HOW
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Curated by Judith K. Brodsky and Ferris Olin
Mason Gross School of the Arts Galleries
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HOW AMERICAN WOMEN ARTISTS INVENTED POSTMODERNISM: 1970 - 1975

The Feminist Art Movement of the 1970s introduced bold new concepts so thoroughly embedded in contemporary art, that they are now taken for granted. The purpose of this exhibition is to make clear that many of the sources of Postmodernism lie in the work of Feminist artists. Among the trailblazing innovations born of this revolutionary movement are re-introduction of narrative into art after a long period of dominance by abstraction; new depictions of the body; evolution of performance art, video, and photography as significant art forms; employment of novel materials to make art; elevation of pattern and decoration into high art; expansion of the use of installation; and collaboration as a mode for creating art.

A number of the artists in the exhibition employ performance and photographic processes to deconstruct the social expectations of women. In The King, Eleanor Antin explores cross dressing, thus questioning stereotyped gender roles and their relationship to power. Martha Wilson turns the use of cosmetics upside down; Rachel Rosenthal investigates social custom and medical procedures; Diane Neumaier reveals the true nature of modern marriage; and Martha Rosler satirizes the image of women as homemakers.

Modernist sculpture and public installations were intended to be imposing, formal, and made to impress. Nancy Azara and Lynda Benglis contradict the usual conventions of monumental sculpture with Feminist iconography and organic form. Judy Baca and Athena Tacha transform public art. Baca pioneered artistic collaboration with the community through her Los Angeles murals; in this exhibition, she shows a poignant drawing of one of her community helpers, killed by a gang member. Athena Tacha, like Baca, works in public spaces with the community in mind. The photograph and model of her installation in Martin Luther King Park, Oberlin, Ohio, show how she created an outdoor environment that invites rather than impresses.

Painting undergoes a metamorphosis in the work of Schapiro, Snyder, Chicago, and Kozloff. In her progression to the creation of "Femmage," a new style of painting in which she incorporated fabrics and cloth trims into the surface of the painting, Miriam Schapiro transformed her abstract work into a Feminist statement by consciously using a centralized image. Big Ox, one of the paintings from that period, is on view in the show. Prior to her installation, The Dinner Party, Judy Chicago also explored a centralized image along with pattern and decoration as in the two abstract works in this exhibition. Through her use of repetitive decorative images like those on tiles or in quilts, Joyce Kozloff created paintings that refer to women's work and to the art work of other cultures. In her Stroke paintings of the period, two of which are included in the exhibition, Joan Snyder also imbues abstraction with a Feminist sensibility. One can see that she has literally pulled abstract expressionism apart to emphasize a new visual language.

Other artists changed completely how the female presence is depicted. Recognizing the male nature of most religions and ritual, Mary Beth Edelson created performances of female rituals. In the three progressive photographs in the exhibition, the goddess figure can be dimly seen in a cave of grasses. Joan Semmel, Carolee Schneemann, and Lauren Ewing used their own bodies to create a new iconography around the female nude.
Semmel paints the model (the artist, herself) from the figure’s own perspective, thus putting the viewer into the image and doing away with the objectification resulting from the conventional portrayal of the model by the artist. Schneemann and Ewing filmed performances in which they portray female narratives through their bodies. Sylvia Sleigh pokes fun at the standard female reclining nude by reversing the gender of the model. By depicting a man in the role, viewers become aware of how women have been traditionally portrayed as sex objects.

Women artists of the period were innovative in injecting social and political themes into art practice. Faith Ringgold’s and Betye Saar’s work address racism as well as sexism. Both artists were pioneers in introducing new themes and materials that countered modernism into the mainstream art world. Two of their works in the show celebrate important African American icons - Wilt Chamberlain and Rosa Parks. Saar’s found objects and Ringgold’s fabric paintings challenge the modes of Modernist art fabrication as well as content. May Stevens is represented in the exhibition by two paintings from her Big Daddy series. Stevens was active in the anti-war and civil rights movements of the late ‘60s as well as in the early Feminist movement. Here she satirizes male authority figures.

Harmony Hammond, Nancy Spero, and June Wayne implant history, archeology, theory, and science into visual art in ways which are now standard to Postmodernism. Hammond uses a museum format to establish an historical narrative that places women as artists in ancient societies through her replicas of archeological fragments and paintings. Nancy Spero also is involved in a complex narrative in the work on view where she combines theoretical statements from Artaud with visual imagery to create new cultural meaning. Wayne invests tapestry, usually used for decorative images, with intellectual content drawn from such sources as the genetic code and analysis of natural cataclysms like tsunamis.

