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INTERVIEW WITH

Betty Parsons

—art, women and
the American Dream

19th CENTURY AMERICAN

Printmakers

Maria van Oosterwijck

—renewed interest in
neglected Dutch painter

OUT OF THE

Mainstream

—surviving outside of NYC



19th c. Printmakers



Betty Parsons



Maria van Oosterwijck

OUT OF THE MAINSTREAM

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Betty Parsons. Photo by Alexander Liberman.

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Out Of The Mainstream

by Janet Heit

Sherry L. Mednick Steiner. "New York offers a more serious attitude about new trends and new people. As far as I'm concerned, Binghamton is just a place to live."

Sherry L. Mednick Steiner and Katherine Kadish are both artists living in Binghamton, New York. I met them a year ago when I was writing a thesis on women artists. At that time, Steiner was rather malcontent, the only post-minimalist in the Paris-in-the-rain world of local taste. She was born and raised in New York City, and graduated from the School of Visual Arts as a major in painting in 1972.

Kadish, on the other hand, hadn't taken herself seriously as an artist until she was into her 30s, although she had minored in painting at Carnegie-Mellon and has been drawing and etching full time since 1966. Her work is primarily figurative, and until this past May, she felt quite certain to remain working upstate.

Both women moved to Binghamton because of their husbands: Kadish (now divorced) in 1963 and Steiner in 1972. Kadish has a house in the city proper, with studio spaces in what was formerly a church in nearby Pennsylvania, and in a factory, where she shares a floor with another artist. She also has a darkroom and an etching press in her house. Steiner's house is a 10-minute drive outside the city limits, in a semi-rural area. Her attic serves as her studio, and she keeps a separate small room as an office.

For three years after her move, Steiner made frequent attempts at situating her-

self with a local artists' "community," only to discover time and again that such a community of people didn't exist outside of several Sunday-painters who showed the same landscapes and other genre paintings year in and year out. Any serious artists, like Kadish, were either content in their isolation or just disinterested in the kind of

"...Space is cheap, there's plenty of privacy and quiet and, presumably, less pressure to compete in the art-world market..."

format for inter-artist contact that Steiner had hoped to participate in. A couple of years ago, Steiner began the Artists' Action Group, designed to encourage dialogues among Binghamton-area artists, both as an information resource pool and as a means of exhibiting. AAG met several times throughout the course of one year, and managed to set up a cooperative gallery in a church basement. But there were problems from the outset, namely, that no policy regarding entrance qualifications was ever established. The resulting differences (in esthetic preferences, in budgetary allotments, etc.) between those for whom art was a hobby and those whose art was the matrix of their existence—coupled

Katherine Kadish. "New York is important, because it's still the center of the art world...But...I don't think it's crucial to live there."

with the ever-present problem of funding —eroded the group's energy and eventually dissolved the group itself.

Steiner has also suffered several run-ins with owners of a local arts center, as well as with several members of neighborhood galleries. "Some of the work in Binghamton is good. But in general it doesn't demonstrate enough effort. Artists can go further, but instead they stay at a certain point and they're satisfied. They put the work in the realm of where it will be appreciated and accepted. I don't see anything innovative."

So, after five years of trying to find her place within the local art "community," Steiner has given up. "Friends of mine around here look at my work and say, 'That's it?' I'd like to invite artists over to discuss my work, but I couldn't even think of five people I'd like to have do it up here. I've come to the point where I can by-pass that until I get into New York [City] and come to people I can talk with."

Steiner misses the critiques, the panel discussions, the galleries, and that feeling of being understood, the feeling that there is something constructive in being an artist. As romanticized as that may sound, I think it's a major undeclared reason why such places as art communities or colonies do exist. As frenzied, as competitive, as paranoiac and as claustrophobic as they have been characterized, such communi-

ties are perhaps the only places where artists as a group aren't subjugated as unproductive, hostile or just plain weird members of society. "I don't like the City [New York] itself—it's too crowded and dirty. I like living with lots of space around me," Steiner said. "But New York offers a more serious attitude about new trends and new people. As far as I'm concerned, Binghamton is just a place to live."

Life outside the mainstream does have its good points. The other side of isolation is solitude, and for all the time spent pining for the company of other artists, there are moments—many of them—during which the act of creation blocks out any urge for other human beings. Part of the problem with living in a place like Manhattan is that while the pace of life can drive an artist wild with creative energy, that energy too often gets displaced by: keeping up with art-world politics (meetings and panels); keeping up with art-world gossip (parties and openings); and survival (nine-to-five and all that). It makes sense, that in a large city there's a lot to do.

And that's why there are those rural art-worlds-away-from-the-art-world, also known as artists' colonies. The atmosphere is relaxed, and artists can work uninterrupted. Katherine Kadish left her job at the State University of New York at Binghamton (where she teaches drawing) for four weeks this past spring to visit Yaddo, in Saratoga Springs. Before she'd gone, Kadish had been fairly satisfied with her Binghamton lifestyle. She had artist-friends with whom she felt comfortable discussing her work. She'd been in national shows, and had already won several awards, including a CAPS grant. Kadish valued both of her outside studios (the factory and the church). When I'd visited her a few months earlier, she'd mentioned the possibility of exchanging living spaces with someone in Manhattan for the summer, but she still had every intention of returning.

At Yaddo, everything changed. "It began instantly when I got there, and it carried through to the end. I would go into the studio every day, and I would feel like something very powerful was happening. It was terrific knowing that all the people around me were really good [artists]. You had a feeling of being really special." Transferring all that positive energy back to Binghamton was difficult, and some got lost along the way. Teaching became even more of an effort: the University's policy of relegating the arts to the periphery of life only accentuated her new-found isolation. Her church studio, once a relaxing hour's drive, now seemed too far. The factory space was inadequate because it had to be shared. Kadish's definition of an ideal space became "a nice loft or part of a factory I could have to myself."

"It seems inevitable to me now that I will move, but whether that move is going to be to New York I don't know. There are other alternatives for me, but they are all



Katherine Kadish, *Saddled Man #2, 1977. Charcoal, 41½x30"*.

urban. What I need—and I'm not sure I can take it all the time—is a level of excitement. New York is important, because it's still the center of the art world. Practically speaking, if you live in a place it's easier to make contact with other people. But if you exhibit all over and you're working as an artist you make plenty of contacts. So I don't think it's crucial to live there."

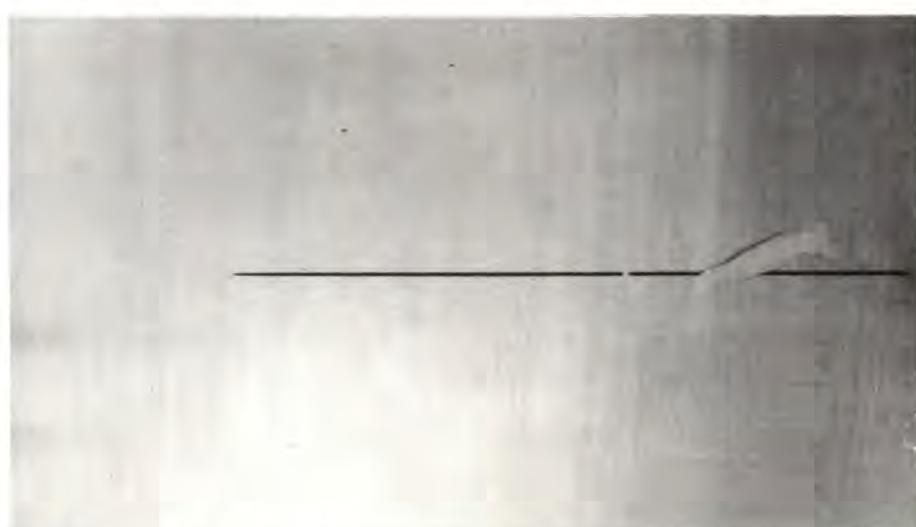
What is crucial, however, is the support emanating from a community of people intimately connecting art with their lives. We talked about the New York artists I know who claim they haven't anything to do with the art-world's social life, yet wouldn't live anywhere else. "I really understand that, although I didn't before," Kadish said. "The idea that there are a lot of people right outside your door that you don't even have to talk to. Just knowing they're there, knowing that they're working, is very important. And sometimes, it's more important that it be an art person than it be a lot of friends waiting to see you."

Of course it wasn't Yaddo itself that imposed such changes on Kadish's life. "I think going to Yaddo has made me get in touch with the way I really felt for a very long time, but didn't necessarily know that I felt." She says that for the first time in her life, she isn't worried about the future—about her ability to find a job and resume life in a new, urban place. Her plans now call for a major move in a year's time.

Of course it is true that plenty of artists choose to make their homes away from the mainstream, in small towns and rural areas. Space is cheap, there's plenty of privacy and quiet and, presumably, less pressure to compete in the art-world market. Kadish said she knows artists who are quite happy working on farms, surrounded by their families and animals. I, too, have met artists who are content to work out of the mainstream, but they live in groups and were originally from New York City.

As physical and spiritual core of the art community, the art-world mainstream provides a physical ground for exhibiting and, possibly, marketing one's work. It also serves as a focus, through museums, galleries, art bookstores, for artists and public to receive and dispense information regarding art and art-related activities. Art magazines originate from there, and so, accordingly, do most critics. But such a network as the art mainstream is only as productive as the undercurrent of personal power dedicated to its preservation and strength. Living in the art-world proper or just communing with it in spirit (and in frequent physical trips) is more than exciting or educational: it is, as Katherine Kadish put it, "An enormous burst of validation."

Author's note: Although she'd given up on the local scene, Sherry Steiner brought her work into New York City this spring to seek a gallery affiliation. Her work has been accepted at the Kathryn Markel Gallery, and several other Manhattan galleries have asked her to return this fall.



Sherry L.M. Steiner, *Spec Ateen, 1976. Acrylic and pencil on paper, 13x18"*.



19th Century American Printmakers

by Ann-Sargent Wooster

The lack of attention paid to American women printmakers of the 19th century is not entirely a matter of the sexual politics of art history. The work of their male counterparts has also been ignored and is just beginning to be examined. But, there is a substantive difference in the regard in which the two sexes are held, demonstrated by the fact that it is extremely difficult to locate prints by many of the women described favorably in the literature of the period. With the exception of Mary Cassatt, who is universally acknowledged as a printmaker, most present day dealers in 19th century prints do not handle the work of women printmakers nor do they even have a historical sense that women at this time raised burin or needle to plate.

Women printmakers were important in the period. Their abundance in late 19th century America is indicated by the presence of humorous commentary on them in the magazines of the time, such as the following ditty published by the journalist, Hood:

It scarce seems a ladylike art
that begins with a scratching and ends in a
biting. (1)

One of the difficulties however in considering prints of the 19th century is their dubious status as high or low art. With few exceptions, prints were put to a commercial purpose whether it was the popular Currier and Ives lithographs, the plates in travel books, or newspaper or magazine illustrations. The difference between the fine art print and the commercial one was

not as great as it is today. Women were involved in all aspects of printmaking from the nearly anonymous occupations of wood engraving other artists' drawings and hand tinting lithographs to the production of their own lithographs and etchings. Most artists fell somewhere in between high and low, using the print medium as a marketable outlet for their art.

***...It scarce seems a ladylike
art that begins with a scratching
and ends in a biting...***

Fanny Flora Bond Palmer (1812-1876) was one of the most successful printmakers of the last century, producing close to half of Currier and Ives' lithographs. Born in England, she arrived in America in the early 1840's with her husband, brother and sister (both artists) and two children. Her husband was not willing or able to earn a living and when he fell to his death, drunk in 1859, James Ives is said to have remarked, "That's the best thing he ever did." Fanny Palmer became the major breadwinner of the family, finding employment first as a governess and then holding other "female" occupations before beginning to work for Currier and Ives in 1852. She continued to work for them until her death in 1876. (2)

Unlike her contemporary, the painter Lily Martin Spencer (1822-1902), who also supported her family and specialized in domestic genre scenes of happy families, Palmer's lithographs depicted what might be thought of as masculine subject matter: hunting and sporting prints, railroad and steamboat scenes and landscape. She was

driven in Currier's carriage to Long Island and along the Hudson River to sketch all types of rural and urban scenery. Her landscapes, with every tree and house in place, were models for those with upwardly mobile social aspirations. The scenes of steamboat races, some of her most successful, spoke to a different taste, one which found in their rowdy excitement, the equivalent of today's movie and television adventure stories. They also evoked a nationalism aroused by symbols of America's might and a nostalgia for the immediate past.

Palmer was involved in all stages of the lithographic process. She colored the models for the colorists to follow (individually hand coloring the lithographs was traditionally a female employment). She also worked with Currier to develop and manufacture lithographic crayons. (3)

When Palmer began in the field of commercial printmaking, she was one of the few women involved. As part of the trade school movement, which achieved momentum in the mid-century and sought to teach working class men and women useful trades, women entered the field of illustration and wood engraving. Using an argument which was later to give women access to another field of work, stenography, the French writer, M. Lagrange, writing in *The Crayon* in the 1850's (the article was reprinted in the *Cooper Union Annual Report*), closed his appeal for the government establishment of schools of design for women, by likening engraving to needlework:

Man is not made for sedentary life; woman on the contrary, conforms to it without inconvenience; she better maintains that close, unceasing, the

motionless activity which the engraver's pursuit demands. Her nimble fingers accustomed to wield the needle, lend themselves more easily to minute operations, to the use of small instruments, to the almost imperceptible shades of manipulation wood engraving exacts. Cutting on copper and steel demands also patience and minutia much more compatible with the nature of woman than with that of man. It is only in *womanizing* himself, in some degree, that man succeeds in obtaining the development of these faculties so contrary to his physical constitution, and always at the expense of his natural force. (4)

Although it is difficult to trace the achievements of specific students of the various Schools of Design, because records render them virtually anonymous, the development of the School of Design for Women (New York) exemplifies the successful training of women for entry into the professions of illustration, wood and metal engraving and later photography. It was founded before 1852 by a group of women interested in providing useful careers for women of the lower classes. Similar schools were founded at the same time in Cincinnati, Philadelphia and Chicago. The school was taken over in 1859 by Cooper Union and became the Free School for Women. It differed from the rest of the program in its more limited curriculum and its emphasis on on-the-job training. The school offered courses in designing and drawing on wood, lithography, etching on stone and wood engraving. Although some paying students were accepted, most of the women attended without cost. They earned the money for living expenses by a sort of work-study program where they undertook engraving commissions through the school while they were studying. The *Annual Report* of 1860 states, "Already many of the pupils have qualified themselves for the practice of wood engraving as a business, and several books have been illustrated with great success in the school." (5)



Anna Lea Merritt, Louis Agassiz. Etching, in "Century Magazine", 1883.

By 1869, approximately 1500 students had passed through the school. In a single year, 1871-72, there were 36 pupils in the Free School for Women in wood engraving, 24 receiving certificates and that department earning \$2,950.34 for engravings executed through the school, (a substantial sum by the standards of the time). (6) 1873 was the year the study of photography was introduced, which was to spell the end of the necessity for wood engraved illustrations. In listing the achievements of former pupils, the *Annual Report* of that year states one alumnae earned \$1,000 for newspaper illustrations. We do not know for what this woman earned her money. Did she follow fires with her drawing pad or sit in her parlor executing clothing advertisements? The school's records do not provide the identity of these women and we may never know how many of them were merely skilled

craftswomen, carving the blocks of other artists' designs and how many were original artists in their own right.

Mary Hallock Foote's life (1847-1938) offers an example of a career pursued by a School of Design alumnae. She learned wood engraving under W.J. Linton, long time head of the wood engraving department and had a successful career illustrating texts of her own writing on her travels in the West with her mining engineer husband for *Harper's Magazine* and *The Century*. Eleven engraved woodcuts, entitled "Pictures of the Far West," appearing in *The Century* of 1888-89 are often considered her best work. She was included in a recent exhibition of "The Woman Artist in the American West, 1860-1960," at the Muckenthaler Cultural Center, Fullerton, California. (7)

During that period, in 1887 and 1888, exhibitions of women etchers were held in Boston and New York City which were part of an etching revival happening in America and Europe and which marked the activity of women in the field and the need for an outlet for their work. Unfortunately, these were one-time exhibitions and the women included either became affiliated with one of the predominately male etching clubs or continued working and exhibiting on their own. The work presented in these two shows represented a broad spectrum of the applications of the medium. The traditional uses for etchings were in the travel and gift books popular in the period. These used original work (the books included actual prints) of a high quality, such as the prints of Eliza Greatarex, to satisfy the public's hunger for picturesque views and distant vistas. These were gradually replaced by independent suites of prints of similar subjects such as those produced by Gabrielle de Veaux Clements and Ellen Day Hale. As part of the painter-etcher movement, a new wave of etchers was appearing that included Mary Cassatt, Mary Nimmo Moran and Mattie Twachtman (wife of the painter, John Henry Twachtman), who saw the technique as a special way of



Currier and Ives, New York Bay from Bay Ridge Long Island, 1860 (after F. Palmer). Hand-colored lithograph, 14 1/4x20 1/4". Courtesy Associated American Artists.



Mary Cassatt, By the Pond, c.1898. Drypoint and aquatint, 12 1/2x16 3/8". Courtesy Associated American Artists.

making pictures, which had close to the same importance as painting.

