. The essays are well documented, and this handsome paperback volume includes color illustrations throughout and features a substantial bibliography and index. •

Reviewed by Mary C. Simpson, Assistant Professor of Art History at Eastern Illinois University.

Adélaïde Labille-Guiard: Artist in the Age of Revolution
by Laura Auricchio
J. Paul Getty Museum, 2009

An expanded version of her doctoral dissertation, Laura Auricchio's recent monograph on Adélaïde Labille-Guiard is the first English-language book devoted to the artist's career. Auricchio departs from previous studies that compare Labille-Guiard (1749-1803) with her contemporaries Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun (1755-1842), Anne Vallayer-Coster (1744-1818), and Angelica Kauffmann (1741-1807). She focuses on Labille-Guiard's unique situation as an ambitious, career-oriented artist from a merchant family, and later as one of the only successful women artists to remain in France during the Reign of Terror. Trained in the miniaturist genre, Labille-Guiard subverted gendered expectations and creatively reworked traditional practices to establish herself as a respected portraitist, first in pastels and then oils. In 1783, she gained admittance as a member to the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture and actively exhibited at the institution's annual Salons.

Auricchio charts Labille-Guiard's continual "reinventions" of her artistic style and changes in her subjects, content, and professional clientele as strategic maneuvers to remain professionally relevant within a difficult socio-political environment following the Revolution. Labille-Guiard's tactics subverted gender proscriptions, and her changing approaches put her in dialogue with the greater context of the French Revolution and the role of art within it. Once she gained membership to the Royal Academy, her work transitioned from pastel portraits of well-respected contemporary male artists to commissions for the royal family, characterized by sumptuous costumes and décor. Later, in the altered cultural landscape of a new government, Labille-Guiard adopted a reserved Neo-classical approach to express her fidelity to and patriotism for the state. Auricchio's focused study reaches beyond Labille-Guiard's personal narrative to underscore how her aesthetic decisions also served as political statements, and how political values affected the artists of the day and the works they created.

High quality color reproductions of Labille-Guiard's paintings and pastels and images of comparative works by her contemporaries clearly illustrate Auricchio's arguments, which are rooted in close visual analysis. This book expands recent scholarship on Labille-Guiard's adaptive art practice and her work's reception and function within Revolutionary France. A comprehensive index and an appendix to the most recent catalogue raisonné of Labille-Guiard's work add to the book's value for scholars. •

Women Gallerists in the 20th and 21st Centuries
by Claudia Herstatt
Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2008

Female patrons have long supported the financial and commercial interests of artists, and in the twentieth century, women gallerists directly impacted the market and social milieu of the international avant-garde. While numerous publications memorialize Peggy Guggenheim's legacy as a passionate art supporter and gallerist, the public record of other transformative art businesswomen active in the recent past and today is rare.

Herstatt's collection has an anecdotal tone and includes brief profiles of thirty international women gallerists who established their commercial ventures in the male-dominated art business. Chapter summaries introduce subjects ranging from "pioneers" like Annely Juda—a proponent of non-objective art in the Pop-centered, 1960s London art scene—to "power woman" Marian Goodman and "climber" Ellen de Bruijne. Goodman held her first exhibition in 1977 in New York and established a reputation by cultivating the careers of non-U.S.-based artists such as Gerhard Richter and Gabriel Orozco at a time when the New York art scene focused on U.S. talent. When Amsterdam-based de Bruijne opened a project space for young performance and installation artists in 1999, it was a risky endeavor in the context of the region's then-collapsed market.

The remaining twenty-seven women span generations, geographies, and socio-political contexts and represent varied interests and motivations. In 1990, for example, Nina Menocal opened NINART in Mexico City, determined to shift international perceptions about contemporary Latin American and Cuban art practices. Pearl Lam opened Contrasts Gallery in Hong Kong in 1992 to do the same for Chinese art and design. Regardless of consequential differences in economic and political structures and individual intentions, Herstatt finds commonalities among her diverse subjects that cause her to wonder whether women gallerists have an entirely different style from that of their male counterparts.