These brief descriptions cannot convey the complex innovations in ideas and style abundant in the exhibition. In summary, what one can say is that above all, these artists infused art with new content drawn from Feminism: content that is inclusive, investigative, and democratic. These American women powerfully countered mid-20th century Modernist doctrine and transformed visual art practice, thus altering the cultural landscape forever. We also wish to comment on the dates we have chosen to document in the exhibition, 1970 - 1975. These are the earliest years of the Feminist Art Movement as a recognized and organized entity with specific ideologies and goals. The late ‘60s gave rise to many of the ideas inherent in the movement, but these ideas didn’t coalesce until the period of the early ‘70s. Subsequent to 1975, a proliferation of women artists emerged who were very important to Feminist art and to the development of Postmodernism. Our intention here was to focus on some of the pioneers. We also wish to recognize that others were involved in the early ‘70s as well as those included in the exhibition. Space precluded a larger selection of artists. We hope that an expanded and more inclusive version of this exhibition will take place someday.

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This exhibition is the first event to occur under the umbrella of The Feminist Art Project, a national program. From 2006 - 2008 and even beyond, exhibitions, symposia, and publications will focus on the contributions of women to the visual arts. One of the goals of The Feminist Art Project is to celebrate significant historic anniversaries of the Feminist Art Movement of the 1970s. In 2006, the Mary H. Dana Women Artists Series at the Douglass Library, Rutgers University, founded by Joan Snyder, and A.I.R. Gallery in New York mark their 35th year; 2006 is also the 35th anniversary of the publication of the groundbreaking essay, Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?, by Linda Nochlin; the founding of the Feminist Art Program by Judy Chicago at California State College, Fresno; and the 30th anniversary of the exhibition, Women Artists: 1550 - 1950, curated by Linda Nochlin and Ann Sutherland Harris. The Women's Caucus for Art celebrates its 35th anniversary and the National Museum of Women in the Arts, the 20th year of its founding in 2007, a year which also will see the 35th anniversaries of the Feminist Art Program led by Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro at the California Institute of the Arts, the founding of the Woman's Building by Arlene Raven, Judy Chicago, and Sheila de Bretteville in Los Angeles, and the 30th anniversary of the founding of the Women's Art Registry of Minnesota (W.A.R.M).

The Feminist Art Project is also the umbrella for new undertakings. The grand opening of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art which will include the permanent installation of Judy Chicago's Dinner Party and an international exhibition of Feminist art curated by Linda Nochlin and Maura Reilly will take place at the Brooklyn Museum. WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution, curated by Connie Butler, will open at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles and then travel to the National Museum of Women in the Arts. The exhibition, Women's Art Organizations and Exhibitions: An Historical Overview, curated by Jeffrey Wechsler, will open at the Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers University, and the Miriam Schapiro Archive for Women Artists will have its official opening at the Rutgers University Libraries.

A National Committee for The Feminist Art Project, facilitated by Judith K. Brodsky and Ferris Olin and managed by Tiffany Calvert at Rutgers University is coordinating these activities and others that are in the planning stages. The committee also includes Judy Chicago, Through the Flower; Dena Muller, A.I.R. Gallery; Arlene Raven, Maryland Institute College of Art; Maura Reilly, Elizabeth A. Sackler Center, Brooklyn Museum; and Susan Fisher Sterling, National Museum of Women in the Arts. The National Committee and this exhibition are collaborative projects sponsored by the Foster Center, Rutgers University Libraries, Rutgers Center for Innovative Print and Paper, Mason Gross School of the Arts, and the offices of the Associate Vice President for Academic Partnerships in the Arts and Humanities and the Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs. Special thanks for their support are due to Marianne Gaunt, University librarian; Françoise Punillo, acting director, New Brunswick Libraries; Isabel Nazario, associate vice president; and Philip Furmanski, executive vice president for academic affairs.

The curators wish to acknowledge the work of Tiffany Calvert in organizing this exhibition; to thank Lynne Allen, director, and Cara Sullivan, administrator and curator, Rutgers Center for Innovative Print and Paper for their help with this exhibition; and Amy and Ronna Lebo, Joe Nanashe, and Mashell Black, the exhibition preparateurs. Joe Nanashe also helped with the design of this catalogue.