S.R. Kohler, the curator of the Print Room of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts expressed the belief in the catalog for the 1887 exhibition of Women Etchers in Boston (8), which he organized, that Eliza Greatorex (1820-1897) was the first woman to etch in this country with her 1869 plate, *The Old Bloomingdale Tavern*, part of her series of etchings, "Old New York from the Battery to Bloomingdale" (a complete set of them is owned by The Museum of the City of New York). Greatorex was born in Ireland and came to America in 1840. She exhibited at the National Academy of Design as early as 1855. After her husband died in 1858, she supported her family by teaching and selling her work. She found a market in the gift books popular in the late '60s and '70s. Greatorex' etchings of the *Homes of Ober-Ammergau* were published in Munich in 1871 and *Summer Etchings in Colorado*, accompanied by notes from her travel diary were published in 1874.(9) Greatorex brought a painter's eye to these scenes, and her paintings brought her election as an associate member of the National Academy of Design in 1869, the only woman member at the time. A wall of her pen and ink drawings was included in the Women's Pavilion of the 1876 Philadelphia Exhibition. Greatorex became deeply concerned with print quality, leading her in 1879 to Paris where she learned



Mary Nimmo Moran, Between the Gloaming and the Morn, c.1886. Etching. Courtesy the author.

the art of engraving, which permitted her to execute her prints herself. She was accompanied on her travels by her daughter Kathleen (1851-c.1910), also a painter, etcher and illustrator. Kathleen's etchings were exhibited with those of her mother in the 1888 Union League Club (New York) show.

This show was a large exhibition of women etchers, devoted exclusively to Americans. It included 500 prints by 35

artists. Four plates made in 1844 by Sarah Cole, sister of Thomas Cole, were found and printed for this exhibition, establishing her as the earliest woman etcher in America. The plates and prints appear to be no longer extant. In her catalog essay, commenting on the vitality of the work, the prominent critic of the period, Mrs. Van Rensselaer, who was one of the organizers of the exhibition wrote, "In this country it is very different (from Europe). It would be a singularly incomplete collection of American Etching that should contain no plates with a feminine signature."(10)

Mary Cassatt (1844-1926) and Mary Nimmo Moran (1842-1899) were the most striking artists in the show. Cassatt is the only widely known woman printmaker of the period, having made over 200 prints. One hundred were drypoints, and with the exception of two lithographs, the rest were her special combination of drypoint, soft ground etching and aquatint. She began making prints about 1879 and exhibited four "etchings" in the Union League Club show. These were probably drypoints, because Cassatt rarely used conventional etching and characteristically began all her prints with a drypoint drawing. The attraction of the medium for her lay in its demand for excellent draftsmanship and she said of it, "In drypoint you are down to the bare bones, you can't cheat."(11)

In 1890, Cassatt was excited by the exhibition of Japanese Art at the Ecole Nationale des Beaux Arts, Paris. One of her greatest contributions to printmaking lies in the 10 prints of women in richly patterned domestic interiors done in 1890-91, in which she attempted to imitate the polychrome Japanese woodblock print in aquatint. To secure the print quality she wanted, Cassatt worked closely with her printer, M. Leroy.

The printing is a great work; sometimes we work all day (8 hours) both as hard as we could work and only

SOHO 20

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printed eight or ten proofs in the day...I drew an outline in drypoint and transferred this to two other plates, making in all three plates, never more for each proof. Then I put an aquatint wherever the color was to be printed; the color was painted on the plate as it was to appear on the proof...The set of ten plates was done with the intention of attempting an imitation of Japanese methods; of course I abandoned that somewhat after the first plate, and tried for more atmosphere. (12)

Cassatt showed these prints with much popular and critical success at her first one-woman show at the Durand-Ruel Gallery in 1891. She made the decision to show alone for the first time at the age of 7 when she was refused admittance to the newly formed Societe des Peintres-Gravurs Francais because she was not French.

Exceptional amongst her later prints is *By the Pond* (1898), in which three-quarter length figures of a mother and a strangely angelic/satanic boychild fill the foreground and are outlined against a semi-circular frieze of flat tree shapes. In prints such as this one, Cassatt goes beyond her origins in Japanese prints to prove the strength of her personal vision and to bring the art of printmaking to a new level.

Mary Nimmo Moran had no art training before she married the painter Thomas Moran in 1862. The style and quality of her work, something recognized in her own time, was radically different from the somberistic effects espoused by Moran in his landscape paintings and etchings. As part of their first trip to Europe in 1866, they met Corot in his Paris studio and visited Fontainebleau, a center of Barbizon *plein air* painting, to paint together outdoors. Moran condemned Barbizon painting, but his description of it could easily be a diagram of what was to be one of the strengths of Mary's etchings: "French art in my opinion, scarcely rises to the dignity of landscape—a swamp and a tree constitute its sum total. It is more limited in range than the landscapes of any other country." (13)

Until ill health forced her to stay home, they traveled together as companions and fellow artists, including one trip to the Far West in 1873. Before leaving for another trip West in 1879, Moran coated a number of copper plates for her to experiment on while he was gone. The first or second print she made was a sketch done outdoors of a bridge over the Buskill River, accompanied by her young daughter, Ruth. Working out of doors, closely with nature, was to characterize her etchings. The horizontal sweep of landscape, the brooding abstract sense of mass, sometimes darkened by the use of the roulette were representative of the best of Barbizon *plein air* painting and her interpretation of Pre-Raphaelite thinking about nature.

In etching, Moran had found her medium. Her paintings had been exhibited at

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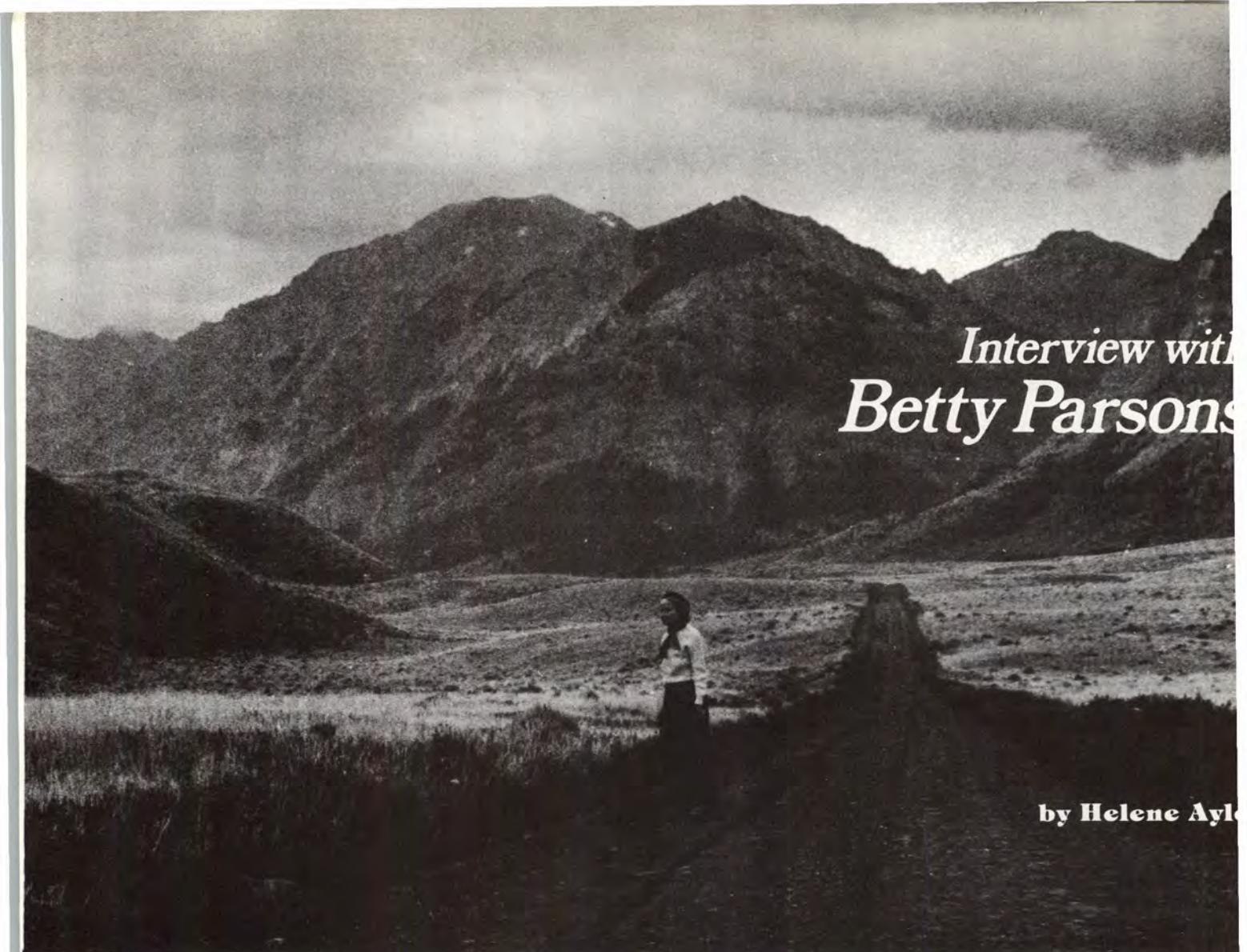
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Fifteenth Anniversary



Interview with Betty Parsons

by Helene Aylon

Photo: Gwy

AUTHOR'S NOTE —

Betty Parsons, through her involvement with abstract expressionist painters, has long been a prime mover in the arts. From her gallery—active for three decades—emerged some of the most influential painters of the '50s: Jackson Pollock, Clyfford Still, Barnett Newman, Mark Rothko, Ad Reinhardt, Hans Hofmann and Adolph Gottlieb.

Betty Parsons is a stunningly theatrical woman. Seventy-seven years old, she is strong, independent and upper-class. Her consciousness has been molded by the era she came out of. However, in the tumultuous and often tainted world of art dealership, she has been consistently ethical, and artists who have not yielded commercial returns have nonetheless retained her loyalty over the years. An artist in her own right, she has had more than a dozen solo exhibitions, the most recent in January 1977 at the Kornblee Gallery in New York.

What follows is a partial transcription of a conversation taped on January 19, 1977. It took place first at a private dinner club, where Betty is a member, and then continued to her apartment on Central Park West. It was continued briefly on her visit to California in April. Parts I and II explore Betty Parsons' connections to the art world, and to women in particular; Part III, her views toward abstract expressionism. Interestingly, she articulates the inherent link between action painting of the '50s and American expansionism; to her, action painting was energetic and masculine, inseparable from the American Dream. There's a strong correlation in her attraction to both the "heroic" aspects of these artists and to the American Frontier mystique.

PART I

"...In those days, women didn't really respect each other. I think they do respect each other now..."

Helene Aylon: I'd like to know about your contacts with women artists in the '50s. You knew Agnes Martin.

Betty Parsons: Agnes Martin I met out in New Mexico. She told me she was a painter. She was coming to New York and could she come and see me. I said, "by all means." She came to see me. She was extremely poor, no money. I bought a couple of her paintings and I said to her, "I can not take you on now, but eventually I would like to." She went back to Taos, New Mexico, and took a job as a librarian. I finally went out there and went to her studio and thought the paintings were marvelous. I said, "All right, I'll give you a show." I think she had her first show with me in 1960. I remember getting a couple of paintings sold to keep her afloat and then she went back to New Mexico. Two years later I gave her another show,

when I was at 15 East 57th Street, and that was quite a success.

HA: You became very friendly with her.

BP: Oh yes, we were always good friends. In fact I actually went on a pack trip with her. She was a fantastic outdoorswoman. She had grown up on a farm with horses and was the national swimming champion of Canada for two or three years. When she moved to New York she got a big studio down on the Bowery. And I used to go down there and actually did a lot of paintings in her studio. I wrote this to Agnes: "May the leaves of yesterday not follow you. May the birds of the future guide you. And the voice of the wind inform you and the rays of the sun embrace you."

HA: What made you write that?

BP: She was leaving. She left New York! It was a farewell poem to her.

HA: It was an act of great independence for her to move away by herself.

BP: Agnes Martin was an extremely independent woman. She took care of all her brothers and sisters. She took care of everything, and everything she did, she learned from. She learned about life through it. When she talks about happiness and joy...there is a big difference between them to her. Joy is a spiritual thing. Happiness is a worldly thing. I know what she talks about. Happiness has to do with this world and Joy has to do with what made this world...But she also had a great many hostilities. She disliked a lot of things. She was a fighter. And a thinker. And a poet. If she didn't like something, she came right out and said it.

HA: That is something I imagine you could identify with because you do the same thing. That is something I notice about women artists of the '50s. They're tough. They weren't out to please men.

BP: They weren't out to please them, but I



In her studio, surrounded by sculptures-in-progress. Photo: Gwyn Metz.

know Louise Nevelson loved men. She wasn't out to please them, but she was out to have fun with them. And I think Agnes also. Her whole life was out to enjoy whatever relationship she had.

HA: When did you connect with Louise Nevelson?

BP: I remember Louise Nevelson's show at Grace Borgenicht's. She was very unknown. I thought her show was so exciting. And I fell in love with a piece, and I had no money, very little money. Louise said, "Cut it in half." I think the piece was \$450. And I bought it for \$200 or \$250. I'm very proud of it and it has been shown all over. I call it *Mistress of the Moon*. I admire Grace Borgenicht for finding her and showing her.

HA: Hedda Stern was in your gallery for years.

BP: Yes, Hedda Stern. She has been with me for 34 years. A very electric but sensitive person. But I think she was brought up with the domination of the male, coming from a Rumanian family. But she managed to get away from it and she is very much on her own now, and sees through all of it. She was married to Saul Steinberg for 15 years. Saul's material came out of going to night clubs and parties, and he wouldn't go out without her. They finally parted company because she could never get enough work done.

HA: You showed Lee Krasner, too.

BP: Oh yes, I knew Lee Krasner through Jackson Pollock. She wanted to be in the gallery and I said that I don't like to have a wife and a husband in the same gallery. Pollock convinced me that it was unimportant, and there was no competition there at all. I feel that Pollock respected what she did, and of course, she thought he was great.

HA: When Pollock left, I heard that you wanted her to leave, too.

BP: No. Before Pollock left, Lee said she didn't want any more shows. By the time she wanted to come back, I was filled up again.

HA: Did you feel she was a strong woman?

BP: Oh yes, very strong. I don't think Lee was ever too much in favor of women. I don't think she ever went to any trouble to help a woman. In those days women didn't really respect each other. I think they do respect each other now.

HA: In the '50s and '60s I feel that women dealers related differently to their male and female artists. The classic story is the one about Jackson Pollock and Peggy Guggenheim. You know the story...Pollock urinated into the fireplace to put out the fire. Peggy Guggenheim was enchant-

Betty Parsons in her gallery with several of the major artists she represented in the late 1950s. From left to right: Ellsworth Kelly, Richard Pousette-Dart (?), Parsons, Ad Reinhardt, Kenzo Okada. She had written in a catalogue: "The American artist...is at the spiritual center of the world...they have the background of the American Dream."



ed and thought, "how original!", and took an interest in him. If Lee Krasner had done that, I don't think it would have been quite so fascinating.

BP: I guess so, I guess so. I never thought in terms of whether they were male or female. I didn't give a damn.

HA: These are very subconscious kinds of feelings.

BP: I always got on with the artists. A lot of them fell in love with me. Their names will be nameless. We had discussions. I made it absolutely clear what to expect from me, and we always got on.

HA: What about you? Were you an artist in those days?

BP: I have worked at painting and sculpture since 1920.

HA: Were you visible as an artist?

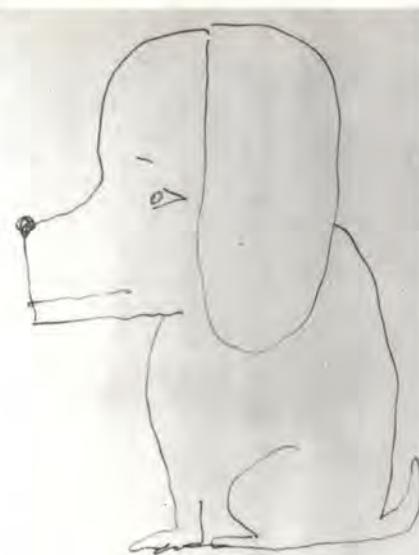
BP: Well you see, I had to make many decisions about that. I had gotten a divorce in 1921. During those years I worked right alongside Giacometti. I spent eight years working very hard. I was extremely serious about it. I wanted to be a sculptor. My greatest love was sculpture. When the crash came in 1929, I lost everything. I went to California and taught.

HA: Where?

BP: I taught privately in my own studio in Santa Barbara. To the young people there. I was glamour, glamour to them. They were dying to learn something.

HA: Did you ever want to have a child?

BP: When I started out I wanted to have 12 children, let me tell you. It would have



Saul Steinberg, Profile of Betty Parsons, 1958. 8x5 1/4". Photo: Geoffrey Clements.

been great fun—all the fighting, arguing, great fun! That was when I was in my teens. That wasn't my destiny. If it had been my destiny, it would have happened.

HA: Betty, I look at your piece that you traded with me, and it reminds me of secret places, secret dwellings. Almost child-like, like children playing with blocks and making magical things.

BP: Well I have that Irish thing in me. I have always been fascinated with what I

call the invisible presence. We all have it. Everything has it...a room has it. And that is what I am intrigued with...especially when I am working. That invisible presence. You know that big painting...the one you see when you come into the big room. When I was doing it, I was filled with that invisible presence. It was like a journey. I was riding into some strange country that didn't exist. You know the most permanent thing in this world is the invisible. You can never get away from it. You could not put an arm out this way if there was not something invisible to put it into.

PART II

"...I have had tremendous nourishment from women..."

HA: Do you have any close women friends?

BP: Oh yes, I have many close friends. But the thing with me you see, is that many of my close women friends are dead. My very close women friends are dead. I had a very close woman friend in France, Mrs. Emmanuel Bove, a sculptress, who is dead. A very close friend in England, Ade Baker, is still alive and I still get letters from her. She is in her 80s. I went over there to get a divorce. She was 10 years older than I was. I met her through friends; she took an interest in me and I was flattered. Ten years older—that was quite old then. It's nothing now! And really, I was very pleased. Very extraordinary Englishwoman. And she gave me hell all the time; she was extremely critical. She never let me do anything but the best. She had quite an influence on me to keep on my feet and not be dominated by the male. I fact, I don't think I would be alive today if I never met this Englishwoman. She was an artist. She saw so clearly, she was so wise. She saw through the male at a very early age. She had nearly always lived alone, the way that I have nearly always lived alone in my life.

