IKON

creativity and change

THE NINETIES

Moving Forward, Reaching Back/A Multicultural Odyssey

Focus on COAST TO COAST: National Women Artists of Color

IKON #12/13: A Double Issue

IKON #11 & IKON #12/13 were originally conceived of as a piece, chronicling and comparing two periods of great social struggle and change, the Sixties and the Nineties. IKON #11 presented, along with a retrospective of work from the seven issues of IKON *Series One* (1966 to 1969), an essay by Carole Byard, "On Being a Woman Artist of Color: The Sixties, Seventies, Today," which was meant to serve as a transition between the two IKON issues—the IKON of the Sixties reflecting the lack in even the most radical publications of adequate representation of women of color.

There is nothing more demoralizing than feelings of futility and isolation. Ironically, at the same time our popular media blames the failure of socialist regimes on the authoritarian restriction of freedom of choice, it announces to us we have freedom of choice, but no alternatives to choose from, that there is no real alternative to the system under which we currently live. Each system promotes its own philosophy to further its aims, and the current fashionable capitalist version of "postmodernism" is firmly grounded in the hopelessness of connnection—based on the "discovery" of the fragmented ego, the "illusion" of identity. It is a deeply pessimist view of difference.

IKON was founded on the conviction that creativity and social change are irrevocably bound, that contact, coalition is not only possible, it is inevitable. In this spirit we present IKON #12/13, featuring *Coast to Coast: National Women Artists of Color*, founded in 1987 "as a creative response to the challenges women artists of color face in their struggle against marginalization and invisibility...providing a place for artists to exhibit their exceptional talent, as well as creating opportunities for dialogue."

Coast to Coast is a grouping of independent women artists of color who have thus far been united principally by their collective participation in two exhibitions: "The Book Project" and "Ancestors Known and Unknown: Box Works." We have made an editorial decision not to isolate work from or articles/interviews with or about women who are connected with the *Coast to Coast* exhibitions in a separate section. Pieces from the exhibits themselves are identified by "Box show" or "Book show," and a list of artists who have participated in the two shows, as well as further information about the organization, its future plans and address can be found on page 155.

Because of severe budgetary limitations, after this issue IKON will be changing format, but we have exciting plans, including adding a newsletter and a series of chapbooks. Our subscribers will be automatically informed of future projects, and we encourage interested readers to write us for further information. More than ever, we depend on your support to continue.

To all those whose work is represented in these pages, and to all those countless other tireless workers for whom creativity and social change is not an empty slogan, this issue is most lovingly dedicated.

THE NINETIES

Moving Forward, Reaching Back

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COVER GRAPHICS: (clockwise): Details from works by Clarissa Sligh, Sheila Hamanaka, Beverly R. Singer, Faith Ringgold, Regina Araujo Corritore.

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ADRIAN PIPER

The Joy of Marginality

The following article is adapted from remarks made by Adrian Piper at the New Museum's panel "The Ideology of the Margin: Gender, Race, and Culture."

This article deals with a number of specific questions, which I was asked to address in a way that was "personal and non-theoretical." I'll try to do that, with the understanding that "personal and non-theoretical" needn't mean "exclusively autobiographical," and may well mean "generally symptomatic."

First, there is the issue of my racial identity, and the conflicts between the way I perceive it and the way others do. I don't perceive my racial identity in any way at all. My racial identity is not a pervasive feature of my consciousness, the way my skin surface is a pervasive feature of my body. When I am alone in my apartment doing my work or reading, I don't think about my racial identity. Nor do I think about it when I am with good friends, regardless of their racial identity. Indeed, that's part of what it means for me to consider someone a good friend: their behavior toward me and in my presence does not continually remind me that I am either of the same race as them, or of a different race. In a friendship, race is just one more index of singularity. It becomes a symptom of alienation when it demarcates group allegiances.

I become aware of my racial identity when someone brings it to my attention. This happens, for example, whenever someone makes a racist, sexist, homophobic, or ethnic slur of any kind. That brand of irrational hostility, no matter where it is explicitly directed, reminds me of my vulnerability as a black person. Sometimes a white person will mention my racial identity as a way of dealing with his or her own conflicts about it. Sometimes mentioning my or our racial identity in the course of conversation with another black person can be a needed source of solidarity that compensates for the dissonance created by my appearance and "nice white lady" personal style. Only once in my life have I ever mentioned my racial identity to a white person in order to remind him how alien, and alienated from him, I felt (he had made an anti-Semitic joke to me in an attempt to establish rapport). However, mentioning my racial identity in passing to whites sometimes has this effect, even though I don't intend it.

Conflicts arise when another person, either black or white, has false preconceptions about who I am and how I will behave on the basis of how I look or identify myself racially. But I encounter similar conflicts and false preconceptions about my gender identity, professional identities in academia and in the artworld, and character. I frequently provoke hostility in those whose social comfort requires my conformity to stereotyped social

categories. Because they rarely question the veracity of their own preconceptions, I must be prepared to disabuse them, in order to avoid serious and irreversible misunderstandings. Some such relationships survive these corrective efforts; most do not. Sometimes I get tired of having to make these efforts, and go on strike while the relationship deteriorates. The result is that I have very few friends, and it takes me a long time to relax and stop being vigilant in any friendship I do have. Being seen clearly, understood, and accepted as I am is an exceedingly rare and valuable experience for me.

As to how all of this affects my artwork, it affects it very deeply. In part my work stems from a compulsion to embody, transform, and use these experiences in constructive ways, in order not to feel trapped and powerless. I want to contribute to the creation of a society in which racism and racial stereotyping no longer exist. Obviously I don't aspire to get rich or famous (however, I am grateful to the artworld for having kept me afloat—or perhaps occasionally bobbing to the surface would be a better way of putting it—for the last twenty years without ever requiring that I sell my work). My work is an act of communication that politically catalyzes its viewers to a target or stance that I depict. Through the work I try to construct a concrete, immediate and personal relationship between me and the viewer that locates us within the network of political cause and effect. My purpose is to transform the viewer psychologically, by presenting him or her with an unavoidable concrete reality that cuts through the defensive rationalizations by which we insulate ourselves against the facts of our political responsibility. I want viewers of my work to come away from it with the understanding that their reactions to racism are ultimately political choices over which they have control.

I have great respect for what I call "global" political art that attempts to educate its viewers about matters of crucial importance that bear no obvious and direct relationship to their lives. But I worry that the ultimate effect of this work on a viewer's subsequent behavior in the world may be very slight. Because however forceful, original, or eloquent it may be, global political art is often too removed from the indexical present to situate the viewer him or herself in the causal network of political responsibility. It is easy to walk away from such a work without any lingering sense of how one may be personally implicated in the political situation that necessitated it. Sometimes such work lets one off the hook by targeting villains, whom we who choose to view it may all smugly deplore from a safe distance. This kind of work can be profoundly moving. But relative to my own work and my own purposes, these escape hatches would count as failures to fully engage the viewer.

Because I believe we are all implicated in the problem of racism, my work addresses a general audience. I am particularly interested in grappling with the "Who, me?" syndrome that infects the highly select and sophisticated audience that typically views my work. But the work functions differently depending on the composition of the audience. For a white

audience, it often has a didactic function: It communicates information and experiences that are new, or that challenge preconceptions about oneself and one's relation to blacks. For a black audience, the work often has an affirmative or cathartic function: it expresses shared emotions—of pride, rage, impatience, defiance, hope—that remind us of the values and experiences we share in common. However, different individuals respond in different and unpredictable ways that cut across racial, ethnic, and gender boundaries: Some people align themselves with the standpoint from which I offer the critique. Others identify themselves as the target of the critique. Yet others feel completely alienated by the whole enterprise. There is no way of telling in advance whether any particular individual is going to feel attacked by my work, or affirmed, or challenged by it. So people sometimes learn something about who they are by viewing my work. For me this is proof of success.

I think my work very definitely is marginal relative to mainstream art—certainly in form, content and marketability; but in my strange world that's evidence of quality and significance. The margin is where much of the really advanced, exciting, original work is being done—by artists who are critically distanced from the status quo both politically and aesthetically; who see the mainstream clearly because they've been excluded from it while having to navigate through it; and who are unwilling to accept the narrow range of aesthetic options validated by the mainstream. When it became clear in the mid '70s that conceptual and performance art was being eradicated from the annals of art history by dealers and collectors who saw that its continued support would entail their financial ruin, many of us decided to keep producing it anyway. Now conceptual art is back in style, but examining one's own racism is just as unfashionably marginal as ever. So I'm always amused by the solipsistic and parochial post-modernist lament that the mainstream co-opts everything. It doesn't even try to co-opt politically hot work, for fear of evaporating outward toward the margin. And we wouldn't want that, would we? (For example, I don't see anyone trying to co-opt Faith Ringgold, or David Hammons, or PESTS, or Judy Baca.) But I find I can live with that. Every foray into the mainstream reminds me how saturated by money, power, fashion, and social status it is. I find most of the work I see there monotonous, formulaic and deeply boring. Surely the inflated theorizing of much recent art criticism is inversely proportional to the interest and significance of the work it occasionally mentions. The values and practices of the mainstream would have to change very radically to make it a club I'd want to join.

I've discussed elsewhere how I would like (and not like) my work to be written about, so I'll be brief about this. I admire clear, intelligent, intellectually honest, and self-reflective art criticism. These qualities are much more important to me than how politically correct a critic thinks he or she is. Ideally I would like such criticism to situate my work at the interior boundary of consciousness between the self and the other, and at the intersection of the political and aesthetic avant-garde. This implies that I

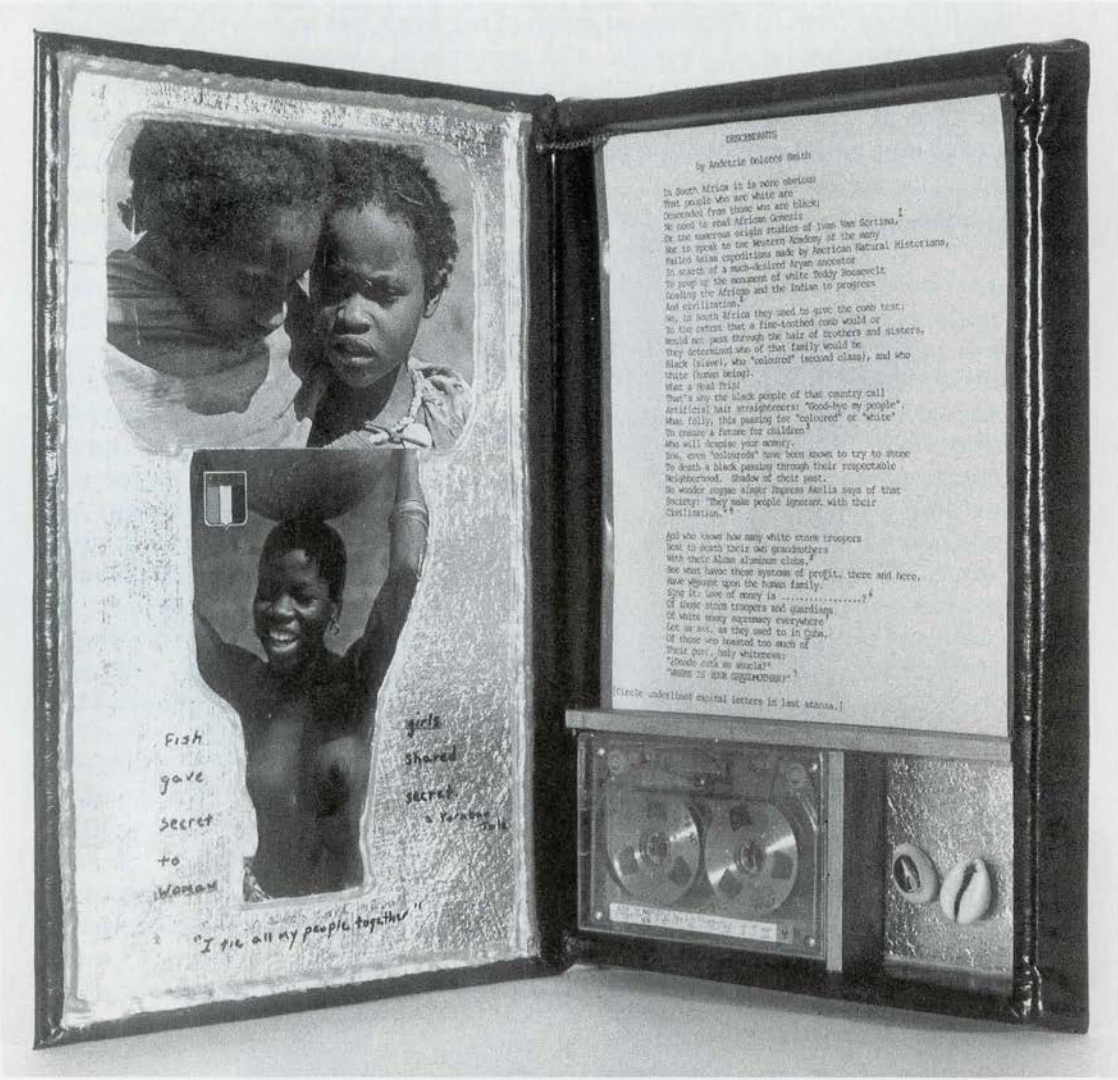
still think there is an avant-garde. I view the doctrine of postmodernism as an oppressive mainstream ideology that legitimates disregard of the aesthetic innovations of marginalized artists. I have no patience with criticism that relies on obfuscating jargon or esoteric references that obscure rather than illuminate the aesthetic and political realities it purports to address; nor with criticism that fails to take art at least as seriously as its own theoretical underpinnings; nor with criticism that flinches in the face of the realities my work represents. A piece of criticism that does not respect its readership enough to render difficult or loaded ideas intelligibly does not deserve the respect expressed by reading it. Some recent experiences have led me to realize that I would rather not have my work written about at all, than have it discussed in an irresponsible or intellectually dishonest way. Publicity as such, irrespective of quality, is of no interest to me.

As to how I feel about having my twenty-year retrospective at the Alternative Museum, my feelings about it express a kind of "Woody Allen" syndrome in reverse: I have tremendous respect for any institution that would take the risk of giving its stamp of approval to work that is difficult, disturbing, confrontational, politically volatile, and of uncertain market value at best. That means that the institution in question must believe in the work for its own sake, and *that* kind of support is more important to me than anything else. It's easy to gas off at length about one's political convictions, but there are very few art institutions willing to back up those convictions by exhibiting work that explicitly critiques the racial power structure of, among other things, the artworld itself. I have great admiration for individuals in positions of responsibility—in the case of my retrospective, Jane Farver—who are willing to take that risk. It is no accident that the Alternative Museum has a reputation for doing whatever it thinks is important and interesting, regardless of whose feathers it ruffles. I don't see how my retrospective could have originated anywhere else.

My relation as a marginal artist to art institutions generally is fraught with ambiguity. Because I have never actively attempted to join the mainstream, I am impossibly, unbelievably stupid and naive about power relationships with those who represent it. I can't quite grasp the fact that someone could be enthusiastic about something as centrally important to me as my work, without also being a good and trustworthy friend, or that such a friendship might be constrained or corrupted in unmentionable ways by considerations of power or professional position; or that I might foreclose a professional relationship by treating a person as a friendly equal rather than as God the Father. In some circles I have a reputation for being difficult and unaccommodating: I have occasionally refused to sacrifice the integrity of my work for the privilege of promoting it, and do not respond well to attempts at manipulation or coercion. In these ways I marginalize myself, by prescreening the art institutions that are willing to deal with me. I find I can live with that, too.

I have been asked how I like being marginal, and whether I think that's an appropriate way to categorize me and my work. The answer is that I can't imagine what it would be like *not* to be marginal, because I have never felt anything *but* marginal relative to any group I can think of. I like it fine. I think my marginality gives me a clearer vision of the practices, conventions, and beliefs that define the mainstream, precisely because of my distance from it. Because so much of my work has to do with critiquing mainstream habits of thought and perceptual categorization, my marginality is a major resource for me both in art and in philosophy. I wouldn't sacrifice it even if I could, which of course I can't; so it's remarkably convenient that I prefer it.

"Evidence of Grace: Ancestors Known & Unknown"
MICHELLE BARNES (Box Show)



"I & I Talking Book #1" SHARON JADDIS (Book Show)

Lucy R. Lippard

The Hand of Memory in Some African American & Latina Art

My sense of this land can only ripple through my veins
like the chant of an epic corrido.
I come from a long time of eloquent illiterates
whose history reveals what words don't say.
—Lorna Dee Cervantes

Stories come through you and through your culture. When I lived in Georgia, in my family there were "storytellings" around the breakfast table. The stories would start back in slavery time....The real and false Br'er Rabbit tradition, or even Amos and Andy—two white guys imitating two working-class Black men to bring up the issues of the working class. That's the kind of strange mixture we make our stories out of....but it goes back to the oldest oral tradition in Africa—the telling over and over.
—Robbie McCauley

The role of tradition and belief, of memory, family, and history in art is a touchy subject today for a variety of valid political and theoretical reasons. Among them is the Western habit of trapping people with non Western backgrounds in another time associated with their "origins"—a time separate from validated history, so they are cast adrift into some woozy "mythic" realm that is irrelevant to the "real" (i.e. Western) world. Artists and scholars of color have justifiably rebelled against this relegation to "other" status.

Yet origins—some dimly recalled and still meaningful, and some more recently invented and manipulated—constantly surface in even the most sophisticated and experimental artforms; they are often manifested in "traditional" elements as diverse as storytelling, pattern, references to belief and value systems, and family histories. But they are emotionally and analytically complex, hybrid narratives derived from both tradition and experience. These new/old stories challenge the pervasive "master narratives" that would contain them. Through them, and the arts by which they travel, it has become clear that the hybrid is one of the most "authentic" creative expressions in the U.S.

Belief and ritual as they are integrated into everyday life, and a certain nostalgia for the historical African unification of work, religion and art, is

a frequent subject, for instance, of contemporary black women's art. The syncretism at its core is often misunderstood by white critics, as epitomized by Benjamin Buchloh's question to the organizer of the "Magiciens de la Terre" show in Paris in 1989: "Don't you think that the search for the (re-) discovery of spirituality originates in a disavowal of the politics of everyday life?" Such a viewpoint misses the crucial point at which spirituality and politics meet and reinforce each other in the work of many contemporary artists.

African-American and Latina women (like Native American and Asian women) have traditionally been the keepers of stories, the holders of history. Darlene Clark Hine, professor of Afro-American history at Purdue University, was led to her "Black Women in the Middle West Project" by local women who were determined to have their histories told: "They believed that somehow you could change your present circumstances if only your history was told. Then they would finally be accorded recognition and legitimacy. It knocked me on my heels and taught me, the historian, what history can really teach."

Louise Anderson, North Carolina storyteller and healer, mourns a past when "people would sit out and talk about the things that hurt them, things that concerned them. At that time people knew how to heal each other by talking to each other. This is what the psychiatrist does today. I knew a girl who told me about her grandmother. It was a terrible story about how her grandmother had been treated as a slave. The girl said she hated to think about it, but I told her that is her story, and she needed to take it, bring it back and hold onto it."

In the visual arts, weaving and quilting—both literally and metaphorically—have offered "narrative" vehicles for memory. The polyrhythmic tradition of African art surfaced in textiles, blankets, and quilts made in the Americas, and there is a strong possibility that New World quilting was itself of African rather than European origins. African art historian Robert Farris Thompson has written about the "thunder" and the "metric witticisms" found in African-American quilts, the way the artists talk about "building a quilt" and "playing the fabric," denying separations between mediums and cultures. He finds the "hidden cross-rhythms" of African music, quilters "shading the count" like jazz dancers.

> Such vernacular art has had a huge influence on modernism in general, and on the white avant garde of the '70s and '80s. But for artists like Joyce Scott, who works out of Baltimore, it is a direct source of empowerment. Scott is a transitional figure between tradition and the avant garde. Her mother and grandmother are African-influenced quilters and Scott herself makes eccentric sewn and beaded assemblages as well as performances. "Generations tearing through stitching and hitching their dreams to untamed stars have coalesced in me. I accepted that challenge," she says. Scott's sculpture/jewelry is unlike any other "wearable art" in its fusion of a wry and nasty political humor with

opulent materials. Scott, who insists on taking on the biggest issues in the smallest scale and most intimate materials, has studied craft traditions in Mexico, Central America, and Africa. She cites the silkscreened fabrics of West Africa with their portraits of political leaders and pop stars as the basis for her opinionated adornments.

Faith Ringgold, born and bred and still living in Harlem's Sugar Hill, often worked with her mother, Willi Posey, a dress designer who had learned sewing and quilting from her mother and grandmother, who had learned in turn from her slave mother. For two decades, Ringgold's tankas, masks, stuffed sculptures, performances, and story quilts have told Harlem's stories. In 1983, she made the first of the painted story quilts that constitute her major mature works. They combine the gridded ranks of frontal, hieratic, portraits of fictional Harlem residents that have recurred in Ringgold's painting since the 60s, and the narrative threads and African influences of her fabric pieces and portrait masks. With flair and ebullience, Ringgold performs the African griotte's function in the domestic materials of story and cloth, telling dramatic tales of foreign wars and city street life, slavery and resistance, passion and greed, jazz and the Harlem Renaissance, murdered children in Atlanta, family intrigue and tragedy, all painted with compassion, humor and often anger in a proud vernacular tradition.

Alternating rhythms of intensity and relaxation mark all of Ringgold's work. Cee Cee, the determinedly original heroine of her multipartite *Bitter Nest* quilt story, is the female connection between African roots and 20th-century intellectuals, irritating the latter by reminding them of the former. Cee Cee's method, as described by Ringgold, is precisely that of "rhythmized" Mande narrow-strip weaving and its Creole, African-American offshoots described by Thompson, who calls Mande cloth "a world of metrically sparkling textiles" designed "in visual resonance with the famed off-beat phrasing of melodic accents in African and Afro-American music."

Michigan artist Carol Ann Carter also refers to this tradition. Her early prints were literally "patterned after" African weavings. When she was able to spend time in Nigeria, she returned to make the ragged and opulent cloth wall pieces embellished by buttons, sequins, horsehair, embroidery, rhinestones and found objects that make up her mature work. "The energy and exaggeration of life there made it imperative to me, and subsequently to my work, to respond with like energy," she recalls.

Emma Amos, formerly a weaver as well as a painter, uses strips of gorgeous Kente cloth (and sometimes her own fabrics) as borders for her paintings. She says they are "homage to the craft. I can give a salute to other artists by using their fabrics, and I can show off what I know about color and texture by collecting and using Kente cloth." Amos likes to think of herself as "a writer in paint." Her "Odyssey" series of hanging paintings bring together her own story and the histories of her family and the African

American community in Atlanta. When she showed the ten paintings in Atlanta, "Black people came and cried. They recognized the symbols."

A good deal of Latino art in the U.S. emerges from an ambivalence toward traditional belief systems, an ambivalence fueled by both the seductive life of post-industrial capitalism and by the alienation it ultimately produces, felt most strongly among those who have little share in the spoils. Pockets of belief have survived the determined ethnocentrism that has substituted for religious persecution in this country, though these cultural survivals are often viewed by the dominant culture as "sects" or "cults" rather than as institutions taken for granted like Catholicism and Protestantism. For the artists working in that misty and controversial domain where artworld "primitivism" meets mass and popular culture, as well as for those to whom belief itself represents something new, the visual accoutrements of religion are both disturbing and attractive.

Cristina Emmanuel is a Puerto Rican artist from California whose work is informed by two poles of Latin culture—*chucheria* (kitsch) and African-Catholic religions. Her multicoded collages fuse the African-based syncretic religions with Catholic images, combining, for instance, Our Lady of Sorrows and Erzulie, the Dahomean goddess of love and abundance. "When I use saints," she says,

> I use them in an archetypal sense....as images of human experience and potential....I perceived [the Virgin] to be an expression of the ecstatic experience and mystery of the opening of the heart center—transformational ecstasy—and I associated her with the experiences of being in love (or 'being' love).

Los Angeles artist Betye Saar's work epitomizes the "collage esthetic" that women so often transfer to their art from the sense of patched time where they lead their lives. She sees herself as the medium through which the energies of all these weary objects are revivified, the seer who perceives the hidden properties of discarded lives. Her use of objects, and the way she taps the life and energies they themselves have accumulated, is evocative in the most profound sense of the word, giving voice.

Saar makes shrine-like assemblages, altars, hanging fetishes, or "mojos." Some refer directly to syncretic religions, such as Haitian vodun. Other works are still more intricately cross-cultural, inspired by the artist's extensive travels, and by her own mixed African, Irish and Native-American heritage. For Saar, materials are just that—mothers and matrixes. Her cumulative process can be seen in historical terms, but also as a way of hoarding psychic nourishment. Mary Schmidt Campbell has pointed out that the ethos and esthetic behind the Western avant-garde definition of assemblage—"ironic, perverse, anti-rational, even destructive"—differs from the view that informs African fetishes and accumulation, which "emphasizes consensus and consolidation, and the affirmation and reinforcement of social values and cultural continuity."

Home altars were already being made by women in Europe 10,000 years ago. In the U.S. today, the altar form is most firmly rooted in Latino-American art, especially within the tradition of the *Dia de los muertos*, the Day of the Dead, or All-Souls' Day, celebrated by Mexicans on both sides of the border as a welcome to souls who visit from another "other side," and as a bridge between their ancient indigenous and modern religious traditions. The most popular symbol of the celebration is the *calavera*—the cavorting skeleton or laughing skull in fancy dress. Westerners are fascinated by the relaxed assumption of a connection between the worlds of the living and the dead, by the candy skulls, the altars and feasts laid out for the departed, and by the concept of consolation through festivity, which is so ingrained in the Mexican psyche and so foreign to the Western Protestant.

> I sit here before my computer, *Amiguita,* my altar on top of the monitor with the *Virgen de Coatlalopeuh* candle and copal incense burning. My companion, a wooden serpent staff with feathers, is to my right while I ponder the ways metaphor and symbol concretize the spirit, and etherealize the body. —Gloria Anzaldua.

Altars are sites of accumulated power, points of departure to the past of *la raza*, the culture, the family, as well as a "performance space" in the present, and the site of prayer and desire for future fertility, protection, good fortune. Amalia Mesa-Bains is among those responsible for the modernist and theoretical evolution of the altar, or *ofrenda* form, and for its documentation as an art and a source for art. She traces two strands of women artists' involvement in ritual—that which has been "part of a continuous tradition of domestic folk-ritual" within minority art communities, and the "reclamationist" phase instigated by the latest wave of feminism, which has "pursued the secret history of women." They share roots in "a decorative tradition and the restricted mode of women's relegation to production in the home." Thus altars "became the most political of statements. They were the outgrowth of the individualized oppression in the most private places of the domestic chamber, the bedroom and the kitchen."

The altar form (and its portable counterpart, the box/reliquary) has become very popular with Latino artists in the last decade, but few have expanded and developed it like Mesa-Bains. By the late 1980s Mesa-Bains' altars have become innovative full-scale installations, sometimes incorporating music and sound, reflecting her scholarship and her personal concerns, but never abandoning the initial cultural impetus. She began by making homages to the home altars and yard shrines (*nichos* and *capillas*) she had grown up with. As her art became more sophisticated, she began to heighten her esthetic as well as didactic cultural statements. She experimented with the traditional forms, honoring women who had broken social barriers—Sor Juana de la Cruz, Frida Kahlo, Dolores del Rio, and her own

"Eternity Shrine" BISA WASHINGTON (Box Show)

beautiful, Indian-featured grandmother—a domestic worker who had never received the social respect she deserved—whom Mesa-Bains wittily celebrated in a confessional booth; visitors had to kneel before her to receive art's absolution.

