

But at the top of their list of prejudices, outnumbering all others
by far ----- THE WINNER!! ----- are America's
 women artists, all colors. YOU DON'T BELIEVE US? THINK WE'RE
 JUST A BUNCH OF SOUR GRAPES? ↘

Would you like to know how many
 of last year's one hundred and forty-three (143) exhibitors in the painting Annual were
 women? The answer is eight (8). (That was not a misprint.) And it didn't happen because
 there aren't many good women painters or because they didn't submit their work.

HERE ARE	1968 (sculpture) -----10	women	out	of	137	exhibitors
SOME MORE	1967 (painting) -----16	"	"	"	165	"
DAMNING	1966 (sculpture) -----12	"	"	"	146	"
FACTS: ➡➡	1965 (painting) -----14	"	"	"	138	"

Well now, for some strange reason, after some groups of women artists (The Women's
 Ad Hoc Committee, Women Artists in Revolution, and WSABAL) began to complain
 loudly (better late than never) about this gross bigotry, the Whitney staff did a lot of
 hasty and unaccustomed scrambling around to see the work of women artists, and lo!
 Suddenly there are a whole lot of women artists who never existed before. From
 nowhere! To the rescue!! Came these women artists!!!

This year's Annual has twenty-one (21) women out of one hundred
 and three (103) exhibitors. That makes it about 21% of the exhibition
 to last year's 5%. ↘

An interesting possibility is emerging. |

← Perhaps there are more.

WE'RE NOT SATISFIED! WE WANT MORE! WE HAVE BEEN DEMANDING
 FIFTY PER CENT, AND WE'RE GOING TO KEEP RIGHT ON UNTIL WE GET IT.
 The reason is this: there is no reason to believe that twenty-one per cent is a fair rep-
 resentation of the number of women artists doing good work in this country, any
 more than five per cent was.

EVEN WE don't know the potential of women artists in this country, because we've
 never had a chance to find out. ON TO FIFTY PER CENT!!!

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Monica Sjöö, 'Art is a Revolutionary Act' (1980)

From *Womanspirit* (Fall equinox 1980): 55-8.

[...] In 1968 I had a few small exhibitions in Bristol and London. Then in 1970, the
 first real persecution started of my work, and in particular of my painting *God Giving
 Birth*. Six of my pictures were shown as part of a South-west arts festival sponsored by

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Challenging Patriarchal Structures

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the Arts Council of Great Britain, in St Ives, Cornwall. Within ten minutes of the paintings being hung in the Guildhall they were taken down by police and city councillors and turned face against the wall.

Supposedly, *God Giving Birth* was 'obscene and blasphemous'. I would say that because 'God' is shown as a non-white woman of great dignity, looking straight ahead unsmiling, with a child coming out of Her womb, between Her legs, it is disturbing. If it had been painted in bright colours (not in its stark black/whiteness), if it had been lesser in size (it is 6 feet tall), if 'God' had had long blonde hair and been pleasantly smiling then that would have been okay because at least She would have been of the white race and She would have been attractive to men. Also, if I had called her 'Goddess', then She could have been passed off as one of many Goddesses and/or a fertility image, not as *the* cosmic creative power I intended to express. The painting attacks the absurd myth that the creative force is male and phallic. I wanted to make clear that when people say they do not see the 'God-being' as of a specific sex, they still clearly assume it to be male, and as having created cosmos and the world not by actual bloody birth but abstractly, by 'breath' or by 'word'.

The paintings were moved by us three times and exhibited in what we thought were less public places, but each time we were told to remove them. They could not be shown anywhere within the city. I was shattered by this, and exhausted from breast feeding a three-month-old baby.

After this experience I decided that never more would I exhibit on my own. So I wrote an open letter, which was published in *Socialist Woman*, saying what had happened and suggesting that women artists with similar experiences come together to form a group or movement, and that we spell out clearly who we were and what our aims were. As a result of this letter some women contacted me and slowly a group formed: Beverly Skinner, Anne Berg, Roslyn Smythe, Liz Moore. In 1971 we applied to the Arts Council of Great Britain for exhibition space and economic support, but were refused both. After two years (!) we finally had our first large collective exhibition in 1973 in the Swiss Cottage Library in London; we called it 'Five Women Artists: Images on Womanpower.' We received economic support for the exhibition from the liberal Camden Council. As Beverly expressed it, it was 'the first tangible manifestation for centuries of the return of women's culture.'