You see, I had this thing about wanting to be independent. I had this friend who said she would subsidize me for two years. I thought it over very carefully, and I realized that at the end of two years I would have done a lot, but where would I be? I would have to take a job, for surely no one would buy an unknown painter.

HA: Who was this friend?

BP: Well she is dead now...Dorothy Haydell...She is dead but she was my best friend. Oh my god what a friend she was. She paid my dentist bills. She was a very rich woman that I knew long before. She married this very rich man and had a series of marriages. She was always my friend. I helped her in any way I could. She believed in me. And I believed in her.

HA: Was she in the art world?
BP: She collected. She was married to a prince. Cole Porter and Monty Woolley were her friends. She really was very interested in society, and the worldly

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whirl. I am not a person to be interested in that.

HA: You are sort of in and out of it.

BP: Yes that is right.

HA: You knew Martha Graham, Marlene Dietrich, and after all, you played tennis with Greta Garbo!

BP: Two or three times. Interesting the way I met her. I was asked on Christmas Eve by her ghost writer, Salka Fiertel. She said, "Come over and we are going to dress the tree." I got there and Salka said, "go up to the attic and bring down a great big box of Christmas dressings..." So I went up there, and Greta and I stared at each other over the top of the box.

She was very beautiful. So we dressed the tree. There were candles. The Germans always have candles on their trees. I was standing at the mantelpiece, with a glass of brandy, and she was coming toward me with a candle she was going to put on the tree. I leaned forward and asked, "Which one of us burns more brightly...me with the brandy, or you with the candle?" And she got very serious and said, "You burn much brighter than I, because you burn from within, I, with the candle, am burning from without." I was fascinated.

She was very shy. Her boyfriend was Mamrovillian, the director, and he was very jealous.

She liked women very much. I married a man who was jealous of everything, too. When I got interested in a book, in a place, in a human being...I think the reason is that men feel they really haven't got you, and that makes them jealous of any close relationship.

HA: You yourself were not necessarily male-identified.

BP: No, you see I was always very critical of the male. Because there were so many boring males around me. They were athletic, rich and aggressive and they were insensitive. I didn't like any part of it. I thought they were all bloody bores.

HA: And all those feelings we had for women were considered crushes.

BP: Oh, I've had plenty of crushes on women. At school I had a crush on my teacher, a literature teacher. I was scared to death of some teachers, but I had crushes on them.

HA: Were you shy and secretive?

BP: I was brought up in a very New England background where you never showed to the public what you felt, especially if it wasn't according to Hoyle. I remember my mother saying to me, "Betty it doesn't matter much what you do, but never get found out." That was the philosophy that she had, which I didn't like very much but I knew what she meant. Coming from a very rigid background, the gossip goes on—they tear you to pieces...Because everybody's jealous of anybody getting any of the happiness that they are not getting. So if I had a boyfriend or if I had a girlfriend and got too close, never let the world know it. Unless you get married and all that.

continued on following page

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Gerrit Henry, 1976, o/c, 56x54".

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HA: *But it's a pleasure to be honest.*

BP: But take truth: I agree with what the Greeks say, "Truth is too sacred to tell."

HA: *You have to tell it to yourself first.*

BP: I have a dialogue continually with myself about the truth but I don't tell it to everybody.

HA: *Cautiousness can be paralyzing.*

BP: It's a form of self-preservation.

HA: *Now with feminism, we have our sisters to talk to.*

BP: I think in the past, women have been enemies to each other. In the 100% female, which I can't stand or understand, every other woman is her enemy, because other women may get in the way of getting her man. And in the 100% male, he is out to seduce every woman he can, without any sense of responsibility about the rest of it. That's the dog, I call it. The dog and the bitch. And I can't stand the dog and the bitch...In my childhood, I knew there was something about them that made me uncomfortable. The balanced human being has both male and female...If you are born a female you predominate in the sense that you are the one who has to carry the race. Male is the will power. Male has the will to say I will do this, I will do that.

HA: *But you have the will.*

BP: Yes...I have lots of the male in me. (You see, there are a lot of men who have tremendous feeling...a rounded person will have both.) I think the world now is becoming androgyn, as the Greeks called it. You see people walking the streets today and it is very hard to tell which is the male and which is the female.

HA: *Clear cut lines are rigid.*

BP: I think there are three things we have no control over. We have no control over our birth, we have no control over our death, and if we are sincere, we have no control over our feelings.

I have got to read you something if you would like. Let me try and find it..."Love is a fire burning in one's breast. It needs no object. Sometimes it is the nourishment of longing of what one never met before. You might meet it anywhere, the Master said, 'feed my sheep,' t'was a command." In other words, everywhere there is nourishment, if we know how to take it. It's a terrific poem. Haven't seen this woman for years. I just suddenly got this. She sent me this poem, "...I wrote this poem and I thought of you, so I'm sending it to you..." Oh, I've had tremendous nourishment from women. Because they like me. Women like me, you know.

HA: *You don't play games. You could love a woman, and they sense that.*

BP: Yes, they know it, they know it...

PART III

*"...Well, I tried to be free.
In Europe, they weren't even
struggling to be..."*

HA: *I think at the very beginning you saw*

some of your artists as the legends they were to become; you recognized this quality of rugged individualism.

BP: The individual has always interested me. I can't stand packs.

HA: *The individual man or woman?*

BP: Let me see how I can phrase this...If I have to be in the company of either men or women, I'd rather be in the company of men. But I'd prefer a woman who was an individual.

HA: *And when you say you can't stand packs...*

BP: The general public is dead. All they care about is how they're going to pay their rent and what they'll put in their stomachs. I have always been interested in the creative approach to life. It is regenerating for me. And what I call the higher dimensions. The interpretation of God has failed. You know, Christ was the greatest artist the world ever bred, because he understood what mankind was all about. Mankind is not here for stuffing stomachs and fornicating.

HA: *You do see artists as Godlike. And you wrote about some of your artists with a kind of reverence.*

BP: It's what I call The Unknown Quantity that interests me. You read that thing that I wrote about Ad Reinhardt, didn't you? "...who put the light into the shadows. And crossed the horizon numerous times." You know, he was a great traveler, fantastic traveler, he had a thousand slides from all over the world. "...and death, with many intricate lines who turned the day into night, in his struggle with dark and light." Which are his pictures. Fantastic pictures. God! Now, Tony Smith is another, I wrote a thing to Tony. "...The sky looked down and all around the earth was under something grand; it was not rocks, it was not sand, it was the scale upon the land. It reached the summit of the light, and tossed the day upon the night."

HA: *Whew! There's a feeling of something very huge. It's like the quote from your interview in the New Yorker magazine. Can I read it? You're describing your initial reaction to the abstract expressionists: "It was the expanding world they were after. Barney was doing it vertically, with that great plunging line—his 'zip' as he called it. Rothko was doing it horizontally. Reinhardt, by trying to make his pictures more and more invisible, I guess. Still was always the most romantic, with those dark, jagged shapes. He always makes me think of an eagle or a stallion. And Tony Smith—his sculpture holds down the horizon..." (God, Betty these are potent images. Not many dealers write like this about their artists...)*

Then you compare American painting to European painting. "I realized they were saying something no European could say...Europe is a walled city—at least, it always seemed that way to me. Pollock released the historical imagination of this country. I've always thought the West was

continued on page 20

"Studio Floor Still Life #12," 1977, o/c, 46x56"



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Maria van Oosterwijck

17th Century Dutch Painter

by Rosa Lindenburg

PART I **Life and Work**

Along with Rachel Ruysch, Maria van Oosterwijck (1630-1693) attained fame as a 17th century Dutch flower painter. Following the booming interest in gardens and such exotic flowers as the tulip, flower painting emerged as a distinct genre in the last quarter of the 16th century. In 17th century Holland, the center of horticulture, flower painting became popular and a well-paid occupation. Van Oosterwijck fit into this genre, in which quite a few women specialized.⁽¹⁾

The reconstruction of the artist's life is difficult, as the leading source about male and female painters in this so-called Golden Age, Arnold Houbraken (1719)⁽²⁾ is not always reliable. Maria was born on August 27, 1630⁽³⁾ in the vicarage of Nootdorp, a village near Delft. Her father, the vicar, was Jakobus van Oosterwijck. She had a brother Lambertus and a sister Geertruyt. In 1657 this sister would marry Jakobus van Assendelft from Leyden.⁽⁴⁾ Their son, Jakobus, would, according to Houbraken, later be raised by Maria as if he were her own child.⁽⁵⁾

This article has been reworked and translated from the publication Delftse vrouwen van toen door Delftse vrouwen van nu (Women from Delft in the past by Women from Delft nowadays). Delft, 1975. This publication was a contribution for the International Women's Year and will soon see a second edition.



Wallerand Vaillant, *Maria van Oosterwijck*, 1671. 96x78cm. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum. ©Fotocommissie Rijksmuseum Amsterdam.

Although Maria's family had close connections in Delft, there is no exclusive proof that she kept a studio in Delft, as Houbraken mentions. Her grandfather, Jan Barentz van Oosterwijck became a vicar in Delft in 1597, and supposedly she stayed at his house.⁽⁶⁾ Certainly Maria must have been influenced by the cultural and artistic activities of the near-by city of Delft.

From a very early age Maria had insisted that she would become an artist and she was to devote her whole life to art. Houbraken states that it was Johan de Heem (a.k.a. Jan Davidsz. de Heem) of Utrecht, who introduced her to the art of flower-painting.⁽⁷⁾ Later I will dig a bit further into this doubtful apprenticeship.

According to Houbraken, Maria later became so famous that she received commissions from various royal courts. Louis XIV of France had one of her works in his art collection. Emperor Leopold of Germany was so satisfied with her work that he presented her with a portrait of himself and his wife set in diamonds. William III, King of England and Stadholder of the United Netherlands, paid her 900 guilders on commission. The King of Poland went so far as to pay her 2,400 guilders for three pieces.⁽¹⁰⁾

There is evidence that her works were sold to foreign countries and courts. The majority of her paintings are still to be found in foreign countries, particularly in (former) royal collections in London, Paris and Berlin.⁽⁸⁾ She must have surpassed

many of her colleagues in terms of an international reputation and in being financially well-situated.

A notarial act of January 26, 1678, Delft, speaks of witnesses for Maria van Oosterwijck, "paintress of renown,"⁽⁹⁾ for the handing over of two paintings to the Amsterdam merchant Melchior Lidel. He was to transport them to Munich. From there they were to be taken to Vienna where they would be sold on Maria's behalf.

In a deed drawn up on March 2, 1689, Amsterdam, Maria declares, at the request of the Chamberlain of Ribbold, Elector of Saxony, that she had witnessed the removal of three of her paintings from a locked case in the offices of Mr. J. Uttenbogaert "Concierge of this City" [Amsterdam]. The Elector had previously seen and bought the paintings at Maria's studio. An act dated May 12 states that the Elector paid 1,500 guilders for those pieces.⁽¹⁰⁾

Maria could render embellished imitations of nature; however, states Houbraken, her slow work pace resulted in there being few of her works in circulation. The small number (about 20) of surviving works confirms Houbraken's statement. Her first dated work is of 1667, others date from 1668, 1669, 1685, 1686 and 1689.⁽¹¹⁾ Most of the paintings are flower paintings, considered to be of a high quality in

Note: Poems and parts of the text translated by Kerry O'Sullivan.

comparison with the many followers and imitators of Jan de Heem.

Maria's character is described by Houbraken as both virtuous and devout as well as cheerful. He cites that she was courted by the still-life painter Willem van Aelst, a story that was confirmed by Nicolaas Verkolje who paid a visit around 1716 to Geertje Pieters, Maria's former maid-servant and pupil.

Geertje related that Maria was not very interested in the prospect, as van Aelst was well-known as a "loose chap." In order to disengage herself in an honorable manner, Maria initiated a "trial year," whereby Willem was compelled daily to work in his studio except for a few hours every day as means of relaxation. She could easily keep him under surveillance, as their studios touched each other. If he was not at work at a prescribed time, she then would cut a notch in the window sill. The result was that "Van Aelst, who could well assume that he had too many black marks against his record to talk his way out of, did not put in an appearance henceforth." (12)

Still unmarried at the age of 63, Maria died on November 12, 1693 at the vicarage of Uitdam, a village north of Amsterdam. She was then living with her sister's son Jakobus van Assendelft who had become the vicar of Uitdam. (13)

The story concerning Willem van Aelst is not without significance, as he was one of the important still-life painters who could have influenced Maria's style. Also, the story has a follow-up in 19th century Dutch literature, that relates to the beginnings of consciousness among educated women. This, too, I will pursue later.

Geertje Pieters is often mentioned in connection with Maria van Oosterwijck in contemporary sources. The former, however, was copying gratuitously from her teacher, Maria, in composition and style. (14)

Geertje confirms the story between Willem and Maria according to Verkolje. In fact there are notary acts from the period which confirm they were neighbors, but not in Delft, as Verkolje mentions, in Amsterdam.

In a deed dating from July 25, 1676, Amsterdam, Maria complains of the physical and verbal abuse received from the maid-servant of Willem van Aelst, a "painter living directly opposite" on the Nieuwe Keizersgracht in Amsterdam. Maria and Geertruit [Geertje Pieters], her servant who lived with her, were leaning over the lower part of the door and sent the witness Neeltje Jans to the house of Van Aelst to fetch a 'rain garment' Maria had left there. Van Aelst's maid refused to give it, saying "I won't give it to you...those beasts, those filthy pigs, hanging over the door there."

Maria was so shocked that later in that year she wrote a letter to the Aldermen of Amsterdam asking for their help. She describes herself as a "young daughter (or, unmarried woman), a citizen [of Amsterdam] who keeps house alone with her



Flower Still Life. Oil on canvas, 100x82cm. Augsburg, Stadtsche Kunstsammlungen.

maid-servant Geertje Pieters and who has never given any living soul any cause for displeasure or offence." (15)

Knowing now as much as possible about Maria van Oosterwijck's life, it is time to return to her work. Scholars disagree with Houbraken's statement that Maria was the pupil of Jan de Heem. (16)

De Heem (1606-1683/84) was a native of Utrecht, who settled permanently in Antwerp after 1636. He continued to travel and often returned to Utrecht, where he remained a member of the St. Lucas Guild until 1672. (17) It is very possible that Maria was under his tutelage during one of these journeys. Mitchell believes that Maria went to Antwerp at the age of 28 to study under de Heem. (18)

It is certain that de Heem, with his

Baroque bouquets combining Dutch and Flemish traditions, had an influence on her as he had on many others. He did not limit himself to pure still-lives with flowers, but combined these with fruit images and motifs of "vanitas" (vanity in connection with the transitory nature of life.) (19)

When compared with de Heem's, Maria's paintings were less varied in presentation and composition. A few of her pieces depict vanitas motifs. The best and most beautiful example was recently exhibited in the U.S.A. and is from the collection of the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. (20) Her vanitas motifs included objects connected with the passing of time, broken flowers, an account book, a skull, an hourglass, and were combined with symbols of the personal struggle through life as in the title "self-stryf" (struggle within oneself, a favorite humanistic theme) and the knapsack symbolizing the journey through life. The butterfly is a symbol appearing often in Maria's paintings, suggesting resurrection after life on earth.

The vast majority of Maria's work is in the realm of the flower still-life. A bouquet stands in a vase on the central axis of the canvas, placed in colorful contrast to a dark, unclear background. Small insects alight on leaves and petals; flowers and vase are set on a marble tabletop. Her flower paintings, however, are more sophisticated than those of many of her contemporaries. Intermingled are moralistic quotations, as the above mentioned butterfly. The details are treated very delicately and precisely with many subtle variations.

The only example of this work presently included in a public collection in the



Vanitas. 1668, signed. Oil on canvas, 73x88.5cm. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum. Courtesy Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

Netherlands is a flower painting in the depot (!) of the Mauritshuis, the Royal Paintings Collection in the Hague. The work is a good example of her mature work of the late '60s or later. (Her work does not change much over the years.) The painting is signed in the lower left corner, but not dated. (21)

The painting depicts roses, carnations, poppies, convolvuli and a sunflower in an ivory-colored vase with putti and a vine relief. The vase is standing on a brown-veined marble table-top. To the left of the vase lies a lid with a Venus-figure as a grip. Also on the left is a butterfly, and two cockchafers can be seen, one in the foreground and one in the upper right. Only the background is dark, whereas in the remainder red, orange, white and green are predominant.

In this painting there is also a religious-moralistic meaning. It may be said that the vine motif represents Christ as Redeemer; the Venus-figure and the roses depict love and sacrifice; the butterfly is man freed from his terrestrial existence. Flowers in themselves symbolize the transitory nature of life. (22)

These so-called realistic still-lifes are seldom drawn after "real life," but are combinations of quite separate studies. Flowers of different seasons are grouped together in one bouquet. (23) In no aspect whatsoever does Maria depart from the general rules in flower painting. Her Calvinistic background certainly secured the



*Flower Still Life, 1686, signed and dated.
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Chamberlain, St. James' Palace, London,
England.*

religious-moralistic symbolism which is present so often.

PART II Conditions

Maria van Oosterwijck's dealings with foreign countries imply that in Holland she surpassed her fellow artists who were compelled to work for the Dutch bourgeoisie alone. This was quite an accomplish-

ment for a woman, since the competition was sharp and even as famous a male artist as Jan Steen had to support himself with another job.