Kathy Vargas, a Chicana photographer who is director of Visual Arts at the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center in San Antonio, conveys her religious/spiritual subject matter on a vehicle of near abstraction. Working with the Pre-Columbian and Catholic mix ubiquitous in the Southwest, she is especially knowledgeable about Mayan art. Her layered, lyrical imagery focuses on themes of death, mourning and consolation, the replacement of the older fiercer deities with a gentler Christ figure. Her photographs are black and white with occasional soft touches of warm color, always multifaceted in imagery and meaning.

A series called "Discard This Image" emerged from Vargas' conviction that non-Western images are discarded in the dominant culture, along with women's work, which is seen as non-intellectual; but the title also refers to "leaving the shell of life behind, stepping into another dream." Her "Priest" series of palely visible altarpieces moves from dark to light, creating a complex iconography with references to martyrdom and mysteries, the exorcism of personal pain. The relics of birds which are the central images symbolize spirit, dream, hope—anything free; but they are lured into nets and thorns of pain, which are also the womb, related to the womb-like body halo that traditionally surrounds the Virgin of Guadalupe. Vargas' photographic models are "little dead things"—flowers, birds, and frog skeletons—ghosts which she has found are offensive to a mainstream culture that likes to have death distanced, or on TV, while Third World cultures are far more comfortable with death. "I'm not morbid," she says. "I love life, but we really have to see the end to love the middle." Quoting Roland Barthes, who called the photograph "flat death," she says

> The edge is very thin from one plane to the next and life is sometimes so tentative that we need to be reminded we are in it: extreme pain, intense longing, stifling confusion. I make pictures to remember that.

Ana Mendieta was also obsessed with life, death, and rebirth. A Cuban sent to Iowa at age twelve and raised in alienating circumstances away from her family, she adopted the earth itself as a personal and a spiritual mother. Her *Silueta* (Silhouette) series, begun in the early '70s, consisted of schematic female figures cut or drawn into the earth, mounded or impressed upon it, in a variety of natural mediums—fire, ashes, leaves, gunpowder, grass, flowers, blood, water, wood, clay, stones, mud—and sometimes her own flesh. She also frequently worked with trees, again merging her body or its image—and by extension the female body—with nature, and, eventually, with the Latin American culture she had lost as a child. Mendieta's references were consistently feminist and religious. During her Cuban childhood she had "played priest" in the family chapel. Just

before her death she visited the neolithic "sleeping goddesses" in Malta; entering the temple, she said she felt as though she were "in a big womb...That's what art is about..it binds us historically...I think I am the shaman of pre-Iberian-Afro-Caribbean goddesses," she wrote.

Two early performance works referred to Santeria rituals: in one Mendieta held a beheaded chicken that spattered blood over her naked body and in another she rubbed herself in blood and rolled in a bed of white feathers, transforming herself into the white cock that is crucial to certain rites. In others, she lay down nude in an Aztec grave and was photographed covered in tiny white flowers; she curled herself up in white grave clothes to become a primitive burial bundle lying on the red earth; she lay on a skeleton, giving it life, and painted her own skeleton on her nude body as a living *vanitas*. A "Fetish Series" in the late '70s dealt with the cruelty of, or to, an abandoning or abandoned mother earth, and coincided with her mother's cancer; mound-like figures were marked with red paint or stabbed with sharp sticks. In 1981 Mendieta revealed the image of a female figure in the knots and bark of a tree in Miami that was a local Santeria shrine; later the worshippers added to the healing figure, so that her sculpture entered the public domain on several levels.

Mendieta's work was for years an expression of the need for roots, a desire to belong culturally. When, beginning in 1980, she finally returned to Cuba for several long visits, she carved her voluptuous female deities into the walls of caves in Jaruco, an ancient indigenous site. She said that when she worked on a site, she "claimed territory...somewhat like a dog pissing on the ground. Doing that charges the whole area for me." In 1981, she made a small "valentine" to her lost and then found motherland—five hearts made of areca palm roots were sunk into a square of red earth.

The mythological references that pervade postmodern art and writing indicate how hard it is to let the stories go. Even as they are being deconstructed, the tenacious power of memory at their base—most often entrusted to women—refuses to be uprooted. These are only a few of the many women artists whose work illuminates and draws strength from their inherited cultural histories, beliefs and values. The kind of "storytelling" they do is neither nostalgia nor an imposed and falsified memory existing in a vacuum. Connected to the present, it becomes a survival mechanism—what Mesa-Bains has called, "an art for the sake of life...remembering what [we] had chosen to forget."

MEENA ALEXANDER

LANGUAGE AND SHAME: Reflections on My Life in Letters

> OED: *Shame*: "The painful emotion arising from the consciousness of something dishonoring, ridiculous or indecorous in one's own conduct or circumstances... or of being in a situation which offends one's sense of modesty or decency."
> "Fear of offense against propriety or decency, operating as a restraint on behavior."
>
> *Sense of Shame*: "The consciousness of this emotion, guilty feeling; also the right perception of what is improper or disgraceful...."

As women we have taught ourselves to work our anger, feel it, gaze at it, turn it around to energize us. It's harder perhaps to work with shame. Harder at least for me. Which is what I would like to begin with—shame and the way it's woven in for me with the language of my poetry—a slightly painful sense of having burst the bounds of propriety, of having embarked on something that's not really done, contravening in some subtle if unforgivable way the bonds of femininity. And living now in the United States as I have done for the past ten years—it's almost ten years to the day since I arrived here in the fall of 1979—the shame is compounded by my difference as a foreigner, a woman, a poet.

The being here, the chosen displacement, for I chose willingly to come here and choose now to make my home here, clarifies the sense of otherness. But how thick the words are, not sharp enough really to spell out the beginning of a revelation. The unleashing of knowledge. Where the shame is, I tell myself, that is where you have to go. And the first thickness, the first overlap to my existence, pungent like flesh itself is how my Indianess—inseparable for me from femaleness—fuses with the sometimes wretched marginality of human lives in the inner city. And I'm referring now to Manhattan where I live: a city of subways and a dark underground life, a city of sidewalks where there are more beggars visible than on a comparable street in Trivandrum. Not that E.K. Nayanar's Kerala is paradise, far from it. But rather that marginality is also here and now, radically unhoused.

At first it was difficult for me to write from this new place, America. And one of the problems I faced most acutely was figuring out what portions of my past could work for me here. I thought of this the other day when giving a reading with Gale Jackson and Maritza Arrastía at the conclusion of the

wonderful exhibit of box works by 101 women of color.[1] The theme of the exhibit *Ancestors Known and Unknown* had a powerful resonance for me. It reminded me of how, when I first started to write here in America, I needed to create an ancestral figure. It turned out to be a grandmother who opened my mouth, permitted me to speak. Somehow I needed that female power behind, within me.

Often in those first poems I set bits of Kerala and bits of Manhattan side by side in the imagination. Two of my earliest poems were composed at the same time: "Hotel Alexandria" and "House of a Thousand Doors."[2] The first is a prose poem, a meditation on a bag lady I saw kneeling in the cold outside a building on Broadway and 103rd street. The building, its insides torn out, was to be turned into a condominium. The second poem is a dream poem. I imagine my grandmother as a bride, kneeling outside the teak and bronze house built around a Kerala courtyard. But she is barred from entering any of the thousand doors. The women in the two poems are from very different cultures and moments in history. But each is made marginal, cast out, a part of me. Now I didn't really mean to bring up these two older poems, but there they are, welling up from somewhere: part of a landscape of unhousedness. And being cast out is intrinsic to what I mean by shame: outcaste—because of what one is, rather than does. Shame as ontology. Which is something that I learnt very quickly, coming from the part of the world that I do. Though strictly speaking untouchability does not exist in the Syrian Orthodox church of Kerala, issues of purity and pollution are very live. For me, they came as part and parcel of my femaleness. It was only years later when I read Lalithambika Antherjanam's fierce, tormented novel *Agnisakshi,* set in a Namboodiri household in Kerala, that I understood some of the connections between being female and being outcaste.

Which brings me to language. Can one live in language? And I ask this of myself as a poet. Yes, I live in language, composing with it, I invent myself. I house what otherwise is so displaced that no literal shelters could hold it. And yet, having said this, I cannot forget that my first encounters with language in its powerful canonized forms—the refined inscriptions of religious texts and of literature—were complex: a simultaneous sense of absorption (through the listening ear) and alienation, a cutting away and thrusting apart (through the script and the burden of knowledge needed to decode it.) Perhaps this is partly why I have held onto a cherished illiteracy in Malayalam, my mother tongue.

And so this marginality, being female, an Indian writer, here in the United States, is compounded, energized, by the complications of my ordinary life, which after all is all I have. I stop and think: it's taken me so many years as a writer to say this, that the ordinary life is all I have. After all what else can give substance to words, to a life in letters? Yet clearly the two are different. For I eat, sleep, walk about, cook food and so forth when I do not write, but I could not write unless I did all that and

more—the more I have in mind is making sure that certain young creatures have their breakfasts on time and get to school. It's a myth after all, a myth and nothing less, that the life of the writer is a seamless whole, a perfect web out of which cries the voice: "Choose perfection of the life or of the art." We have learnt to put those voices behind us. We write in the cracks of life, in the fissures which body forth our actual marginality. And with words we house those very imperfections that make us what we are: discrepant creatures, fierce, unrepentant, utterly ordinary.

But what of the language I use? I need to focus on that a little. Just the other day it seems, the hot unease, the shame I felt as a small child learning to repeat English words and trying to get them right, that dense tissue of feeling, (unease, embarrassment, a fear of being exposed—exposed as what, for what, I need to ask—a shame finally of being improper, not quite right, never quite right) returned sharply, enveloping me. I felt again that hot scent: forcing me back onto myself, onto a border existence.

And I'm not talking about poems that are sent back by mainstream literary journals where their content is viewed as too "exotic," too different from what taste permits, though that too is part of the story. No, I'm thinking now about my earlier life in the academy here. I recall being called into the office of the Chairman at the Jesuit University where I used to work. He leant forward in his black garb, stiff, quite clear about his own position. "It has been pointed out to me that you do not publish in the area in which you were hired, British Romanticism." I perked up. "What about that?" I pointed to a book lying on his table. He picked it up, a little puzzled now. "Look at the table of contents": I pointed at it with my finger. He glanced at me. I was sitting there, quite proper in my Kashmir silk sari, erect at the edge of the chair. His eyes shifted to the titles of chapters listed on the contents page. There was a gap there, a split second. I shivered. Not because I was cold—it was fall then, early fall and quite warm still—but because I suddenly saw something. There was no way the man who sat in front of me could put together my body with any sense that he had of mentality, of the life of the mind. I had fallen under the Cartesian blade. "Yes, yes," he muttered, looking at the chapters with names like Wordsworth and Coleridge littering them. "Yes, yes." I stood up. The trouble was what I was, quite literally: a female, Indian. Not that I had not published in the area, but that I had published outside that docket. A paper on Jayanta Mahapatra had just come out in London. Some senior colleagues had seen it. Was this stuff really literature? Also I was active in the readings *Art Against Apartheid* had started in the City and poems were coming out in journals. It was all quite improper. Later, when I was denied tenure, it was now the spring of 1986 and my body was swelling with a second child—my little daughter—going into work I sometimes smelt that old shame. The sharpness of the recollection excited me, but by then I was too tired to sort it out. I left it hanging there in memory.

I was a small child of six, sitting at a polished wooden table with a sheen so bright it reflected all that was cast onto it, an ivory vase with roses, a

placemat, a knife, a fork pushed to the side, two faces, one small and dark, the other older and pale. The book I was trying to read from was flush against the wood and so didn't make a double image: an old, old book with pictures of Tom and Bess, little English children who wore knickerbockers and pinafores, carried caps in their hands and drank milk. They were forever loitering by ponds filled with ducks, racing down lanes towards windmills with red wooden slats. My Scottish tutor leant forwards. Over and over she made me say: "duck duck," "pluck pluck," "milk milk," "silk silk." It was hard for her. I pouted, I fidgeted under the table, knocking my knuckles against the wood, then tried over and over. It was a ruinous waste of time but she persisted. I was all wrong, I knew it. And I felt quite ashamed. The trouble was I knew the words already but in a different way. And she tried her level best to polish out my Indian English and replace it with the right model. From her point of view she did a good job. Traces, perhaps even more than traces of that speech linger on my tongue. How could she know that more than two decades later, that very diction would work against me, make me an oddity in the eyes of the white Midwestern feminist at a university in the colder reaches of this country who wanted nothing to do with me, who turned and said: "Of course they'll hire you. They'll trot you out because you speak such good English."

But returning to my childhood adventures with English—I should add that I was in Khartoum, in North Africa, at this stage, my father, who worked for the Government of India, was seconded there—after the year with the lady tutor I enrolled in the Clergy House School in Khartoum, the first non-white child. And for almost a whole year in class I was dumb, I refused to open my mouth.

"You were considered very slow, you wouldn't read in class when you were asked to," my mother reminded me this summer when I was in Kerala. "I came to school," she explained, "and told that English woman: My child is not slow, just shy. She let you be. Then it got a little better."

I remember my mother walking me to the gate to wait for the school bus, helping me over and over with the English words so I wouldn't be puzzled or get lost. But when it came to writing poetry when I was ten and eleven she thought better of it. Even now she is anxious, perhaps justifiably so, about the disclosures that a writing life commits one to, quite contrary to the reticence that femininity requires.

As a child I used to hide out to write. Either behind the house where there was a patch of bare wall and the shade of a neem tree, or better still in the half darkness of the toilet. I gradually found that the toilet was safer. There I could mind my own business and compose. I also learnt to write in snatches. If someone knocked at the door, I stopped abruptly. I hid my papers under my skirts, tucked my pen into the elastic band of my knickers and got up anxiously. Gradually this enforced privacy—for I absorbed, perhaps even in part identified with my mother's disapproval over my poetic efforts—added an aura of something illicit, shameful, to my early

sense of my scribblings. School work was seen in a totally different light. Essays, exercises, note taking, reading and writing about the literary works that I had on the syllabus at school, was always encouraged. It was good to excel there, interpreting works that were part of a great literary past. The other writing, in one's own present, was to be tucked away, hidden. No wonder then, that my entry into the realm of letters was fraught.

The facts of multilingualism added complexity to this split sense of writing in English. I am thinking of my childhood in India, my later childhood in North Africa punctuated by long extended stays in Kerala, my years as a student in Britain as well as my life now. I was born in Allahabad and so Hindi washed over me in my earliest years, I chattered aloud in it to the children around. It was my first spoken language, though Malayalam, my mother tongue, has always been there with it, by its side, alongside any other language I have cared to used: Hindi, English, French, bits of Arabic. Malayalam is speech to me. Tightened though into the hold of privacy as I live here, it is closer to dream. Its curving syllables blossom for me in my illiteracy in other letters: gawky, dazzling letters spray painted in fluorescent shades onto the metal sides of subway cars or the dark walls of inner tunnels, shifting, metamorphic. Sometimes in chalk I read another script, a man draws out laboriously on the sidewalks of Manhattan, spelling out the obvious as necessity so often compels: "I am homeless, I need food, shelter." A small smattering of dimes and quarters lie near his bent knees. Those letters I read in the only script I know, makes for a ferocious, almost consumptive edge to knowledge.

I never learnt to read or write Malayalam. I ran away when the tutor came to the Tiruvella house and no one enforced my studies. So I had the privilege of my illiteracy and turned into a truly post-colonial creature learning to be in English. Though a special sort of English I must say: for the version of the language I am comfortable with is one that bends and flows to the shores of other territories, other tongues. First in Allahabad there was Hindi; then in my childhood months in Pune, Marathi; then in North Africa, French; and now in New York, there is Spanish. And always, of course, there has been Malayalam—that both heightens and undermines the course of my English. And necessarily so. Else how would I be? Indeed what would I be? The cost of multiculturalism, the price of fluency in many places, is an illiteracy. But one so radical that I cling to it. And it serves me as a sort of symbol. Perhaps when the metaphoric use dissolves away, I will learn to read and write Malayalam, no longer needing the friendly mediation I now rely on in my forays into literary life in Kerala.

But I have to stop myself here. I used the phrase "a sort of symbol," deliberately vague. What did I have in mind, or not have in mind? After all I was alluding to my illiteracy in Malayalam, something which does trouble me from time to time. For instance, I would love to read the prose of Lalithambika Antherjanam and the poetry of Balamaniamma, ONV

Kurup, Ayyappa Panniker and Sugathakumari rather than have that fiction and those poems read to me. I would love to read Mahakavi K.V. Simon's epic *VedaViharam* rather than have it recited to me. Or is that precisely part of the problem? After all, if it were just an issue of mother wit, I am sure that I would be able to read and write Malayalam by now. Is there a deliberate dependency, a true holding revealing something of the nature of my being in Kerala: a childhood simplicity lingering, being dependent on a community without which one could not survive, a treasured orality. For the rhythms of the language came to me, not just in lullabies or the chatter of women in the kitchen or by the wellside, but in the measured cadences of oratory and poetry and nightly recitations from the Bible and the epics.

But is there a fear that learning the script would force me to face the tradition, face up to the hierarchies, the exclusionary nature of canonical language? And then how would I ever be restored to simplicity, freed of the pressures of counter-memory? Sometimes all that has been deliberately forgotten wells up again and I use my English to let it surface. Towards the end of my long poem "Night-Scene, the Garden" I have a vision of ancestors dancing free of the earth. First come the men:

Men dressed
in immaculate white
bearing spears, and reams
of peeling leaf
Minute inscriptions
of our blood and race.

Stumbling behind
in feverish coils
I watch the women come
Their eyes averted
from the threads
of smoke that spiral
from my face.

Some pry
their stiffening knuckles
from the iron grip
of pots and pans
and kitchen knives.

Bolts of unbleached
cloth, embroidery needles,
glitter and crash in heaps.

• • •

Slow accoutrements of habit
and of speech,
the lust of grief
the savagery of waste
flickers and burns
along the hedgerows
by the vine.

The lost child
lifts her eyes
to mine.

• • •

Come, ferocious alphabets of flesh
Splinter and raze my page

That out of the dumb
and bleeding part of me

I may claim
my heritage.

The green tree
battened on despair
cast free

The green roots
kindled
to cacophony.[3]

I had a lot of trouble writing that poem. Perhaps because of the primitivism I am claiming, an illiteracy that allows me to identify with what is dumb and bleeding. Around the same time I wrote my poem "Passion," about the female experience after giving birth.[4] The tenth month, that limbo when one is no longer pregnant and not quite yet a mother, a condition I had read no poems about. Just a few months ago, I was seated on the floor in a house in Cuttack reading the poem to a poet friend and his wife. She asked me: "But why the bird image. Where does it come from? How does it fit? It seems different really." "I don't know, I think it was my way of conveying the intensity," I replied. Now as I think back, that's it. I wanted to convey something mute, unspeakable, brutal, everyday.

"Where do you write? When do you write?" someone asked me in Hyderabad after I gave a reading. My questioner, a political activist, was moved by "Passion" and had invited someone to come and listen, a man who wanted to translate the poem into Telugu. I write in all kinds of places, including buses and subways, I told her. Whenever, however I can. That's the virtue of the miniature form of the poem—a word here, a line there, all sustained by the rhythm that beats in the head. I write on all kinds of paper including kitchen towels.

I write on paper to reclaim ground. Even in Manhattan where so little ground is visible. Marginality compels me to it, a territorial thing. The idea of America excited me long before I thought of coming here. And that idea came to me when, as a teenager, I read the works of Whitman and Emerson.

At eighteen I was fascinated by Emerson's voice in "Self-Reliance": "The centuries are conspirators against the sanity and authority of the soul." Could there be a self freed from the burden of the past? It sounded unbelievable, exhilarating. Surely then all territories would be free! It took me another eighteen years—though I already knew the work of Fanon, Cesaire, Senghor, Dennis Brutus and Wole Soyinka—to read Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs and know the other picture: the degradation, the handcuffs, the forced illiteracy of slaves in America, the mutilation of body and mind. Indeed, it is multiculturalism in America that has sharpened my wits, forced me back to my own post-colonial heritage.

In the last two years, struggling with these questions of meaning and dislocation I composed two long poems. Each is roughly thirty pages long, each creates a living space, an environment, something I can never take for granted. Each circles around an ancestral house. In "The Storm,"[5] it is my father's house in Kozencheri; in "Night-Scene," The Garden' (*Chelsea* #48, 1989) it is my mother's house in Tiruvella. "The Storm" begins with my father's father breaking down the ancestral house to build a modern one up the hill, all white-washed and fitted with electricity. I saw the fragments of teak and mahogany being carted up the hill to be set in place in the new dwelling. The voice begins in the Kerala landscape, moves through a section on the Middle East and the war in the Gulf, and turns to immigrants in New York. In "Night-Scene," it is the Tiruvella house where my grandfather Kuruvilla lived. It is a poem about generations. At its heart lies a vision of female dislocation and madness. For reasons of space *Chelsea* omitted the 145 line section entitled "Aunt Chinna" which portrays the mad aunt I think of as an artist figure. She keeps scribbling her name over and over on scraps of paper, in all the languages she thinks the earth contains. She loses her mind, she holds onto nothing. The poem as a whole, in its uncut form was performed Off-Off Broadway by the Medicine Show Theatre Ensemble in 1988 and 1989. I have notes on the performance, on my emotions at seeing what

was so private, so interior, an intimate elsewhere, fleshed out, translated into the physical space of a New York City theatre. In a chapter of the autobiography I am working on, I try to figure out how these poems came into being, how Manhattan with its crowded streets and subways frames the landscapes of my Indian imagination.

And somehow I say to myself it has to be that way, the imagination claiming what was foreclosed. How else would I be able to touch where the shame is, tell it out? How else could I feel the quick of a true desire? For in living here and writing as an Indian woman—even though in writing, in the intensity of that posture, there is a letting go, a burning up of the acts of accommodation that ordinary life works with—in living here and writing, the self splits and multiplies, the dubiousness of one's estate, the shame even turned into a thickness, a nourishment infolding the stuff of poetry: a torsion stylized, the quick-step of marginality.

Notes

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[1] The reading took place on the evening of February 24, 1990 at *Art in General*, 79 Walker Street, NY City.

[2] These two poems can be found in Meena Alexandar, *House of a Thousand Doors* (Washington, DC: Three Continents Press, 1988)

[3] "Night-Scene, The Garden," *Chelsea* #48 (1989)

[4] "Passion," *The Massachusetts Review*, "Desh-Videsh: Special Issue on South Asian Expatriate Writing and Art." Vol. XXIX, No. 4 (1988-89)

[5] Meena Alexander, *The Storm* (New York: Red Dust, 1989)

ELIZABETH HAY

A Snowball from China

Salem. Unnatural quiet. Almost no seagulls, no smell of the sea. We bring a lamp into the kitchen and it makes the overhead light less lonely.

We're new.

The town of A, the scarlet letter, the beginning. And such a sad beginning: Hester Prynne blinked in the unaccustomed sunlight, my daughter's hand in mine.

I read *Robinson Crusoe* in the donut shop. At least I can eat donuts when I'm lonely. The waitress bends her bleached head forward—mauve lips, fins of an old Buick.

"They grow so fast," looking at my daughter. "My baby is 35."

The next time she doesn't remember us.

"She doesn't remember us," I say to Alec.

"She's just pretending not to."

The third time I go in, "You were in twice before. Is it a boy or a girl?"

Donut Cove. A seaside donut shop.

The party. We are all strangers overeager for friendship—the lack of conversation, the heartiness, the impossibility of finding music to suit the mood or change it.

One man flings his tie over his shoulder trying to look casual in office clothes. His wife is cold. She puts on his suit jacket and hunches in her chair. He suggests she sit beside him on the sofa.

"You're not *that* cold," he laughs when she shakes her head.

And when she does sit beside him, exaggerating her coldness, looking much older than he, he immediately gets up and sits in her chair. "My back needs a straight chair," slumping in it. "I'm getting old."

On the way home, "I miss my friends," says Alec.

The photo. Alec is standing against a painted backdrop of flowers and a banner held aloft by two birds. On the banner, *TE TRAIGO ESTAS FLORES*. The photo is twelve years old. Alec is wearing summer trousers and sandals, a shoulder bag, a wide- brimmed hat which he holds over his heart. "I bring you these flowers."

Skinny, skuffed but neat, serious, very young. A traveller. At the bottom of the photo a few strands of hair from the photographer's head blow into the picture.

Alec is Robinson Crusoe in reverse. Cast ashore on his native land, head bent over a computer manual, editing to pay the rent. A descent into

Orwellian newspeak. Crusoe taught a parrot how to say his name, Alec is taught how to parrot.

"He would sit upon my finger, and lay his bill close to my face, and cry, 'Poor Robin Crusoe! Where are you? Where have you been? How come you here?' And such things as I had taught him."

Afternoon sun. The woman who runs the laundromat is missing two lower teeth. My daughter's clothes are missing my daughter—her tiny shape, fur without the animal. I nuzzle her head and the side of her face, then watch her swirl emptily in the dryer.

An expedition has just reached the North Pole. One of the party was evacuated three weeks early and his dog, remaining behind, died a day before they reached the Pole. From the paper I read out, "He never pulled well after his master left, and died of unknown causes."

"*Tristeza,*" Alec says, "*se murio de tristeza.* There's nothing unknown about that."

He died of sadness.

A child cries one house over. In Mexico City we were always awakened at 1 a.m. as the child on the other side of the wall began to cry. And his mother came in yelling shut up, shut up, SHUT UP...

"Murder, suicide or madness," Alec says. "Those are the alternatives."

I look at him, my glance accusing him of exaggeration once again.

"I don't mean you murder someone, or kill yourself or go into a mental hospital. I mean you let parts of yourself die or you don't let parts of other people exist, or you go crazy."

In the rocking chair late at night he smokes a Havana cigar, reads *The Quiet American.* He is the unquiet American.

"What did you dream about when you were a kid?" I ask him.

"I always dreamt about going away. My favourite fairytales were about people who walked over mountains and found something they had never known about."

And I realize that's why I fell in love with him.

He sits with our daughter in his lap and teaches her Spanish so he'll have somebody to talk to. "Where have you been? How come you here?"

• • •

We eat purple grapes. Stems pile up in the middle of the table; furs receded as settlements advanced.

Francis Parkman called his work of many volumes a history of the American Forest. I think of leaves when I read the title; a history of leavetakings, sheddings, falling in and out of love.

If only I could only be loyal enough, but what is enough? I must mean enough to kill any doubts before they arise. As if love can be reduced to loyalty.

"Don't worry," says Alec as I lie awake, "I may never hold a high-paying job but I'll earn enough."

He has a new ailment: Any physical exertion, even a walk, and his body becomes so itchy that he strips off his clothes and rushes into the coldest part of the apartment, trying to shed his detested American skin but unable to—trapped inside the contradiction of wanting warmth and not being able to have it. Yesterday I realized how quiet he's become. Visit after visit and he didn't talk.

"You know what it is? I'm not doing anything worth talking about...And I don't think enough of myself to even talk about that."