While neither a historiographic nor contextualized study, *Women Gallerists* is a worthwhile introduction to some of the businesswomen that have shaped and continue to shape the commercial global art scene. The profiles include a photographic portrait of each subject, a synopsis of her endeavors—often including direct interview quotations—and anecdotal comments from artists and colleagues. •

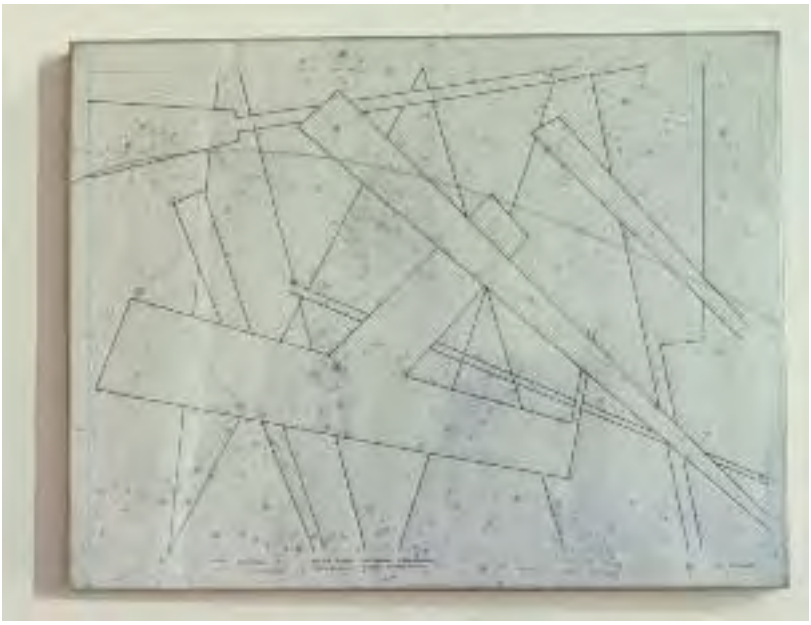
Reviewed by Nina Gara Bozicnik, Assistant Curator at the Currier Museum of Art, Manchester, NH.



Pl. 1. Michelle Stuart, *Stone Alignments/Solstice Cairns* (1979), permanent land work, 3200 boulders, varying sizes from Hood River starting at foot of Mt. Hood, overall 1000' x 800' approx, circle 100', 4 cairns 5' high. Rowena Plateau, Commissioned by Portland Center for the Visual Arts. © Michelle Stuart.



Pl. 2. Michelle Stuart, *Nazca Lines Star Chart* (1981-82), earth from site, Nazca, Peru, on 100% rag paper, mounted rag board, 120" x 168". Museum of Modern Art, NY.



Pl. 3. Michelle Stuart, *Nazca Lines Southern Hemisphere Constellation Chart Correlation* (1981), pencil, vellum, red, 17" X 22". Museum of Modern Art, NY.



Pl. 4. Mimi Smith, *Steel Wool Peignoir* (1966), steel wool, nylon, lace, wood hanger, 59" x 26" x 8". Spencer Museum of Art, the University of Kansas, Lawrence. Museum Purchase, Helen Foresman Spencer Art Acquisition Fund, 2000.71. Photo: Oren Slor.



Pl. 5. Mimi Smith, *Recycle Coat* (1965, remade in 1993), plastic bags, plastic, bottle caps, aluminum hanger, 50" x 34". Courtesy the artist. Photo: Mimi Smith.



Pl. 6. Mimi Smith, *Don't Turn Back* (1985), acrylic, paper, Xerox on clock, 14" x 2". Courtesy the artist and Anna Kustera Gallery. Photo: Mimi Smith.



Pl. 7. Mimi Smith, *Protector Against Illness: Red Tamoxifen Bra* (1997), nylon, lace, tamoxifen pills, satin hanger, 16" x 15". Courtesy the artist and Anna Kustera Gallery. Photo: Mimi Smith.



Pl. 8. Janet Culbertson, *The First Billboard* (1987), oil on canvas, 34" x 48". Photo: Douglas Kaften.



Pl. 9. Janet Culbertson, *Paving America* I (1993), (from Paving Series), acrylic, enamel yellow lines, on rag paper, 80" x 110". Telfair Museum Collection. Photo: Douglas Kaften.



Pl. 10. Janet Culbertson, *Toxic Garden* (2001), mixed media, rag paper, 22″ x 30″. Photo: Janet Culbertson.



Pl. 11. Janet Culbertson, *Sunburst* (2009), oil, iridescent pigments, collage, rag paper, 22″ x 30″. Photo: Janet Culbertson.



Pl. 12. Janet Culbertson, *Vanishing Butterflies* (2010), acrylic, pastel, collage, rag paper, 22″ x 30″. Photo: Janet Culbertson.



Pl. 13. Magdalena Abakanowicz, *Agora* (2006), iron, 106 figures, *circa* 114" x 35" x 55", Grant Park, Chicago. Photo: Julia Barlow..



Pl. 14. Magdalena Abakanowicz, *Puellae* (1992), bronze, 30 figures, 41" x 12" x 8". National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.



Pl. 15. Alina Szapocznikow, *Lampe-Bouche III (*1966), polyester, metal, electrical installation for lamp, 17" x 3". © The Estate of Alina Szapocznikow-Piotr Stanisławski. Courtesy of Broadway 1602, NY.