Maria's fame was also great within the country's borders. She was even lauded by the members of the only elite culture that the Netherlands could boast at that time: the court of Prince Frederik Hendrik and the literary-humanistic "Muiderkring" (Muyder Circle). On September 18, 1677 Constantijn Huygens, secretary to the Prince and member of the Muiderkring, composed the following poem to "Miss Oosterwijck and her maid-servant, also an artist:"

*Our fair friend, the rare young Oosterwijck,
Whose peer is yet to be found,
Performs each day wonders unbound.
One wonder, ne'er easily gauged,
'Tis that she, yet a maiden, bore a maiden,
to wit a maid,
And cast work-cloth, broom, and heart aside.
The Oosterwijck maid was nurtured
so quick and so well
That 'tis Oosterwijck's brush alone
her can quell,
Think ye, my witty friend [W. van
Heemskerk] it a great mistake,
To call Geertje Pieters Geertruyd van
Oosterwijck?
Oosterwijck's teaching has guided her
fate,
She is her own print; Or clearer to
state,
She is Oosterwijck's moon; so give her
such shine,
Think what light must be in the Sun
to give off a glare so fine. (24)*

The contemporary poems from the bourgeoisie at large reflected Maria van Oosterwijck's fame. The Amsterdam poet Dirk Schelte made "a birthday garland woven from the letters of Maria van Oosterwijck's name, being a eulogy to the same in recognition of her matchless flower paintings, on the occasion of her birthday, August 27th, 1673." After praising how colorful and realistic her roses look ("And I fear no sharp thorns") Schelte goes on to speak of the art of this "paintress of renown:"

*Oh how rich poverty is for whosoever
possesses this art;
So artful is your work that with your
brushes,
You defy everything that presents
itself as art...
But, oh star, never yield! You are the
best, and most proper,
It would shine very brightly, if it did
not go against your humbleness...
Oh matchless picture of a Maid, in
art, in speeches, in morals... (25)*

This in turn became the inspiration for painters. One painting, probably by G. de Lairesse, portrays Maria as an allegory of Art who inspires Prose and Poetry, personified by Dirk Schelte. Another portrait of

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Maria painted by W. Valliant in 1671 is undoubtedly of her. As a matter of fact, this portrait bears such a strong resemblance to the allegorical woman figure, that de Lairesse's (?) portrait is considered to be Maria van Oosterwijck. (26)

She must have lived primarily off the general art-market in 17th century Holland, in which the socio-economic power was in the hands of the propertied bourgeoisie. There still was no great class difference between the bourgeoisie and the merchant-regents until the end of the century.

Although there was a considerably large amount of capital in many sectors of the bourgeoisie, on the one hand they did not wish to invest because of their somber Protestant ethic, and on the other hand they could not invest in land because their society had already become too urbanized.

As a result they invested in articles of use or decoration such as paintings, which could also serve to beautify their houses. Painting was the cheapest of the plastic arts. Besides providing a purely decorative element, the purchase of paintings was also motivated by prestige and national pride. Among the upper classes there was a veritable fury of collecting; and thus there arose a very lively trade in art. (27) The relatively high degree of production by hundreds of artists in the period 1610-1675, therefore, was largely a socio-economic phenomenon.

During the 17th century a surplus of paintings developed, so that the price was no longer determined by purely professional aspects (the material and labor involved), but rather by fashion. This laid the basis for regarding the artist as a genius and not just a craftsman. Only the artist of genius could hold his or her head above water, while others would flounder on the market and had to support themselves in other ways. As a reaction the artists became more and more specialized in one particular genre. (28) Maria's became flower painting.

As an artist, Maria van Oosterwijck was exceptional; she was a woman artist springing from a non-artistic environment. She came from a preacher's family. How and where could Maria learn and practice her profession? How could she sell her work in a market that was often and strictly organized by guilds and so male-dominated?

In Jan Steen's painting *The Studio* we do see a girl practicing drawing from a plaster model. (29) This is a common exercise in the training of a painter, and thus the girl was obviously being trained for this profession. And of course, there is evidence of private arrangements by artists, like Maria herself teaching her maid-servant Geertje Pieters.

But officially the apprentice system as well as transactions concerning the purchase and sale of paintings had to be officially conducted via the St. Lucas Artist's Guild. In order to practice the profession of an artist openly one had to be accepted

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into the Guild as a master. Thus Maria would also have had to become a member of the guild, even though women were not as a rule accepted in their own right. (30) An exception, however, was often made for widows.

There is no evidence to show that Maria van Oosterwijck was a member of a St. Lucas Guild, although this is further hindered by the fact that the archives of the Guilds in Delft and Amsterdam have only been partially preserved. The only surviving membership list of the Amsterdam Guild dates from March 1688. This list does in fact include the names of women, even of non-widows, but not that of Maria van Oosterwijck. (31)

The Amsterdam Guild was very flexible in enforcing the prerequisites for membership and was the model for other guilds such as the one in Delft. (32) In the extant Delft book of masters (not from Maria's era) women were also included and there is no reason to assume they were widows. (33)

The Haarlem Guild was much stricter than the Amsterdam-modeled Guild of St. Lucas. Yet the painter Judith Leyster and the flower painter Rachel Ruysch both were accepted into the Guild on their own merit (34) though in Leyster's case, as in others, her marriage to another painter might have helped.

However, in the middle of the 17th century, the guilds gradually lost their monopolistic position. The municipal government of Amsterdam felt less and less sympathy with guild coercion and the surreptitious free trade in art thrived. In practice the Amsterdam Guild was powerless to control the thriving art trade outside of the St. Lucas Guild, in spite of a 1630 ordinance which stated that a senior member of the guild must be present at every purchase of a painting. (35)

Probably it was not essential for Maria van Oosterwijck to have become a guild member, as it would have greatly restricted her. Perhaps, as a woman, it was even easier to avoid coercion by the Guild. We know that she used intermediaries, usually Amsterdam merchants, (36) in the sale of her works. It seems unlikely that she requested the permission of the guild to do so. In the previously mentioned transactions no witness from the guild is ever mentioned.

*

Nostalgia for the Dutch Golden Age occurred in the newly formed Kingdom of the Netherlands in the 19th century. Maria van Oosterwijck's name in the meantime had slipped into obscurity. She again became a heroine during this time via the novel bearing her name as title, written by one of the few important Dutch women novelists of the period, Anna Geertruida Bosboom-Toussaint.

Bosboom-Toussaint uses Houbraken's data as a starting point for the novella *Maria van Oosterwijck*,* (37) which was

published in 1862, as well as for her later book *Willem van Aelst, The Last Act of a Stormy Life*.

In the hands of Bosboom-Toussaint, the romance between the two painters develops into a bitter struggle centering on van Oosterwijck's fight to retain her identity. Bosboom-Toussaint's own romance with another rakish genius is certainly projected in the novel story.

For the author as for her readers at the time, Maria van Oosterwijck is "truly an emancipated woman" who, with vocation and energy, is able to master herself so as to devote her life to art, while yet retaining her feminine inclination toward sacrifice.

Thus in the novel, Maria pledges her faith to Willem van Aelst with the words: "I could hate you because you have succeeded in making me unlike myself." (38) Thanks to Bosboom-Toussaint, Maria van Oosterwijck has rightly entered the annals of the struggle for the emancipation of women.

FOOTNOTES

1. Ann Sutherland Harris, Linda Nochlin, *Women Artists: 1550-1950*, New York, 1976; at the same time catalogue for the exhibition of the same name at the Los Angeles County Museum Dec. 21, 1976-March 13, 1977. This excellent thorough overview on women artists contains more information about women still-life painters in Holland, p.35, and on Maria van Oosterwijck, pp.145-146.
2. Peter Mitchell, *European Flower Painters*, London, 1973, p.25. Basic work about the subject of flower painting in general.
3. Jakob Rosenberg, Seymour Slive, E.H. ter Kuile, *Dutch Art and Architecture 1600-1800*, Harmondsworth, (1966), 1972, pp.334-335. Contains a good cultural insight in the Dutch Republic.
4. Arnold Houbraken, *De grote Schouburgh der Nederlandsche Konstschilders en schilderessen*, Amsterdam, 1719. (Translated: *The Great Showcase of Dutch male and female Painters*), two volumes, II pp.214-216. If not mentioned otherwise I use his information as a source.
5. C. Hofstede de Groot, *Quellenstudien zur holländischen Kunsts geschichte: Arnold Houbraken und seine "Groote Schouburgh" kritisch beleuchtet*, Den Haag, 1893. Hofstede corrects Houbraken on van Oosterwijck's birthday to August 20, p.425. However, this is in contrast with the birthday poem, see note 25.
6. Hofstede, II, p.216. Spoor p.98 finds evidence of these facts, though the location is slightly different.
7. See note 2.
8. U. Thieme, F. Becker, *Allgemeines Lexikon der bildenden Künstler* tome XXVI, Leipzig, 1969, p.25.
9. A. von Wurzbach, *Niederländischer Künstler-Lexikon* Leipzig, 1910, p.256.
10. Bredius, *Archivsprokollen* [Archive Miscellania] in: *Oud-Holland*, Jrg. LII, 1935, pp.180-182. The basic notes for this article are kept at the Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie, Den Haag. I have used both sources for the notarial acts and deeds mentioned in this article.
11. See note 9. Updated list of works in Harris & Nochlin, p.145. See note 1.
12. Houbraken II, p.217.
13. See note 2. Houbraken's information is accepted.
14. Ralph Warner, *Dutch and Flemish fruit and flowerpainters of the XVII and XVIII th centuries*, London, 1928, pp.162-163.
15. See note 9.
16. Houbraken I, pp. 228, 229.
17. Rosenberg, p.338.
18. Mitchell, p.190. Not able to verify.
19. Rosenberg, p.338.
20. Harris & Nochlin, see note 1, catalogue #28, p.146, colorplate p.76.
21. Catalogue of the Koninklijk (Royal Painting Collection) Kabinet van Schilderijen, Mauritshuis, Den Haag, 1935, #468.
22. Mitchell, p.13,23.

*Note: In the novel Maria's name is spelled differently.

Harris & Nochlin, p.146.

23. See note 22, Rosenberg, p.338.

24. Quoted from Spoor, p.100.

25. Quoted from Spoor, p.102. His source is C. Huygens' *Rijmwerken* [poems], Amsterdam, 1714, pp.425, 426.

26. B.J.A. Renckens, *Een portret van de schilderes Maria van Oosterwijck en de dichter Dirk Scheite*, in *Oud-Holland*, Jrg.LXXIV, 1959, pp.236-239. Illustration de Lairesse's (?) painting, p.238.

Vaillant's portrait is illustrated in *Oud-Holland*, Jrg.LXXXIII, 1958, p.244.

27. Ileen Montijn, *Schilderkunst en samenleving in de zeventiende eeuw*, in *Spiegel Historiel*, Jrg.10, #4, April 1975, pp.220-229, especially pp.221-223. About social-economic structure.

28. Montijn, p.224.

29. Hoogewerff, p.85, Illustration 6.

30. Hoogewerff, p.91, 96, 101, 102.

I.H. van Eeghen, *De Gilden, Theorie en Praktijk*, Bussum, 1974, p.24.

31. Fr.D.O. Obreen, *Archief voor Nederlandsche Kunstgeschiedenis*, tome I, Rotterdam, 1877, 1878. Pp.1-25 contains remaining name list of Amsterdam guild members.

Hoogewerff, p.59.

St. Lucas ordinances 1790 and St. Lucas charter 1566-1611 fol. 305-310 vs. From the Municipal Archives of Delft.

Interviews Archivists July 1975 in Delft (Mr. van Leeuwen) and in Amsterdam (Mrs. van Eeghen).

32. Hoogewerff, p.121.

33. Masterbooks Delft St. Lucas Guild, 1679-1715, fol.18 vs. 19 vs. 20. Preserved in the main library of the Netherlands, the Koninklijke Bibliotheek, Den Haag.

34. Eleanor Tufts, *Our hidden heritage*, New York, 1973, pp.72, 100.

35. See note 27.

36. See note 9.

37. A.L.G. Bosboom-Toussaint, *Maria van Oosterwijck* Rotterdam, 1862.

38. J.M.C. Bouvy, *Idee en werkwijze van vrouw Bosboom-Toussaint*, Rotterdam, 1935, p.118, 119, 124.

BETTY PARSONS continued from page 15

an important factor in the art of the '40s and '50s here. Pollock came from Wyoming, Rothko in Oregon—all those enormous spaces. Still grew up in North Dakota. They were all trying to convey the expanding world." You didn't say what you meant by the 'expanding world.'

BP: Yes, I wrote that in my catalogue. Did you see this? "America is at the crossroads of a spiritual center. The American artist therefore is at the spiritual center of the world. The problem of being an American is unimportant. They could paint their paintings anywhere. It is important that they have the background of the American Dream."

HA: *I could never be that patriotic. But then, you wrote that in the '40s. Expansionism is no longer an acceptable political concept.*

BP: But the American Dream is a dream of freedom.

HA: *I guess you still have that patriotism. You came here, your grandfather was in New York, living on what is now Rockefeller Plaza.*

BP: Yes that's right. You see the American Dream did not exist in Europe, and remember, I had been in Europe 11 years. The Italians, the English, the Middle East, they were all dominated by politics. By the male. There was no freedom, and whatever the morals were, the laws were

Strangers When We Meet

by Lawrence Alloway

Joe Singer. *Painting Women's Portraits*. 29 color, 100 b/w illus. 152 pp. Watson-Guptill. \$16.95

For once I am writing about a book in which all the artists are unknown to me. It feels like that James Cagney film *Come Fill The Cup* which opens with him sitting down at his desk in the city room of a newspaper and typing, close-up: "all the dead were strangers." I recognize some of the artists that Joe Singer cites as comparisons—Leonardo, Rembrandt, Vermeer, Velasquez and Van Gogh, but all the others, though called "prominent" in the introduction, are strangers. In addition, most of the portraits are of strangers, except for an artist's wife and daughter or two.

The first contact of this kind of artist and sitter begins with the commission to paint the picture. Not for these artists the portraits that signal love, affection, familiarity, respect, admiration, or liking, or any of the cadences of proximity. No, this book is about how to paint strangers for money. You should "put all clocks out of sight" and in conversation "avoid politics, religion, gossip, and ethnic jokes." Even gossip? And three-quarter views of the head are virtually obligatory as full face depiction flattens. You should avoid the notation of idiosyncratic individuality and stress the socially continuous aspect of the unknown sitter before you.

Since the mid-19th century innovative and perceptive portraiture has rested on the personal relationship of artist and sitter. This is as true of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood as it is of the Impressionists: Millais painted Ruskin, Monet painted Mme. Monet. Commissioned portraits, or the depiction of strangers, have come to

occupy a secondary role in art history. Singer is concerned not only with formal professional portraiture (this is predomi-



Claude Oscar Monet, La Capeline Rouge—Madame Monet, ca. 1870. Oil on canvas, 39½x31½". The Cleveland Museum of Art, Leonard C. Hanna Jr. Collection. Since the mid-19th century innovative and perceptive portraiture has rested on the personal relationship of artist and sitter."

nantly male and belongs in colleges and board rooms) but with informal professional portraits. These are images of wife and mother (often the same person) and adolescent daughter, designed to hang in the homes occupied by the sitters. Singer discusses ways to handle strangers, but not with much candor. He projects a sensible, hard-nosed attitude, but gives no information on how to find a painter if you want your portrait done and does not mention how much the transaction is likely to cost or in what form payment is made. I

suppose Portraits Inc., mentioned in the acknowledgments, would be the best way to go about it.

Painting Women's Portraits taken as a typology, makes sense. The individual identity of sitters is purposefully blurred, but the social function of the paintings are clear. The sitters have a certain exchangeability. For instance, mothers and daughters are not keenly separated: are we looking at a youthful mother or at a daughter ready to take her mother's role in society? The general wardrobe of shirt dresses, woolen coats, and mid-town New York hair styles, slurs generational variation. This is not a mistake on the part of these painters, but their purpose: it implies the existence of a league of good women, persistent from generation to generation, the external sign of which is durable, long-term style. The effect is like Hollywood movies of the '40s and '50s in which fashions, Lana Turner's, say, were generalized so that movies could be re-issued without dating too fast. Similarly the dating of the portraits is rather indeterminate. Out of 129 reproductions, I counted one from the '30s, two from the '50s, four from the '60s, and 14 from the '70s (eight of them, done for the book, from last year). This leaves 108 undated pictures which shows Singer's detachment from the usual procedures of art history.

The social homogeneity of the sitters is marked and it is true that many husbands want to be married to a woman who is like other women of the same class, age, education, and race. If a husband or father is paying for such a portrait he would want the statistical resemblances to be present no less than traces of specific identity. These are women who can raise children, run the house, give a party; they can earn executive approval (good for husband's career) while maintaining the infra-structure of domesticity. The roles that these images of women imply are company wife, hostess, and as mentioned above, mother-daughter. As a sociological document concerning the self-images of one group of women in society the book is a gold-mine.

still 200, or 500 years old.

HA: *But is the Dream real?*

BP: The American Dream was the dream of freedom to do as you please, to do as you risk. Each person must be free.

HA: *But you were in a Victorian, imperial world. So you were not free.*

BP: Well, I tried to be free. In Europe they weren't even struggling to be. They aren't even struggling now to me.

The Italian woman is still actually dominated by the male. The English are a little more independent, but not much. Go over there and you'll see it, right today.

I think if I were running this world, I

would have the United States as an international country. I wouldn't have it just the United States. New York is to me the international capital of the world, I don't care what you call it. You walk down Broadway, and you hear every language spoken. And in New York, there should be a University which would teach people about the problems of the world.

HA: *Artists are increasingly recognizing themselves as political beings, in a larger world. They don't want to just be locked up in their studios in the middle of New York City.*

BP: I think politics is dangerous to the

arts. I think everyone should be conscious of politics, because I want to know where in the hell my tax money is going. And if I don't approve of it, I'm going to fight it. It goes to corruption.

HA: *Getting back to politics and art. We're creatures of the world right now, and we communicate feelings about the world through the work. It is unavoidable.*

BP: We know so little. The purpose of life is, as dear old Shakespeare said, "I come hence and go forth—ripeness is all."

reviews

Diane Karol

(55 Mercer Gallery, April 23-May 11) Diane Karol's mural-size assembled paintings perform magic with the gallery space, transforming its most notorious characteristic—that distancing, white austerity—into something beautiful and friendly.

Karol's achievement is the result of a long, painterly process. Her paintings are constructed from canvas that has been stain-painted in the lush, tropical colors of her Floridian childhood. The fabric is then cut and stitched into rectangular shapes. Karol stacks the shapes in vertical segments, arranging them in overlapping flaps. Finally, the segments are placed side by side and the entire project is hung, flat, against the wall.