No one ever asks him about where he's been. All those years away, and they have no curiosity, as though they get a certain small satisfaction from knowing he's back and floundering. They're ahead of him now.

In 1603, Champlain returned to France with an Iroquois woman and the son of a Montagnais chief. Nothing is known about the woman. The boy was baptized, dressed in a blue coat and bonnet, and taken to the palace at Saint-Germain. There he played with the three year old Prince Louis who was so pleased with his little "Canada" that he sent him dainties from his own table. Throughout the winter the boy sickened, and in June 1604, he died.

On Washington Street I notice a plaque—"pressed to death." In that place where it happened a printing shop presses out copies. All our large and small disloyalties. Wharfs (silent now, not a ship in sight) reeked of cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg and tea. No one seems to remember where Gallow's Hill was.

Giles Corey "broke charity" with his wife and she was hanged. Others accused him of witchcraft and he was pressed to death; they used stones.

Beside me in bed: "You know when Lea was talking about her father and her husband, how they couldn't get it together? I thought, is that what you think of me?"

"Why did you think I was thinking that?"

"I just thought it. Were you?"

"—no."

"You're lying."

Snow. A few flakes, a light dusting on roofs and street. Faster now. Big fat flakes. On the cover of a college calendar a large house half-disappears into falling snow. Snow is so peaceful because it's uninterrupted. (My daughter crying. Again.)

The tension in the apartment—the lack of a job, all his doubts about being here. And what am I? The snow? Covering him over?

When I was away in Canada he jokingly made a *suplente*, a substitute woman. He draped a Guatemalan skirt over the seat of the sofa, arranged an embroidered blouse over the back, ran a woven belt across the middle

and a clay necklace around the neck. He set the white skull mask on top and dangled an earring from the bony left ear.

My empty boots for feet.

We stayed there, Death and I, for a month until we had a party and needed the sofa to sit on.

• • •

Alec throws open every window and every door. He strings up the hammock on the verandah and, basking in the hot humid air, says he feels almost at home.

"What is the meaning of life?" he calls to me. I go out and find him swinging our daughter in the hammock. "Where does she come from?"

It starts to rain. Dozens of birds are suddenly noisy and the smell of dust is very strong.

"Where do you come from?" he asks her.

How come you here?

Yesterday on the way to Boston we passed a truck piled high with canoes. Eight of them, drifting north. Such an odd sight amid the concrete as were the flowering trees which are so intricate and soft and beautiful. Persephone making her appearance.

Underground, a sugar coffin dissolves and our lives, sweetened, escape into blossom, new grass, leaves close to the window. The old smell lifts (slightly stale, crowded, warm: the Irish soda bread we made all winter and ate around the small table, Alec reading want ads, our daughter reaching for them). We celebrate by taking down the plastic from the windows. A champagne of light.

Leaves surround the verandah, the verandah half surrounds the house, and more houses—graceful, tall, beautiful houses—surround this one in a display of Puritan sensuality.

In the late eighteenth Salem and Boston sent ships to China and the China trade—foreshadowed by Hester Prynne's "rich, voluptuous, Oriental characteristic"—began. They took ginseng from the cool woodlands of the Atlantic seaboard, furs from Nootka Sound, opium from Turkey; they trafficked in immortality, death and forgetfulness.

In Canton fur boats were met by flower boats whose upper works were carved with petals and birds. Low moans issued from painted windows and stirred the loins of every Yankee sailor. One form of sensuality was traded for another. Fur (soft, silent) was traded for porcelain, "a clear ringing sound when struck, one could see the liquid contained" between parted thighs.

Fur became translucent, fragrant: silk, spices. One thing became another. Salem became Cathay. Po Adam, the wealthiest merchant of Quallah Battoo, thought Salem was a country in itself and "one of the richest and most important sections of the globe."

In the museum we look at displays of porcelain, model ships, lacquered teatables.

A bamboo and cane ottoman with a beautiful sloping line. A sofa.
Vases.
Gaming table in black and gold lacquer with mother-of-pearl inlay.
Sewing table with ivory fittings—spools, needles.
Ivory fan.
In silver: a praying mantis, nutmeg grater, hand flowerholder.
Light comes through the window, brushes against a fern, reclines in the ottoman, lies on the sofa. We leave.
Missing—the smell of spices, feel of silk.
After twenty years in Canton J.P. Cushing came back with an ivory ball consisting of twenty patterned and perforated spheres carved one within the other. The outside ball was carved first and through those holes the next ball, on and on—deeper and deeper into ivory—looking for Cathay and finding intricate, infinitely beautiful, unbelievable white. A snowball from China.

After supper we go down to Palmer Cove and sit on the seawall in a long sweep of golden light. We listen to cowbells—halliards jostling against masts, a pasture of sailboats, the quiet lapping of grass.
"Was having the baby the biggest change in your life?" I ask Alec.
"Meeting you was a pretty big change."
My disbelief. But he repeats it. "I'm learning how to love you."
We go down the steps past the wild rose and down to the sea, carrying the perfume with us—wild roses everywhere. Our daughter licks pebbles, Alec reads Garcia Marquez out loud: the doctor and Fermina, spending their first night together, talk for hours. He touches her neck with the *yemas,* yolks, of his fingertips, his penis *enarbolado,* tree-like in all its leafy eagerness. I listen, lose track, start thinking about how our neighbor Jean, the shyest man I've ever met, and how he married Joanie.
He was working at a gas station where she went to fill up her car. One day, having overheard his name, she sent a card to "Jean, at the gas station." Inside, "You think you're nobody special but you must be to get this card. Signed, Guess who?" A couple of weeks later she came in for gas, and just as she was pulling out she leaned out the window and called to him, "Get any mail lately?"
He asked her out and two months later they were married.
He didn't love her, Alec is reading, but that night he felt there was no obstacle to their inventing a good love.
The tide goes out along this coastline of rosehips, lilies and woodland, the warmth of the sun untropical but penetrating. We bend to smell hedges of wild roses, hardly having to bend, intoxicated by northern sensuality: a special coastline of white flesh marked off by brown—the lovely milkiness of breasts, crotch, underarms—where a benign sort of winter resides. We cup our hands around the soft wreckage of snow, inventing warmth.

SAFIYA HENDERSON HOLMES

gospel

i have always been
afraid of the dark,

not the absence
of the light,

the absence of
touch,

my flesh lost
somewhere in the night,

dreams crouched
low in a corner.

my parents lived
within the dark

absence of touch,
their hands blind,

maybe since birth.
but on sunday mornings

they stood next to each other
in long maroon choir robes,

sang with wide mouths
and closed eyes.

i remember wishing for
the songs to never end,

for my mother and father
to never open their eyes,

or close their mouths.
this was the closest

i would see them together.
maroon touching maroon.

each tongue plunging from the dark
and wailing toward the other.

SAFIYA HENDERSON HOLMES

1670 seward ave.

in nearly every dream
i am there in that apartment
in the bronx, six rooms on the seventh
floor, left of the elevator, in the corner.

six rooms for fifty six dollars
a month, gas and electricity included,
livingroom windows overlooking a playground,
bedroom windows looking over the back way,

towards the community center, elementary school,
nursery and hills of grass for rolling and sleighing.
from those windows i threw toys i didn't want,
called to boys i wanted, wished for summer breezes

and wings.
in dreams now i enter the rooms,
lean from the windows, sit on floors
or the old couch with present friends,

lovers, husband, or alone, small,
crawling up the hallway begging
mommy not to leave for work. standing
in the hall, bigger, begging daddy not to drink.

see me? i'm in the kitchen—the table
with six chairs and a center of artificial
grapes and pears, a small four burner stove,
a broom closet, a double sink,

a wall of cabinets, top cabinets for
food, bottom cabinets for pots
and hidden booze. a shelf for cough
medicine and wishbones.

see me? i'm in the livingroom, large,
long, television, stereo. daddy and
his friends built a counter, a bench,
picture frames, the window where daddy

threatened to throw mommy from, vegetable
knife against her neck, is open, stuck,
everything blowing in.
see me? on the old couch where daddy

lay with whiskey and some of the rent,
where i, mommy and the boys sat

saturday nights with movies
and waiting. the commercials
were too loud, love scenes too long.
see me?

in my parent's bedroom, two
windows, two dresser drawers,
a wall mirror, and empty bed,
a closet of good clothes.

in my room—mommy in my
bed with her youngest son and the lord's prayer.
me in a sofa bed with the other son
and my pretending.

i pretend to be invisible.
i pretend not to hear mommy's praying
or her son's crying. i pretend
to be in a room of my own.

i pretend to be mommy's lover,
a handsome man with lots of money
and love, taller than her weariness.
she hugging this man instead of her

infant son. she praying over
this man instead of my pillow.
i pretend into sleep, into morning
which arrived as uncertain as the night.

see me? on that sofa bed with
my brother, pretending sleep, pretending
little girl tiredness. i want mommy
to wake me with a kiss, make this man

i have for her real. but the sons are
kissed. see them? they are kissed and
whispered to like promises.
i am called to help, hurry the morning

from my room, into the kitchen
and out the door. see me? rushing
the moments and the boys and slowly
watching mommy,

watching her look into her empty bedroom,
watching her quietly step towards her
unmade and empty bed, watching her
scream into her bedroom mirror—

to hurry, move it—
clear out of those six rooms,
taking only what we can carry in boxes
and bags, anything else stuffed into our heads,

down our throats, swallow every
broken night, swallow every single one
and hurry, move it.
see me?

at the front door, returning,
nearly every night returning,
for what, for whom?
perhaps to make mommy's bed.

perhaps to lie in it.

DIOSA SUMMERS
Badges of Truth

The following is excerpted from an interview by Carole Byard, June 1990.

Badges of Truth: A Woman's War Shields was the title of the book I did for the first *Coast to Coast* exhibit. I choose that title because I wanted to use the war shield as a vehicle to proclaim my realities and talk about the things that are important in my life. Traditionally, a war shield is a shield you use when you go into battle, and the men would paint or decorate their war shield with things that reflected their personal lives. The art work women produced traditionally didn't have something that talked about their personal accomplishments, so I borrowed the shield.

After all, women are warriors also. There has been a concerted effort by the government to emasculate Indian men for 350 years—and since 1776 it's been very concentrated. The dominant society treats their women very badly, like second class citizens, and Indians don't; Indians know that women are powerful. So it's been the women who've had to pick-up and make sure that the men survive and give the children the skills to see they can fight the battles that need to be fought. We've got good strong men out there now, but there was a period when a whole lot of people despaired, and it was the women who carried on.

When I first came up with the idea for *Badges of Truth,* I had been very ill for about six months. The illness was really life threatening and it was very frightening. The treatment was absolutely awful. One of the things I do while recovering when I've been ill is art work. It helps me focus. My book reassured me in the seven months it took me to do it that I really was alive and everything was going to be okay and I was able to function. The medication they gave me was so hard on me that it was a constant reminder every day that my life was just a tiny little thing that could be snuffed out very easily and coming back to life, literally, just made me treasure living, and all the things that go into living, that much more.

Previously I had been uptight about my artwork. I had been listening to people tell me I had to do what sold, what the public wanted. Of course, that misses the point of what you're creating as an artist, what *you* want. The book freed me from that. I really dug into myself and said I'm going to state what I'm going to state because it's me, I don't care what anybody else thinks about it. I don't care whether they like it or not. I'm going to make images that need to be made and words that need to be said.

There are an endless number of issues that I can paint about and talk about but Native American culture and Native American history is what I talk about all the time with my paintings. Most people, even if they know the facts, don't really *understand* what events in Native American history

are about. I started studying the Ghost Dance religion a couple of years ago and had a collection of facts about it but had not made the effort to look at it that closely and really understand what it meant to the people. So I looked at ghost dances all over the country and then finally settled on the people that it hit the hardest—the Sioux people, the Lakota people.

Wounded Knee is a catch word in this country now. Everybody knows about Wounded Knee and Wounded Knee '73 but they don't know what that really meant to the people. So I decided to paint that, and two of what are I feel are my most successful paintings are really talking about Wounded Knee. The understanding of how the people suffered, how deep it was is just not there, and I think people need to understand how our lives as Native American people are so difficult. And it continues, it's not past tense, it continues. I think the Sioux people still feel the pain from the original Wounded Knee. It wasn't that long ago, you know. It was a hundred years ago, there are people who have grandparents who were there. Most American people cannot identify with that suffering. They don't know what it is to starve, to try to live in tee-pees that are all worn and have holes in them, in the snow, with barely enough clothing to cover your body to stay warm. And they don't know what it is to be so desperate that you will try to dance to make it right. That's serious desperation. To believe, firmly believe, that dancing will bring the dead to life and chase all the Europeans back across the ocean and things would be back to normal, and all the ancestors would be back with them. And they believed if they painted this special clothing it would be impervious to bullets.

And of course that wasn't so. Imagine when Big Foot stood up in front of a howitzer absolutely sure because he had his ghost dance shirt on that the howitzer was not going to do anything and wham-o, he was dead. He was dead. Just imagine the shock, the pain,t he sense of betrayal that hit them along with the starvation and everything else that they were dealing with. It's tragic, it's absolutely tragic.

Whenever I do anything, I want to do it completely. And, of course, that's not always possible. I had hoped to be able to make the paper for my book, but I couldn't because I'm asthmatic and I didn't want to deal with the pulp. So I went the next best route, I found this wonderful French, handmade paper that was in beautiful muted tones and I used that. When my daughter was in the fifth grade, she taught me how to bind books which I thought was wonderful—that a ten-year-old could teach me to bind books.

One of the nice things about Native American culture is it teaches you to do it all. If you need a basket, you make it. You start by cutting a tree down and then pounding splints and then cleaning the splints and then cutting them down and then weaving your basket. It gives you an outlook on creating that tells you that it's not immediate, it's not instant. But what you end up with is something that you have created; you really invest in something. At the same time the culture doesn't say that women do this and men do that—you can only do one thing. It says you can do it all and

you can do it all in any way you want. One of the really old traditions is taking one artform and super-imposing it on another one—specifically, the designs on the finger-woven sash, a old technology, being incised on clay pottery, which is a newer technology, so that one influences the other.

Dealing with leather is another part of my existence. My mother tanned all the deer skins for the family. And I had the unfortunate job of helping her. It's nasty, it smells, it feels bad, it's just ugly work. It's labor; it's really labor, but you deal. Many objects that are tied to my culture require leather. Clothes, pouches, we use those things all the time.

One of the boxes I did for *Coast to Coast's* exhibit, "Ancestors Known and Unknown" was a box that folds. Actually I never gave it a name, but it really fits with the theme. It has little figures of people, and the faces on the people are actual faces of people in my family as well as historical, famous Indian people. As I dressed them and painted their hair, I became attached, very much attached to them. At the bottom—there are three sections—I have an alter type configuration with my great- aunt sitting in a reclining position on a bearskin rug with an Indian outfit which is a conglomeration of cultures. The photograph was taken in 1920, I believe, and she's looking very languid and like an Indian princess—that's the kind of thing studio photographs were into for Indians during that period. There's something about that I rather enjoy. And underneath it there are crosses with rhinestones that represent the glitz of the Catholic Church, because she was an avid Catholic in direct contrast to the people like Geronimo and Kicking Bird and my mother and my other great-aunt and my aunt and my father!

I always seem to work better when I become passionate about something. And I think pain and the frustration make me very passionate. Understanding it. But then I was fortunate, I had parents who did convince me that I could do whatever I wanted and that I would find a way. But I know most Indian kids don't have that; they don't have the opportunities I had. And there's a trade off, I don't live on a reserve. I've had to let go of a certain piece of my culture in order to deal with the things that I want to deal with.

That's another big issue. They're a whole lot of people who don't want to leave their traditional surroundings because they don't want to lose all of that important tradition. The ceremonies are very important. When I made the decision to leave upstate New York, it was very difficult. I had to give up a whole lot, and it's still hard for me. I don't participate in ceremonies that I used to participate in regularly and I miss that for myself and my kids. They *had* it, thank god, so that they know what it is. They have the memories.

Being a mother actually inspires my art. Because I'm always aware that what I'm doing is not for me, it's for my children's children and their children's children. And the fact that I have to give my kids resources, give them strength, is always there. I just hope that my art work says something to them. From what I can tell so far, I think it has. I think it's made

them secure in ways that they would not have been. My oldest daughter especially. She just sold a painting in her first exhibition. I think that's quite wonderful. She finally said at one point when somebody said that she shouldn't be an art major in college—you can't be an artist, that's just playing around. She looked at them and said, what do you mean that's playing around. My mother's an artist.

What I love about what I do is the fact that I can share it with people. And maybe I can influence people. You know, I'm out there propagandizing all the time. I think the way I believe isn't so bad! So maybe if a lot of people believe the way I believe things in the world will get a little better. I want people to take care of the world. I want them to take care of children. I just want to see the world a whole lot more caring place. And especially to take care of the environment. I mean that's a real part of who I am. You know, nature's there to use, but you have to respect it.

Religion and spiritual things also play a part in my work. My mother was an avid Catholic and I went to Catholic school when I was very small, and then again later when I was a little older. My first experience with Catholic school was not a good one: I was expelled, I was called a pagan, I was a heathen savage. The nuns had it in for me and a piece of it was because I was Indian. My second experience was much better. It was a very small school and the nuns were very human. But, even there, I had trouble with the priests. I just didn't agree with a lot the Catholic church said that you had to do. And my mother finally gave up when I was about sixteen or seventeen and just let me go my own way and find what was important for me. And what I discovered was traditional Indian religion through the Longhouse was the thing that meant something to me. They were talking to me. It's a powerful, powerful thing. It can't help but influence me.

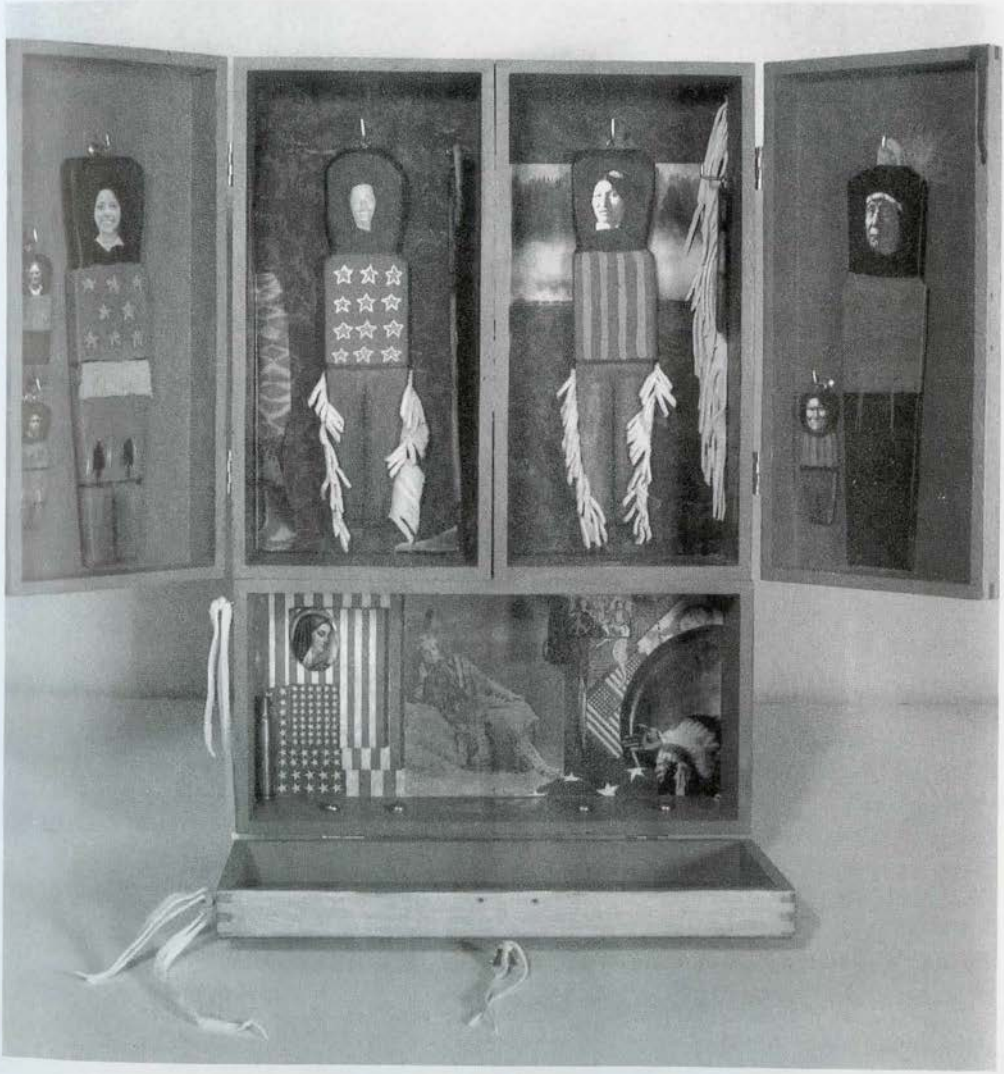
In my artwork, I want to put people in a historical context that really talks about what and who they really are and where they fit in society. I did a painting, a portrait, called "Smallpox Blanket" showing a teenage boy with his hair cut. The men cut their hair—their braids—when there was death in the family. This boy's got an army blanket wrapped around him and a tragic, but resentful, look on his face. And in the background there are horses which speak to the fact that this is a Plains person.

Smallpox blankets were sent to a group of Indians on the Plains when they complained to the Indian agent they hadn't gotten their allotment of blankets. General Phil Sheridan, who was the head of the Department of the Interior at that time, said—send them these blankets, they're perfectly good. The blankets were from a smallpox hospital. And, of course, all of the people became infected and in a matter of about three weeks two thousand people died. And that's what that painting is talking about. This boy's got this infected blanket wrapped around him because he's starving and freezing and he has no choice. But he's furious.

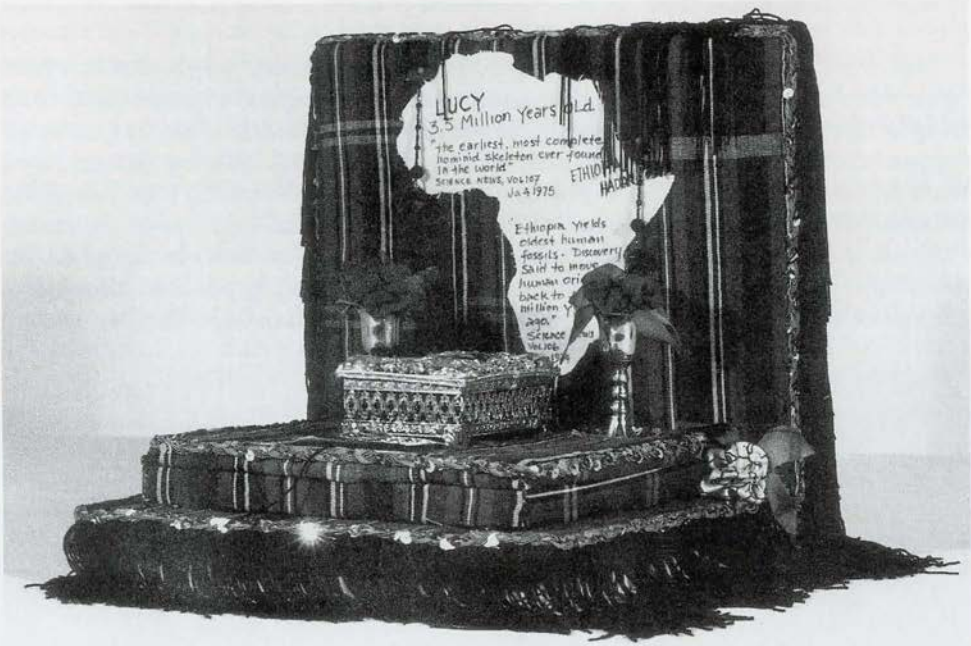
Something else I've been doing is looking at other cultures. And other Native American cultures. I've done this for years but not in such a concentrated way. I also appreciate other people's visions. Exactly how all

this influences me I'm not sure, but I know it does. I tend to absorb a whole lot.

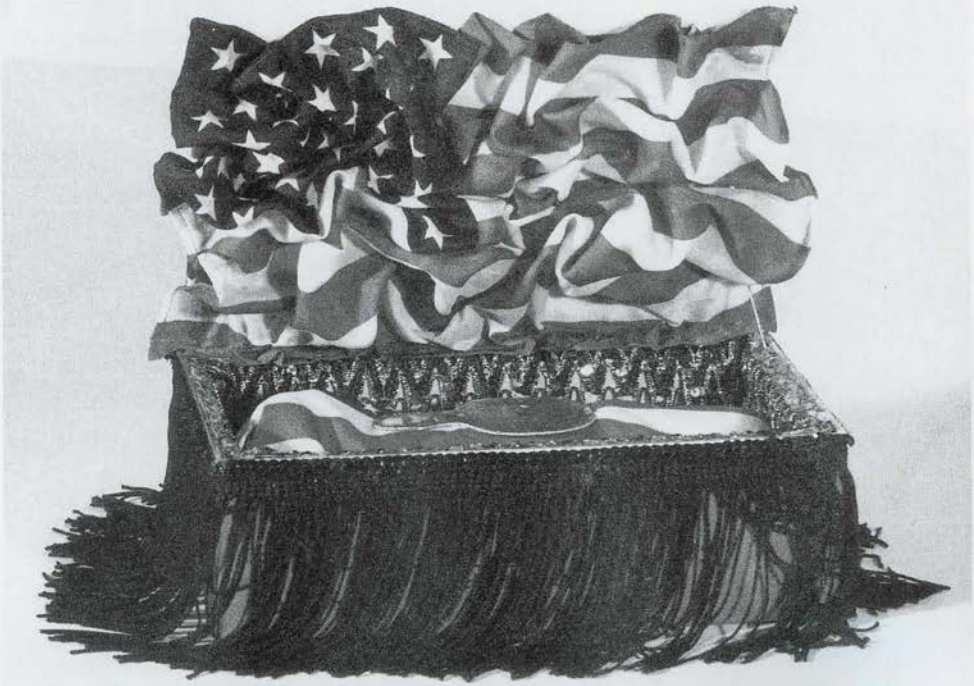
Coast to Coast has created a new life for me in many ways and it's just been very special. Being on the committee, I've gotten to know and love people that I never would have encountered. I've learned to understand things about other women artists, about people from other cultures; I've learned to appreciate those things in a way that I couldn't before, just because of a lack of experience. I have made friends that I will value for the rest of my life. We've created a family. I mean I've been isolated as an artist for years. *Coast to Coast* changed that. I just hope that there are groups of women all over the country who have been able to do this too.



"Untitled" DIOSA SUMMERS (Box Show)



"Lucy: The 3.5 Million Year Old Lady" FAITH RINGGOLD (Box Show)



"Buba Jones" FAITH RINGGOLD (Box Show)

FAITH RINGGOLD
Close to History

The following is excerpted from an interview by Carole Byard June 1990.

I was born and raised in a time when family history was very important. People lived very close to their history. I think I've kept that. My own things are not autobiographical, but they are things that I know about, things I feel close to. I guess that's the reason why I don't really think of my work as being political—because I don't self-consciously try and make things political. I just do things about subjects I want to do them about. And if they're connected to something political then it's just part of my life. It's what I do.