Pl. 16. Alina Szapocznikow, *Belly-Cushions* (1968), polyurethane, 5 pieces, each 5-7" x 11 4/5" x 13 2/5". Photo: IRSA Fine Art. © The Estate of Alina Szapocznikow-Piotr Stanisławski.



Pl. 17. Alina Szapocznikow, *Dessert III (Coupe de seins) (*1970-71), assemblage: colored polyester, porcelain dish, 7 " x 9 1/2" x 9". Photo: Thomas Mueller. © The Estate of Alina Szapocznikow-Piotr Stanisławski. Courtesy of Broadway 1602, NY, Galerie Gisela Capitain, Cologne.



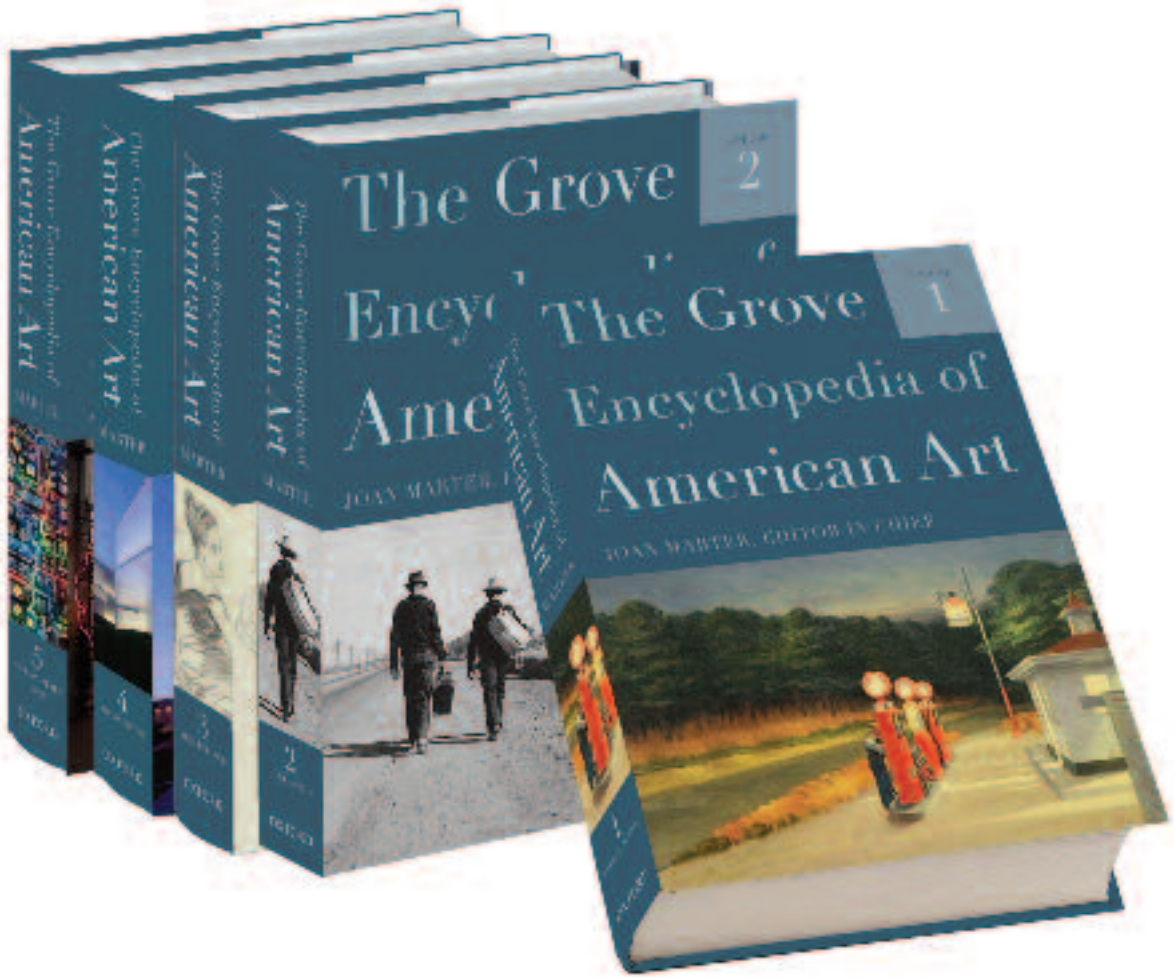
Pl. 18. Alina Szapocznikow, *Kruźlowa (ca. 1971),* polyester resin, photographs, gauze, 16 1/2" x 20 1/2" x 7". Chapel of Polish Pallottines, Paris. Photo: Archives of Piotr Stanisławski. © The Estate of Alina Szapocznikow-Piotr Stanisławski.

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