Rather than assuming neutrality, the wall becomes part of the painting, thus taming the color, and allowing the work to breathe. *Causeway* heightens the effect by leaving space for the wall to peek through. This utilization of wall also eliminates distinctions between fore- and background. Karol has succeeded in not only incorporating the actual hanging space into her painting, but in maintaining a semblance of flatness as well.

Closer inspection of the component flaps reveals their intricacies. Each rectangle is stitched on four sides, then stitched onto a canvas backing. Colors bleed subtly one into another in polychromatic washes. Karol's care in executing her work is obvious. She is a foe of what she terms "fast food art." Her paintings are visually appealing and carefully thought through; they are a burst of flavor in the typically dry gallery air. It was a pleasure to be in their presence.

—Janet Heit



Diane Karol, *Causeway*, 1977. Acrylic wash on canvas, 8x27'. Photo: Bevan Davies.

Pat Lasch

(A.I.R. Gallery, April 2-27) Looking at Pat Lasch's work, I am reminded of delicate handkerchiefs whose lace is gently rubbed between the fingers, of family occasions and their accompanying decorated cakes. Memories and associations are stirred. It is moving to be allowed to study Lasch's presentation of four generations of her family.

Her earlier works involved hand-sewn interpretations of the cycles of generations, and was more influenced by her maternal grandmother's and mother's involvement in thread. The new works are small, still deal with time and family connections but the technique is derived from Lasch's father's occupation, that of a cake decorator or *konditor*. Each canvas has one or two small black and white photos of a family member. Pastry tubes filled with paint create floral and vegetal motifs, or effects of macrame and fringe. In each series one or more motif surrounds the tiny photo and is retained in each version. The *Fred Lasch* series utilizes abundant quantities of colorful roses around the photo, and with the passage of time the composition loosens up until the flowers seem to shoot off the canvas. Lasch's series dedicated to her mother, Helen, has a different sensibility altogether. White strands of paint are woven and knotted together and look like crochet or macrame. In one version a single blood red rose is placed under a photo of the artist's mother as a young woman. The series is indicative of her mother's crocheting as well as her more reserved personality. The configuration of an arch with curtain-like fringe is the main motif in Lasch's self-interpretation. The arch and tondo forms of older work are carried through and the fringe is parted to view the artist.

Another aspect of the works is its

reference to relics and their containers. The wedding portraits of her grandparents and parents use fine gold threads and strands of hair caught behind horizontal bands of paint, a symbolic reference to time.

All the works have elements of fantasy. We develop whatever story we wish to when looking at these works. Lasch tells a story about life, death and the connection among people in a personal, sensitive style.

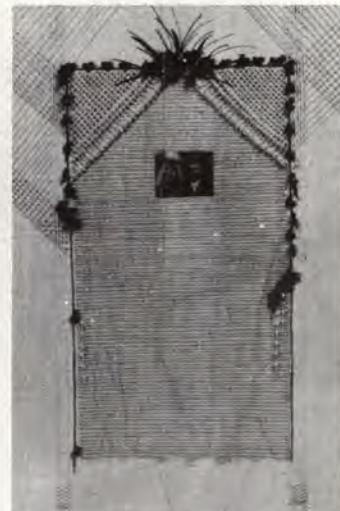
—Lorraine Gilligan

Judy Seigel

(Ward-Nasse Gallery, April 23-May 12) Material, act, imagination—all these go into a process, and the fruits of an obsession with process are Judy Seigel's recent paintings. Seigel has thoroughly familiarized herself with the properties of various liquid states of acrylic paint, and the behavior of watery plastic pigments when washed over the mounds and valleys of sculpted gesso form the material basis of her paintings.

More fascinating even than the process is the inspiration. Seigel has explored some of our most sophisticated image-making tools, computers. Introduced by computer animation, and initiated by computer graphics, she discovered in color production via cathode ray tube the pinnacle of computer art. This led to the appearance of video motifs in her paintings; in fact, the "Channel Six" series is inspired by that electronic image-making tool known in every household as the television set.

The "Channel Six" series became the ground for Seigel's perfection of technique. All the motion and visual excitement of an out-of-kilter television screen is reproduced almost literally in the earlier



Pat Lasch, *Wedding Portrait, Wilhelmina and Friedrich Lasch c.1900*, 1977. Oil paint and photos on muslin.

paintings, using a runaway squeeze bottle and neon colors. As the series progresses a large repertoire of simple mechanical grids and objects are used to make textures and shapes, and the squeeze bottle is tamed. The neon color becomes more transparent, emitting the light energy of ionized atoms. Seigel develops an interest in borders as she gains control of both composition and material, so that the image is comfortably anchored by a crisp bead of gesso drawn through the smoky edges of the canvas. In the "Jumping Doily" series, an outgrowth of "Channel Six," the compositions within the borders are almost classical, with all the elements tightly reined in.

Though I have repeatedly emphasized control in this review, that is not the major impression of the show. Rather, the rapturous color, the obvious delight in the unerring laws of liquids, and the play of textures and lines infect the viewer with Seigel's own irrepressible enthusiasm.

—Carla Sanders

Donna Byars

(A.I.R., April 30-May 25) Byars works with found objects of different sensibilities that are joined to portray a personal esthetic. Objects such as metal wings, animal horns, shells, ironing boards, curved sticks and old wooden boxes; stitched, nailed, stuffed, enclosed, leaned and half-hidden sometimes by a drape of cloth or bandage are assembled in a sculpture format working off the wall and floor. The integrity of a particular component is never violated.

An old ironing board presented vertically on the wall supporting animal tusks reminds me of the phrase by the poet Lautremont, "as beautiful as...the fortuitous encounter upon an operating table of a sewing machine and an umbrella."

Unlike the surrealists, it is not the irony implied in the bringing together of these remote realities, it is rather the reality of Byars' imagination. She works off the fusion of her dream and unique sensibility as an artist. She is deeply romantic in her repudiation and clarity of esthetic choice. Her use of certain objects which by their nature are symbols, are derived from memory, nostalgia and dreams. The ironing board, an object she uses over and over again is for instance a reminder of her mother and the love she poured into the pressing of the family's clothes; the smell, the starch, and process is implanted in her mind as an act of her mother's caring hands. Animal horns, another symbol frequently employed by the artist, is combined with the ironing board in *Harbinger*. Her interpretation of the horns rejects any primitivist allusion and insists that her attraction to them was more their shape, symmetry, texture and in this case, their color, a pale yellow which worked with the old cover of the board.

It is natural that the dream stimulates much of Byars' creative powers and particularly for the *Oracle Stone's Grove*. All the components for this work sit on the floor and do not occupy any wall space; two stones perpendicular to each other sitting like the lap and torso of some ancient temple ruin on an old paint scratched rocker in a grove of four weeping fig trees. For Donna, the grove becomes the shrine of the oracle of her dream.

The sense of mystery and spirituality that pervades her work is further evidenced in her other works. The feeling evoked, especially in the wrapped works, is that of a sense of trespass on a private world. The images must be seen as they are. There is no supremacy of the invisible over the visible. The fact that they both exist simultaneously in Byars' work is a tribute to this sensibility and a test of our own.

—Carolee Thea

Helene Valentin

(Max Hutchinson Gallery, March 22—April 23) Using raw acrylic pigment with glue and water, Valentin creates paintings organic in feel. She builds up color via very very thin layers, achieving opacity and transparency almost simultaneously. One thinks of water and vapor when looking at these, sometimes smoke and fire. Her "backgrounds" are more indistinct, utilizing blurred edges, while the "foreground" activity is in more intense color, in markings and small areas that fit very naturally and easily into the spaces and rhythms of the backgrounds (which could be striated, mottled, or just smoothly mixed). Those paintings utilizing earthy palettes look like natural skins, or rock.

Shown with the paintings was a four-minute film, "Smoke Project Painting Film," which she made at Artpark in 1976. Using smoke flares from different sources implanted in cracks and on ledges of a cliff in Lewiston, New York, she produced smoke in wondrous colors—turquoise, apricot, brick red, filmy blue, pink—that gushed and/or lazily hazed. The rhythm of the film was that of the smoke, and of the eerie voice that was the soundtrack, which sounded like an odd reed instrument.

—Ellen Lubell

Anita Steckel

(Hansen Galleries, April 5-May 1) For a number of years Anita Steckel has related to women through her own experiences and fantasies. Both the *Giant Women* and *New York Skyline* series, done in the early '70s, use photomontages of actual places combined with the artist's rendering of herself and others in imaginative situ-



Donna Byars, Oracle Stone's Grove, 1977. Mixed media, 6x5x5'. Photo: Maude Boltz.



Helene Valentin, Winds and Hill, 1976-77. Acrylic pigment, glue, water, 84x127". Photo: Eric Pollitzer.

tions. The resulting images are powerful, painful and defiant, relating to the viewer on many levels. These series of large canvases, executed in blacks, whites and grays was Steckel's means of directly presenting her message (such as Picasso presented *Guernica* and Rivera his murals) devoid of what she termed 'seductive' elements.

Among Steckel's new work is a large collage and series of xerox pieces and mixed media which continue to draw upon her fantasies and their materialization. The new work focuses on a spiritual journey represented in the form of Steckel's likeness mounted on a bird. Steckel/Bird flies from the confines of New York to visit women in a medieval garden, invades the Sistine Chapel, Da Vinci's *Last Supper*, and Picasso's garden. Magically, Steckel's spiritual release allows her to transcend boundaries of time and events. Woman, in the presence of Steckel, is introduced into male dominated events (such as *The Creation*) and assumes an active role. The concept of a journey is further reinforced through the xerox technique. Each series utilizes the same background (e.g. Sistine Chapel) while in each version the image of Steckel/Bird is shifted while being copied. The distortion creates a sense of movement and energy. Each version in a series is a one-shot image and yet a series could continue indefinitely. The further it is expanded the more unrestrained Steckel's journey. Another series, *Erotica*, combines sterile photo copies of couples in various love-making positions with drawn fantasy images triggered off by these pictures. Reality and fantasy are combined in these, the show's most beautiful pieces.

A new addition to this show is Steckel's use of color. Many of the xerox series are hand colored, *Picasso in his studio* being a striking example. Color relationships and rhythms are lovingly presented in the figures of Lenny Bruce, Genet, Billie

Holiday and Picasso (to name a few), individuals whose lives have deeply affected Steckel. A large collage utilizes many of these personages plus pictures of back alleys, subways, the city. The piece begins to take on connotations of a forest. It is an appropriate feeling, for Steckel's works is lush and optimistic. In paying homage to Picasso, she visits his garden not only as a pilgrimage but as an invitation to women to rove in what has been the male garden.

—Lorraine Gilligan

Lois Polansky/ Barbara Press

(*The Graphic Eye*, June 15-July 3) The works of both Lois Polansky and Barbara Press developed out of their previous printmaking experience. Although they work very differently, both artists are interested in exploring feminine identity.

Inspired by old family photographs, Polansky combines intaglio printing with drawing to produce a series of nostalgic prints. Viewing her show is reminiscent of leafing through the pages of a family album because she repeatedly uses images of her grandparents, parents, husband and children. The significant and varied placement of the family members gives us insight into each of their roles and the relationships between them. The works give a photographic impression because of the studied poses and use of cropping technique; however, the artist chose to etch the likeness rather than utilize the actual photograph. The artist's foremost interest in printing is demonstrated by the presence of written references to the stages in the printing process which are inscribed all over the meticulously graphed ground. In addition, smaller, more intimate reflections on art and life are penciled in other areas of the works.

Barbara Press' prints emphasize deep space and the contrast between soft organic forms and hard bone-like structures. Her three-dimensional works are abstract reliefs made by combining molded handmade paper and small bags (made from nylon stockings) which are filled with lentil beans. She also includes copper and brass plumbing parts, hair like rope fibers, steel wool, springs and nails. By placing the nails in long rows, they serve a supportive function and correspond to the vertebral columns found in some of Press' prints. The effect is an erotic contrast between overt and hidden form as well as a contrast between organic and machine-made elements. One work, inspired by the way truckloads are held in place with tarpaulins and cleats, uses handmade paper and ropes to secure the bean sacks. In this work, the organic forms are mainly hidden, but can be perceived straining against the paper while being resisted by the strings. The stockings, cooking beans, and obvious hand-sewing imply traditional feminine roles, but there is a tension between those materials and the testicle-like forms they create. Press' work conveys not merely an interplay, but more of a struggle for balance between textures, planes, organic and artificial materials, and, perhaps most importantly, between male and female symbols.

—Barbara Coller

Tamar Laks

(*The Sixth Estate*, May 31-June 19) Laks paints figurative abstractions, using arbitrary, sharply delineated chromatic divisions to suggest a form broken by colored light. In her most successful works, the figure becomes an object of identification for the viewer; its position works in conjunction with close tonal variations to



Anita Steckel, *Creation Revisited*, 1977. Collage-xerox wall, 10x10'.



Lois Polansky, *Template Series: Double Intaglio #1. Intaglio and drawing*, 30x22".

create an encompassing mood. The paintings are emotional, yet highly controlled.

While earlier works are obvious renditions of the body with sharply contrasted divisions reminiscent of jigsaw puzzles, her later pieces are more like zoom-lens abstractions in which the body is seen too closely to define its form, and close tonal variations dominate. It is in the middle range of these extremes, with such paintings as *Contemplation* and *Torso I* that the artist makes the most use of the emotional impact of the human form and the mood-manipulation of color.

Contemplation is an extroverted, threatening painting, akin in mood to a tiger poised for attack. The female figure is here seated with her arms wrapped around her knees, pulling them close to her body; her head is sunk behind them and one eye gazes out from the canvas. The position is tense, the gaze, intense, and the warm reddish light in which we see her sets this intensity on fire.

Torso I forms an emotional contrast. The figure is seen obliquely from the rear as she crouches over, legs crossed, palms turned inwards and tucked beneath her knees; the head is lowered and unseen. The figure is closed, introspective, depressed and enervated. Her earth-toned form casts a deep blue-green shadow on her blue environment and the mood of withdrawal is equal in intensity to *Contemplation's* threat.

—Nancy Ungar

Eileen Spikol

(SOHO 20 Gallery, April 30-May 25) Eileen Spikol's exhibition at SOHO 20 made me think of her as a sea-goddess changing nature's debris into "something rich and strange." In *Sea Strangled* bones found on the shore, cast in resin, strung

together in fives, painted in pastel shades like ruched ribbons, their cords tangled behind them, lie as if thrown down by a wave.

Ancient people used bones and teeth as jewels, tools and ritual objects. Similarly Spikol has converted cast vertebrae and other bones into joyous forms of subtle color, scattered on the ground, or placed on the wall as in *Hard Constellation*. This is a piece with 11 units arranged in two rows of four and one of three, one lower corner of the rectangular display empty. This sends the eye back to observe the pattern of the group only to find the uniqueness of each object as an entity; although the effect of each unit is of translucent gold tipped with red, each "star" is a slightly different hue or tone. The most subtle pinks are present where blue has been added, looking almost like shadow, there is an effect of violet. These unearthly stars are more marine than celestial.

In *World Without End* her units are "leaners," dappled poles eight feet high. Open at the base, they overlap at the top, with cast bones, painted in muted colors, suspended from the apex on cords. In *Soft Curves* the artist has created a thing of beauty from folded coffee filters, pinned to the wall in two rising and falling arcs, like a flight of butterflies. The lower arc is somber, like moths, the upper more colorful, like Japanese fans with dreams of half-remembered landscapes.

Visiting the Natural History Museum where Spikol works one can see why it is her inspiration. Unfolding in room after room is the immensity of the past and present, of man and beast, of rock and plant. The realization of this immensity seems to me to be encapsulated in Eileen Spikol's work, the vital meeting of past and present, the serenity of acceptance.

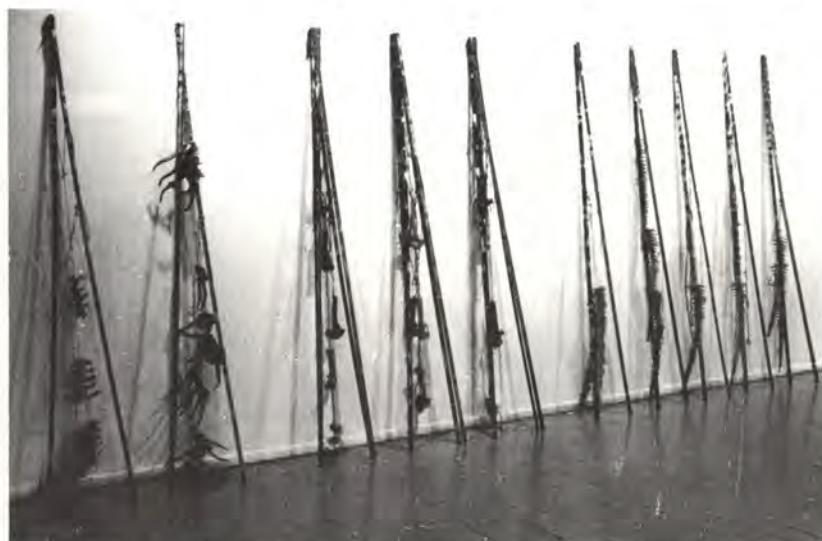
—Sylvia Sleigh

Invitational

(A.I.R. Gallery, May 28-June 28) A.I.R.'s June Invitational included a sampling of works by 10 artists of varied styles and media. All of the participants live outside of New York City; the object, to give them an opportunity for exposure in SoHo. Photography was the dominant medium, used either for itself or as records of the work itself. In Ana Mendieta's (Iowa City) color prints, women's figures interact and become one with their surroundings—rocks, trees, a log in the sand. Miriam Sharon (Tel Aviv) offered a large series of photos titled *Sand Tent Project* (April, May, 1976), documenting the activities and experiences surrounding the setting up of a tent in the Negev desert. She does earthworks in this locale, exemplified here by a boxful of paraphernalia accompanying the 45-picture layout. Joyce Cohen (Washington, D.C.) contributed haunting and well composed photographic self-portraits in which she explores the many sides of self with images of spectral and vampire-like somberness. *The Beech Tree Piece* (1976) by Rosemary Wright (Washington, D.C.) is a book of prints commemorating the wrapping of the artist with a beech tree accompanied by commentaries on how the process worked and the emotions experienced during the process. Charlotte Brown's (Woodbury, New York) technically proficient xerographic prints were arranged in rows of five across and seven down to form a large wall piece collage of squares. The surface and textural variety and the range of beige tonalities form an interesting pattern obviously based on the works of artists such as Michelle Stuart. Linda Rubinstein (Putney, Vermont) had two cases of miniature ceramics, strange and macabre images of dismembered body parts and mummified grotesque figurines. The only painting in



Tamar Laks, *Torso I*. Acrylic on canvas.