As an artist I like the fact that I can see an idea through from start to finish, and through the execution of it I can communicate to other people how I feel. Visual art has that power—to be able to document the time and to communicate it for coming generations. It's a wonderful way of duplicating one's self. I like to get as close to myself as possible so that my art becomes me and I become my art. It's being a creator on real serious terms, making something that you hope will live. I like the power of being an artist. I can say things that I can't say any other way. I just try to be as honest as I can be and I try not to allow myself to shrink away from taking risks. It's very hard sometimes because you always know what you're doing. And then sometimes we do take ourselves too seriously.

My piece for "Ancestors Known and Unknown," Buba Jones, came about when I thought about my father weeping about not being able to go to the Second World War. I remember the day he went and tried to join the army, and I also remember that was the last war that people felt patriotic about. Because after that, during the Korean War, people began to realize that Black people were being sent to these wars to be fodder, to be targets actually. And when the Vietnam War came it got even worse. By then patriotism had taken on a new meaning in this country.

I like to do work that has to do with research, because I like it to be grounded in something concrete. I have all these old photographs that my uncle left me. He fought in World War I and I've always been fascinated by the idea that all my life I've seen my relatives in army uniforms—in photographs or in reality. So I wanted to use one of these photographs and I also wanted to show a link-up between the African slave trade and homelessness. You see all these different processes Bubba Jones has gone through and ends up homeless. So that's what Bubba Jones is about, he's the personification of Black people's investment in America through the Black male, his having fought in all the wars—having participated as an

American, but not having participated so fully in the American dream. I don't often do things about men, so that one is for him.

And Lucy is for us, the women. I'm terribly fascinated by Lucy, the three-point-five million year old lady and the fact that Mother Africa is the mother of civilization. I thought that was fabulous, because everybody is so much into race and who they are. And here's this three-point-five-million-year-old lady who's born in Ethiopia which takes the heritage of Black people back there that far; it sort of makes the whole concept of race pretty ridiculous in the process. Except that it makes people nervous because there is this great problem with blackness unfortunately. It doesn't seem to make that many people feel proud, for some reason. People measure themselves by how much whiteness they may have in them, but not how much blackness. Maybe it's because blackness is a very strong, powerful set of genes one has to deal with. It's a very heavy-duty chain. You don't ignore it because it's gonna take you generations to get rid of it once you have it in your family line.

This is really the decade of people of color. We are going to have to struggle to see that it's not just something that people will do for a while and then go back to business as usual—which is the old racist way of leaving women of color out. There's a lot of hard work that still has to be done to make sure that we don't step back, but I feel really good about being a part of this really great, wonderful movement. And having been the initiator of *Coast to Coast* and then being able to step aside and watch other people do it is probably the best part of it. Because nobody does anything alone. It's wonderful having people working together doing wonderful things. That's what it's all about.

Coast to Coast is actually the fourth institution I've initiated. The first organization in 1970 was WOSABAL (*Women, Students and Artists for Black Art Liberation*) because I was beginning to see that the Black art movement was moving ahead without women. So we were trying to do something about that. That was just Black women though. So was *Where We At,* in 1971. That came about as a result of the exhibition that Nigel Jackson had in his "Acts of Art." WOSABAL never got too much support, it was really just me and Michelle (MICHELLE WHO?). But we actually did some very important things. We demonstrated with the *Artworkers' Coalition* and with the *Ad-Hoc Women's Group* to get two Black women, Betty Sarr and Barbara Chase Rimbaud, in the Whitney bi- ennial of 1970. I made that a non-negotiable demand and it was met, and that was the first time Black women had been in that bi- ennial. And I see twenty years later, Marsha Tucker, who was the curator at the Whitney at the time, just now having "The Decade Show", which is an integrated show. She was at the Whitney then. Now she's at the New Museum.

Where We At was never political, and I realized right off the bat that it needed to be political. But they weren't interested, so I moved on. In the meantime another organization I founded *Art Without Walls,* was a prison organization. I had done a mural for the Women's House of Detention, the

women's prison that used to be in the West Village in New York, so I knew all the guards. People would call me up and say, "Listen, why don't you get us into the prison? We'd like to go into the prisons." So I did. Twenty artists or more would go there every Sunday and do all kinds of stuff with the inmates. My mother would go, and we would do rap sessions with the women. And finally the authorities decided it was too much talking. They liked the yoga and the dancing, they didn't want the talking because we were trying to get the women to get it together and get a space when they get out of jail to be together with each other so they didn't have to go back to prison. Form some kind of a half-way house. The prison people heard about that and they didn't like that idea so much, so they stopped me from coming—me and the rest of the people who were doing the talking. So *Art Without Walls* became another kind of organization and I moved on again.

I envisioned a support group type organization so women who got out of prison wouldn't have to go back to their old Johns because most of them were in jail for prostitution and different problems their man had gotten them into. So, anyway, that's the third one and then *Coast to Coast* is the fourth.

Coast to Coast's political action involves collaboration. The actual act of bringing women of color together is a political act, and it has been done through the collaborative process and through having shows of the work that comes out of our coming together. And I think that turns out to be an extremely political act because it's never been done before. It addresses an issue that is very, very important—that is, in order for women of color to change anything they first have to come together. After they come together through meetings and through discussion, they can decide what else needs to be done. But if they're not together, they can't do it.

Women of color sharing cultural experiences is certainly opening up better race relations for those women who participate, and that fans out to other communities, people take that back. Because just because we're all women of color doesn't mean we all understand each other, or that we all like each, or that we all know each other. So coming together breaks down some of those barriers and spreads good will among large groups of people—not only us but other people we do things with. It's not just a problem of people of color and white people. We have a huge problem here of women of color being together with each other. To understand who we are. That is our first political issue.

There's a struggle ahead, and it's not going to be easy. In the Sixties you wanted to get this happening fast, that happening fast, but today we're a little more sophisticated. The case is a little different. But the issues in many instances are the same. The racism and sexism is still here. But I think we're just all smarter, we're more savvy about how to go about dealing with these things.

This is a time when people have to decide their own issues; when issues come out of people coming together and doing it themselves.

photo: Sarah Wells

"An Orca in Captivity is like an Eagle in a Parakeet Cage" JOSELY CARVALHO

JOSELY CARVALHO

MY BODY IS MY COUNTRY

The body is the landscape of my soul
A procession of memories
to the origin of being female

Tales of Purgatory
The sacrifice as a tool of meditation
Blood
Flagellation
Ashes
The sanctity of fire was forgotten
The witches of truth were burned

The liturgy of flight is reshaped
The body landscapes rocks into an altar
The source of earth

We can't breathe
Trees were scorched
Forests massacred
Rivers swallowed
Mountains ravished

She screams from deep caverns
She revenges the unnecessary sacrifice of her blood.

...the turtle carries her shell through waters and savannahs...

My Body is my Country
An enlarged boa swallowing its own entrails
A landscape of flesh made of transparent reds

Earth holds the tranquility of a mountain
Several branches are already barren
The several parts of a whole become the trunk of love
Enchantment has been broken
Innocence has been lost
Voices roam around decimated towns
penetrating into woodlands of desperation
Red rivers enter mountains cut by gold fever

At night
after the 4th of July fireworks ignite Baghdad
bodies embrace dead branches.

Earth bleeds
She penetrates a seascape of mourning
My country oozes
The dolphin is the prey of tuna fishing

The soil is my flesh
Earth weeps benumbed fluids
Extinct semen
Cracked egg
Corpse born from savage rape

...the turtle returns to the oleaginous sea after
depositing its uncertain future on the honeyed sands...

Oceans choke on excrement
Birds drench their thirst with oil
The sea turtle is the catch of shrimp fishing
In the desert of loneliness
I cry sunset tears
while he broadcasts the surgical operation
laser scuds tattooing images in the guts of men women children
one thousand and one horror nights in the name of Pax Americana

...the northeast is the area of eternal destruction...

My Body is my Country
an iridescent landscape
saturated by ancestor's pigments
An anthropology of memory
A geography of history
The citizenship of being

My Body is my Country
An impenetrable purple soil
trailed by bronzed footprints
and engulfed in hot lava.

My Body is my Country
A resilient mass that stretches to embrace my territory
A land of iron, memories and resistance.

RACHEL GUIDO deVRIES

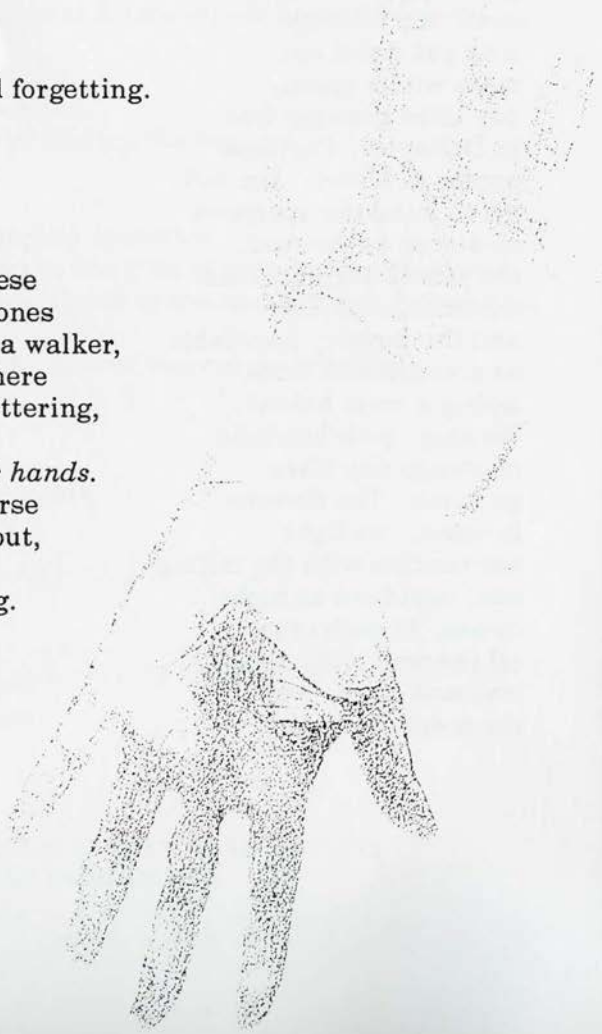
All The Way Long

"The trees are proud,"
you say. "They're all
puffed up, they love
today." We drive
in the country, like
any married couple
in America: two
women in a Ford station
wagon, the five cats
safe at home, the dog
drowsing in the back
seat. All the way
long you point out
trees wildly green,
day lilies growing free
in DeRuyter, Cortland
apples in bloom. You tell
me to mind the sparrows
clustered in the road,
the rabbit darting, even
the occasional cow,
and the farmer, inevitable
as a weathered fence,
loping a ways behind.
We stop, pick handsful
of orange day lilies,
go home. The flowers
in vases, we light
our candles with the falling
sun, and turn as night
comes, to each other
all the way long, thru
love and sleep, and
the scent of country.

THERESE ON

VISITING

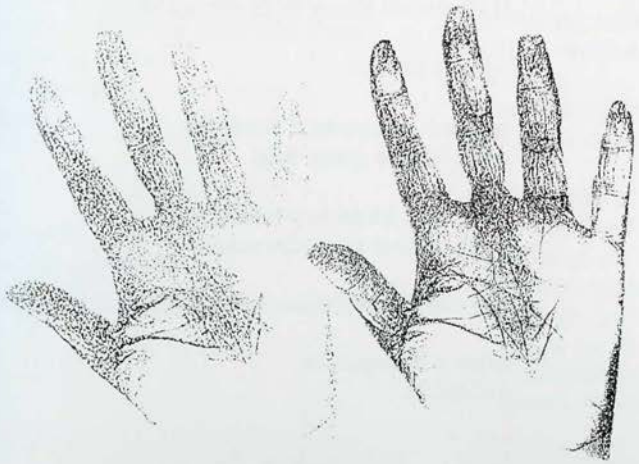
I say to her,
"Which ones of these
do you want as yours?"
fanning photos out like
cards in a deck, their faces up,
a small me in colors
fading into a smear of
orange and white.
"Pick your favorites," I say,
and she looks at me,
her face gone round
and soft as an "o"—
the sound of surprise, and forgetting.
Her engagement ring
glows, a gold orb on a
crumpled hand, fingers
twisting, tips bent
forty-five degrees left.
I remember hands like these
as "grandmother" hands, ones
connected to a cane, then a walker,
then confined to a bed, where
they lay, motionless or fluttering,
like helpless birds.
These are not my mother's hands.
I say to myself, but of course
they are, and one crawls out,
touches my wrist,
startling me out of staring.



She selects three photos, her hands
suspended like helicopters in trouble.
One taken at Halloween, a sweet pink
prairie dress for Mary with her lamb,
my brother plumped in his
cottonball suit. One of me in a winter coat—
fake, spotted, plum-colored fur—
hair swinging out of focus,
a shower of white blossoms.
The last one after a funeral;
I am stolid in my first black dress.
My brother's mouth is wide,
his throat red with crying.

"Why this one?" I ask, pointing
at the grey clouds, the rain
blurring the lens.
My mother is an optimist, so
silence is something I expect.

She's fallen asleep
or she is pretending.
I can't tell which.
She even snores lightly,
her mouth open.
I fake a yawn, then take out my book,
compiled reviews of places to go, of travel.
From this chair, I watch her hands.



EVE PACKER

after braque & picasso

how the diagonal bisects
the rectangle of chest
where once stood a breast
& on the left a pear
apple a perfect bowl
hacked from flexed bone flesh & blood
this assymetry
won't go away if i turn my head look in the mirror again
exhibit in pioneering cubism
radical construct
me

pulling my hands thru my hair

til it positively stands on end
saying how could that happen

whose dream

if thats all there is thats all there is

whose dream

beyond image and memory
bald desire gone wild

you dont have to understand
i dont have to understand

the truth machines dont have to understand

dream rosepetals
old coins

ground zero

it's
nothing
I'm gonna lose
my hair
nothing
I couldn't
swim for a month
nothing I lost
a tit
in pain
it's nothing
to do chemo
nothing
to have to
shlep to Macy's
on Saturday
buy a wig
& it's nothing to stand here
in the cold
subway
& write down
nothing
to run around the
locker room & hide
in the bathroom stall to change
from shirt to bathing suit and back
nothing to go to work
& it's nothing
my son is
furious at
me for
it
the loss of this tit
let's call it a breast
state we lost a slice
of our sex

up the chimney up the spout

but here
where in some dark wood
by the shores elfin reeds
in new jerseys backyard
or some garbage dump
somewhere somehow they
collect all the green
plastic bags discarded
uteruses chunks or hunks
pairs or single breasts
up the chimney up the spout

no ceremony flower
slab of stone no prayer
or blessing candle

no marker but a scar

what will happen will happen

talk about your cat
your son
the xmas tree
sound of the steam
not falling asleep
getting up to eat
the night
snow falling down
talk about what you know

write about the sound of the snow
the dull quilt of pain under yr arm
yr hand on the teacup
green apples
how yr eyelids close then open
tinsel on the tree
the smallest star
sound of the snow

CAROLE BYARD

Light

We have as far as possible closed every avenue by which light can enter their minds. If we could extinguish the capacity to see the light, our work would be completed. They would be then on a level with the beast in the fields, and we would be safe.

—Virginia House of Delegates, 1832
(From *The American Slave Trade in Theory and Practice* by William Goodell)

When I think about censorship, I think about light denied, a deliberate attempt to ban the SPIRIT, a dark chamber...

We have as far as possible closed every avenue by which light can enter their minds.

1731 ...Her name is Ade Nike, but they call her Eula Mae. Work. Bend. But don't break. Don't break, Eula Mae. Ade Nike sings for you. Holds you up. Keeps you warm... In the light... Listen... Baba chants your native tongue... Light... Hold on, Eula Mae. Ade Nike's song, Eula Mae. Your Mother's beads. Baba's word. Brother's drum. Sister's hum... Light... In the bronzes from the master sculptors of Benin.

When I think about censorship, it is 1832...

If we could extinguish the capacity to see the light, our work would be completed.

1832 ...his name would have been Abiodun, but he answers to Ned. "N-E-D! Plant it. Pick it. Rope it. Fix it. Bale it. Drive it... Bring that MONEY here to ME!

"Yessah-h Mr. Yessah"

Hear your mama's song, son. Hold on to the spark. Feel the light in the word, Ned, in your poet's heart. It's mama's song of shining stars you'll follow late tonight...Take Henry, Ruthie, Li'l' Josh and Hannah... It all depends on you, Ned... See the light... Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

When I think about censorship, it is 1991.

They would then be on a level with the beasts in the fields, and we should be safe.

1991 ...Ayodele Babatunde Eshubiyi Ajani Albert McCray Nelson is sixteen years old today and his braces come off tomorrow. Stretched across his futon, twirling his baby dreads and looking more than ever like the only living bronze sculpture molded by the master artists of ancient Benin. Ayodele, with his rich dark chocolate skin, high cheekbones accenting his very, very slanted eyes is seriously handsome and seriously troubled.

"I guess the taller I got, the more people became afraid. I've lived in this building for eight years, these people see me every day. Yet when I get on the elevator, they move their bags to the other side. They think I'm going to take their pocketbooks. They see me every day. I don't understand it. It's wrong! They know you, Mom, they know where I live, but they still do that."

His mother is worried too. Other things have changed since he came home from camp last summer with his man voice and two inches taller. He has not been doing well in school and often does not go at all. Says he feels out of place, as if he does not belong.

He had always been playful growing up, always running, laughing, climbing. Has lots of friends, says the funniest things, makes her laugh often with his words. Has never been a troublemaker...

"What happened last night?" she asked.

"We were coming home from the teen club, me, Mikell and Ptah..."

The boys lived in Greenwich, they were raised there. Ayo said they were on Sixth Avenue near Eleventh Street, when suddenly a police car and truck drove up. About ten policemen jumped out. With their guns drawn, they ran up to the boys screaming and shouting.

"Put your hands up! Put your hands up! Up against the wall! Spread your legs! Spread um-m! Empty your pockets. Take it all out, com'on, com'on..."

"What did we do?"

"Shut the FUCK UP!"

"Are we under arrest? You didn't read us our rights. What's going on? What did we do?"

"Shut the FUCK UP, before I put my fist through your FUCKIN' FACE!"

In their minds, (we found out later), each boy was thinking... What did we do? Did we jay walk? Were we laughing too loud or something? We must have done something. The police have us handcuffed, pushed back against the wall, they are cursing and shouting at us right here in front of Ray's Pizza. The guns... A crowd is gathering.

Just as quickly, another Police car arrived. Seated in the back was a man the police referred to as a witness. The boys saw him shake his head, heard him say, "No, they're not the ones."

The Police took their names and addresses, removed the handcuffs and told them to go home.

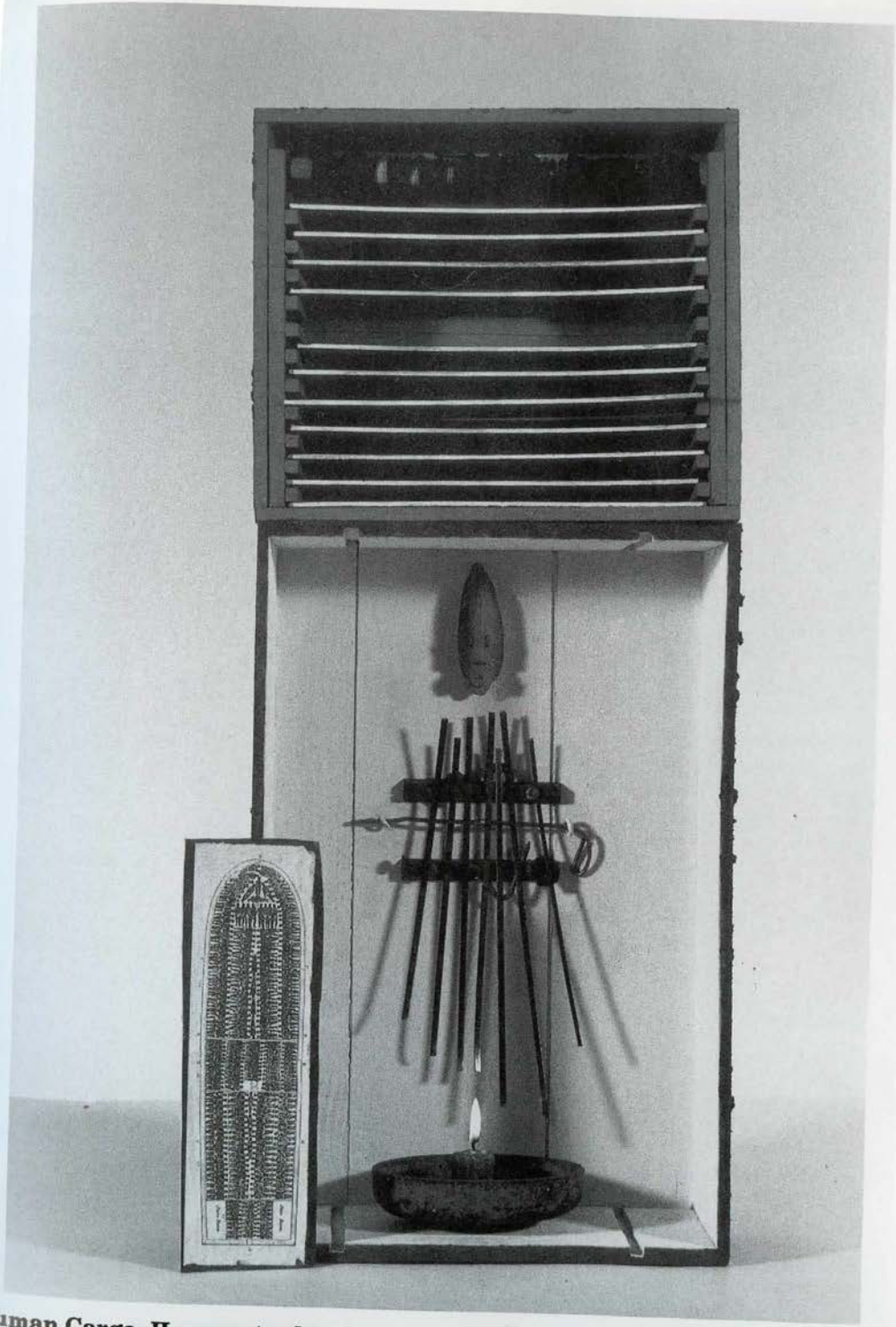
"We were so scared, Mom, we sat down in Ray's for 45 minutes. Why are these things happening, Mom? I can't go in any store without being followed. Everywhere I go people think I'm going to take something. It's like they are saying to me, We know you're going to take something, so we're going to follow you until you do and then we're going to grab you! It's wrong, Ma. It's like they WANT me to do something to them, like they WANT me to hurt them. Why?"

When I think about censorship, I think about a history of suppression, repression and attempted genocide.

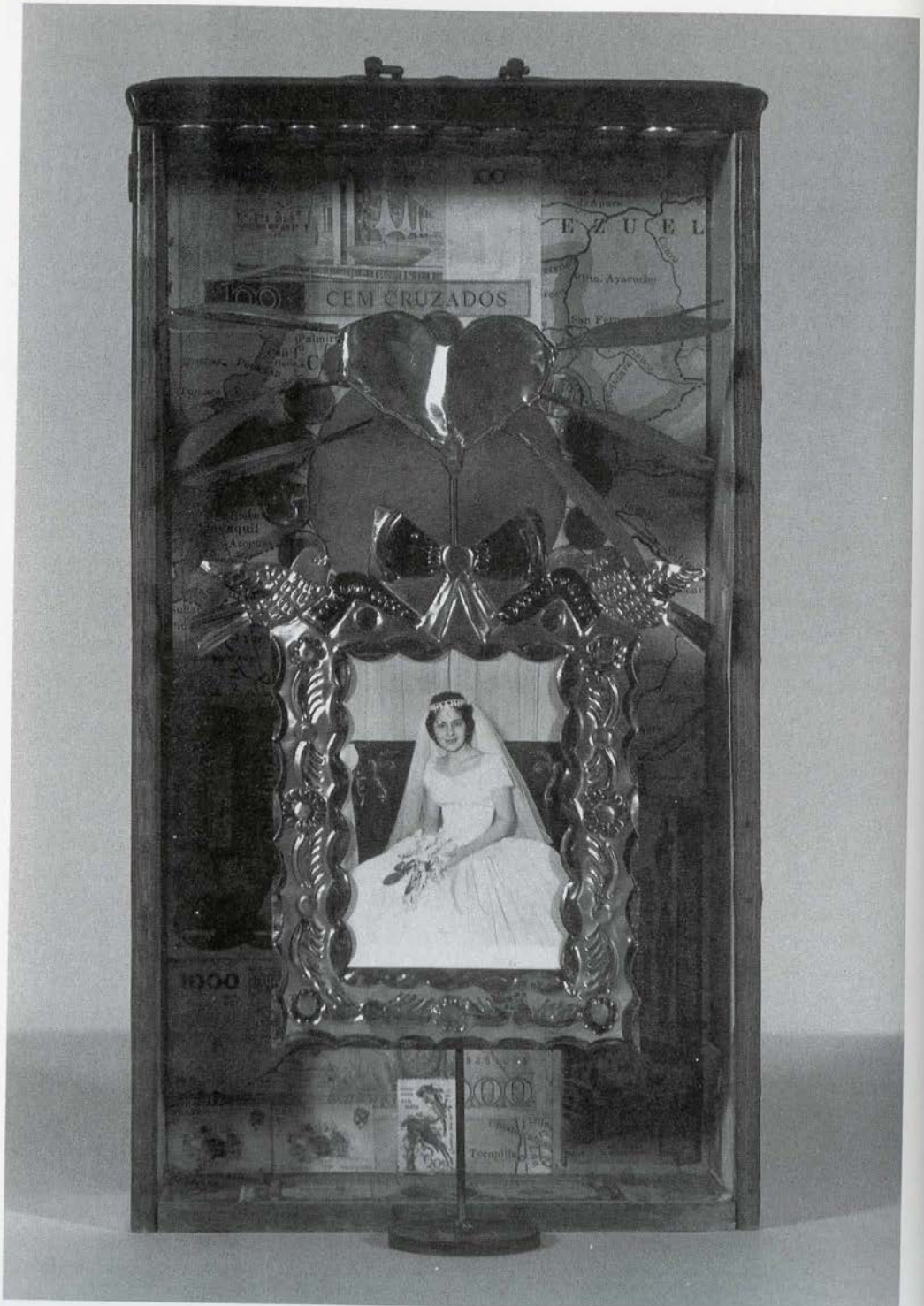
Human Cargo: Homage to the Middle Passage

For the nameless thousands and thousands who died in the crossing of the Atlantic Ocean during one of the most horrendous, inhumane, deliberate acts of violence and unspeakable abuse, I light this candle.

In the names of the Gods and Godesses whose names you changed, Amma, Yemanja, Hapi, Oshun, Osirus, Oboto, Shango, Aziri, Obatala, Olokun, Nummo, Elegba, Mawulisa, Mammie Wata and more, I sing this song.



"Human Cargo, Homage to the Middle Passage" CAROLE BYARD (Box Show)



"My Mother's Side" REGINA ARAUJO CORRITORE (Box Show)

LATINA PANEL

Regina Araujo Corritore, Maria Elena Gonzalez, Miriam Hernández, Elaine Soto

Facilitated by Carole Byard, this panel took place at Clarrisa Sligh's loft on January 26, 1991 expressly for this issue of IKON.