Probably this important exhibition would have been totally ignored by the press, the public, and the arts world, however, if it had not been for the fact that once again, my painting *God Giving Birth* caused a public scandal. Some members of the local 'Festival of Light' brigade had been to the exhibition and had called the police. The pornography squad of Scotland Yard and the public prosecutor came along to investigate whether I should be taken to court for my painting. By now all this was headlines in the London and national press, which of course brought huge crowds of people to see our exhibition. I was, in fact, never taken to court, but for a couple of weeks I feared that my paintings would be burnt, disfigured, or taken away. We had to guard them daily, and we received threatening phone calls, etc.

The visitors' book at Swiss Cottage Library is full of page after page of the most incredible comments. Many are vicious, e.g. 'When you have finished burning your bras why not burn your paintings, too'; 'These are obviously five confirmed Lesbians and very unattractive women who cannot get any man and this is why they do these

ugly and aggressive paintings.' Others are very supportive, e.g. 'This is the most important exhibition I have ever seen. At last, paintings that talk to me.' We felt particularly good when elderly women, who had painted for years but hidden their work away in shame in dark attics, came up to us to say, 'This show has given me courage. I no longer feel I have to apologize for doing women's painting; now I can go right ahead.' [...]

Guerrilla Girls, 'The Advantages of Being a Woman Artist' (1988)

Poster format, published by Guerrilla Girls 1988.

THE ADVANTAGES OF BEING A WOMAN ARTIST:

Working without the pressure of success
 Not having to be in shows with men
 Having an escape from the art world in your 4 free-lance jobs
 Knowing your career might pick up after you're eighty
 Being reassured that whatever kind of art you make it will be labeled feminine
 Not being stuck in a tenured teaching position
 Seeing your ideas live on in the work of others
 Having the opportunity to choose between career and motherhood
 Not having to choke on those big cigars or paint in Italian suits
 Having more time to work when your mate dumps you for someone younger
 Being included in revised versions of art history
 Not having to undergo the embarrassment of being called a genius
 Getting your picture in the art magazines wearing a gorilla suit

A PUBLIC SERVICE MESSAGE FROM GUERRILLA GIRLS CONSCIENCE OF THE ART WORLD

Mary Beth Edelson, 'Male Grazing: An Open Letter to Thomas McEvelley' (1989)

From *New Art Examiner*, 16 (8) (April 1989): 34-8.

As I have great respect for much of your writing, I was surprised to be distressed by your lecture, 'Currents and Crosscurrents in Feminist Art,' which I attended at the Artemisia Gallery in Chicago last fall. Your initial overview of the feminist movement

6.1 Sexuality and the Sexual Body

Barbara Rose, 'Vaginal Iconology' (1974)

From *New York Magazine*, 7 (11 February 1974): 59.

In 1972, Professor Linda Nochlin caused a scholarly sensation at a meeting of the College Art Association: she exposed the obvious fact that nineteenth-century erotic art was created by men for men, and suggested a facetious female analogy. First she showed a slide of a popular French illustration of a woman, nude except for stockings, boots, and choker, resting her breasts on a tray of apples; then she projected a photograph of a bearded young man, nude except for sweat socks and loafers, holding a tray of bananas under his penis. Instead of the invitation '*Achetez des pommes*' (Buy some apples) inscribed under the maiden, the man advertised 'Buy some bananas.'

A decade ago Professor Nochlin's comparison would have been unthinkable at an assembly of art historians. Even more unthinkable, however, would be the idea that women might begin producing their own erotic art, aimed at eliciting a response in a female audience. Today, women are among the most prolific producers of erotica, suggesting that if there was a revolution in the sixties, it was not political but sexual. Perhaps sexual issues appear to dominate the women's movement at this moment because erotic arguments do not fundamentally challenge the social structure as political disputes do.

By equating sexual liberation with radicalism, the women's movement is following a direction other initially revolutionary forces have taken to survive in our time. The most obvious example of the displacement of revolutionary political aims to more acceptable targets is the history of modern art itself. When the goal of social and political revolution seemed unobtainable, the ideology of modernism rephrased itself

so as to locate 'revolution' exclusively within the boundaries of art itself. 'Radical' became the most flattering adjective one could apply to art, and aesthetic experiments were validated on the basis of how 'revolutionary' they were.

Now something similar is happening with sex, which, like art, has become a pursuit for its own sake. Within the general context of feminism, the women's art movement has been one of the most energetic exponents of an altered concept of female sexuality. Publications, university courses, and women's cooperative galleries stress the importance of women in art. In meetings, 'rap' sessions, and symposia, women examine the question of whether or not there are such things as a 'feminine sensibility' and a subject matter that can be described as 'female.' According to women artists associated with the feminist movement, there is. They cite Georgia O'Keeffe's voluptuous flowers and Louise Nevelson's sculptures of dark, mysterious interiors as early examples of female imagery; and they are searching out the names of the daughters, nieces, and students of famous painters whose works in the past often were attributed to the men they worked with.