Eileen Spikol, *World Without End*, 1977. Fiberglass, resin, wood, each 8'h.

the show was a large abstraction with large empty areas of pale grays and blue-greens by Enid Sanford (Washington, D.C.). An active and starkly jolting wall piece with all sorts of collage items from peacock feathers to wires and loaded with images alluding to the frightful atrocities of Nazism came from Gerda Meyer Bernstein (Germany). On the whole, the exhibition was a rather unmemorable conglomerate of works offering no surprises but following closely on ideas already explored by better known artists, usually with more noteworthy results.

—Barbara Cavaliere

Idelle Weber

(*Hundred Acres Gallery, April 30-May 21*) Idelle Weber is our guide through the trash of the city, the discards of a consumer society and its inefficient means of disposal and recycling. In the past, Weber focused her energies on painfully accurate depictions of fruit stands but tired of the monotony found even in variations on this theme. She is much more intrigued with photographing trash piles, and transforming the results into oil paintings. Weber discovers random association in package graphics, the texture of the debris and the site, the effects of light and color relationships.

The show consisted of a dozen paintings, the majority of them oils on large canvases and a few smaller watercolors. The paintings are done slowly and carefully with an eye for exactness. It is surprising to find out that the pieces are not still lifes but found arrangements Weber calls city scapes. Weber's impeccable technique captures the effect of morning light on glass, paper, cellophane, metal and distills pure color relations that dissolve the canvases into abstract grids of brilliant

color. Weber is careful to point out that not all trash combinations make interesting paintings on many levels but pushes herself to explore new relationships within the work. One painting, *127th Street, Harlem*, has a large mirror devoid of reflections in the center of the composition while gaudy contact paper, liquor bottles and other objects capturing reflections vie for our attention.

Weber's work contains political, economic, and social connotations, they are unavoidable, and yet they are not the artist's foremost concern. She is like the collage maker who shuffles down a street looking for scraps of things except she looks for large collections of objects in a setting and transforms them into magical walking tours of warmth and humor.

—Lorraine Gilligan

clear.

Her most ambitious work, *City Environment #1*, was a multiple-unit dwelling made of free-form pottery. One viewed the scene through the missing wall. The figures themselves are not more than a few inches high, and the surrounding rooms make up the rest of the 40-inch height. The vignettes seen in the rooms are almost theatrical.

Grabel also showed her version of "drawings." These were in fact rolled tablets of clay with figures painted on in glaze.

Susan Grabel's sculpture included humor—a rare and special quality in the visual arts. The other pleasing aspect about her sculptures is their multiplicity—of types of people, of actions, of gestures, of rooms. Hers is a complex and warm art coming from a very original point of view.

—Marjorie Kramer

Susan Grabel

(*Prince Street Gallery, April 1-21*) Susan Grabel is a figurative sculptor who works in partially glazed clay. Her work consists of figures in many-roomed city environments; her interest is in city family life. The work is domestic and intimate in a humorous and compassionate way. It is inclusive of people of all ages, from a nursing baby and mother in a natural gesture lying on a bed to an elderly person. The work seemed more arresting in a human interest way than for its forms, although the making of colored figurative sculpture, especially of environmental genre pieces is very unconventional in sculptural terms. It shows a brave and rigorous stance. She questions assumptions of what is craft or pottery and what is fine art in her own personal way. In addition, these works are close to genre painting in their small scale, emphasis on family life and in the way the actions are so

Four Artists from California

(*Sculpture Now, June 4-30*) The four artists were women—Nora Chavooshian, Julianne Frizzell, Robbin Henderson, Anna Valentina Murch—who were united in that stylistically they were each quite unconventional. Henderson's *Kimono* comprised two pieces of roughly painted cloth that approximated the shape of the garment, and was tacked directly to the wall, challenging its usual qualities of delicacy. Her other piece was an untitled work of acrylic and polypropylene. Black right angle triangles were moored to the wall at their top point and to the floor at the point at the other end of the hypotenuse via a cord running through the edge. These were repeated the length of a long side of the gallery, gaining substance



Idelle Weber, *Nugget*, 1976. Oil on canvas, 47x72". Photo: Bruce C. Jones.



Susan Grabel, *City Environment #1*. Clay, 13½x35x40".

through the repetition.

Murch showed a number of floor pieces, the best of which was composed of nine plexiglass boxes, each row of three descending in size, and each box containing light reflectant materials. The first row of boxes contained clear marbles in granular material in white, brown, and a silver reminiscent of mica chips. The second and third rows contained prisms, crystal spheres, quartz crystals. The various light effects were quietly beautiful.

Chavooshian's large suspended plastic cylinder contained mixed media sculpture that looked like several fetuses in amniotic sacs, strung along a few umbilical cords. The artist's colors, use of translucence and shapes directed a viewer to that image.

Frizzell's wood sculptures were balance pieces, in which position is held through exact placement and weight distribution, rather than nails, braces, etc. In *Balance Series 3* (1977), a free-standing work, seven blocks of wood were held by one, long opposing one. In *Balance Series 1* (1977), similar blocks of wood ascend a wall, held by a block leaning against wall and floor. One viewed this work in breathless and motionless contemplation.

—Ellen Lubell

Louise Fishman

(Nancy Hoffman Gallery, May 7—June 2) Until 1974, Louise Fishman was painting her thickly impasto abstractions on wood. Now her oil and wax images are done on stiff handmade paper that adds a sculptural dimension to the solid presence of the earlier work. Abstract/geometric art rarely invites the viewer into a pictorial experience, but Fishman challenges that attitude with these seductive new works that evoke endless corridors and open



Louise Fishman, *Little Light of Mine*, 1976. Oil on paper, 31x22½". Photo: Bevan Davies.

windows. The earliest works in the show (1976) document a recent transition from more hard edged forms to the concentric rectangles of the newest pictures, which draw the eye deeper and deeper into each composition.

Fishman's imagery is just ambiguous (abstract) enough that we aren't forced to see any particular scene. But it is clearly her intent that we investigate and enter the center of each work. The oil and wax surface is thickly applied, then scarred with repeated, rhythmic gestures. These strokes further coax the eye inward to invent and dream on the central forms that are just out of focus or out of sight. The muted colors, mostly combinations of pink, gray and beige, are painted as borders within borders, and further suggest depth.

Fishman is a master of painterly innuendo. Her works turn inside out before your eyes. This inward movement, and the literal reference to a window/door frame allow for daydreaming into each work. This is a refreshing idea in abstraction—one that brings aspects of fiction and the narrative to that genre.

—Jill Dunbar

Susan Stein

(Henry Hicks Gallery, June 17-July 6) Stein models face masks out of papier mache mixed with a variety of materials such as Burpee's Plant Formula. The surfaces she achieves are crusty and irregular, adding an aged and somewhat repulsive look to the already mysterious entities. Some of the works are eyeless and meant to be worn; the artist provides mirrors, a hat and a wig for this purpose. Others, complete with eyes but without bodies, form the bulk of the gallery's population of strong personalities. Among



Susan Stein, *Old Man with White Beard*. Painted papier mache.

Stein's newer works are full-figure dramatic pieces in which she has modeled not only the face but an additional part of the body, such as the hand, and incorporated the form with a sweep of draped clothing. The latter works she would like to see used in theatrical and dance productions.

One of Stein's most effective works is a three-faced mask in which one face looks to the left, one straight ahead, and one to the right. the divided personage, neither Picassoid nor schizoid in feeling, is, to my mind, a revealing statement of why masks are made and worn to begin with: wearing such a mask, an individual need not expose her true self. Yet, a mask usually indicates a commitment to a facade. This mask doubly frustrates the viewer; it not only masks the person behind it but, by refusing a commitment to any one direction or point of view, it masks itself as well.

The three-faced mask is not one of Stein's most recent pieces but it perhaps reveals the impetus and irony behind her present drive to eerie drama and to down-home, tongue-in-cheek naturalism. On the other hand, her move toward extroversion might indicate a decision to choose among her three opposing faces.

—Nancy Ungar

Jan Van Raay

(Hansen Galleries, May 10-June 5) Van Raay, a photographer, here presented a series of color xerox works entitled "Xerographic Fishworks." Basically, the works show the artist's face and/or hands in combination with various sea creatures, primarily octopus, with squid, snails and small fish. She works with her materials right on the glass plate of the Xerox 6500 color copier, manipulating color and arrangement for each work. For example, a series might consist of one xerox of the



Jan Van Raay, *Xerographic Fishwork*, 1977. Color xerox, 10x8".

composition in full color, approximating reality, while the remainder of the xeroxes in that series are of the same composition in one or two colors each (blue, magenta, green, orange). Some are combination works, and many 'single' pieces have been cut around the edges, emphasizing the compositions.

A series that combines hands, an open (screaming?) mouth—often with a snail inside—and an octopus conveys a sense of terror, of invasion as in a myriad of science fiction movies. Van Raay uses her medium well, appearing to understand the machine more fully than many other artists who employ it.

—Ellen Lubell

Jeanne Miles

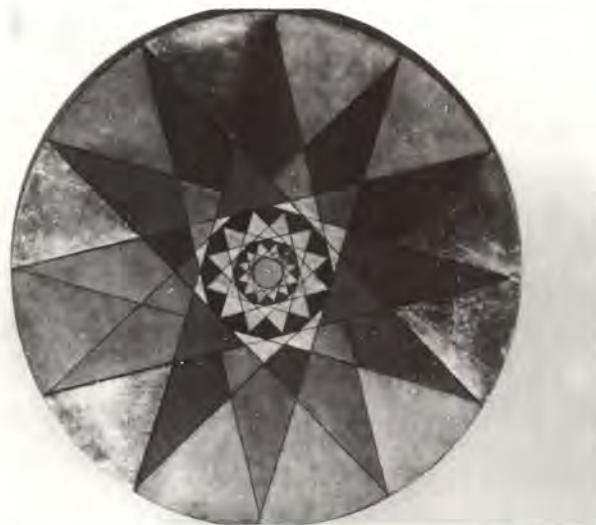
(*Betty Parsons Gallery, April 1-16*) Jeanne Miles is an artist who brings a wealth of influences and experiences to bear upon her small geometrical paintings done on plexiglass and worked in gold and platinum leafs and oil. Drawing from Miles' long interest in actually using jewels in early works, the use of precious metals in the development of a painting gives it warmth and makes already beautiful colors shimmer. The metallic leafs lend a feeling of great depth to the paintings despite the use of heavy black lines to outline geometric shapes.

Miles works with tondo shapes or rectangles and squares that contain circles. Within the circles are grids, other circles, or star-like configurations. This dichotomy of a straightforward pattern combined with a mystical color sense is the strength of these paintings. Many of the grids are symmetrically balanced, emanating a sense of harmony coloristically and compositionally. Psychologically and symbolically the use of circles and squares has

come to represent the individual in a state of wholeness and self-assurance. The paintings have a strong meditative quality, and spiritual connections can also be made. The circles with their touches of gold leaf are reminiscent of Byzantine dome mosaics, or of stained glass. The star-like pattern has the mystery of an all-seeing eye.

The paintings radiate a great sense of peace. These are mature works whose beauty and sensibility are received with welcome. It is hoped that Miles continues to receive the attention due her.

—Lorraine Gilligan



Jeanne Miles, Mandala #6. Gold and platinum leaf, oil on plexiglass.
Photo: Mary Donlon.

contains both these opposites, contains them and does not contain them. It is a great virtue of this series that many opposite discoveries are capacitated by an arrangement of simple elements modestly situated without frame, on borrowed planes. The effects are subtle, and the hand-written signs telling us what to look for do not distract with over-definition.

Allen says her work is concerned with paradox, but these are not startling paradoxes of manipulated illusion which require the viewer to yield. Rather they are inherent paradoxes of opposition and unity which yield to contemplation. They also yield to focused attention to centers and to more diffuse attention to boundaries, where the falseness of "centers" is clearest. The series is a whole much more than the sum of its parts. Its economy of means and richness of effect are most impressive.

—Patricia Eakins

Roberta Allen

(*John Weber Gallery, June 1-18*) Allen's series "One as Two and More" deals in several ranges of understanding. A simple sign, the X, defines focal points: actual centers and false centers, simultaneous centers of large surfaces divided into parts (wall or floor) and small undivided surfaces (plexiglass). The principle of ordering is theme and variation and the variation is closely, even scientifically, controlled. The sign X is conventional but in this context emerges clean, stripped of its meanings, so the viewer can easily focus on work that deals precisely with focus. The effect of the series is thus intense. The poet Charles Olson has said, "There must be a way which bears *in* instead of away, which meets head on what goes on each split second, a way which does not—in order to define—prevent, deter, distract, and so cease the act of, discovering." Allen has rigorously delimited what is going on, and within these limits has stripped away deterrents to discovery. Yet part of the discovery of focus is the discovery of its opposite, diffusion. The X creates a field that



Jane Schneider, Altar, 1977. Wood, feathers, fibers, seeds, 24x12x10".
Photo: ©Little Bobby Hanson, 1977.

nylon and steel, the sculptures are enlivened by the use of brightly colored twines and beads. Schneider values the humanizing aspect of handiwork, so that each piece is marked by a high standard of craftsmanship—each feather carefully wrapped, every bead securely bound.

By traversing stone age and jet age technology in her choice of materials, Schneider affirms a belief in a collective unconscious. For all our sophistication, our rituals and symbols spring from the same subliminal fears that motivate the primitive mind. Her sculptures become the totem objects. The "Sticks" are efficacious tools dropped by some mythic warrior, or a goddess of supernatural strength, and preserved through generations by loyal devotees. These pieces are almost entirely crafted of natural materials, often employing the same techniques used by American Indians in their decorative arts. There is a strong sexual power within these images, but it is symbolic of an active power beyond the image itself. Though not lacking in humor, the sticks denote a preoccupation with the sacred.

The "Strumpets," formed by the ancient totem idea acting on modern materials, deal less with mystery and are more like individuals. They are in fact satirical caricatures of easily recognized personalities, such as *Bitch* and *Vampire*. The sexuality of these objects is carnal, bound to the characters, thus losing its mystical power, and relegating the objects to the realm of the profane.

—Carla Sanders

Sally Amster

(Prince Street Gallery, April 22—May 11) Sally Amster's "Paintings of Maine" describe the beautiful roughness inherent in the craggy landscape of rock, tree and

sky that is coastal Maine.

Amster observes nature with a keen eye for color and shape. Painted outlines contour each element, charging these scenes with the rhythm of a crisp wind rustling branches or that of little waves lapping at the shoreline. The planar constructions of these paintings allude to landscapes by Cezanne in their obvious reliance upon contemplation before setting any strokes to the canvas, while the ease with which Amster employs her earthy colors speaks of Milton Avery.

But historical references alone cannot elaborate sufficiently on the vivacity, the deceptively effortless toil and the expression of joy that Amster imparts to her work. Every tree, every leaf and inlet appears anthropomorphic. For these paintings are no more based upon pure objectivity than they are upon purely subjective discourse. Amster orders nature without forgetting that, before anything, it is nature that orders her. She brings forth the life, seemingly in smell and texture as well as in color, that is the pine tree, the cool lake, the cliff.

It is a treat to follow the sheer drop off of a peak or to observe the horizon line tugging at both ocean and sky. A bristly spruce blossoms into a plush weave of velvety greens, modified with soft blues and a murky yellow. The ground shifts and pulls in gravity and perspective. The air is so clear one can take it in exuberant gulps.

"Paintings of Maine" are more than landscapes; they are telling portraits. These paintings are zesty, fragrant, fresh.

—Janet Heit

Annie Bell

(Alternate Space at Westbroadway Gal., June 18-July 6) Mid-westerner Annie Bell

borrowed heavily from the origami tradition in her solo show at Alternate Space. Her folded and watercolor-dyed paper pieces look like classroom exercises. Most of the works are folded into similar slender forms, some purposefully torn, that never rise above their crafty Oriental counterparts. The watercolor stains make a batik-like effect on the tissue, usually in rainbow progressions from green to blue to purple or from red to yellow. At their best, Bell's collages are playful copies and attain experiments that Frankenthaler perfected in the '60s. There is too little variation in technique, form, intent and color to give this show body. The installation suffers too from the symmetrical, dry hanging of five single works facing five single works and four double pieces facing four double pieces on the remaining two walls.

—Jill Dunbar

Barbara Grossman

(Bowery Gallery, April 1-21) Barbara Grossman showed figure paintings, landscapes and drawings. The works are quiet and harmonious, with great strength of composition. Their color is gentle, muted and pale. The paintings don't jump out at you, they sit back. The large scale paintings are in general continuing a theme Barbara has been pushing and developing for several years. Its roots are in Matisse. She has been painting models and women friends life-size, from the front, dressed in ordinary modern clothes. The paintings seem more like figure paintings than specific portraits. The models sit in chairs, at tables, often with cups of coffee and houseplants around them. There is something unflinching in her attitude toward the sitter. The newer paintings seem more conversational, re-



Sally Amster, *The Bay, Summer Afternoon*, 1976. Oil on canvas, 50x40".



Annie Bell, *untitled*, 1977. Watercolor collage.