REGINA ARAUJO CORRITORE: My box for "Ancestors Known & Unknown" centered around my mother, her lineage, her history. To trace the three different cultures (Puerto Rican, Peruvian, North American) that make up who my mother is, I used maps and a photograph of my mother as a bride, because it symbolized transition for her. I made my box like a little altar or a *retablo.* It had a lot of things that I'm used to seeing in my upbringing as a Catholic: the way an image of a person is like the spirit behind the photograph of the person, not exactly to worship, more to have respect for the image. The objects you put around it add to the power of that respect, so I have a little candle in it too. I even included money because the reason why most of my family came to New York was economic—that's always been a real part of the shifting of migrations.

MARIA ELENA GONZALEZ: I approached the box project differently. I was working with wood and rawhide at the time and what I did was use the rawhide as a presence of skin and the wooden box as a container, as a cage, juxtaposing the rawhide and wood, pulling the rawhide to all the sides like a self-contained thing being pulled apart or being kept inside. That was the essence of my box. Previous sculptures I've worked with before and work I've done since have had to do with drums. But for the first time this one didn't.

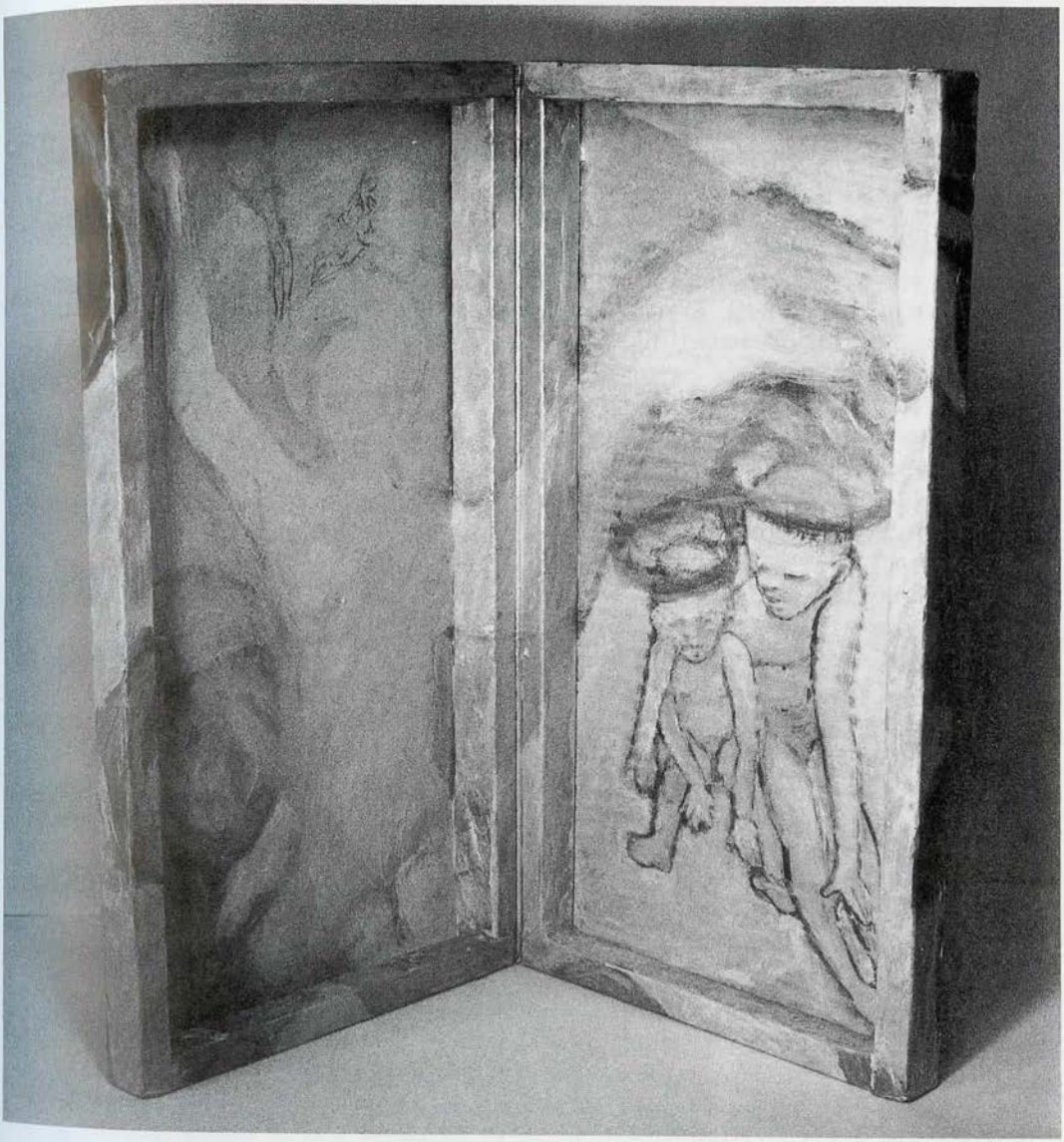
MIRIAM HERNÁNDEZ: My piece *Secret Sex Symbols* for the most part uses found objects. I turned them into new objects, shapes that I have been working with for many years, the helmet and the helmet shape—the helmet coming from different cultures, not only the bronze age helmet from Greece, but also, for instance, from Japan, and the basic shapes used on helmets that go atop the head in different West African cultures. To me the helmet symbolizes protection for the mind and the spirit—everything that's good in a human being, that is enlightened and evolved. The more evolved and the more enlightened you are, the more you believe in the goodness of humans, the more your thinking is attacked and assailed from all sides. So aside from the spiritual symbolism, for me the helmet also represents a kind of protection of who the person is. In this case of who I am, who my ancestors were, who I've come to be because of my ancestors,

as well as where I come from, and the freedom that I have to be who I am, sexually, as a woman, as an artist, as a human being. All this needs protection. My piece is invoking protection of the ancestors to help me to stay whole and stay who I am.

ELAINE SOTO: My ancestors are spiritual ancestors. My box on one side depicts a woman warrior on a horse climbing up the mountain of life. The mountain is the challenge we face as people, and living our life is like climbing up the mountain. The horse is our helper. My woman warrior has one eye symbolic of the all seeing eye of god, if you want to call it god, or the forces that put us on earth—powers that are bigger than us, that we don't see or know exactly, we just know they are there. So the warrior has that eye as an intuitive guide to figure out what has to be done. Inside the leather cover there are sparkles. It's like you're getting closer to going back home, going back to where you came from. Inside the box there's water and there's land, symbolic of the earth and being in this incarnation. Then there's the tree of life and a man and a woman. The more evolved we get, the more in touch we get with the two sides of ourselves, our male and our female side, the more they get together and work together as one. Where we came from I think, ultimately, is our higher self, or the best self we can be in the world. That's the meaning of the box. Those are our ancestors.

MIRIAM HERNÁNDEZ: The boxes that I made are very related to my other work which, for quite a few years, has related to the desire to have the protection of higher forces visualized in my work. I really believe in the strength of the visual message, the power of the artist, to make things happen. That's the main reason I don't think I could ever portray anything violent or negative, as much as those things affect me in my daily life, because I think by making things visual you give them even more power, and what I want to do with my work is to take the power and put it in a very positive perspective. We can get power from supernatural forces to make changes here on earth.

My first box—I had two boxes in the show—was ancestral, much more pictorial than sculptural, and took me a very long time to make—which is usually the case when I make paintings. I go over and over and over them with layers and layers of paint until I feel the image shines. I tend to capture the spiritual in a very pictorial way by using light and using bright colors—yellow, for instance—in the work. Then when it came time to do the other box, *Secret Sex Symbols,* which to me was the other side of the same subject matter, the same symbolism in a much more personal and secret way, it happened very quickly because of having gone through the labor of the first box. It's always a real joy when you don't have to labor the piece. One day you're looking at it and the next day it's done. It's very magical when that happens.



"Ancestral" MIRIAM HERNANDEZ (Box Show)

REGINA ARAUJO CORRITORE: I also believe objects have a certain power. I grew up believing your thoughts are almost as important as your deeds—if you have bad thoughts they'll come back to you, and if you have good thoughts then you put out good energy. The process for me was really hard and scary because I was acknowledging something in myself my family doesn't acknowledge. When I put it out there and show people, that's scary, but for myself, the box represented the coming together of different areas that have entered my creative self, the African influence, the Indian influence and the Spanish influence and how that all comes together in my culture, and how I really want to recognize that.

ELAINE SOTO: I'm not religious *per se* although a lot of the energies that I put forth have been called religious. Some of the inspiration for the images in my work are experiences I've gone through, but a good portion is from meditation. I meditate every day, and when I'm meditating images come to me. Some are so powerful I need to express them, to put them outside, to look at them and see what they mean. I have only recently come to understand what they mean in terms of unconscious meanings versus very conscious meanings. In a lot of ways they're very spiritual images, images that I wouldn't consciously think of seeing. They're part of my inner soul and self.

MIRIAM HERNÁNDEZ: When I go back home to Puerto Rico and get off the plane the light just hits me. It's a light you don't see anywhere else except in the Caribbean. The light in Hawaii is probably equally as beautiful, but it's different. The light in West Africa is also stunning and yet different. The colors of the sky, the colors of the flowers, all of the natural things appear in my work. I have to say, yes, I fall into one of those so-called stereotypes about Latin American art. I can't get away from it and I love it and one of the things I've been doing with my work is refining the color and getting it more saturated, as bright as I can possibly get it.

REGINA ARAUJO CORRITORE: One thing I think is really special for me is the sense of community in my culture is phenomenal. No matter where you go you expect your family and your neighbors to be a part of your audience. They're going to be the ones that are going to be looking at the work, and they're the people I'm going to be communicating with.

MIRIAM HERNÁNDEZ: Belonging to *Coast to Coast,* being part of a group of very supportive, intelligent, creative women of color who are artists has been an incredible support system for me. The more Latina artists I meet, the more women artists of color I meet, the better I feel about myself and the more sure I feel about my role as an artist in the world. When you don't have that support, when you feel isolated, you ask

yourself: Why am I doing this? Why am I suffering to do this? For what reason?

REGINA ARAUJO CORRITORE: My position in society as an artist feels really good, although a lot of others get more economic benefit. I think I show other people you can take on a job you love to do, as a worker, to love the work you do, something that's beneficial for society.

ELAINE SOTO: For me, art is like my heart. I love art and part of my doing art is expressing who I am as a Puerto Rican woman. When I look at other paintings in the general art world, I think, where's the color? I'm talking about real color, skin color, and so in my images I love beautiful, bright colors too, like Miriam, but I also like to have my people have color on their skin, so they look like our people, which is part of my culture and the things that we struggle for.

If I categorize myself as anything it's Puertorriqueña. But if you have to categorize me in terms of larger numbers of people like me, I like Latina. It's not an historical thing, it just has to do with how it feels inside. I remember years ago we had debates about whether Latina or Hispanic was more politically correct, and people decided that Hispanic was. It just feels inside of me somewhere that Hispanic has a class bias to it. I come from the working class. That's who I am and that's what I connect to.

REGINA ARAUJO CORRITORE: Hispanic reminds me of colonialism and Columbus and imperialism and using their language from their history. Latina feels less colonial, more geographic.

MIRIAM HERNÁNDEZ: I prefer to be addressed as Latina, although that may change. I don't think it's that important whether someone uses Hispanic or Latina, though for some reason when I hear Hispanic, the hairs on my back go up. I don't know exactly why. I don't like it because I think it's like "his" panic and "our" panic. It has more to do with language, the connotations of Hispanic. Latina also includes Brazilians who speak Portuguese, and it opens up other areas of the Caribbean where they don't speak Spanish as well as areas where people speak the indigenous languages of the Americas.

MARIA ELENA GONZALEZ: I, too, prefer Latina, if we're going to be categorized in a group. I don't particularly care for Hispanic. I mean who's he, you know...

ELAINE SOTO: Sexism, racism, classism... When I think of all those words, sexism comes later, but racism and classism, those two hit me when I was very young. I remember when I was in Catholic school, when I was living in the South Bronx—that's when I first became aware of being Puerto Rican because everybody would look at me and say you're Puerto

Rican and it sounded all of a sudden like I had a disease. They were talking to me fine until I said I was Puerto Rican. I don't know what they thought I was. I'm light skinned so they probably thought I was white.

You could be at a party and a white person would come and talk to you and all of a sudden you tell them you're Puerto Rican, they stop talking to you and walk off. I don't know if you've experienced that but I've experienced that a lot. They let you in the door and then they close it in your face. Even today, I go into a place and wonder if I will be rejected because I'm Puerto Rican. It's always the tension I experience wherever I go.

Classism had to do with where I lived as a kid in terms of the services and the things that we got and what we didn't get. In our building there was never any heat, our toilets didn't work. I was always catching colds because of where I lived. We didn't have too much food at that time and my mom was a single parent, with not a lot of education, but she busted her butt and did the best that she could with what she had. It's always been a challenge, a prod for me, having to go past these barriers. As for sexism, I remember when I was in college and they would say, well women are only here to get their Mrs. I remember feeling so discouraged, hearing this baloney. But it didn't stop me. You think you're gonna stop me, well try, because I'm gonna fight. If I can't go straight, I'm gonna go around, but I'm comin'. That's the name of that tune.

MIRIAM HERNÁNDEZ: I think all three isms—sexism, racism and classism—affect me and have affected me since I was a little girl, even though I didn't know what to call them then. And I know even now they are kind of a driving force in my life that have caused me to have the desire to excel. I think they still motivate me to break through barriers and try to be better than anyone of any race or any sex or any class. Class comes up right away with my mother because she was not allowed to go to school. Her father was very poor. I don't know if he was a farmer, because he didn't really have any land. I don't know exactly what he did. And my mom was sent out to work at the age of five to be a maid in somebody's house, so she never learned how to write or read. That was something that I was very keenly aware of when I was growing up. I knew I had to be really good in school to make up for all my mother didn't learn. Racism prodded me the same way when I got to this country. And sexism, of course, is all linked up in there. I'm sure that if I dwelt on it, it really would wear on me to the point where it might immobilize me—the way it has at moments in my life—and, yet, the overall effect it has had, in terms of my own ability to keep up a positive outlook on life and to seek support and get support from other people, is to want to get past it, get through it and excel.

REGINA ARAUJO CORRITORE: The thing that I'm dealing with most is the internalized racism. Because I've been taught ever since I was a little child that I'm not as good as other people. Even though I know it's wrong, I see how people have taken that in and how they give up, and what

I try to do is to fight back. But to see my own people giving up is really hard and then to see the divisions within my own community because of differences in skin color, differences in hair, differences in the island or country that you come from—that is really really distressing. It's like your own people pulling you down, which for me feels like a stab in the back. It's bad enough when we have to face it from the outside world. They're not holding a gun to our heads twenty-four hours a day anymore, yet we keep that attitude going. The guard keeper doesn't even have to be there.

MARIA ELENA GONZALEZ: Starting with my parents anything that me or my brother wanted to do, we were encouraged to do. I liked to hang out in the carpentry shop and shoe shine for money and that was okay. Education was very important. My mother was a teacher and she made learning great for me. I always wanted to go to school and to learn more. I told her, I'm going to college and I'm going to study art, and it was fine. My parents were always very supportive and that has always been my guide to go ahead, and I've pretty much followed through in my goals.

We came to the United States in 1968, relatively late, so there were a lot of Cubans in Miami already. There was a community that we fit right into, so I didn't hear "So you're a Cuban." We were a majority. The only thing was when you got your alien card—the people from outer space are aliens and so are you. That was my only question as far as my identity.

MIRIAM HERNÁNDEZ: I get a reaction which I perceive as a racist reaction when people ask me where I'm from and I say "I'm from Puerto Rico," and they say you don't look Puerto Rican. I feel it's racist when someone makes a remark like that even though that might not be what they're thinking about. It's just coming from a very racist place.

REGINA ARAUJO CORRITORE: I could conceivably go around saying I was Italian and no one would know because my father is Italian. When I tell people that I'm Peruvian/Puerto Rican on my mother's side, they think it's exotic. I lived in a mixed neighborhood in the Bronx and then later on in Long Island where the word, "spic" was constantly being used. It really hurt. When I look at my people, I think they're fantastic and I think, "Well, don't you want to know more about me, about my culture?" Even in the art world, we may be used for a couple of shows, but I don't feel that overall the popular culture really wants to know about me. I know I have a lot to give and I know I want to know about my culture and my people, but I don't have faith in the white racist culture.

MARIA ELENA GONZALEZ: I think people have to be educated into a lot of things. I don't know if people even know what they want to know, if they don't know what's out there to know.

Which brings up the issue of multi-culturalism which, I think, is just one more step toward broadening the horizons of the mainstream beyond being

so narrowly white male, including other groups of artists. Now we're hearing about multi-culturalism everywhere. It's a movement. I also think critics, curators and others are grabbing on to it as a means to attract crowds to their spaces, their books, their reviews. But I don't feel particularly used personally. It's just another step.

REGINA ARAUJO CORRITORE: I think it's going to be another fad where the mainstream culture, the art world especially, which feels really dead, very sterile, is using our vitality. The really exciting things that are happening are with people of color. I feel like we are getting ripped off. Instead of going toward the original, like with our music, to find where the roots are, these pre-packaged deals come out that some white guy puts his name on it, and he gets the money. And all the people he's used as his influences don't even get credit or a footnote when they're using our work, our ideas.

MARIA ELENA GONZALEZ: I think there will be a positive result from multi-culturalism aside from the temporary packaging of it for the sake of promoting shows. One has to look at what happened as a result of feminism, how many doors it opened for women artists and sculptors. These things do have an effect, an important effect in the artworld, in the mainstream.

ELAINE SOTO: I think multiculturalism is an idea whose time has come. I prefer to be invited to show just because people like my work and are interested in me as an artist, but since the reality is that people do stereotype, that's what we have to deal with right now. There is racism, and we have to deal with it. I don't think we should let it stop us. Why let anything stop us?

MARGO MACHIDA

Seeing "Yellow": Asians and the American Mirror

> For the myths of the East, the myths of the West, the myths of men, and the myths of women—these have so saturated our consciousness that truthful contact between nations and lovers can only be the result of heroic effort. Those who prefer to bypass the work involved will remain in a world of surfaces, misperceptions running rampant.
>
> —David Henry Hwang[1]

Developments over the past decade make it increasingly evident that an accurate description of contemporary arts must include the cultural expressions of America's numerous racial and ethnic subcultures. With a population gleaned from around the world, the American environment contains numerous communities that often are unaware of the richness and depth of each others' cultures. Such realities, reflecting local circumstance and history, have developed simultaneously within the complex generalization known as American culture. There is an emerging consensus that "mainstream" cultural and political dialogue should emphatically embrace a widening diversity of voices. Therefore, for curators of multi-ethnic exhibitions, the specific challenge is in allowing for uncertainty and paradox when interpreting functions and meanings of artforms originating within another's culture or subculture.

With the dramatic growth of immigration, recent turmoil in a number of nations, rising economic power and international influence, American public awareness of things Asian is heightening. Although the 1980s have been a barometer of the growing visibility of Asians in contemporary American culture, those artists who intentionally address issues of Asian identity rarely receive serious curatorial or scholarly attention for doing so.

Further, the current absence of a body of scholarship based on systematic investigation and documentation makes it extremely difficult to define the full extent of Asian American cultural production or even locate many artists whose work might have relevance for this type of exhibition.

Crosscultural Interpretation: Who Speaks for Whom

As artforms originate within specific sociocultural matrices, understanding the premises for their existence is contingent upon acknowledging the

primacy of their original contexts. For Stephen J. Gould, a scientist who writes extensively on bias underlying "objective" knowledge, "Facts are not pure and unsullied bits of information; culture also influences what we see and how we see it. Theories, moreover, are not inexorable inductions from facts. The most creative theories are often imaginative visions imposed upon facts; the source of imagination is also strongly cultural."[2] In recontextualizing artforms for audiences other than those for which they were originally produced, museum curators must be rigorously aware of latent cultural chauvinism. All individuals tend to interpret and evaluate the world through indigenous beliefs, while other cultures seemingly exist to mirror and confirm their own. Reversing enculturated expectation by turning the interpretive mirror upon oneself requires a cognitive leap in accepting that artforms might originate within another culture/subculture for seemingly inconceivable reasons.

For people of color, the ongoing experiences of difference, disenfranchisement, and marginalization from a self-designating mainstream's "center" are core issues. Whether, at the extremes, individuals deal with persistent feelings of displacement by resisting and rejecting American culture as corrupting and destructive or attempt complete assimilation in hope of achieving success within its structures, non-European origin is an undeniable marker affecting all aspects of life within a predominantly Caucasian, Eurocentric culture where images of one's ethnicity are not the "norm."

The Asian American Presence: Challenging Stereotypes

Despite continuous involvement in Asia beginning in the 1820s with the China trade and missionary activity, Commodore Perry's opening of Japan in 1853, the annexation of the Philippines in 1898, and three major wars (World War II, Korea, and Vietnam) during this century, it is notable that a majority of Americans still misperceive Asians as a homogeneous group identified with exotic foods, quaint ceremonies, or colorful costumes. Outside of urban centers, many Americans have never had even minimal contact with Asians; and regardless of nationality, frequently presume that all are members of a monolithic "oriental" culture. In this unfortunate and generally unquestioned distortion, there exists an underlying mythologizing principle, a seemingly "Volkisch" tendency that can be best summarized as "race indicates culture."

With precedents in European Orientalism, Asians have been subjects of continuous stereotyping in political cartoons, films (i.e., Mr. Moto, Charlie Chan, Mr. Wong, Fu Manchu, Emperor Ming, Dr. No, Kato; innumerable mystic kung fu masters), and printed media since substantial numbers—initially Chinese—began arriving in 1849. By the late nineteenth century, a political cartoon in a mainstream publication depicted a giant "Oriental" winged serpent hauling baskets packed with Chinese immigrants to American shores.[3] Given such fear, restrictive "Exclusion" legislation was soon

enacted that prevented substantial growth of Asian communities until as recently as the mid-1960s.

In the last decade, according to historian Ronald Takaki, Asians emerged as the fastest growing ethnic minority group in the United States.[4] This rapid and continuing development has furthered the emergence of "Asian American" forms of cultural self-conception and pride, and a recognition by Asian Americans of different national backgrounds that common political, economic, and cultural needs are better served through a shared agenda. Yet, in part because of relatively recent immigration histories, Asian Americans of successive generations as well as new immigrants usually experience their primary identity through separate national communities and often refer to themselves as "Chinese Americans," "Japanese Americans," "Korean Americans," etc. "Asian American," a term that first gained popularity during the antiracist struggles of the civil rights movement, denotes a shared reality to some, while others view it with skepticism or pragmatically accept it as an effective and necessary political construct.

Asian American Arts: Defining A Sense of Identity

Beginning in the early 1970s, buoyed by a climate of social upheaval, intense political activism, and the idealism of the civil rights and antiwar movements, individuals of different Asian American national backgrounds formed urban grassroots cultural organizations based on a sense of shared history and common needs. For these new intra-Asian groups—the progenitors of hundreds of current organizations—an ideal of public service within local communities became the motivation to provide both artistic and social programs, especially in outreach to newer immigrants. Yet at inception, few thought these organizations would be the basis for a larger movement as concepts of an inclusive "Asian American" culture were considered quite radical given divisions among national groups. However, by seeking to reconnect with "roots" in traditional immigrant communities, a context arose in which a specifically "Asian American" identity could develop.

Dominant culture provides few models capable of engaging the singular experience of being Asian American. Incorporating multiple Asian—as well as Western—traditions and the experience of not being white in a society in which racial identity can automatically set one apart, "Asian American" denotes a continuously evolving ethos. In a description of Chinese Americans that could easily be applied to other Asian Americans, anthropologist Michael M.J. Fischer sees ethnicity as "something reinvented and reinterpreted in each generation by each individual...often unsuccessfully repressed or avoided...to be Chinese-American is not the same as being Chinese in America. In this sense there is no role model for

becoming Chinese-American."[5] To be "Asian American" is not yet an essentializing vision; it is a mutable situation located among countervailing pressures within a hybrid, multivalent, and bicultural reality.

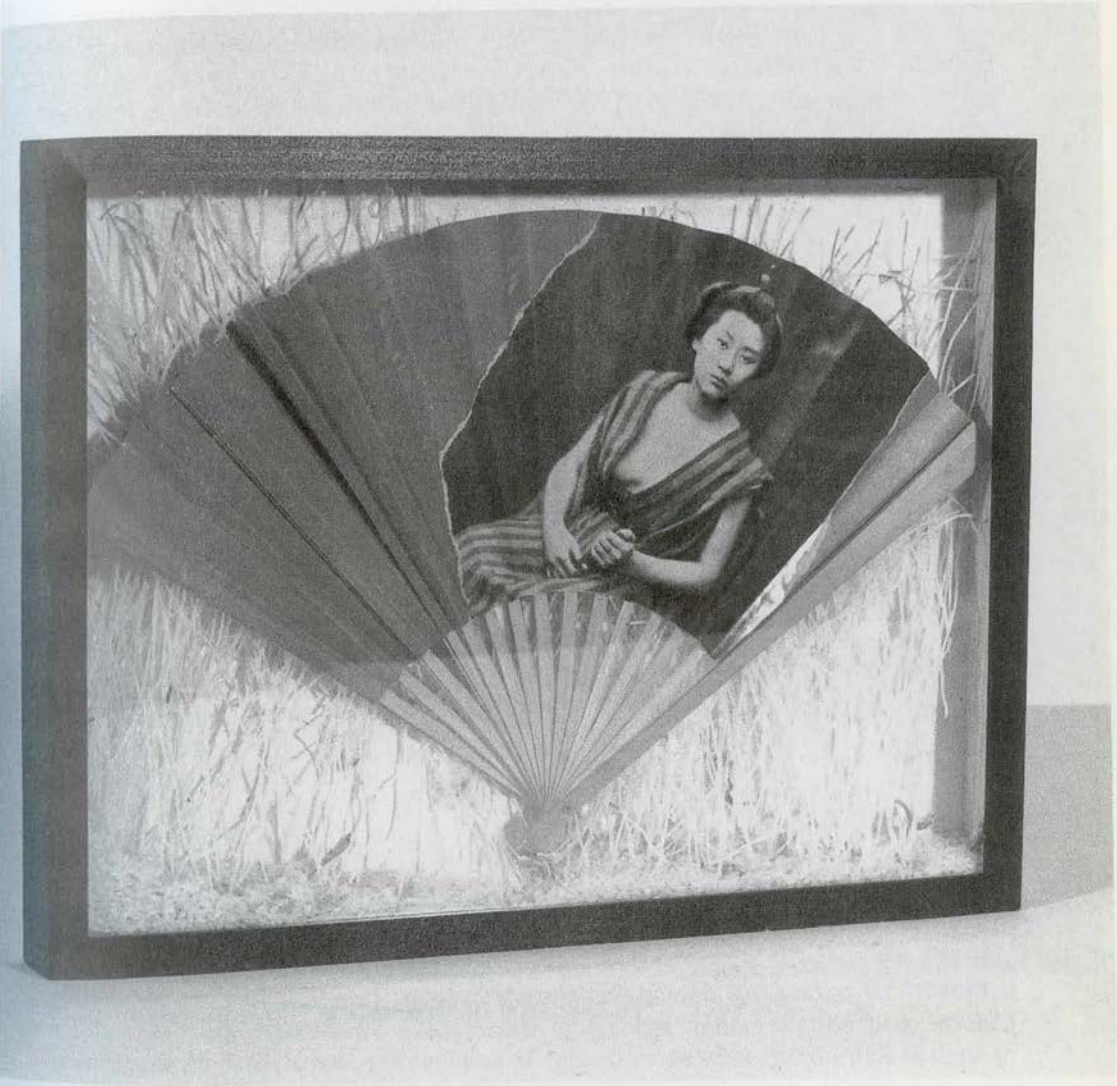
Modes of Self-Representation

Among artists consciously invested in "being" Asian American, cultural production can involve a painstaking but animate self-empowering process to clarify, document, affirm, and project membership in a singular ethnic identity. In seeking to possess diverse heritages and separate national experiences, many deliberately invent means to recast and thereby vitalize representations of their Asian identity. For Elaine Kim, a professor of ethnic studies known for her work on Asian American literature, community life, and social relations, "the most recurrent theme...is what I call claiming America for Asian Americans...It means inventing a new identity...this seeming paradox, the Asian claim on America, that is the oppositional quality of our discourse."[6]

For Asian American artists, strategies of critiquing and naming that attempt to expose, disempower, and ultimately co-opt the mainstream's representing process become antidotes to the myriad homogenized depictions, endlessly repeated cliches, externally imposed conventions, and smothering expectations that have served to circumscribe and deny their sense of unique identity. Critiquing mirrors, mocks, steals, reverses, captures, and defuses stereotypes emanating from other (usually dominant) societal groups and, in so doing (re)turns them upon their sources. Naming is a conscious and collectively assertive act seeking control over the very fabric of self-description. As art historian Judith Wilson clearly states, "In the U.S., a person of color...ultimately has little or no say over the interpretation of his or her identity. Like women, like gays, we lack the power to name ourselves for the dominant culture."[7] Ethnic autobiography, whether in literature or the visual arts, has been a major vehicle in this process, often providing layered, dialogic structures that can embody the multiple voices and images of an individual's identity in formation.