Such a re-examination of the forgotten chapters of history is analogous to the quest among blacks for their essence in a universal *negritude*. Indeed, the parallel between women and blacks is one of the fundamental premises of the women's movement. As Gunnar Myrdal wrote in 1944, women, like blacks, had high social visibility because they were different in 'physical appearance, dress, and patterns of behavior.' Most men 'have accepted as self-evident, until recently, the doctrine that women had inferior endowments in most of those respects which carry prestige, power, and advantages in society.'

Inferior status has stimulated both groups to assertions of pride in their 'differences.' Black art frequently serves as propaganda for the important idea that 'black is beautiful,' essential in creating not only an ideology of equality, but a psychology built on the confidence that black is as good as white. To dignify female 'difference,' what should feminist art glorify?

The answer is obvious, and even if feminist art bears no slogans proclaiming 'power to the pubis,' that is what it is essentially about. For much of the feminist art that has been labeled 'erotic' because it depicts or alludes to genital images is nothing of the sort. It is designed to arouse women, but not sexually. Hannah Wilke's soft latex hanging pieces, Deborah Remington's precise abstractions, Miriam Schapiro's ring-centered *Ox*, Rosemary Mayer's cloth constructions, Judy Chicago's yoni-lifesavers are all vaginal or womb images. What is interesting about them is the manner in which they worshipfully allude to female genitalia as icons – as strong, clean, well made, and whole as the masculine totems to which we are accustomed. Although there are many categories of women's erotic art, the most novel are those that glorify vaginas. This category of women's art is profoundly radical in that it attacks the basis of male supremacy from the point of view of depth psychology. At issue is the horror of women's genitals as mysterious, hidden, unknown, and ergo threatening – as chronicled by H. R. Hayes in *The Dangerous Sex*, a fascinating compilation of age-old prejudices against women as unclean Pandoras with evil boxes, or agents of the devil sent to seduce and trap men.

By depicting female genitals, women artists attack one of the most fundamental ideas of male supremacy – that a penis, because it is visible, is superior. At issue in vaginal iconology is an overt assault on the Freudian doctrine of penis envy, which posits that all little girls must feel that they are missing something. The self-examination

movement among women that strives at familiarizing women with their own sex organs, and the images in art of nonmenacing and obviously complete vaginas, are linked in their efforts to convince women that they are not missing anything. In realizing that 'equality' depends on more than equal rights and equal salaries, women are exalting images of their own bodies. Their erotic art is, in effect, propaganda for sexual equality based on discrediting the idea of penis envy. Equality on these grounds is far more humane than the alienating prospect of women treating men as sex objects – my favorite example of this being Sylvia Sleigh's group portrait of nude male art critics. Turning the tables is not the road to equality; nor will male brothels solve anyone's problems. But a healthy self-respect may help diminish the debilitating inferiority complex the second sex finally shows signs of transcending.

Suzanne Santoro, 'Towards New Expression' (1974)

From *Per una espressione nuova / Towards New Expression* (Rome: Rivolta Femminile, 1974).

I found [a] picture drawn with chalk on a wall in Rome. What struck me was its size, about 3' x 3'. At first it seemed common enough, just like many of the graffiti that you see all over the world. Then I realized I was getting curious about the drawing and that it required a little more attention. In fact, the elements in it were quite clear if you were prepared to recognize them. The penis and the semen were drawn with force and the cup for the care and preservation of the semen was given great importance. On the other hand, there was the subordinate and mystified presence of the female genitals, the usual crack-hole, hole-crack. The drawing is a product of today.

When I saw how this subject had been treated in the past, I realized that even in diverse historical representations it had been annulled, smoothed down and, in the end, idealized.

The placing of the Greek figures, the flowers and the conch shell near the clitoris is a means of understanding the structure of the female genitals. It is also an invitation for the sexual self-expression that has been denied to women till now, and it does not intend to attribute specific qualities to one sex or the other.

Each need for expression in women has a particular solution. The substance of expression is unlimited and has no established form. Self expression is a necessity. It is easily accessible if authentically desired. Expression begins with self assertion and with the awareness of the differences between ourselves and others.

We can no longer see ourselves as if we live in a dream or as an imitation of something that just does not reflect the reality of our lives.