Judith K. Brodsky and Ferris Olin
THE ARTISTS

Eleanor Antin
Nancy Azara
Judy Baca
Lynda Benglis
Judy Chicago
Mary Beth Edelson
Harmony Hammond
Joyce Kozloff
Faith Ringgold
Rachel Rosenthal
Betye Saar
Miriam Schapiro
Carolee Schneemann
Sylvia Sleigh
Joan Snyder
Nancy Spero
May Stevens
Athena Tacha
June Wayne
Martha Wilson
Rutgers University Affiliated Artists
Lauren Ewing
Diane Neumaier
Martha Rosler
Joan Semmel
The King
1972
Video transferred onto DVD
Courtesy of Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI), N.Y.
Widows' Tongues
1974
Painted wood
8 x 9 feet
Courtesy of the Artist
Dead Homeboy Killed by a Placa
1974
Wood stain on paper
32 x 42 inches
Courtesy of Patricia Correia Gallery, Santa Monica, CA
COME
1974
Bronze
Edition: 1/3
13 x 49 x 30 inches
Courtesy of the Artist and Cheim & Read Gallery, New York
Christine of Sweden from "The Great Ladies" series
1973
Sprayed acrylic on canvas
40 x 40 inches
Courtesy of Elizabeth A. Sackler

Elizabeth for Elizabeth (originally titled Queen Elizabeth) from "The Great Ladies" series
1973
Sprayed acrylic on canvas
40 x 40 inches
Courtesy of Elizabeth A. Sackler
Shaking the Grass from the "Great Goddess" series
Began in 1968
Photographed in Port Clyde, Maine
Each 20 x 20 inches
Courtesy of the Artist
Message
1973
Photo/video documentation
40 x 15 inches
Courtesy of the Artist

Ophelia
1972
Photo/video documentation
40 x 15 inches
Courtesy of the Artist
Collection of Fragments and Woven Paintings
1973
Paintings: oil and wax on canvas, 11 x 24 inches
Mixed media installation with fabricated clay-like shards, small baskets, and woven sandals.
Courtesy of the Artist
Hidden Chambers
1975
Acrylic on canvas
78 x 120 inches
Courtesy of Françoise and Harvey Rambach
Alfred, Harry, Emmet, Georgia, Eleanor, Edith, and me

*Jed: May, June, September, October, 1973*

*The Last Day of a Modern Marriage: Richard and our son, Jed, 1976*

Gelatin silver prints
Courtesy of the Artist
Wilt Chamberlain
1974
Mixed media
80 x 10 inches

Run and Fight from the Slave Rape series
1973
Acrylic on canvas with pieced fabric borders
Each 53 x 31 inches

Courtesy of ACA Galleries, New York
Replays
and
Thanks
1975
Photographic stills from the performances
Courtesy of the Artist
Semiotics of the Kitchen
1975
Video transferred to DVD
Courtesy of Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI), N.Y.
BETYE SAAR

Victory of Gentleness (for Rosa Parks)
1975
Mixed media assemblage
13.5 x 11 x 1.75 inches
Courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, New York

Rainbow Shrine
1975
Mixed media assemblage
20.75 x 7 x 12 inches
Courtesy of Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, New York
Big Ox
1970
Oil on canvas
90 x 108 inches
Courtesy of the Artist
Up To and Including Her Limits
and
Interior Scroll - The Cave
1975-1995
Videotapes transferred to DVD
Courtesy Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI), New York
**Woman Under Sheet**
1974
Oil on canvas
48 x 78 inches
Courtesy of National Museum of Women in the Arts,
Gift of Gertrude B. Drake

**Antonio and I**
1974
Oil on canvas
56 x 96 inches
Courtesy of the Artist
Paul Rosano Reclining
1974
Oil on canvas
54 x 78 inches
Courtesy of the Artist
Birth
1972
Oil on canvas
40 x 72 inches
Courtesy Anne Kaufman and
Judith Kaufman Hoffman

Resolve in 4 x 8
1972
Oil on canvas
40 x 72 inches
Courtesy of Johnson & Johnson
Codex Artaud VI
1971
Typewriter and painted collage on paper
20.5 x 124.5 inches
Courtesy of Galerie Lelong, New York
Striped Man
and
Top Man
1975
Acrylic on canvas
Each 60 x 40 inches
Courtesy of Mary Ryan Gallery, New York
Streams
1975
Model and photograph mounted on board
The actual installation consists of sandstone, pumice rocks and lake pebbles and is located in the Martin Luther
King Park, Oberlin, OH (National Endowment for the Arts and Ohio Arts Council grants)
10 x 30 x 20 feet
Model and photograph
Courtesy of the Artist
Col Noir
1972
Tapestry woven at Atelier de Saint Cyr
62 x 75 inches
Courtesy of the Artist

Onde en Folie
1972
Tapestry woven at Atelier de Saint Cyr
119 x 38.5 inches
Courtesy of the Artist
MARTHA WILSON

Premiere
June 1972, 2 minutes
Performance recorded on VHS, transferred to DVD
Courtesy of the Artist

Art Sucks
June 1972, 1 1/2 minutes
Performance recorded on VHS, transferred to DVD
Courtesy of the Artist

Deformation
April 1974, 8 minutes
Performance recorded on VHS, transferred to DVD
Courtesy of the Artist