For some artists fighting submergence in American culture, embracing the "margins" of society is considered an empowering declaration of autonomy. This stance, stressing marginalization as *de facto* reality for minorities, is seen as a realistic means of countering exclusion and alienation. In serving as an intercultural border zone, the margin usually fosters interaction and blending among divergent influences. Lucy Lippard calls this "liminal" edge or boundary between cultures a place that is liberating precisely because it allows for polyphony and multiple vantage points in interpreting experience.[8]

With recent Asian immigration, some first generation Asian American artists have begun reversing what has been a ubiquitous "Orientalist" mirror reflecting most things Asian for Westerners. Generalized abstractions of an exotic, mystical, sensual, hyperaestheticized, brutal, or primi-



"The Floating World" SHEILA HAMANAKA (Box Show)

"In Memory of Hiroshima" TOMIE ARAI (Box Show

tivized East, whether from the mass media, popular culture, or "high art," obviously do not inform those whose formative years were spent within Asian cultures and are, as Edward W. Said explains, "a kind of Western projection onto and will to govern over the Orient...."[9] By seeing American experience through Asian "eyes," these artists necessarily recontextualize the West in "Occidentalist" terms. In this reverse mirroring, they make alternative and often oppositional artforms to aggressively engage both Western and Asian audiences.

Yet, for others seeking to maintain Asian cultural "authenticity" against the perceived debilitating effects of Western cultural practices, naming, critiquing, reverse mirroring, and even certain forms of ethnic autobiography are often rejected as assimilationist and antithetical to their notions of an Asian understanding of culture. Among such essentialists—indifferent, ambivalent, or actively hostile to Western traditions—most external involvements with other cultures are considered unalterably assimilationist. Given inevitable and conflicting claims of authority over the defining process, there is internal debate over which subjects and art making processes are most "authentic" and to what extent an artist's "community" identification and involvement are determining factors.

By maintaining a sense of rootedness in the ancient heritages of non-Western cultures, many Asian Americans and Asians in America feel better able to negotiate American society from a position of strength. For some artists seeking spiritual continuity with Asian teachings, Eastern faiths, like Zen or Taoism (among others), provide iconography and meditative practices that integrate religious, ethical, and philosophical beliefs. Others, seeing themselves as perpetuators of traditions like calligraphy and brush painting, or as part of the richly varied "folk arts" tradition, believe in maintaining an Asian heritage in the context of a diaspora—adapting Asian cultural forms to relate their experiences amid Western society.

Whereas concepts of purism and continuity are inspirational for Asian American cultural production, they can also encourage a stratififed traditionalism attempting to recreate romantic notions of an "unblemished" Asian past. Many have responded to essentialist arguments by pointing to the inevitability of change, as no society remains "pure" once it has interacted with another. Further, not only is there no homogenous Asian tradition among nationalities, but also ways of doing things are rapidly changing in Asia as well. And certainly, although questions of "cultural pollution" are raised in Asia, they often are more compelling within diasporas in which considerations of rejection or absorption are linked to conditions of community survival.

Altough currently unfashionable in dominant criticism, any analysis of contemporary artforms emanating from newly expanding Asian Ameican communities, infused with constantly increasing numbers of first generation immigrants, refugees, and expatriates, would require an active solicitation of artists' intentions. In developing interethnic interpretations that

limit Eurocentric assumptions, it is necessary to establish a body of knowledge based on local description—both in the societal context in which distinctive Asian American artforms are produced and in understanding their functions as symbolic constructs and wordly objects. As anthropologist Clifford Geertz has pointed out, what is produced as art exists within the definitions of cultural systems so that "giving to art objects a cultural significance is always a local matter."[10] Therefore, by drawing on primary sources—material generated in extensisve interviews and written artist's statements—manifestations of self-identity are directly related to pertinent autobiographical information.

Conclusion

Complete comprehension between cultures is probably impossible, yet accepting the need for some forms of "translation" is necessary if ethnocentric practices are to be combatted. Systematic knowledge of another's artforms requires a willingness to empirically accept alternate making explanations. Hence, specificity—not hegemonic notions of universality—will make for a complex cultural environment in which polyphony is a central mode of discourse. As Fischer states, "the ethnic search is a mirror...seeing others against a background of ourselves....This bifocality, or reciprocity of perspectives has become increasingly important in a world of growing interdependence....No longer can rhetorical figures of the 'primitive' or the 'exotic' be used with impunity. Audiences have become multiple."[11]

At best, the potential of exhibitions like *The Decade Show** is in indicating complexity within an amorphous American environment—regionally, ethnically, and generationally. America is neither "melting pot," "orchestra", nor "salad," but a loose confederation of autonomous subgroups, in dynamic interaction. Hopefully, some sense that crossculturally transmitted ideas and images are inevitably redefined in transit will also be imparted. By questioning ethnocentric and Eurocentric assumptions, interpretation can refocus on open-minded investigations that expose diverse audiences to broader cultural parameters.[12]

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*Dates of the exhibition: Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art, May 16 to August 19, 1990; The New Museum of Contemporary Art, May 12 to August 19, 1990; The Studio Museum in Harlem, May 18 to August 19, 1990.

Notes:

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[1]David Henry Hwang, "Afterword," *M. Butterfly* (New York: New American Library, 1986), p. 100.

[2]Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1981), p.22.*

[3]"A Flimsy Barrier," *The Wasp Magazine* (San Francisco: 1893), collection, The Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies, Philadelphia.

[4]Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Distant Shore* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1989), p.5.

[5]Michael M.J. Fischer, "Ethnicity and the Post-Modern Arts of Memory" in James Clifford and George E. Marcus (eds.), *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), pp.195-196.

[6]Elaine H. Kim, "Defining Asian American Realities Through Literature," *Cultural Critique,* No. 6 (Spring 1987), p.88.

[7]Judith Wilson, "Stereotypes, Or a Picture Is Worth a Thousand Lies," *Prisoners of Image: Ethnic and Gender Stereotypes* [exhibition catalogue] (New York: The Alternative Museum, 1989), p.21.

[8]See Lucy R.Lippard Mixed Blessings: *New Art in a Multi-Cultural America,* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990).

[9]Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1978), p.95.

[10]Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge, Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1983), p.93.

[11]Michael M.J. Fischer, "Ethnicity and the Post-Modern Arts of Memory" in James Clifford and George E. Marcus (eds.), *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p.199.

[12]For a more detailed discussion on contemporary Asian American art and issues of self-represenation, see the author's forthcoming working paper, *Cultural Identity in Transition: Contemporary Asian American Visual Arts as a Vehicle of the Representation of Self and Community,* to be published by the Asian/American Center at Queens College, City University of New York in 1990-91.

SUSAN SHERMAN

Women, Culture, Identity:
A Re–examination

A human being does not live in isolation. Our community is the context in which we move, the background that brings our lives into focus. Conversely, our community is defined by who *we* are, what we bring to it. An examination of this interrelationship of the individual to the group, to other people, to history is basic to any discussion of "identity." What people we choose to surround ourselves with is one of the most important choices we can make. And no less important is whether that choice is ours *to* make.

It is a truism that one way of keeping an oppressed group in their place is to deny them their identity by subsuming them as anonymous beings, beings without individuality, into the hierarchy of the oppressor. In fact, women in patriarchial societies are not even the so-called existential "other." We are not even one side of the duality male/female. In reality, the position of "other" is reserved for the male, the "feminine" is a part of the male—the sensitive artist, the "obedient" priest (the "bride" of Christ), Jung's "Anima." Even the slave in Hegel's famous exposition of the master/slave relationship is a man. Woman as a *living* being exists on another, a lower level. She is elevated to an equal position as "other" only in man's fantasy life, only as a symbolic psychological representation of some part of *him*self—Goethe's Margareta, Dante's Beatrice, Conrad's unnamed fantastic jungle woman in *Heart of Darkness* (in direct contrast to the real life "at home" woman he must protect, who cannot face life as it *really* is). The examples are legion. The living, breathing she has no identity and so, *in order even to assume an adversary position, an identity must first be forged.* The question of identity is an essential part of any political struggle which purports to liberate us from oppressive definitions and stereotypes, group anonymity, the "biological imperative," and perhaps, most important, the acceptance of violence as an integral part of our lives.

Women's source of power and use has been traditionally conceived of by patriarchial society as based in our sexual organs, either as a source of male pleasure or the place of the conception of children. The oppression of women as a class is known as "sexism." Consequently, women have been defined traditionally primarily by their relationship to their sexual partner—both within and outside the family unit. Women operate within these limited relationships as sexual beings, whether as mother, wife, mistress, lover. While the male, by virtue of his privileged status, is an independent being, a being with self-identity, the female is identified as dependent and her identity is always relative to a masculine/dominant figure and is always sex-related, including the fruits of sexuality—motherhood and children.

The point here is not that women have been traditionally defined primarily as sexual beings by men—that is hardly news—but that after all these years, after all these books, articles, essays, discussions, that sexuality continues to be overwhelmingly the perspective by which women are seen both by men *and by other women.* This includes all categories of sex-dependent relationships: the matriarchy, the variety of heterosexual feminism that sees feminist struggle literally as the battle of the sexes, certain kinds of women's spirituality that ritualize women's sexuality, as well as the latest phase of punk/"postmodern" sadomasochism. A man is spoken of as worker, artist, intellectual, scientist, soldier, revolutionary and is rarely seen as father, husband or even as lover except in extravagant proportions, lover with a capital L, while women's rights and concerns are most often grouped under titles like "reproductive rights," and focus on issues like abortion, birth control, and sexual choice.

Certainly political issues like "reproductive rights," and sexual choice and economically related issues like childcare are *absolutely essential* in determining our ability to choose and act free of outside coercion—now more than ever, as these rights are being rapidly eroded—and are an indication of the position of women in society in general. *However, we must ask whether, in addressing these concerns, we are addressing problems vital to our self-interest*, or whether we are, in reality, using these problem areas to define our self-*identity*—thereby unconsciously submitting to the standard subservient biological role women are placed in daily by a patriarchal culture which sees men as human beings, varied and individual, and women as a homogeneous grouping—identical, one-dimensional, sub-human. This is of particular importance in clarifying the crucial question of how issues of racism and economic class specifically affect women's relationships to—*images of*—each other and the outside world.

The Self & Social Identity

If it is the case that our perception of the world is to a large extent based on our needs, it is also true that our needs are determined both by who we define ourselves to be and others' definitions of us—by our *self*-identity and our *social* identity. While it is true that the two overlap, that the political and personal are mutually interdependent and inseparable, it is equally true that the two terms—"personal" and "political"—are *not* identical, *are not reducible one to the other.* Without political activism, a sense of being part of a larger struggle, questions of self-identity become isolated and fanciful; without a sense of personal identity, political activity is empty and without focus.

The contradictions between the personal and political become apparent in situations of crisis, when the two clash. The controversies revolving around issues like feminism and the Left, separatism, racism, classism, sexuality are based on real social situations as well as theoretical differences and social and/or psychological conditioning. However, many of the

controversies surrounding these issues are further complicated by a reductionism which is a by-product of patriarchal methodology, a reductionism that is exacerbated if the basic assumptions that underlie traditional patriarchial philosophy are not taken into account and are consequently allowed to operate subconsciously. One result is that we tend to turn to the past for relief—either to a mythic antiquity, to the way things were before feminism went astray (e.g. before lesbianism became a focal issue), to nineteenth–century based psychologies, or at its extreme, à la Camille Paglia, to the time before modern feminism entered the picture altogether and got the "real" feminist agenda confused!

Self-identity for the patriarchy is always bought at the expense of "the other."[1] Not only is duality defined as opposition, but conflict becomes a resultant category of human existence. For classical patriarchal thinkers motion, change, the physical world, material existence itself is caused by a state of imbalance. The classical ideal of the universal in Western tradition rests on a concept of timelessness predicated on perfect balance, perfect measure, perfect form—ideals that do not exist in the mundane world, a physical world denied any value except as a testing ground for the intellect, or, in the more liberal patriarchal philosophers, the place where the laws of the intellect are, by necessity, disclosed. Modern structuralist and psychologically–oriented "postmodern" philosophers go one step further. By eliminating the idea of balance and a unified ego in favor of a syntactically organized theory of human orientation, they predicate conflict as a basic fact of human life.

Not only are we dealing here with duality, but with the concept that "ordinary existence" is *of necessity* violent. Consequently, one side of the duality must always be subjugated by and/or subsumed under the other. Rather than using the *relative* ethical construct "good/bad" to judge actions *within* a class, classes and qualities in their entirety are divided into the now primal categories "good" and "evil." (e.g. Black is evil, white is good; feminine is evil, masculine is good; passion is evil, thought is good; night is evil, day is good etc.) Whether it is internal or external, it is conflict that sets us in motion. It is war that purifies us. Power becomes the defining value.

By the middle of the Nineteenth Century, in his now famous presentation of the "master-slave" relationship, Hegel, certainly one of the most important influences on modern philosophical theory, brought this ideology to a new level by describing the benefits that accrue to being placed in the inferior position:

> ...the slave...in the service of the master, works off his individualist self-will, overcomes the inner immediacy of appetite, and in this divestment of self and in 'fear of his lord' makes the 'beginning of wisdom'—the passage to universal self-consciousness.... *Slavery and tyranny are, therefore, in the history of nations a necessary stage and hence relatively justified...*[2] (Italics mine).

Hegel goes on to state that, in any case, unless a man is willing to risk his own life *and others* for freedom, he deserves to be a slave.

This ideology of domination is presently exemplified by sadomasochistic movements and trendy "postmodern" flirtations with the Marquis de Sade which define pain as a necessary part of life and dominance as an innate quality of human existence. Ironically, disguised as rebellion against an authority which is blatantly oppressive, they ritualize the very heart of the patriarchial justification of brutality towards women—derived initially from the belief that the desires of the physical world, the world of the senses, which are the main barrier to enlightenment and immortality, must be forcibly disciplined through mortification of the flesh.

And who is the living symbol of this deceptive world of the senses? Who seduces man to his doom? Woman. This is, in fact, the basic assumption behind the male justification of why women have to be kept in their place—forcibly, if necessary.

Violence against women—an everyday condition of our lives. As one woman so aptly put it, "Think of the relief you feel, any woman feels, when you realize the shape at the far end of the deserted street is a woman, not a man." It confronts us physically; it confronts us psychologically. It is part of every image on every level that we incorporate into our own self-image. The core issue isn't sex. Images of violence against women are destructive whether they occur on 42nd Street in a porno house, in a fashion magazine, on a record cover, in a touted work of "great" literature, or in the Bible. *All condition us into accepting violence as an integral part of our identity.*

If you accept the transferral of the medieval devil from the netherworld to the recesses of our psyche and make it the source of our most basic (read: sexual) energy—as Freud does with his amoral, aggressive, selfish life *force* the Id[3]—images of violence play a necessary role in keeping human beings under control, allowing them to let off steam in fantasy rather than reality. If, on the other hand, you believe that images educate, that they play a vital role in shaping our self-image, our self-identity, and keeping us in line, then you believe images of violence are a *cause* of violent activity rather than a safety-valve, you implicitly assert that violence is not a "given" of human existence.

Nationalism: Cultural & Revolutionary

Our self-image, our identity, determines both the choices we make and whether we act on those choices—whether we believe we are even *capable* of acting in our own or others' behalf. That is why *all political struggles have first been struggles bound up with identity and have had strong nationalistic elements.* One of the most important documents to cover the concept of women's identity in this way is the essay "The Woman-Identified Woman." Written by Radicalesbians and published in 1970, it still stands as one of the most important theoretical documents on feminist identity.

Defining lesbianism as first and foremost a question of identity in which a woman in a male-dominated society rebels against the subservient role foisted on her, "Woman-Identified Woman" also separates women from the heterosexual privilege that comes with the acceptance of that role and recognizes the sexual act as an act of love determining whom we value, spend time with, give our loyalty to.

> Until women see in each other the possibility of primal commitment which includes sexual love, they will be denying themselves the love and value they readily accord to men, thus affirming their second-class status.

Furthermore,

> As long as male acceptability is primary—both to individual women, to the movement as a whole—the term lesbian will be used effectively against women.[5]

"Woman-Identified Woman" was an important document because it spoke of the positive potential of women asserting themselves as independent individuals, no longer needing men to validate their identity. It spoke of "women-loving women." It empowered women, in the full knowledge that a woman who feels powerless is a woman unable to choose or act.

With this essay and the lesbian movement, a burst of new energy propelled the feminist movement forward. But could other women in the movement discuss these new ideas, grow with them, change them if necessary to fit their own needs, taking part in the process of refining and shaping them into a more mature form? Most could not. "Woman-Identified Woman" as a theorectical document was limited. It did not adequately cover questions of economics and racism. The idea of cultural feminism was vague and led to misunderstandings still with us today, primarily due to its association (intentional or not) with cultural nationalism, a term which referred to separatist struggle not connected to a broader context—the counterpart to "cultural nationalism" being "revolutionary nationalism," an ideology recognizing the need for cultural integrity, the necessity of both autonomy *and* coalition in a unified struggle for *radical* social change.

It was also argued that "Woman-Identified Woman" implied that lesbianism *per se* was revolutionary even though the essay stated quite clearly that:

> ...irrespective of where our love and sexual energies flow, if we are male-identified in our heads, we cannot realize our autonomy as human beings.[6]

"Woman-Identified Woman" stated that to see lesbianism as purely sexual was divisive and sexist, but it neglected to address clearly the

position of feminists who chose to continue the struggle as heterosexuals. Unfortunately, vicious attacks like those codified in the article "The Pseudo-Left/Lesbian Alliance,"[7] and ensuing conflicts, resulted in an even greater schism in the movement.

The women's movement in the 70's was not diverted by the lesbian movement—the lesbian movement was one of the main sources, if not the main source, of energy that kept the women's movement alive.

Identity & Struggle

In the United States today we are confronted negatively by the re-activation of overt and concentrated activity that threatens every one of the gains we have made—and positively by the creative energy coming from an emerging movement of women of color. Women of color have been in the movement, have been in the leadership of the movement, from its beginnings. What is new is that *communities* of women of color are now asserting their feminist identity and they, *as women,* have gathered strength and become a main source of energy within the women's community as a whole. *What happens now to the American women's movement may well rest on how well this new transition will be made, on whether white feminists and women of color, gay and straight, will make the same mistakes heterosexual women and lesbians made in the past.*

It is unfortunately more and more the standard of our times to see things in a way that distorts and mystifies them—in statistical patterns rather than individual events and historical process, through re/presentation rather than direct experience.[8] As we drift further and further, carried by the current of contemporary events, it becomes increasingly necessary to set our own course, to refuse to be intimidated—at the same time remaining flexible enough to change as conditions change.

This seems obvious enough, but the obvious is often the hardest thing to act on and the most difficult to see. As human beings living in an ever-shrinking world, we exist in a situation of mutual interdependency. We carry that set of relationships which is our society within us. Unless we understand the forces that move us, we perpetuate oppression. We become involved in actions that are self-defeating. We mimic the oppressor.

With years of experience behind us, it is time now to re-evaluate the relationship of identity and struggle—remembering that a change in labels, in outward form, is meaningless unless it grows from a change in attitude and is accompanied by action. Not just a shifting of priorities, but a radical alteration in our way of existing in the world.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Specific examples are legion. Modern examples include Hegel, *The Philosophy of Mind*; Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*; Jung on individuation; even Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception.*

[2]Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind.* Oxford at the Clarendon Press: London. p. 175.

[3]For clarification of this point of view: Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis: London.

[4]Karla Jay & Allen Young (eds.), Out of the Closets: Voices of Gay Liberation. Douglas/Links: New York. p. 174.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Ibid., p. 175.

[7]Redstockings, Feminist Revolution. Redstockings, Inc.: New Paltz, N.Y. "The Pseudo-Left/Lesbian Alliance," pp. 189-194.

[8]An interesting presentation of the philosophical implications of technology is presented in Martin Heidegger's *Questions Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, particularly in the essay, "The Age of the World Picture," p. 115. Harper Colophon Books.

"Love Surrounds Me" ALETA BASS (Box Show)

MARITZA ARRASTÍA

INSURGENCE

From the Brooklyn Bridge
there is a rain of ashes
the skin
the medium for his flame
is dead

we the living go on,
is there no shame?

what binds the self in a place?
the skin, a coincidence of dust?
where does the self end or begin
without your hands?
what is the distance
from the hands,
to the electric action of the brain,
to the hands again?

from the hands
to the mash of paper and paste
that his long fingers made
into the face and the hands
of Albizu
seated at the writing table
inside the prison cell
behind glass?

and where is the self of Albizu?
made of paper mache
by my friend who is dead?

in the aphorisms?

in the ossified patriotism
of the Parties
that are also dead?

in the coal inside the eye
that will one day
move the hand
to fire
the last, victorious round?

the self is

in the body
in the places
in the dream
in the labor
in the artifact
in the poem
in the love
in the hate
in the bond
in the hand
that throws his ashes
from the bridge
in the ashes
in the wind

the self lives in its own borders
in the sweet danger
at the edges of its skin

listen to the ground
for the terror drum
of its pulse

listen, in the hush
between our breaths
love's insurgence
beachheads on its shore

the self weaves
a tissue of root
a filigree of vein
a creature from the earth

the self
grows in its intelligence
intelligence is the organ of love
love is the eyes
of the skin

MARGARET RANDALL

I AM LOVING YOU

for you, Barbara

I am loving you in the furrowed temperature
of our bodies broadening soft
moving into the trust we fashion
this day and the next.
Holding each other, our children
becoming grandchildren, our grandchildren
growing into this world we want to change,
its broken law of greed and pain.

I am talking about the curve of a breast, yours
in this time when nothing is given
and almost everyone dies before her time.
A cawing trail of Sandhill cranes
hold captive breath and sky.
In some ancient cell I know our fingers
moved and touched, remembering.
Perhaps we were sisters, husband and wife,

perhaps we were mother and daughter
father and son, interchangeably.
In a future that requires
successful closure of the Salvadoran war,
all sides in the Middle East
to give something and get something,
I am loving you still
resting against your shoulder's heat.

I am loving you as the sun goes down in Matagalpa,
women like us stroking each other
in old high-ceilinged rooms, jacaranda patios
their walls pocked by the silent caliber
of old battles.
Sun rising over Johannesburg, over Belfast
pale through a narrow ravine on Hopi land
where a child pushes her flock before her
embracing herself against the wind.

Against the winds of change we shape the words
with our mouths that can say these things
because other women said them
and others dreamed them
looking then looking away
holding each other quickly, fear
standing at the door.

Pinatubo's* fallout
turns the evening clouds a burning red
above this New Mexico desert
where I am loving you now
long and carefully slow
with words like *wait* and *here* and *yes*
as we tell each other
the world is still a dangerous place.

We will take it one death at a time
claiming only the memory
of our trembling and our rage.

**Mount Pinatubo, in the Philippines, erupted most recently in 1991. The tremendous amount of volcanic ash spewed into the air traveled thousands of miles, reddening the sunsets in places as far away as New Mexico.*

THE GAMES THAT KEEP THEM QUIET

—for Lia Margarita, Luis Rodrigo,
Martin, and Mariana: my grandchildren
who play their own games.

Shhhh. They are playing the games
that keep them quiet, keep them good
when the wind throws barricades
against their secret mimicry
cancels them out
and saves them from broad wings of fright.
A sickened sky and water bubble, churn,
spinning the children fast
until there is no place at all to go
but over that familiar wall.

I remember the years young mothers
shared the danger of Johnny
who wanted to play with guns.
I was one of those mothers
warding off the images that pulled them in.
No miniature replica of war for our kids,
no ratatat of toy machine guns,
bombers swooping, descending with sound
between their chubby fingers.
No tiny tanks
not even the chocolate-covered kind.

Explaining *yes, honey, I know*
Shirley's mommy lets her
and Michael watches TV anytime he wants
but I need you to understand...
The silence that lasts. And lasts.
Today muscle shudders at the games
they sell undercover in Germany
the games they sell and buy, children playing

Aryan Test or *Total Auschwitz*
rules blazing electronic on blinding score boards,
points for how many Jews sent to forced labor
or gased when it's your turn.
And the different kinds of torture, yes,
you can move right up
in the ranks of a toy SS
revived for efficiency in times of genocide
against those teeth, that hair, the lonely mole.

On this side of a weary ocean
in our own video stores
there is *Cavalry,*
a point for each Indian woman
you can rape.
Now there is *Desert Storm:*
called patriotism
in a game to be played since the TV screens
no longer flash their glow-green nights.

Spectator parents buy sixty minutes
of Stormin' Norman wired for sound.
How We Won the Gulf War
an evening's entertainment
while men who still need toys
drive a HUM-VEE for forty thousand
High Mobility All Purpose Vehicle
just like the ones
that blustered through that line of sand.

For kids whose parents can't afford
this fun on the edge
there is always the collection of cards
our great American baseball in memory:
replacing Mickey Mantle's center field
or DiMaggio up to bat.
Lore of a nation that bleeds itself to death.

Shhhh. They are trading the new cards
jiggling the bright screen
punching in those lethal keys
for the ultimate game
of torture, maim, rape, kill,
to rise in the ranks
and win, win, win.

Until we sink
weighted down with victory
in this history book of burning flesh. Our own.