Barbara Grossman, *Louise in Rocker*, 1976. Oil on canvas, 48x36". Photo: eeva-inkeri.

laxed and natural, and less posed, formal and abstract.

The sense of space created is not atmospheric or three-dimensional, but an abstract, non-illusionistic space, the kind of space one senses in Matisse, Picasso, DeKooning or perhaps in some earlier artists' work, Uccello or Utamaro, where there are clear airless layers with flat but beautiful shapes revealing the space.

Grossman's paintings are involved with combining organic body forms with the human-made geometric forms of tables and rooms. The figure usually is in the middle of the composition and bumps into at least one edge of the canvas. In the slightly smaller landscapes the involvement is also with composition or structure and there is often a barn to balance the lumps of cedar and land forms. I believe this shows a considered point of view about people and the things people have made and how they fit in with nature.

While I felt that Barbara hadn't completely found her own voice yet, these were large-scale, ambitious works, expansive and strong yet quiet.

—Marjorie Kramer

Diane Kaiser / Emily Fuller

(SOHO 20 Gallery, May 31-June 22) Works by two artists shared the space at SOHO 20 during the month of June. Diane Kaiser works loosely brushed gray-toned ink washes to create an abstract calligraphy Oriental in flavor and suggestive of the movement of the forces of nature. The *Waterpoem Series* are all-over gestural works which have a soothing, feathery touch. The flurry of nimble, spontaneous dashes resembles shooting stars or blinding blizzard conditions. Images become more centralized and hover in rows or clusters like the patterns of leaves in her

Shadowdance Series. Layers of vibrating almost pyramidal organisms move in rhythms resembling futuristic paintings and become decodable hieroglyphs written in the haste of some intense emotional need. The fired clay and white enamel *Awakening Series* is less effective for its loss of subtlety. Shiny, cream-colored, slimy coiling forms bend and ripple like octopus arms obeying the contours of the sinuous slab on which they rest.

Emily Fuller's works are comprised of rather irregular squares, triangles and rectangles seamed together to make a patchwork pattern suggestive of aerial views of a landscape or engineers' plans of some new urban development. In these acrylic paintings the interior linear patterns are sewn lines of subdivision echoing the shape of each piece of material, and in the works on paper, interior markings are accomplished by scratching out of lines and dots, adding textural interest. The works are monochrome, and Fuller prefers raspy and slightly off tones of red-purples, red-oranges, bright aquas. She manages to achieve considerable variety of both interior and exterior shape and shows a flair for giving vitality to geometric patterns.

—Barbara Cavaliere

Janet Culbertson

(Lerner Heller Gallery, April) "Islands," Janet Culbertson's exhibit at Lerner Heller, combined landscape paintings of islands in the Galapagos and large drawings of tortoises, seen as symbolic islands. There is a sharp visual contrast between the drawings and the paintings and it forms itself into an emotional contrast as well. While the islands are depicted as sullen brooding forms imposing themselves upon the sea and mist and sky, the



Emily Fuller, untitled, 1977. Sewn canvas and acrylic paint, 30x54 1/4".

tortoises are alive with texture, light and personality.

The paintings at a glance are cold and uninviting, and there is great temptation to dismiss them in favor of the turtle drawings. This response is due in part to the flat solidified colors and stark compositions in which craggy rock formations are stamped upon pale slate backgrounds. The tortoise however draws the viewer's eye to play in its myriad shapes and lines and points of light and dark, for Culbertson has transformed its solid dome-like hulk into living texture, tangled and intense as its primeval jungle habitat. But turn one's back on the tortoise and look closely at the island paintings, and their forbidding solidity dissolves into nuances of color as cold stone and flat water are described with unexpected textural richness with a subtle light playing upon them.

The aloofness of the islands and the intimacy of the tortoise form a contrast that is visually distracting at times, but contribute to a depth the show might otherwise lack. Between the tortoise and the islands the viewer stands absorbed in a puzzling field of thought, unable quite to reconcile these two aspects of the artist's vision. It is as if within the viewer's mind the remote lonely island of rock seeks its only means of union with the living island which is its soul.

—Carla Sanders

Elba Damast

(Alternate Space at Westbroadway Gal., May 28-June 16) Because they fuse styles that have diverged in the history of 20th century art, Damast's paintings seem markedly ambitious. They are involved in the full range of possibilities the notion "abstract" seems to present. They have characteristics both of abstract expres-



Elba Damast, I Am Confused. They Are Confused Too. Oil on canvas, 60x54".

onism and of the quasi-geometric linear abstraction that preceded it. For instance, some of Damast's color areas blot and fuse (characteristic of abstract expressionism) and others stay distinct, are even outlined. The balance of colors sets up rhythms which, while large and conspicuous, are discontinuous, syncopated; they emerge and re-emerge from the linear spatial organization of, say, crossed axes. Particularly in the triptych, *In, During, and After February*, the sense of variation on an essentially linear theme is strong. And there is a sense of wit at play, indeed, one might even go so far as to say Damast has a witty sense, a scathingly witty one, like Francis Bacon's. Yet her work remains painterly. It is characterized by the effect of rapid handling one associates with abstract expressionism, although it is rather more evenly saturated than most expressionists' work.

The effect of contrasting depths that holds the color masses in such tension has more to do with the dimensionality Damast evokes (only to destroy) than with uneven densities of paint. Anabolism, catabolism, metabolism: these are paintings of complex process, but the synthesis they represent is a balance more difficult to describe than to perceive. In the paintings, it is dramatically present. And it is strong, as intense as the artist's dark, earthy colors.

—Patricia Eakins

Nancy Malkin Stember

WestBroadway Gallery, June 4-23) Nancy Malkin Stember's vividly colored and visually stunning decorative abstractions are a play on illusion and reality. The beige-to-warm-brown ground depicts a puckered material which forms rather deep folds. Looking closer, the surprise is that what

we have become accustomed to seeing as an illusionary tactic in realistic art here becomes real texture, Stember having crumpled the material and formed some low relief areas blending with the flat, illusionary areas. Beachball-like circles, colored in swirling quarters of bright hues (which seem to follow some color pattern) float across the surface and are framed by squared-off areas of the brown backdrop. The strident, lollipop colors are continued in the streamers of rickrack which often act as connectors for the ball-circles and further embellish the already highly ornamented surfaces. Stember's is a long and tedious process; she works in acrylics on a wet surface, unprimed where the folds appear, going back and forth over various areas, reworking them to her high degree of finish as the paint is drying.

—Barbara Cavaliere

Ce Roser

Ingber Gallery, May 31-June 18) Roser showed 20 works, oil paintings and watercolors, of which many belonged to her "Square Sun Series." The majority of the more recent paintings incorporate the white of the ground as a major constituent of the compositions. Brightly-colored, minimally-indicated landscapes arch their way over the whiteness. The square suns are rectangular lozenges, outlined or in two close sections that seem to indicate movement, phases, or the sun's dynamic volatility.

The successful compositions vitalized the entire canvases, mobilizing the surfaces. Among the best were *Flight* (1972-76), which looks like an electrified floral still life energized in its angular vector; *A Quiet Beauty* (1971), almost an abstract watercolor with a square sun, onto which are collaged pieces of paper containing

handwritten fragments of a poem, the meter of which seemed to fit the descending nature of the painting; *Sun Patch* and *Sun Wise*, two tiny, square, colorful watercolors hung next to *Exploration*, a very large watercolor with centralized images on a white field, which was more abstract and expressive than most of Roser's other paintings, seemingly less tied to a (real?) landscape. The artist also showed a tapestry for which she did the design, in which medium her disjointed elements on a plain background worked very well.

—Ellen Lubell

Site Sculpture

(Zabriskie Gallery, June 21-July 29) In what seems to be an annual event, Zabriskie showed the work of its site sculptors via a display of photo-documentation and models, plus a realized work designed for the space. The latter was by Athena Tacha, who was accompanied by Mary Miss, Anne Healy and Lloyd Hamrol. Tacha's tape sculpture stretched across part of the gallery, from an "upper horizontal and adjacent vertical to opposite lower horizontal and opposite vertical," producing part of a spiral. Twenty-three bands of tape, like ivory paper about two inches wide, stretched and turned across the space. She also showed six drawings of alternate proposals for tape sculptures for the gallery site.

Miss was represented by a number of photos depicting many on-site works. A large number of these combined circles with rectilinear elements that included grids or just straight planks of wood; most notable among these were her pieces for the Battery Park Landfill (New York City), *Sunken Pool* (Greenwich, Conn.), and for Lewiston, New York. In addition, her many wood and rope pieces displayed her



Nancy Malkin Stember, untitled, 1977. Collage and acrylic on canvas, 42x42". Collection: Kenneth Balk.



Ce Roser, Square Sun II. Wool tapestry, 42x74". Photo: Nathan Rabin.

great feel for her materials and for rhythms appropriate to her sites.

Of Healy's three models for sculptures, two were architectural sculptures that would fill the huge inner court spaces in buildings at Wayne State University (to be executed) and Stanford University (proposed). Both utilized huge banners of nylon sailcloth; at the former, they are situated diagonally across the high (100 ft.) space, forming step-like movements, each in a different color. In the latter space, the long, rectangular bands are hung parallel to the ground at different levels and angles within the (60 ft.) space. In both works the bright clean shapes of color effectively slashed the enormous rigid blocks of space.

Hamrol's works, as seen via photos, utilized burlap bags filled with sand to form compact, contained, curved and/or spiralling stacks on sloping lawns or around trees, displaying again his proficiency with shapes generally included in the roster of female images. There was also extensive documentation of the site for, and the progress to completion of his share of "The City Project," a joint venture between New Gallery and Cleveland State University in which four artists were each given a vacant lot to work with. His sculpture, of wood planks and the burlap bags, formed a sprawling near-cruciform shape.

—Ellen Lubell

Florence Siegel

(*Exhibitionists, March 8-26*) Siegel's almost fanatically careful, yet deft, graphic technique combines with an emotional commitment to several causes—socialist,



Anne Healy, *Color Crossection*, 1977. (Wayne State University, Detroit General Hospital). Model, scale: $\frac{1}{4}''=1'$.

and above all humanist—to produce large, impressive, often powerful drawings. The basic components of these works are tendrils linear forms interwoven amidst geometric divisions—sometimes rendered in three dimensions—and laced with sometimes copious written text. The texts are written in tiny lettering, but the lettering is exact enough to be easily legible to the naked eye. In recent works Siegel has incorporated figurative images, specifically of her social and political heroes, and in some cases villains. A spectacular document on the overthrow of Salvador Allende of Chile—complete with crisp, precise depictions of Allende, Pinochet and other military leaders, scenes of marchers and of tanks and soldiers in the streets, of prisoners being tortured, and, postscripting the whole testament in the lower right corner, the Pentagon—is a case in point. Even her more or less purely formal works are informed as much by Siegel's social awareness and sensitive self-examination as by her eye and hand.

—Peter Frank

June Blum / Ilise Greenstein

(*Stony Brook Union Gallery, April*) Two talented women shared the Union Gallery, State University at Stony Brook, N.Y. in April. June Blum of New York and Ilise Greenstein of Florida had also exhibited here three years ago in a show entitled "Two Women."

At first glance the work in the gallery seemed to be disparate in intent, but on closer examination the common denominator of energy and intensity emerged.

Blum paints in oil to create her "Environmental Portraits" of well-known women in the arts as well as members of her family. These expressive, realistic portraits are equally balanced between the sitter and details from her particular life style. Blum skilfully selects the appropriate palette to communicate her very personal interpretation. Her strong sense of line and shape captures the spirit of the sitter, as in the successful rendering of *Betty Friedan*. The use of biographical elements particularly enhance the portraits of *Sylvia Sleigh*, *Judith Van Baron*, *Cindy Nemser*, and her *Self-Portrait*. In the paintings of her sister, *Joan Braile* and of the *Resignation on TV* Blum conveys a strong response to her subject through the use of vibrant color. In all of these portraits the entire canvas illuminates the personality.

Greenstein is an abstract-conceptualist who is combining words with acrylics, aluminum powder and silver glitter. Her current format of free-hanging, diamond-shaped canvases, the *Kites*, is well chosen for continuing her dialogue between poured, drip-stained painting and architectonic, hard edge, printed letters. She

investigates art as language. Her effervescence contrasts sharply with her tough minded involvement in the substance of paint and surface. The six kites making up this exhibition range in size from six inches to five feet and are so placed as to make an environmental statement.

Greenstein is also exhibiting working drawings and documentation of her work for the Sister Chapel, a monument to feminism which she conceived and organized. This kite series reinforces her involvement with the theme of freedom for women, and her belief that "there is no ceiling on human potential."

—Rhett Delford Brown

Margie Billstein Katz

(*Razor Gallery, June 4-25*) The paintings of Katz's "Human Experience Series" take place on the abstract end of the abstract/representational continuum. In each of them, an abstract figure with strong representational references has been dripped and scratched on a smooth, brushed ground. The paintings are most successful when the representational references, to human forms, are fully subsumed in the abstract compositions—when the viewer feels more caught up in the kinetics of "experience" than in the descriptive of "human." To have one's attention caught by what seems to be a foot is to be drawn reluctantly from what one feels is the real interest of the paintings: the rhythm, variety, and richness of the drippings and scratchings and the larger gesture of the compositions. There is a great deal of vigor in the shapes and placements of the figures, and their dense variety of texture compels scrutiny. Katz's drippings, and particularly her scratching, are deft and catlike. They suggest a furiously playful attack, a cat after a mouse. The metaphorical intentions are fully realized in the simple fact of figures built up in hundreds of tiny gestures on a relatively bare ground. This Beckett-like image of human experience is reinforced by the indeterminate edges of the figures, which emerge from the ground without ever being separated from it. To mention metaphor and writer Beckett is not to accuse the paintings of being extra-visual. The artist seems to be investigating the metaphorical possibilities of purely visual experience, purely painterly means. She is clearly an expressionist painter of forceful intelligence and sensibility. These paintings suggest others in which the self-consciousness that sometimes intrudes in literality will be contained in the gestures and rhythms of painting itself.

—Patricia Eakins

book report/review

Lucy Lippard. **Eva Hesse**. 250 illustrations
52 pp. New York University Press. 1976

VA HESSE RETROSPECTIVE Droll/Kolbert, June 8-July 15

This year Eva Hesse's artistic spirit has come to the fore with a major first book about her by Lucy Lippard and a retrospective showing of her work at Droll/Kolbert Gallery, the first in New York since her death seven years ago. Both survey her short career, during which she made over 100 sculptures and many more drawings and sketches. Hesse's exploration of materials and sculptural form was as original as any in the '60s "process" and "anti-form" wave.

In the first pages of her book, Lippard announces her intent to "tread a fine and dangerous line between art and life," while writing on Hesse. She quotes extensively ("perhaps more than seems necessary") from Hesse's own diaries, from past reviews and from conversations with her friends and colleagues. Lippard also knew her well; her own remembrances and critical reactions fall sparingly into the text's chronological format. The book does much to dispell the myth of Hesse as a tragic artist. In its place, a complex, ever-struggling Hesse emerges from the pages—obsessed with her own intensely personal work; both emotionally insecure and intellectually determined to overcome it; in deep need of others and yet always striving toward a unique creative vision.

In avoiding a "consistently personal" view of Hesse, Lippard the historian is more in evidence than Lippard the critic. She has left the critical monograph on Hesse yet undone, although her comments are included in the small-print sculpture notes and in the closing chapter, "Some Critical Issues." Here, Lippard gets down to discussing artistic issues of influences,

feminism, materials, humor and Hesse's ever-present oppositions.

The book is extensively illustrated with over 250 photographs. The documentation by Susan Ginsburg is outstanding. Both the bibliography and catalogue raisonné of sculpture are clear and complete.

One cannot judge the Droll/Kolbert show by Lippard's book. One is a scholarly overview, the other a collection of actual work. The inaugural exhibit filled all three gallery rooms. In the first, a mixture of smaller format sculpture and test pieces bear witness to Hesse's striking and original uses of materials—galvanized steel, rubber tubing; latex on wire mesh; papier mache over rubber hose; fiberglass on wire; woodshavings, glue and string; aluminum and rubber hose. Her own shapes and repeated images are almost all present—flat, rubbery squares, clear tubes and winding cords, floppy vessels, staked and folded objects, circles and half-spheres. Only the sculptural works and fiberglass cups (from *Repetition 19*) are missing. From this room, full of Hesse's best exercises, the show slides downhill.

In the main area, three of her large sculptures were installed. From 1966, *Hang-Up*, a work which Hesse acknowledged to be "the most important early statement I made. It was the first time my idea of absurdity of extreme feeling came through." She bound a large stretcher (6x7') with cloth bandages and attached a metal, umbilical-like cord which projects seven feet into the room. While somewhat of a pun on painting, it is also a study in what Lippard calls "a tension between two- and three-dimensional space." *Aught* (1968) was a further investigation of the "unpainted" painting. It was first seen in a show organized by Robert Morris, "9 at Leo Castelli" in that year. Almost 10 years later, it has lost some of its original impact. Her untitled rope piece from 1970

also seemed unimposing, hanging in the slick large room.

Finally, the gallery has resurrected some of Hesse's early work on masonite from 1964-65. It is an interesting return to her pictorial beginnings, but not very good work, and therefore, rather a waste of so much space. The back room would have better filled with her drawings (there were none in the retrospective), but I suspect they are being saved for another show.

In all, these two ventures bring back Hesse's important work for a whole generation who will rediscover her. Just before her death, in an interview with Cindy Nemser (*Artforum*, May 1970), Hesse said:

I don't want to keep rules. That's why my art might be so good, because I have no fear. I could take risks...I really walk on the edge...I want to extend my art perhaps into something that doesn't exist yet...

These statements have guided Lippard's writing; they also challenge all those who now come to look at and make art. Hesse has left behind a body of original work, and in so doing, she has changed the scope of the art world she wanted so much to admire her.