MARGARET RANDALL

bell hooks

an aesthetic of blackness: strange and oppositional

This is the story of a house. It has been lived in by many people. Our grandmother, Baba, made this house living space. She was certain that the way we lived was shaped by objects, the way we looked at them, the way they were placed around us. She was certain that we were shaped by space. From her I learn about aesthetics, the yearning for beauty that she tells me is the predicament of heart that makes our passion real. A quiltmaker, she teaches me about color. Her house is a place where I am learning to look at things, where I am learning how to belong in space. In rooms full of objects, crowded with things, I am learning to recognize myself. She hands me a mirror, showing me how to look. The color of wine she has made in my cup, the beauty of the everyday. Surrounded by fields of tobacco, the leaves braided like hair, dried and hung, circles and circles of smoke fill the air. We string red peppers fiery hot, with thread that will not be seen. They will hang in front of a lace curtain to catch the sun. Look, she tells me, what the light does to color! Do you believe that space can give life, or take it away, that space has power? These are the questions she asks which frighten me. Baba dies an old woman, out of place. Her funeral is also a place to see things, to recognize myself. How can I be sad in the face of death, surrounded by so much beauty? Death, hidden in a field of tulips, wearing my face and calling my name. Baba can make them grow. Red, yellow, they surround her body like lovers in a swoon, tulips everywhere. Here a soul on fire with beauty burns and passes, a soul touched by flame. We see her leave. She has taught me how to look at the world and see beauty. She has taught me "we must learn to see."

Years ago, at an art gallery in San Francisco near the Tassajara restaurant, I saw rooms arranged by Buddhist monk Chogyam Trungpa. At a moment in my life when I had forgotten how to see, he reminds me to look. He arranges spaces. Moved by an aesthetic shaped by old beliefs. Objects are not without spirit. As living things they touch us in unimagined ways. On this path one learns that an entire room is a space to be created, a space that can reflect beauty, peace, and harmony of being, a spiritual aesthetic. Each space is a sanctuary. I remember. Baba has taught me "we must learn to see."

Aesthetics then is more than a philosophy or theory of art and beauty; it is a way of inhabiting space, a particular location, a way of looking and becoming. It is not organic. I grew up in an ugly house. No one there

considered the function of beauty or pondered the use of space. Surrounded by dead things, whose spirits had long ago vanished since they were no longer needed, that house contained a great engulfing emptiness. In that house things were not to be looked at, they were to be possessed—space was not to be created but owned—a violent anti-aesthetic. I grew up thinking about art and beauty as it existed in our lives, the loves of poor black people. Without knowing the appropriate language, I understood that advanced capitalism was affecting our capacity to see, that consumerism began to take the place of that predicament of heart that called us to yearn for beauty. Now many of us are only yearning for things.

In one house I learned the place of aesthetics in the lives of agrarian poor black folks. There the lesson was that one had to understand beauty as a force to be made and imagined. Old folks shared their sense that we had come out of slavery into this free space and we had to create a world that would renew the spirit, that would make it life-giving. In that house there was a sense of history. In the other house, the one I lived in, aesthetics had no place. There the lessons were never about art or beauty, but always only to possess things. My thinking about aesthetics has been informed by the recognition of these houses: one which cultivated and celebrated an aesthetic of existence, rooted in the idea that no degree of material lack could keep one from learning how to look at the world with a critical eye, how to recognize beauty, or how to use it as a force to enhance inner well-being; the other which denied the power of abstract aestheticism. Living in that other house where we were so acutely aware of lack, so conscious of materiality, I could see in our daily life the way consumer capitalism ravaged the black poor, nurtured in us a longing for things that often subsumed our ability to recognize aesthetic worth or value.

Despite these conditions, there was in the traditional southern racially segregated black community a concern with racial uplift that continually promoted recognition of the need for artistic expressiveness and cultural production. Art was seen as intrinsically serving a political function. Whatever African-Americans created in music, dance, poetry, painting, etc., it was regarded as testimony, bearing witness, challenging racist thinking which suggested that black folks were not fully human, were uncivilized, and that the measure of this was our collective failure to create "great" art. White supremacist ideology insisted that black people, being more animal than human, lacked the capacity to feel and therefore could not engage the finer sensibilities that were the breeding ground for art. Responding to this propaganda, nineteenth-century black folks emphasized the importance of art and cultural production, seeing it as the most effective challenge to such assertions. Since many displaced African slaves brought to this country an aesthetic based on the belief that beauty, especially that created in a collective context, should be an integrated aspect of everyday life, enhancing the survival and development of community, these ideas formed the basis of African-American aesthetics.

Cultural production and artistic expressiveness were also ways for displaced African people to maintain connections with the past. Artistic African cultural retentions survived long after other expressions had been lost or forgotten. Though not remembered or cherished for political reasons, they would ultimately be evoked to counter assertions by white supremacists and colonized black minds that there remained no vital living bond between the culture of African-Americans and the cultures of Africa. This historical aesthetic legacy has proved so powerful that consumer capitalism has not been able to completely destroy artistic production in underclass black communities.

Even though the house where I lived was ugly, it was a place where I could and did create art. I painted, I wrote poetry. Though it was an environment more concerned with practical reality than art, these aspirations were encouraged. In an interview in *Callaloo* painter Lois Mailou Jones describes the tremendous support she received from black folks: "Well I began with art at a very early stage in my life. As a child, I was always drawing. I loved color. My mother and father, realizing that I had talent, gave me an excellent supply of crayons and pencils and paper—and encouraged me." Poor black parents saw artistic cultural production as crucial to the struggle against racism, but they were also cognizant of the link between creating art and pleasure. Art was necessary to bring delight, pleasure, and beauty into lives that were hard, that were materially deprived. It mediated the harsh conditions of poverty and servitude. Art was also a way to escape one's plight. Protestant black churches emphasized the parable of the talents, and commitment to spirituality also meant appreciating one's talents and using them. In our church if someone could sing or play the piano and they did not offer these talents to the community, they were admonished.

Performance arts—dance, music, and theater—were the most accessible ways to express creativity. Making and listening to black music, both secular and sacred, was one of the ways black folks developed an aesthetic. It was not an aesthetic documented in writing, but it did inform cultural production. Analyzing the role of the "talent show" in segregated black communities, which was truly the community-based way to support and promote cultural production, would reveal much about the place of aesthetics in traditional black life. It was both a place for collective display of artistry and a place for the development of aesthetic criteria. I cite this information to place African-American concern with aesthetics in a historical framework that shows a continuity of concern. It is often assumed that black folks first began to articulate an interest in aesthetics during the sixties. Privileged black folks in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were often, like their white counterparts, obsessed with notions of "high art." Significantly, one of the important dimensions of the artistic movement among black people, most often talked about as the Harlem Renaissance, was the call for an appreciation of popular forms. Like other periods of intense focus on the arts in African-American

culture, it called attention to forms of artistic expression that were simply passing away because they were not valued in the context of a conventional aesthetic focusing on "high art." Often African-American intellectual elites appropriated these forms, reshaping them in ways suited to different locations. Certainly the spiritual as it was sung by Paul Robeson at concerts in Europe was an aspect of African-American folk culture evoked in a context far removed from small, hot, Southern church services, where poor black folks gathered in religious ecstasy. Celebration of popular forms ensured their survival, kept them as a legacy to be passed on, even as they were altered and transformed by the interplay of varied cultural forces.

Conscious articulation of a "black aesthetic" as it was constructed by African-American artists and critics in the sixties and early seventies was an effort to forge an unbreakable link between artistic production and revolutionary politics. Writing about the interconnectedness of art and politics in the essay "Frida Kahlo and Tina Modottit," Laura Mulvey describes the way an artistic avant-garde

> ...was able to use popular form not as a means of communication but as a means of constructing a mythic past whose effectiveness could be felt in the present. Thereby it brought itself into line with revolutionary impetus towards constructing the mythic past of the nation.

A similar trend emerged in African-American art as painters, writers, musicians worked to imaginatively evoke black nationhood, a homeland, recreating bonds with an African past while simultaneously evoking a mythic nation to be born in exile. During this time Larry Neal declared the Black Arts Movement to be "the cultural arm of the black revolution." Art was to serve black people in the struggle for liberation. It was to call for and inspire resistance. One of the major voices of the black aesthetic movement, Maulana Karenga, in his *Thesis on Black Cultural Nationalism*, taught that art should be functional, collective and committed.

The black aesthetic movement was fundamentally essentialist. Characterized by an inversion of the "us" and "them" dichotomy, it inverted conventional ways of thinking about otherness in ways that suggested that everything black was good and everything white bad. In his introduction to the anthology *Black Fire*, Larry Neal set the terms of the movement, dismissing work by black artists which did not emerge from black power movement:

> A revolutionary art is being expressed today. The anguish and aimlessness that attended our great artists of the forties and fifties and which drove most of them to early graves, to dissipation and dissolution, is over. Misguided by white cultural references (the models the culture sets for its individuals), and the incongruity of these models with black reality, men like Bird were driven to willful

> self-destruction. There was no program. And the reality-model was incongruous. It was a white reality-model. If Bird had had a black reality-model, it might have been different... In Bird's case, there was a dichotomy between his genius and the society. But that he couldn't find the adequate model of being was the tragic part of the whole thing.

Links between black cultural nationalism and revolutionary politics led ultimately to the subordination of art to politics. Rather than serving as a catalyst promoting diverse artistic expression, the Black Arts Movement began to dismiss all forms of cultural production by African-Americans that did not conform to movement criteria. Often this led to aesthetic judgments that did not allow for recognition of multiple black experience or the complexity of black life, as in the case of Neal's critical interpretation of jazz musician Charlie Parker's fate. Clearly, the problems facing Parker were not simply aesthetic concerns, and they could not have been resolved by art or critical theories about the nature of black artistic production. Ironically, in many of its aesthetic practices the Black Arts Movement was based on the notion that a people's art, cultural production for the masses, could not be either complex, abstract, or diverse in style, form, content, etc.

Despite its limitations, the Black Arts Movement provided useful critique based on racial questioning of the place and meaning of aesthetics for black artistic production. The movement's insistence that all art is political, that an ethical dimension should inform cultural production, as well as the encouragement of an aesthetic which did not separate habits of being from artistic production, were important to black thinkers concerned with strategies of decolonization. Unfortunately, these positive aspects of the black aesthetic movement should have led to the formation of critical space where there could have been more open discussion of the relevance of cultural production to black liberation struggle. Ironically, even though the Black Arts Movement insisted that it represented a break from white western traditions, much of its philosophical underpinning re-inscribed prevailing notions about the relationship between art and mass culture. The assumption that naturalism or realism was more accessible to a mass audience than abstraction was certainly not a revolutionary position. Indeed the paradigms for artistic creation offered by the Black Arts Movement were most often restrictive and disempowering. They stripped many artists of creative agency by dismissing and devaluing their work because it was either too abstract or did not overtly address a radical politic. Writing about socialist attitudes towards art and politics in *Art and Revolution,* John Berger suggests that the relationship between art and political propaganda is often confused in the radical or revolutionary context. This was often the case in the Black Arts Movement. While Berger willingly accepts the truism "that all works of art exercise an ideological influence—even works by artists who profess to have no interest outside art," he critiques the idea that simplicity of form or content necessarily

promotes critical political consciousness or leads to the development of a meaningful revolutionary art. His words of caution should be heeded by those who would revive a prescriptive black aesthetic that limits freedom and restricts artistic development. Speaking against a prescriptive aesthetic, Berger writes:

> When the experience is "offered up," it is not expected to be in any way transformed. Its apotheosis should be instant, and as it were invisible. The artistic process is taken for granted: it always remains exterior to the spectator's experience. It is no more than the supplied vehicle in which experience is placed so that it may arrive safely at a kind of cultural terminus. Just as academicism reduces the process of art to an apparatus for artists, it reduces it to a vehicle for the spectator. There is absolutely no dialectic between experience and expression, between experience and its formulations.

The black aesthetic movement was a self-conscious articulation by many of a deep fear that the power of art resides in its potential to transgress boundaries.

Many African-American artists retreated from black cultural nationalism into a retrogressive posture where they suggested there were no links between art and politics, evoking outmoded notions of art as transcendent and pure to defend their position. This was another step backwards. There was no meaningful attempt to counter the black aesthetic with conceptual criteria for creating and evaluating art which would simultaneously acknowledge its ideological content even as it allowed for expansive notions of artistic freedom. Overall the impact of these two movements, black aesthetics and its opponents, was a stifling of artistic production by African-Americans in practically every medium with the exception of music. Significantly, avant-garde jazz musicians, grappling with artistic expressivity that demanded experimentation, resisted restrictive mandates about their work, whether they were imposed by a white public saying their work was not really music or a black public which wanted to see more overt links between that work and political struggle.

To re-open the creative space that much of the black aesthetic movement closed down, it seems vital for those involved in contemporary black arts to engage in a revitalized discussion of aesthetics. Critical theories about cultural production, about aesthetics, continue to confine and restrict black artists, and passive withdrawal from a discussion of aesthetics is a useless response. To suggest, as Clyde Taylor does in his essay "We Don't Need Another Hero: Anti-Theses On Aesthetics," that the failure of black aesthetics or the development of white western theorizing on the subject should negate all African-American concern with the issue is to once again repeat an essentialist project that does not enable or promote artistic growth. An African-American discourse on aesthetics need not begin with white western traditions and it need not be prescriptive. Cultural decolo-

nization does not happen solely by repudiating all that appears to maintain connection with the colonizing culture. It is really important to dispel the notion that white western culture is "the" location where a discussion of aesthetics emerged, as Taylor suggests; it is only one location.

Progressive African-Americans concerned with the future of our cultural production seek to critically conceptualize a radical aesthetic that does not negate the powerful place of theory as both that force which sets up criteria for aesthetic judgment and a vital grounding that helps make certain work possible, particularly expressive work that is transgressive and oppositional. Hal Foster's comments on the importance of an anti-aesthetic in the essay "Postmodernism: A Preface" present a useful paradigm African-Americans can employ to interrogate modernist notions of aesthetics without negating the discourse on Aesthetics. Foster proposes this paradigm to critically question "the idea that aesthetic experience exists apart, without 'purpose,' all but beyond history, or that art can now affect a world at once (inter) subjective, concrete, and universal—a symbolic totality." Taking the position that an anti-aesthetic "signals a practice, cross-disciplinary in nature, that is sensitive to cultural forms engaged in a politic (e.g., feminist art) or rooted in a vernacular—that is, to forms that deny the idea of a privileged aesthetic realm," Foster opens up the possibility that work by marginalized groups can have a greater audience and impact. Working from a base where difference and otherness are acknowledged as forces that intervene in western theorizing about aesthetics to reformulate and transform the discussion, African-Americans are empowered to break with old ways of seeing reality that suggest there is only one audience for our work and only one aesthetic measure of its value. Moving away from narrow cultural nationalism, one leaves behind as well racist assumptions that cultural productions by black people can only have "authentic" significance and meaning for a black audience.

Black artists concerned with producing work that embodies and reflects a liberatory politic know that an important part of any decolonization process is critical intervention and interrogation of existing repressive and dominating structures. African-American critics and/or artists who speak about our need to engage in ongoing dialogue with dominant discourses always risk being dismissed as assimilationist. There is a grave difference between that engagement with white culture which seeks to deconstruct, demystify, challenge, and transform and gestures of collaboration and complicity. We cannot participate in dialogue that is the mark of freedom and critical agency if we dismiss all work emerging from white western traditions. The assumptions that the crisis of African-Americans should or can only be addressed by us must also be interrogated. Much of what threatens our collective well-being is the product of dominating structures. Racism is a white issue as much as it is a black one.

Contemporary intellectual engagement with issues of "otherness and difference" manifest in literary critique, cultural studies, feminist theory, and black studies indicates that there is a growing body of work that can provide and promote critical dialogue and debate across boundaries of class, race, and gender. These circumstances, coupled with a focus on pluralism at the level of social and public policy, are creating a cultural climate where it is possible to interrogate the idea that difference is synonymous with lack and deprivation, and simultaneously call for critical re-thinking of aesthetics. Retrospective examination of the repressive impact a prescriptive black aesthetic had on black cultural production should serve as a cautionary model for African-Americans. There can never be one critical paradigm for the evaluation of artistic work. In part, a radical aesthetic acknowledges that we are constantly changing positions, locations, that our needs and concerns vary, that these diverse directions must correspond with shifts in critical thinking. Narrow limiting aesthetics within black communities tend to place innovative black artistry on the margins. Often this work receives little or no attention. Whenever black artists work in ways that are transgressive, we are seen as suspect, by our group and by the dominant culture. Rethinking aesthetic principles could lead to the development of a critical standpoint that promotes and encourages various modes of artistic and cultural production.

As artist and critic, I find compelling a radical aesthetic that seeks to uncover and restore links between art and revolutionary politics, particularly black liberation struggle, while offering an expansive critical foundation for aesthetic evaluation. Concern for the contemporary plight of black people necessitates that I interrogate my work to see if it functions as a force that promotes the development of critical consciousness and resistance movement. I remain passionately committed to an aesthetic that focuses on the purpose and function of beauty, of artistry in everyday life, especially the lives of poor people, one that seeks to explore and celebrate the connection between our capacity to engage in critical resistance and our ability to experience pleasure and beauty. I want to create work that shares with an audience, particularly oppressed and marginalized groups, the sense of agency artistry offers, the empowerment. I want to share the aesthetic inheritance handed down to me by my grandmother and generations of black ancestors, whose ways of thinking about the issue have been globally shaped in the African diaspora and informed by the experience of exile and domination. I want to reiterate the message that "we must learn to see." Seeing here is meant metaphysically as heightened awareness and understanding, the intensification of one's capacity to experience reality through the realm of the senses.

Remembering the houses of my childhood, I see how deeply my concern with aesthetics was shaped by black women who were fashioning an aesthetic of being, struggling to create an oppositional world view for their children, working with space to make it livable. Baba, my grandmother,

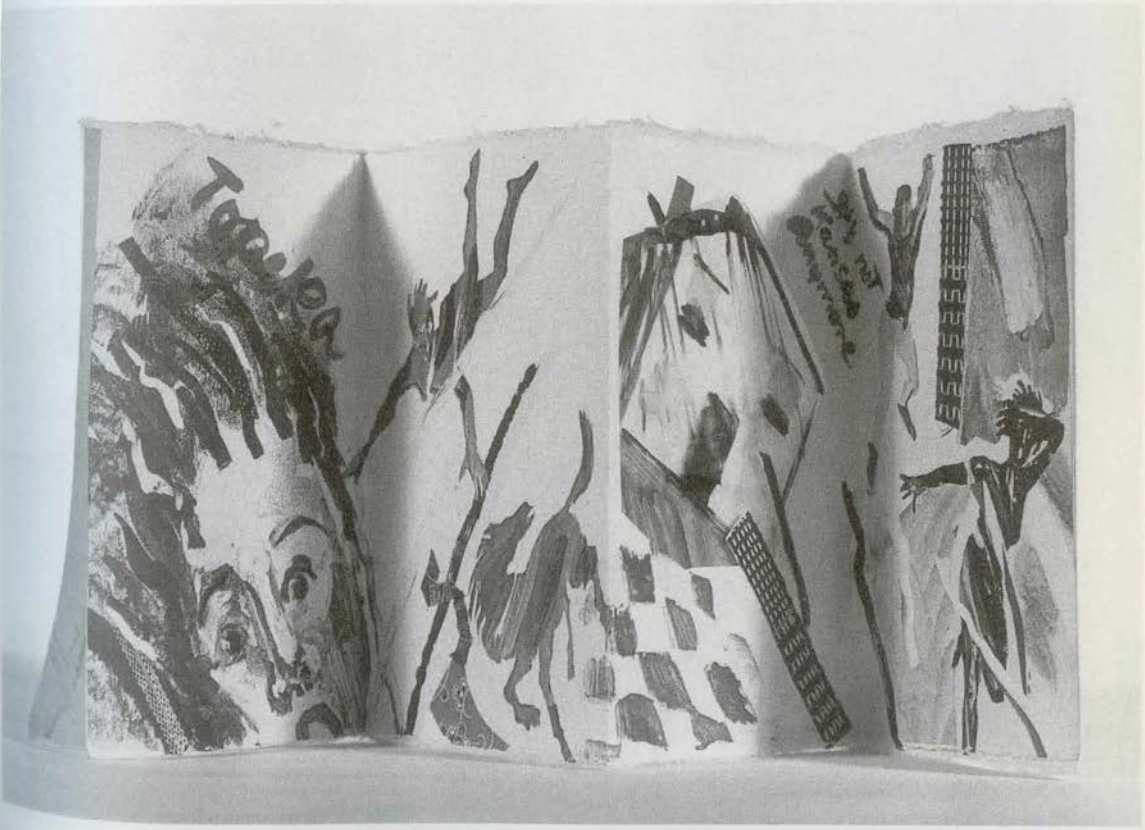
could not read or write. She did not inherit her contemplative preoccupation with aesthetics from a white western literary tradition. She was poor all her life. Her memory stands as a challenge to intellectuals, especially those on the left, who assume that the capacity to think critically, in abstract concepts, to be theoretical, is a function of class and educational privilege. Contemporary intellectuals committed to progressive politics must be reminded again and again that the capacity to name something (particularly in writing terms like aesthetics, postmodernism, deconstruction, etc.) is not synonymous with the creation or ownership of the condition or circumstance to which such terms may refer.

Many underclass black people who do not know conventional academic theoretical language are thinking critically about aesthetics. The richness of their thoughts is rarely documented in books. Innovative African-American artists have rarely documented their process, their critical thinking on the subject of aesthetics. Accounts of the theories that inform their work are necessary and essential; hence my concern with opposing any standpoint that devalues this critical project. Certainly many of the revolutionary, visionary critical perspectives on music that were inherent to John Coltrane's oppositional aesthetics and his cultural production will never be shared because they were not fully documented. Such tragic loss retards the development of reflective work by African-Americans on aesthetics that is linked to enabling politics. We must not deny the way aesthetics serves as the foundation for emerging visions. It is, for some of us, critical space that inspires and encourages artistic endeavor. The ways we interpret that space and inhabit it differ.

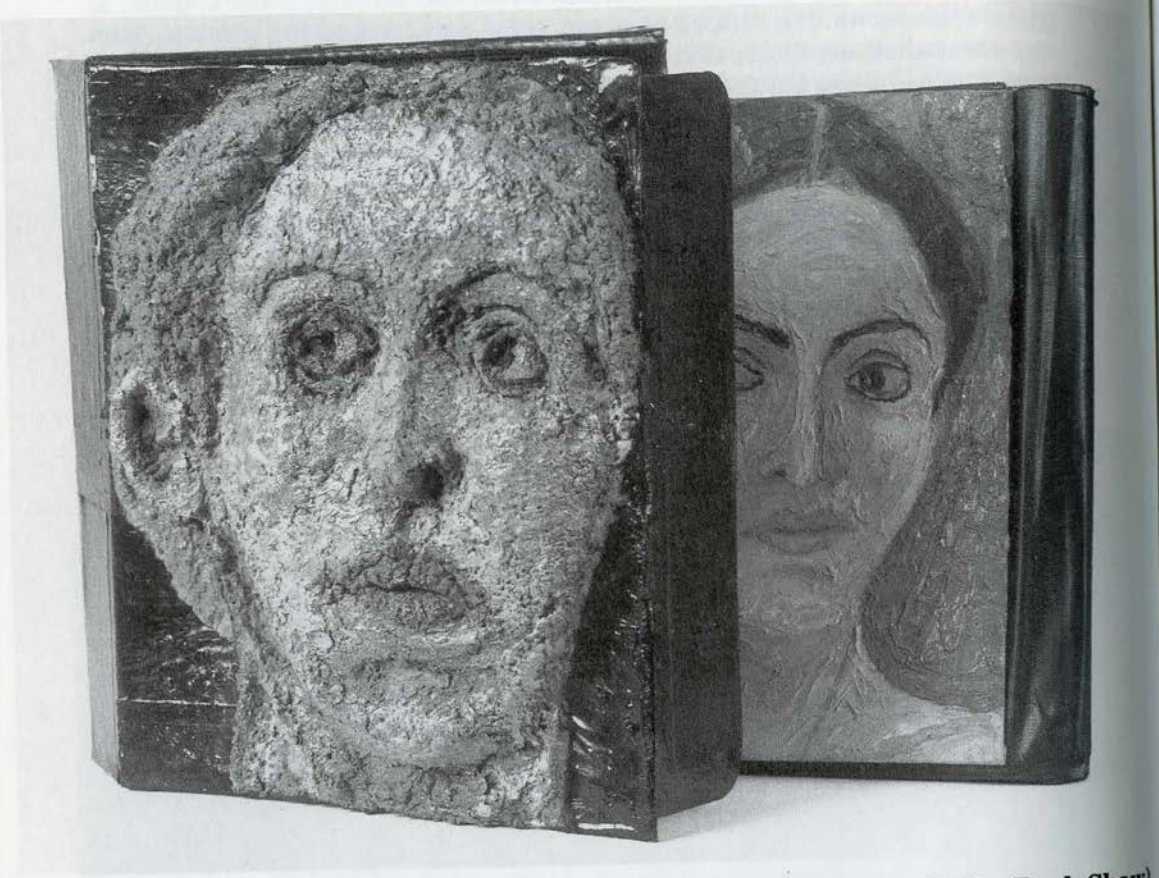
As a grown black woman, a guest in my mother's house, I explain that my interior landscape is informed by minimalism, that I cannot live in a space filled with too many things. My grandmother's house is only inhabited by ghosts and can no longer shelter or rescue me. Boldly I declare that I am a minimalist. My sisters repeat this word with the kind of glee that makes us laugh, as we celebrate together that particular way language, and the "meaning" of words is transformed when they fall from the hierarchical space they inhabit in certain locations (the predominantly white university setting) into the mouths of vernacular culture and speech, into underclass blackness, segregated communities where there is much illiteracy. Who can say what will happen to this word "minimalist." Who knows how it will be changed, re-fashioned by the thick patois that is our Southern black tongue. This experience cannot be written. Even if I attempt description it will never convey process.

One of my five sisters wants to know how it is I come to think about these things, about houses, and space. She does not remember long conversations with Baba. She remembers her house as an ugly place, crowded with objects. My memories fascinate her. She listens with astonishment as I describe the shadows in Baba's house and what they meant to me, the way the moon entered an upstairs window and created new ways for me to see dark and light. After reading Tanizaki's essay on aesthetics "In Praise of Shadows," I tell this sister in a late night conversation that I am learning

to think about blackness in a new way. Tanizaki speaks of seeing beauty in darkness and shares this moment of insight: "The quality that we call beauty, however, must always grow from the realities of life, and our ancestors, forced to live in dark rooms, presently came to discover beauty in shadows, ultimately to guide shadows towards beauty's end." My sister has skin darker than mine. We think about our skin as a dark room, a place of shadows. We talk often about color politics and the ways racism has created an aesthetic that wounds us, a way of thinking about beauty that hurts. In the shadows of late night, we talk about the need to see darkness differently, to talk about it in a new way. In that space of shadows we long for an aesthetic of blackness—strange and oppositional.



"Topeka" EMMA AMOS (Book Show)



"Female Portrait" CARMEN SANCHEZ (Book Show)

"Ancestors, Ancestors, Ancestors, Ancestors" JOY DAI BUELL (Box Show)

LOIS GRIFFITH

Set in Our Ways

One night a crack opened in my dream and I had a baby. She was dead and I knew I had made her dead in the center of a ball of yarn in a wicker basket in the corner of my room where the floor was opening up. And I had to hurl myself through the window to get out into the night and dance. My feet off the ground and I was dancing away from the room with its death signs: creaking floorboards and lights going off and on by themselves and hoarse whispers in the night that shattered my eardrums.