—Jill Dunbar

19th C. PRINTMAKERS

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the National Academy and the Society of American Artists and in 1879, she submitted four prints, signed M. Nimmo to the newly formed New York Etching Club and was unanimously elected a member. The New York Club and later the London Society of Painters-Etchers, to which the New York club was invited to send samples of their work, took her to be a man and her diploma from Queen Victoria and the communications from the London society were addressed to her thusly. In her article on "American Etchers," published in *The Century* magazine of 1883, the critic, Mrs. Van Rensselaer praised Moran's work saying:

Mrs. Moran is, as yet, the only woman who is a member of the New York Etching Club, and no name stands higher on the roll. Her work would never reveal her sex—according that is to the popular idea of feminine characteristics. It is above all things, direct, emphatic, bold—exceeding in these qualities, that of any of her male co-workers. (14)

Anna Lea Merritt (1844-1930) was another expatriate who maintained close ties with America. She studied briefly at the Pennsylvania Academy in 1867 and continued her studies in Paris, Rome and Dresden. She married the English art

continued on following page



Eva Hesse, Installation view of assorted pieces (at Droll/Kolbert), 1977. Photo: Geoffrey Clements.

critic, Henry Merrit. She was a member of the Society of Painters-Etchers, London, exhibited in the Union League Club show and assisted in 1881 in organizing an exhibition for the Pennsylvania Academy, "American Artists at Home and in Europe." Mrs. Van Rensselaer in her 1883 article cited Merrit's work as one of the strongest uses of what was called reproductive etching. The images, primarily portraits, were partially based on painted or photographic originals, often from her own paintings but were treated in an interpretative manner. She changed her style and subjects to conform to the qualities of the new medium.

The Boston and New York exhibitions of women etchers reflected the increased interest in etching in America, as is also evidenced by the earlier formation of the New York, Philadelphia and Cincinnati etching clubs in 1880. The Cincinnati club had the distinction of having three women as founding members. They were Mary Louise McLaughlin (1847-1939), Elizabeth Nourse and Caroline Lord. (15) Cincinnati was the center of a strong women's art movement which produced the wood carvings which dominated the Woman's Pavilion of the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition of 1876 and was one of the leaders of the Arts and Crafts movement, especially in the area of art pottery. Unfortunately, the works of Lord and Nourse are impossible to locate, but McLaughlin's pottery was included in the Cincinnati Museum of Art's 1976 exhibition, "The Ladies, God Bless Them." She also wrote a small manual on etching and exhibited etchings in Cincinnati and New York, as well as in the Union League Club show. The New York Public Library owns one of her etchings—a three-quarter length drawing of a woman. The Library of Congress possesses four of her undated monoprints which reveal an interest in a Japanese sense of pattern, as well as the hand touch sensibility implicit in the Arts and Crafts movement.

The etching movement fostered a particular style and subject matter. It was derived from Whistler's etchings of Venice and sought a quiet, picturesque quality in the American landscape. The etchings, whether of American backwaters or the sites of Europe, represented a saleable record of a type of nomadic freedom which women artists partook of in increasing numbers as the century closed. The etchings of this type, such as those by Ellen Day Hale (1885-?) and Gabrielle de Veaux Clements (1856-1948), both contributors to the Union League Club show, represented a revolt against the earlier etching tradition of dense complex scenes. They chose instead to emphasize qualities of simplicity and rendered their etchings of marine subjects in a pen and ink drawing style. This style has become exceedingly well-liked in the 20th century as a popular type of drawing and painting sold in seaside towns. Its present day plenitude does not negate the revolutionary qualities

these etchings bore for their time.

Clements was born in Philadelphia and studied with Robert Fleury and Bouguereau in Paris. Upon returning to the United States, she became a member of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and executed mural commissions as well as etchings. Hale was born in Worcester, Massachusetts and studied with William Rimmer and William Morris Hunt. Her work is comprised almost entirely of scenes located on the eastern and western coastlines of the United States. By 1894, she had become a member of the New York Etching Club and exhibited with them regularly. (16)

The American women printmakers of the second half of the 19th century do not fit a single mold and do not represent a particular movement. They were found at all levels and possibilities of printmaking. These women were serious, ever-present, recognized in their own time, yet ignored in all subsequent studies of prints or American art. Their work, as well as information about them is difficult to locate, yet they comprise a rich area waiting, hopefully not for long, for greater research and critical attention.

FOOTNOTES

1. Frank Weitenkampf, *American Graphic Art*, (New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1924 [1970]), p.14.
2. Although Fanny Palmer is known primarily as a lithographer, her training was originally as a fine artist and as early as 1844 she exhibited a painting called *Snowdon of North Wales* at the National Academy of Design.
3. Harry T. Peters, *Currier and Ives, Printmakers to the American People*, (Garden City, Doubleday, Doran & Co.), 1929, pp.110-116.
4. *Cooper Union Annual Report*, 1860-61, p.29.
5. Ibid.
6. *Cooper Union Annual Report*, 1871-72.
7. Phil Kovinick and Gloria Ricci Lothrop, "Women Artists: The American Frontier," *Art News*, vol. 75, Dec. 1976, p.75.
8. S.R. Kohler, *Museum of Fine Arts Department Exhibition of the Work of Women Etchers*, (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1887), p.5.
9. Clara Erskine Clement, *Women in the Fine Arts*, (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1904), p.149.
10. Marianna Griswold (Schuyler) Van Rensselaer, *The Work of the Women Etchers of America*, (New York: The Union League Club, 1888), p.5.
11. Frederick A. Sweet, *Miss Mary Cassatt, Impressionist from Pennsylvania*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966), p.117.
12. Ibid., pp.120-121, 122.
13. Thurman Wilkins, *Thomas Moran, Artist of the Mountains*, (Norman: Oklahoma University Press, 1966), pp.48-49.
14. Marianna Griswold (Schuyler) Van Rensselaer, *A Catalogue of the Complete Etched Works of Thomas Moran and M. Nimmo Moran*, (New York: C. Klackner, 1889).
15. Marianna Griswold (Schuyler) Van Rensselaer, *American Etchers*, (New York: Frederick Keppel & Co., 1886), p.18.
16. An extended version of an article first published in *Century Magazine*, 1883.
17. Weitenkampf, *American Graphic Art*, p.8.
- Additional information on Mary Louise McLaughlin may be found in:
- Clara Erskine Clement, *Women in the Fine Arts*, pp.233-234.
- The Ladies, God Bless Them*, (Cincinnati: Cincinnati Museum of Art, 1976).
18. Judith Bernstein, Madeleine Burnside, Jeanette Ingberman, Ann-Sargent Wooster, *19th Century American Women Artists*, (New York: Downtown Branch, Whitney Museum of American Art, 1976).

reports —

ARTISTS SUPPORT WOMEN'S RIGHTS DAY ACTIVITIES IN NEW YORK

The work of six New York women artists was featured in a prominent Fifth Avenue window during the month of August to help publicize a Women's Rights Day march and rally, sponsored by New York NOW, on Saturday, August 27th.

Exhibited in the 20-foot wide window of a former department store at Fifth Avenue



and 40th Street, now owned by the New York Public Library, were paintings, drawings, graphics and sculpture, as well as books and posters about women. Among the works included were a series of four-color collage-etchings by K. Caraccio; six small copper sculptures, some with flame-created coloration, by Nan Magenheim; two multi-media sculptures in styrofoam, plastic and cardboard by Sophie Newman; a series of four metalpoint drawings by Susan Schwalb; four small aluminum sculptures, one of which can be worn as a ring, by Rosalie Schwartz; and a group of six self-portraits in paint, pastel and other media by Sharon Wybrants.

The artists—all of whom are feminists—felt it important to express their support for the August 27 activities by including a signed statement in the window along with their work. The text read as follows:

ARTISTS FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS.
The problems women artists face are the same all women face. Without equal rights we continue undergoing obstacles to living full creative lives. In 1920 women won the vote. Now it's time we win equal rights. Saturday, August 27th is Women's Day in New York. Noon. At Columbus Circle.

The project originated with Lillian Lopez, head of Special Projects for the New York Public Library, and librarian Elizabeth Hale who were planning a window display of books and posters relating to Women's Rights Day. They felt that the inclusion of art works by women would add an exciting element, and approached sculptor Rosalie Schwartz, who is also a member of NOW, with the idea of involving women artists. Even though the deadline was extremely tight, all the artists immediately agreed, and also participated in designing the window and hanging the exhibit.

The artists recognized the necessity of

woman·art·world

protecting their work against theft, fire or other loss by arranging for insurance, but the library's budget only permitted them to pay for the window decoration supplies. The artists, who were also not in a position to cover the \$150 insurance premium, approached N.Y. NOW with the problem, and happily the organization, understanding the valuable contribution of the artists to the publicizing of Women's Rights Day, agreed to pay for the insurance.

An artists' contingent was planned for the march and rally—a day of activities in defense of abortion rights, affirmative action, for the passage of the ERA, and in support of lesbian and gay rights.

—Rosalie Schwartz

BRIDGEPORT ARTISTS' STUDIO— THE FACTORY

After long, unfruitful months of studio hunting, six Connecticut artists made their home last May on the top floor of the Allied Elevator Building in the industrial city of Bridgeport. Painters Barbara Hart, Jane Sax, and Sherry Snedeker and sculptors Cherie Reichgut, Martha Barret and Pat Vingo converted the 2,400 square foot, 14 foot high factory space into a sun-drenched, white washed cooperative artists' studio.

For each artist the major goal in forming the cooperative was adequate working conditions. Barbara Hart had been painting in a poorly lit basement, Martha Barret was sculpting marble in an old barn in Hamden, and Jane Sax had converted her living room into a furnitureless studio. Cherie Reichgut was welding in an unheated garage and Sherry Snedeker painted canvases while perched on a balcony overhanging her living room.

Most of the six artists have young children at home and an active family schedule. Frequent interruptions, feelings of isolation and dubious professionalism were additional incentives for creating a cooperative studio with an unlisted phone number. The group of chairs in the center rear randomly arranged for spontaneous rapping is evidence of another important reason for the co-op—they provide each other with understanding and artistically educated ears.

Now the artists feel they have achieved some of their goals; Hart, Reichgut and Barret recently showed at Moon Street Gallery in Westport, Sax has just exhibited at Fairfield University and the Americana Hotel in New York, and was chosen, with Barbara, for the New England Exhibition.

The group foresees using the studio space additionally as a gallery to show their own work to the public. They have been so satisfied with the fruits of their labor that they hope to expand to an adjoining section of the factory, provided

Women Artists: 1550-1950, the exhibit curated by historians Ann Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin which opened to great acclaim in Los Angeles earlier this year opens at the Brooklyn Museum October 1 for a two-month stay.

Numerous events comprise the program at the museum throughout the show. Gallery talks, women's films and women's music will be frequent activities. At presstime, the museum would confirm only a few dates: October 2-Ann Sutherland Harris lecture; October 8, 30-Programs of women's music; November 12-Nancy Mowll, assistant professor of architecture at Randolph-Macon College will lecture on "Demythologizing Cassatt"; November 13-Perry Miller Adata will discuss the Mary Cassatt film she has directed. Contact the Brooklyn Museum for schedule of events.

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Opening concurrently with *Women Artists: 1550-1950* at the Brooklyn Museum will be **Contemporary Women: Consciousness and Content**, October 1-27. Curated by artist Joan Semmel, the exhibit will display work by 29 artists—Eleanor Antin, Lynda Benglis, Judith Bernstein, Louise Bourgeois, Cynthia Carlson, Judy Chicago, Mary Beth Edelson, Audrey Flack, Mary Frank, Nancy Grossman, Harmony Hammond, Anne Healy, Eva Hesse, Buffie Johnson, Joyce Kozloff, Ellen Lanyon, Pat Lasch, Marisol, Ree Morton, Louise Nevelson, Miriam Schapiro, Joan Semmel, Sylvia Sleigh, Joan Snyder, Anita Steckel, Pat Steir, May Stevens, Michelle Stuart, Hannah Wilke—in the Art School.

Stating in her introductory text that "...there seem to be several basic content areas in which women center their imagery," she has based the exhibition on "four thematic ideas which occur with uncommon frequency in women's art: sexual imagery both abstract and figurative; autobiography and self image; the celebration of devalued subject matter and media which has been traditionally relegated to women; and anthropomorphic or nature forms."

Semmel's statement, photos of the artists, and program listings for events surrounding this exhibit will be included

on a poster for the show available from the museum for \$1. Among the events will be a talk about the show on October 15 by Elizabeth Weatherford, and a panel discussion and debate on October 23.

*

SOHO 20, a New York feminist cooperative gallery, sponsored "Women's Art Across the U.S.A.," a continuous slide/sound presentation that showed the work of each of the members of 14 collectives and cooperatives from all over the country for three days in June (23-25). Those included in Part I (the gallery plans to continue the series) were: ARC (Chicago), Artist's Company (Washington, D.C.), Artemesia (Chicago), Atlanta Women's Collective (Atlanta), Central Hall Artists (Port Washington, N.Y.), Fairfield 8 (Fairfield, Conn.), HERA (Wakefield, R.I.) 12 Women from Westchester (Westchester, N.Y.), WAIT (Miami), WARM (Minneapolis), Womanspace (Boulder, Colo.), Women's Caucus for Art (Kansas City Chapter), Women Artists of the Northwest (Seattle), Women's Studio Workshop (Rosendale, N.Y.). Artists' statements were heard while slides of their work were projected. In addition, English artist Alexis Hunter showed slides of and discussed the work of women artists in her country on June 23.

*

The Sister Chapel (see *Womanart*, Winter-Spring 1977) will open in time for the College Art Association/Women's Caucus for Art meetings in New York in January at a location to be announced soon. The collaboration of 13 women artists is intended as a traveling show. Artist Diana Kurz will be replacing original Chapel artist Ronni Bogaev with a painting of the Hindu goddess *Durga*.

*

Howardena Pindell, artist and assistant curator in the MOMA Department of Prints and Illustrated Books since 1971, has been promoted to the position of associate curator in that department. She has directed numerous shows at the museum, and has had many one-woman shows, the next of which will be in October at Just Above Midtown Gallery.

•

that more artists will participate.

This is a happy ending to a long struggle for the six partners. During their recent adventure of locating a studio they found that being artists and being women was a double jeopardy. The painful education began with a Norwalk hat factory. Before they could even see their lease they had to make partial payment. Amongst other absurdities their contract stipulated that there was to be "no noise, no dust and no

noxious fumes." Their attorney, a "supporter of the arts" was not only ineffectual but proved himself to be more simpatico to the landlord, addressing his clients with "Sweetie, if you want your money back good luck to you." They finally did win back their money, and even more, they won a chance to realize their productivity, mutual support and earned friendships.

—Nancy Malkin Stember

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Bach**

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Doernbach**

**Suzanne
Weisberg**

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Joyce Stillman-Myers

September, 1977

LOUIS K. MEISEL gallery 141 prince street ny 10012

letters

To the Editor:

Heidi Blocher's warm appreciation of Modersohn-Becker's paintings and the perceptive examination of her fate, as revealed in letters and diaries, makes the artist truly come to life (*Womanart*, Spring-Summer 1977). Such empathy, however, can erase the seven decades since her death, virtually take her out of historical context, and make her one of us. It becomes easy to forget that Paula Becker was born a century ago into a cultured, but quite conventional, middle-class German family. She postponed her professional art training and first acquired schoolteacher certification to please her security-minded father, a retired higher official of the railroad bureaucracy. While studying in Berlin, she wrote a letter in early 1897 with that self-mocking and belittling tone she often adopted to amuse her family, which reveals much about her alleged lack of sympathy with the women's movement. Impressed by the intelligent speaker at a meeting for women's emancipation, she almost signed a feminist petition against the new civil code, but was argued down by her outraged older brother and agreed "to let the big men do their thing and to believe in their authority."

Quite possibly, she also responded to parental and societal pressures when she married Otto Modersohn. Her decision to marry followed closely after a terse diary entry of July 1900: "Today my father wrote that I should look for a position as governess." Among the most poignant comments in her diary, partly quoted by Heidi Blocher, are the observations that marriage does not necessarily make for greater happiness; it only takes away the illusion that one might find a kindred spirit: "I have wept much during my first year of marriage," she confessed, and concluded: "I am writing this in my house-keeping budget, Easter Monday 1902, as I sit in my kitchen and roast the veal." Her preoccupations with motherhood, both in

her paintings and writings, furthermore, are not only (or even primarily) deeply personal concerns, but reflect also her familial and cultural conditioning (see Linda Nochlin, *Women Artists: 1550-1950*, pp. 65-67).

Modersohn-Becker was daring and innovative in her art, but she was socially traditional and not bohemian; it took extraordinary courage to leave her husband. Her famous self-portrait of May 1906—half nude and as if pregnant, though she was not—conveys this quiet strength and determination. The inscription also suggests a conflict between her artistic self and her potential maternal role: "I painted this at age 30 on my 6. wedding day [her fifth anniversary] P.B. [the initials of her maiden name]." Against this background, it is not surprising that she succumbed to her husband's entreaties and subtle pressures from friends and family, became pregnant, and returned home with him to Worpswede. Even her untimely death has historical causes: the old-fashioned medical practice in 1907 kept her "convalescing" for weeks in child-bed. And we owe the sentimentalized grave monument of a dying mother and child to the conservative preferences of relatives and community; her sculptor-friend Hoetger initially had designed a more appropriate group of archaic-classical nudes.

Finally, it is only now becoming apparent just how much Frau Sophie Dorothea Gallwitz edited and adjusted Modersohn-Becker's manuscripts and perhaps distorted our view of the artist. The original, and many hitherto unpublished letters have recently been found again in Germany. A corrected and enlarged new German edition, richly annotated, is in preparation and will be followed, we trust, by the eagerly awaited English translation in this country.

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Womanart Magazine welcomes the contribution of feature articles, reviews, reports, book reports, etc., pertaining to women and art. Manuscripts should be typewritten and accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Address all contributions to Editor, *Womanart Magazine*, P.O. Box 3358, Grand Central Station, New York, N.Y. 10017.

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