The first time we went to get Papa out of hospital, Mum asked him what he wanted to eat. He was so weak food was probably the last thing on his mind.

"I made your favorite. Oxtail stew," she said not even waiting for his answer and I wondered was it a meal fit for the condemned and I hate oxtails. Thick, rich stew. It needs to be cooked one day and eaten the next so the fat can have a chance to rise to the surface and be skimmed off. I don't know why she couldn't let it set for a day. Papa didn't eat much of it, he was a baby again. I read that alternative treatments begin with diet. That means the new medicine is threatening to put drug companies out of business.

"You are what you eat," Mum agreed and I thought maybe all these years she'd been turning him into an oxtail.

I went to the market to get some foods that would go down easily and not stay in his system too long. I stood on the corner of Nostrand Avenue with a shopping bag in each hand waiting for the lights to change and out of nowhere a little girl with great dark eyes came up to me.

"Would you cross me, lady?"

So I had to re-arrange myself and take her hand and we waited together till the giant trucks rolled out of our way. We crossed with our warm hands interlocked and as we got to the curb she let go and ran off. I watched her disappear down the subway steps, into the bowels of the underground, alone, unhesitating. Brave little soul. I never saw her again, but I know she must think that strange ladies coming from market with their hands full of shopping bags are like mothers and can be trusted to cross her through dangerous intersections and lead her to the tunnels where she must find her own way.

Gloria, my Mum, is a lady. I always think of ladies as being refined delicate beings, every hair in place and white gloves for church on Sundays. Ladies with their lady-in-training daughters in tow. These are trusting daughters who never notice how under the white gloves the hand that leads them to the place of God has withered and changed into a bundle of dust.

To be a mother is a forever thing Mum tells me. Mother earth. Mother courage. Motherfucker.

When I left home Mum tried to sabotage me. Gloria was sneaky. She hid my suitcases and boxes. I couldn't find my sewing machine because she had given it away.

"I didn't think you'd be needing it anymore."

She was evasive about who she gave it to, but I tracked it down. Maybe leaving is a freak out for ladies, parting with things, people. I watched her cleaning out Papa's closet. He's gone, but where is gone? She packed his suits and coats in boxes with mothballs and put them in the cellar. Did she think someone would eventually come along and take them out and wear them even though she said there would be no replacements in her life and it's hard staying alive without touching.

I moved back into their brownstone on Maple Street in Brooklyn when they did. Papa got sick and they had to leave the island and come back to the States. I knew Mum couldn't tend him all by herself and he would be alone while she was at work. So there I was back in the house of my childhood. They should have had more children, although I can't quite imagine Gloria going through labor even once, but maybe she wasn't always such a lady. I hope she had some wild times with him. I hope she went out with him in that old Buick he used to have when I was a little kid. I hope they tore up the road.

He used to drive around in that old car on hot summer days, racing the motor till it backfired like a shotgun. He'd sit behind the wheel with his shirt open, his chest all wet muscle and he'd hiss at pretty girls who looked his way. When he came to the States from Barbados he worked in Washington, D.C. as a clerk and he liked to tell the story of how even the rednecks in his office had to admit he was a handsome figure of a black caucasian because he had pink gums, a straight nose and wavy hair. He must have gone around opening his mouth for people to look into him.

"So refined. There weren't a whole lot of men around like your father," Mum said. "I could never follow the game, but everyone said what a great batsman he was. A real ladykiller. He looked so handsome in his whites on the cricket field."

What did the whites get him—the usual token of esteem—a gold watch engraved with his name in appreciation for forty years of faithful service as head clerk in the mailroom of a mail order company. And then there was the dream he had of the easy life back on the island, and then three years after he got the dream he dropped dead.

At the time my boyfriend Lorenzo tried to help me as best he could, tried to be supportive, but he had a theory about grown children who move back with their parents.

"You're a dangling metaphor," he said, but I needed to be near my Papa.

Lorenzo is one of six children and his mother still lives in Santo Domingo and his father is out in California somewhere and Lorenzo pats himself on the back that he's been able to put himself through school and master

English well enough to teach freshman composition at one of the community colleges.

I wasn't crazy head-over-heels in love with Lorenzo and he didn't feel that way about me either. We were going together, sort of. Going along day to day sharing our bodies with each other when we could. He was a gentle lover. My mother didn't like him. She didn't like our arrangement.

"Why doesn't he marry you?"

"I don't want to marry him." I thought at the time I was lying, but I really wasn't.

Whenever Lorenzo came by the house on Maple Street to pick me up, he'd ring the bell then sit in his car and wait for me to come out. We usually went over to his place overlooking Prospect Park and when it was warm we'd wait until dark and make love on the terrace and listen to the trees.

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The second time Papa came out of hospital the doctor told Mum that Papa would be dead within six months and there was nothing anyone could do about it. When she told me, she laughed.

"We can make life what we want." She believes you can change the world with positive thoughts. "We won't tell Papa. It would kill him to know."

So neither one of us ever said anything to Papa about his condition. And he never asked.

The scar ran along the side of the navel down to the pelvic bone. The scar tissue was raw looking, a different color from the rest of the dark skin. This thing of being cut open, having your guts exposed is a scary thing. The poison had to come out, and the doctor apologized for not getting it all. They should have left him alone instead of cutting him open. Suppose everything else inside spilled out when he moved, when he laughed, then he'd become a shell of shadows of things that were. Better maybe to be filled up with shadows than with nothing.

I think now how funny it was when the doctor sent a psychologist to the house to counsel us on the ways of death. How this strange authority stood, sputtering, looking down on my dying father asking him questions, taking notes against the silence, remarking on the obvious. So you're moving right up to that big check out counter, eh? Going to kick the bucket? I had to leave the room and take the vacuum out and clean the hall stairs. They wanted cleaning immediately.

I was freelancing as a proofreader for an adult educational textbook company at the time, so I could work at home with the galleys they gave me and make my own hours and look after Papa during the afternoons after the homecare attendant left and before Mum came in from her job. And I think changing him and powdering him down like a baby was the hardest thing to take, not because I missed the logic of its being my turn to wipe

his shitty bottom after all the years he'd done it for me—the thing was that his pride was wounded because he couldn't take care of himself and I didn't know who Papa was, naked without his pride.

I wondered why it had to be this way and the life substance was flowing out of my father and he just lay there and let it happen. Passive in a way, like he gave his consent. I wanted to shake his frail body and tell him to fight, but he'd already given up. I knew.

One time I propped him up comfortably in a chair by the back window overlooking the yard and he watched me water the plants, the avocados I'd raised from seeds. He was watching them grow, I think. He didn't want lunch. I tried to make him eat some soup I'd made for him. Why was he doing this to me?

"I have no ambition," he said.

The words made my heart turn over and I didn't want them frozen in my head. Tell me something more. Is that the final decision? Give me something more. Some sign that a piece of you will always be around, but he wasn't into making conversation. All he wanted to do was feel the soft autumn air coming through the window and watch the plants grow.

Mr. Garcia, one of Papa's old choir member buddies, sang "Our Father" at the funeral. His pacemaker must have been working on overload when he hit that high note. "...forever...Amen." Good-bye old friend. And in the end the sound of the dry earth splattering on the coffin was so loud and hollow. It didn't cover the anger. My cousin the funeral director gave flowers to all the mourners, white chrysanthemums, to be tossed on the casket and buried along with the body. I cried and everybody was sympathetic, like they expected me to be broken up, but I was tired and all I could think about was that I wanted to snatch that rug of a toupee off my cousin the funeral director's head and throw it along with the live flowers into the grave.

The sun was bright and cheerful. Indian summer. All the mourners were looking forward to getting back to the house. Eating, drinking. Have a party and forget—but not in a hurry because everyone knew the night would come soon enough with its darkness screaming for attention.

I choked on the overproofed rum that burned my throat. The rum that Papa had brought back from Barbados. When he left he must have known about not returning. The last thing he did there was go to see the cricket matches. He and his brother went to watch the West Indian team beat the freaking shit out of England. Funny how things come around. British underdogs. The colonized could play the game better than the colonizers from whom they'd learned it.

He came home that day after the test matches and told Mum not to get excited, not to rush to the phone and upset me with news that he'd lost a hundred dollars that day. Muggers behind the stands. Things had changed so. As a boy he remembered thieves and the like getting the lash in public humiliation. I knew he must be weak to have let a thief empty his pockets. Maybe he had to have it done, but how could he do this to me?

Didn't somebody write a book about sickness unto death? I asked Lorenzo and he said that brand of philosophy was played out, that it was pre-death of God. Lorenzo didn't believe in God.

"My mother raised me up to God," he quipped, "but my father abandoned me."

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A week before Papa died, he stopped talking and just lay in the bed with his eyes closed breathing through his mouth. All I could do for him was stroke his forehead and wet his lips with a handkerchief so they couldn't get too dry, deluding myself that he would suddenly have the energy to use those lips and they'd be moist and ready to speak.

The sick room was never a quiet room with Mum in it and when Papa stopped talking she must have felt she needed to make up for his silence. It was her room too, and their marriage wasn't over yet. One night she went about rearranging her bureau drawers, setting aside clothes she hadn't worn for a while.

"I hate to part with them."

Soft delicate things spread out at the foot of the bed she and Papa shared for so many years and he lay there speechless.

"I know you don't want any of these old things."

She always said that whenever she let me go through her castoffs. I loved her castoffs. Her soft sweaters against my skin, the delicate ecru lace on her old slips. Who wears silk lingerie anymore?

"What am I going to do with this?" she said.

As gentle a lover as Lorenzo was, he was clumsy that night and tore the strap of my slip, of my mother's castoff slip and I wondered do ladies tolerate clumsiness in a lover. Did my mother tolerate it in my father?

I needed to get out of myself that night when my father died. How could I know he'd pick that night to die when I needed to get out of myself, when I needed Lorenzo to take me out of myself. Me floating off and Papa floating off at the same time. I think I liked Lorenzo's view of the park more than I liked him. And it was a warm autumn night and we were on his terrace and then it started to rain, a soft sprinkling kind of rain that lasted an hour or so and left the air heavy with the smells of damp earth.

When I came home Mum was in a state, crying and clinging to me.

"Where were you? Where were you when I needed you?" and I comforted her and gave me no answers.

After Papa died I didn't see much of Lorenzo. Arrangements for the funeral kept me pretty busy. I invited him but he didn't come to the funeral.

"I'm a coward," he said.

I had to respect him for knowing himself. Maybe he thought death was catching like some contagious disease. I told him I was mad with the heavy silence that had come over Papa near the end and before that about the

unwillingness in our house to speak about his illness. I had needed some sign from Papa, then, something to reassure me. I told Lorenzo about the time near the end when I read to Papa out of the Bible, one of the psalms, ninety-one, I think. Papa lay there with his eyes closed, the faint sound of the death rattles in his breathing. He folded his hands over his distended belly and I thought maybe this is the only sign I would get.

"It wasn't for you," Lorenzo said. "He was praying for himself and you just happened to be there."

I didn't argue the point.

But it bothered me that I hadn't been there when Papa died. I'd been there all along and when he died I wasn't there.

After the first famous New York blackout when all the lights went out, people went around asking each other where were you?

"Gloria and I were in the dark," Papa had joked.

That year of the blackout was the year I'd given them tickets for a Broadway show for their anniversary. They never got to see the end of the show they told me afterwards.

"I was so glad I was with your father," Mum said. "It was all very orderly. We got our of the theater and nobody panicked and then we met some really nice people and we passed the time in a hotel lobby."

"Misbehaving," Papa had laughed.

I got caught underground that night of the blackout. The train crawled into the station and the doors opened and everyone in the car sat and looked at each other wondering why the doors didn't close so we could be on our way.

A group of musicians were playing on the platform and a horn took the lead. Piercing echoes bouncing every which way off the walls of the station. Sound sweeping about. Sweet samba rhythms seduced toes to tap in place. There were songs for creatures in tunnels and the melancholy in the minor chords unrolled the shade I have in my mind of cool rain splattering off the choppy seas around Corcovado at dusk. Then all the lights went out and an uproar of voices rose in the car. People stood up, bumping into each other, feeling their way through the doors, and the music went on amid animal calls and whistles in the bowels of this fierce jungle. And stumbling, I followed my feet to the exit, although the temptation to linger in the heart of the dark song was a powerful one.

Out on the street people looked bewildered and perplexed walking around with no particular direction. At one corner I passed a group huddled around a transistor radio as if warming themselves at a fire. It was too late now to find my way back to the tunnels. I walked for a long time and finally ended up spending the rest of the night in some drafty old church that had kept its doors opened for the faithful.

CHRISTIAN X. HUNTER

City Satellites

for Ida Odessa

Her room at the George Washington Hotel had French windows. They were swung out to either side, and she sat between them with her heels on the ledge below.

She wiggled her toes in the soot air and moondrift...and conversations trailing from a neighbor's window. Threads of her salt and pepper, spider-plant hair floated in the updrafts and exhaust from the crosstown traffic.

Her gaze followed the path of a patrol car that was slow-cruising Lexington avenue. As it turned east on to twenty-third street, three skittery hookers on wobbly high-heels came out of hiding from behind a construction dumpster and approached the anonymous black cars that had drifted out from amidst a school of taxi fish. Service at curbside was brisk.

Across the street at the Golden Bowl Chinese Restaurant the lights went dark as the cooks and waiters filed out the door carrying translucent orange take-out bags, with their newspapers and racing forms tucked under their arms. Two of the older cooks stayed behind, smoking cigarettes and conversing loudly in Toy San Wah dialect. After the last hooker was off the block, the two cooks drifted away in the general direction of Chinatown.

At last, the shops and restaurants were dark, the sidewalks deserted. The sleepwalk shadows had been dismissed, and they all slipped between the cracks. There was no one left to follow.

Only now could she give her attention solely to the late November sky... Soundlessly she mouthed the words to a nursery rhyme she made up when she was a girl. It was an endless rhyme. A song of names... She had one for every star. No name was repeated and no star forgotten. Not the stars that can't be seen or those too close to touch. Not the secret stars or silent sparks adrift on black ice silence and primitive seas. Not the stars that perish like prayers turned to dust. Not the shooting stars on sleepless nights like birds etched across a mirror. Not magnetic stars or transient stars or stars of premonition, or prehistoric vapor queens swept away and languishing. Not the morning stars, not the northern stars, the ultra violet diamonds. Not the blue stars falling one by one, like a lunatic passion of tears... Each star had its name and knew it.

As she sat in the window singing her song of names, a light gathering of clouds was approaching the city from the northeast, causing the stars to become less distinct and harder to tell apart. So she put on her slippers and robe. Not bothering with an overcoat, she let herself out the door. The low-ceilinged hotel hallway smelled of wicker and mildewed carpet. Still singing the naming rhyme, she ascended the last two flights up to the roof.

Leaning her shoulder against the massive steel fire door, she shoved as hard as she could and the door opened with unexpected ease...

Stepping out on to the gravel covered roof of the hotel, she saw that the cloud ceiling was starting to drift out to sea. Without the low-flying clouds to reflect the city lights, the sky regained its vast black mystery. It was again the theater of limitless depths that she had come to know when she was very young.

Her starry passion had begun when she was twelve years old and living on the naval base with her father in Newport Beach.

You see, all the boys her age had been so tame and predictable. At age twelve they were already preparing to step into their fathers' shoes. She refused to know them. On nights when her schoolmates were visiting each others' homes, going to drive-ins, or loitering in the parking lot of the 7-11, she would walk far down the beach toward the tip of the island to where she could no longer see the yards. The cruisers, destroyers and aircraft carriers all berthed together side by side with strings of bright lights up and down them were like a small floating city.

When she was far enough away so that she could no longer see the hazy glow of the shipyard lights refracting dully in the dense night air out over the Atlantic ocean, she would pick a spot at the base of a sand dune and lie down on her back and begin to sing her rhyming song.

As she sang the names, a feeling like falling in a dream would come over her and slowly...she would begin to float away.

Bits of sand and pieces of broken seashell would shake loose from her dress and loose change would tumble from her pockets falling back on to the wet sand as she fell away from the planet Earth.

On the first night she escaped up through the atmosphere, she determined that when she was old enough to leave behind her father's rules, her father's house and her father's life, she would have as many lovers as there were stars that she could name.

When naming the stars she would drift randomly, like a dust-mote being bounced off the crests of dancing thermal waves. Sometimes an especially breathtaking star would leave its path to follow hers... And as they careened among the asteroid swarms, like two drunks jaywalking in heavy traffic trying to find their way out of Times Square, they'd leave a helter skelter spray of angel eyes sparking in their wake.

BEVERLY R. SINGER
views from the sky about earth

The following is excerpted from an interview by Carole Byard, June 1990.

I am from Santa Clara Pueblo in Northern New Mexico and currently reside in New York City. Linda Lomahaftewa, who is Hopi and Choctaw, lives near Santa Fe, New Mexico; Karita Coffey is Comanche from Oklahoma living in Alberquerque, New Mexico; and Terry Duffy resides in Santa Fe. We collaborated on a work "To Carry Forth a Culture and People" for the first *Coast to Coast* exhibition. Linda, Karita, and I became acquainted with one another while teaching at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, a two-year junior college for the study of Native American art and culture.

When the notice soliciting work for the exhibition came in the mail from *Coast to Coast,* we talked about what to do and how we should do it. Nothing had ever come around like that—to get people [artists] to work together. Although we were mutually interested in each other's work, none of us had collaborated with anyone previously.

We did a lot of sitting around laughing and joking. We talked at length about the various stereotypes people had about native women—some of those had to do with ideas about Pocahontas. It was a good time for each of us to be open with what we felt about Native women and ourselves. Eventually each of us decided to make a personal statement, but relate it to the conversations we had. We ended up doing long weekend print marathons. We'd all meet at eleven o'clock in the morning and we'd work until eleven or twelve at night. We were working on monoprints using plexiglass plates. Karita at first said, "This is not my medium... I'm a potter... It's tough relating to this two-dimensional flat surface." But she got into it after an hour or so. For the rest of us it was an opportunity to explore, not to be tied down to anything in particular. One of the most important parts was the process of getting to know one another better and sharing our pieces. Just being together seemed to bring out a lot of good feeling and good energy.

My perspective at the time was looking at my relationship to the earth and how I fit into the idea of woman as giver of life—that kind of thing. And I was trying to resolve some personal issues as well: ending a relationship, going on my own, feeling very alone. While my work had to do with sky, water, and earth, Linda was concerned at the time with the negative social treatment of Native women, so her work had more to do with women warriors. Since Karita was getting a lot of energy from the younger Native female students at the school, her work had more of a popular culture feeling to it although she felt much like Linda and some of her pieces

reflected the warrior nature of women too. Terry was learning about Native American women's perspectives because she never grew up around Native American women. She brought to the group a different perspective about our individuality and preferences. She listened a lot and asked questions which gave us the opportunity to share our stories about being "Indian."

I think what was was the strongest part of all, besides our getting together, was learning about *Coast to Coast*—that there was some way to get further exposure, to break out of some of the conventional ideas about where to show art—that it isn't always about getting into a gallery, but how to expose the work to a larger audience around the country. Also, to have a chance to learn about other artists, women of color, to realize it wasn't just "Indian" women who went through discrimination and racism, oppression and repression and abuse, but that it was a common experience among women.

I am deeply committed to my ancestral heritage, my own community. It agonizes me to look at the list of social ills that have developed at home as a result of colonization—the raping of people's minds and ability to live together according to our unique culture. The Native people I see successfully getting ahead in the art world are those who come from mixed marriages, whose mother or father is Anglo or white. They learn certain ways of pushing their technical abilities and how to market themselves and talk a good line about their "Indian" culture. Being a full-blood native woman, I see differences in outlook or purpose between them and those of us who were born and raised in a village or at a reservation our entire life. Although I have a good education from excellent schools in this country, there's something there that is different. The things that you see about the world and the way that you process everything and make it a part of you is very significant. Someone who perhaps had little or no contact with the reservation in childhood will have had different influences. It's not resistance, but my feelings come out in the form of anger sometimes—like when I think about Indian people I know with so much creativity, especially Indian women, who just don't get the breaks, and some kind of way I want to cut through that with them.

Some time ago I worked at a university and I always felt like a token. I don't want to be that. I want to be this person, who is so full of life and so spirited, who has this joy, to bring really good thoughts and good feelings to the world, to do just that. Sometimes the only time I feel this way is after I have gone back to my community. I draw strength from my family and the village dirt and look around at the landscape and say, "Wow, am I lucky I have some place to call home." And that's about as fulfilling as anything. My art is influenced by everything I've experienced, so I can't say I do "Indian" images or things—everything I do is about my being a Native Person.

I am definitely inspired by family. Having come from a family of artists, albeit mostly unknown to outsiders, I was able to watch as if from the sky,

my growth as a person and as an artist—whatever that means!—how we share what we create. Also where I come from we were fortunate to maintain certain aspects of our relationship to the landscape.

Take our creation story. Having been born from the earth and emerged through a lake, we [the Pueblo people] came out of the lake and traveled great distances, ending up in what is known today as the Rio Grande Valley in New Mexico. In the middle of our village at Santa Clara, a name given by the Spanish in the seventeenth century, is our kiva. We enter it from the roof and descend back into the earth—it's very symbolic of our original emergence. That's the center of life in the village, the arrangement of the village to the agricultural and farming area to the special shrines that circle the village which protect it.

From there are outlying spaces in the foothills for all the animal populations. I was going to say animal people, because of the relationship of respect we have to them. Anytime you go and hunt and take one of them for food, you leave your offerings for their spirits.

Beyond that there's the mountains. Where I come from there's four sacred mountains and at the mountaintops there are these incredible views and places to make offerings of prayer and there are very beautiful clear springs of water. For us, those places are where you feel the greatest energy for connecting with the spirit world to get guidance and strength.

When I was growing up, one of the things my parents were very adamant about us doing every year was making an annual pilgrimage to the mountains. It was a long haul, four hours up and two hours down. That was your connection to the skies and beyond. Then, tied into that, from the time you're seven or eight years old, the way you get your connection to the community and the earth is by participating in ceremonial ritual dances. The Corn Dance is the strongest, where everyone participates, and then we've got our animal dance and social and other dances. Fortunately, we still have our native language so having certain things repeated to you over and over and over again—the repetition—is really what gives you the knowledge of what it means to be Pueblo, what it means to be a human and to have a respectful relationship with the Earth which nurtures you.

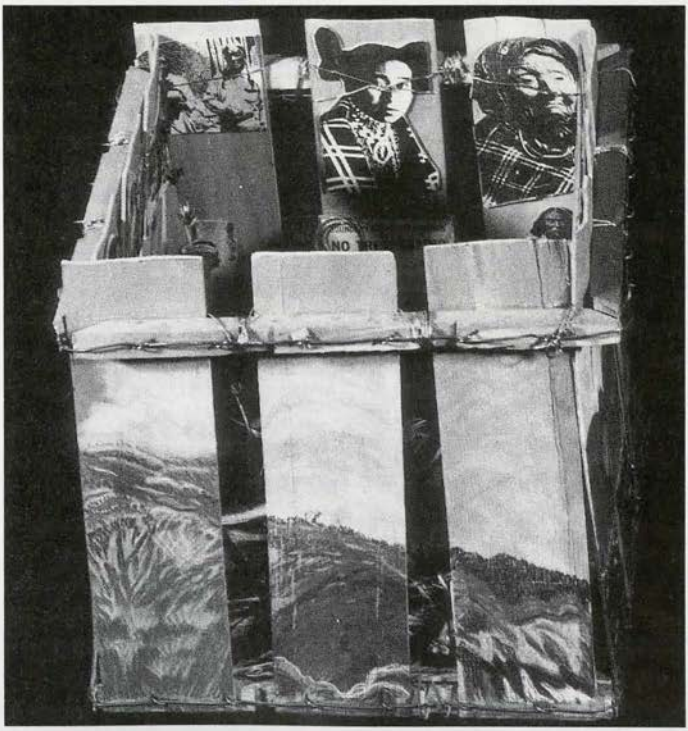
I was trained in film, but I also love painting and printing and putting together images, splicing pieces of video or film—if I could afford to make films on my own I would be doing it now as I speak. My video work is mostly documentary, documenting Indian lives, or people's lives. I've mostly done artists with amazing folk stories. Their own stories.

As a formal title, I use Native American or Native Person, although when we're together we call ourselves Indians. It changes all the time simply because we've never had an opportunity to be our own group. I always identify with being a member of Santa Clara Pueblo or Santa Clara Indian Reservation—though even that is a name assigned to us. Just as "Indians" was incorrect from the outset. The original inhabitants

of this land consisted of many different groups of people. We know who we are though. I remember in the early to late 70's, I didn't like being called Native American. "American Indians," made me think of 'Buffalo Bill and the Indians' or American Indians on the Plains. So Native Person is what I've narrowed it down to now. But you might just say it would be wonderful if each of us could be identified by our own tribe or nations. So you would call me a Tewa Pueblo. That name, Pueblo, came when the Spanish came in and they saw these villages that looked like the villages back in Spain. Our actual village name is "Khapogeh" which translates into English as "The Village Along Singing Water" or "The Village Along Rose Trail." There's all these villages' names for themselves.

It's interesting that piece of history has been shrouded, just simply covered over, completely ignored and denied until Indian people themselves, or Native People, just started saying I want to be recognized as this, that or the other. We are not monolithic nor a homogeneous group. But our collective experience has been shaped by such thinking.

Through the 50's and 60's a lot of Indians denied their identity, denied their heritage—they were forced to. Through the 70's there was a little more enlightenment and then through the 80's we realized a lot of our elders were dying and were not going to be there to tell us these stories or to encourage us to know ourselves; so it's really up to the children of the 70's and 80's to keep it going.



"Life Root Giving" BEVERLY R. SINGER (Box Show)

CLARISSA SLIGH

Witness To Dissent: It Wasn't Little Rock

As a visual artist who uses words and photographic methods to create narratives which derive from life experiences, I go back to resurrect and reinterpret the past. Much of my work I refer to as reframing the past.

In June of 1991, I went to Washington, D.C. to research the Civil Rights Movement. I was more interested in people's personal lives than in various interpretations of history. I looked through photographs, newspapers, and legal briefs. I interviewed neighbors, family, friends and Civil Rights activists who are now living and working in the Washington area.

My own connection with "the movement" began during my adolescence. As the lead plaintiff in *Clarissa Thompson et al. v. County School Board of Arlington County* (June 1956), I was forced to confront the issues of racism at a time when "Jim Crow" laws were brutally enforced by the police and the courts. When they write about school desegregation or about "the movement," they never write about my community because it wasn't bloody enough, it wasn't violent enough. It wasn't Little Rock. Many communities were like mine. Many people became involved. Oppressive practices do not just end by themselves. Too many people benefit from them.

Why is the Civil Rights movement important to me now? At the time we decided to take on the system, there had been no space to speak of our fears. We could only speak of what had to be done, of the next step. Each step taken by each of us in small groups throughout the South became many steps throughout the country as more and more people in other groups realized that they could do something too.

I grew up in the shadow of the Washington Monument. I saw various special interest groups win the national elections, move into the White House surrounded by all their friends and supporters, implement their laws and policy, and move out as the next group moved in. Each spring, I watched hordes of Americans, mostly white, come to see their nation's capitol. It was very pretty when the Japanese Cherry trees bloomed. A Cherry Blossom festival with a queen and parade made it into a special event. At that time I did not think of myself as an American, even though I was born here. I knew I was an outsider to the mainstream culture and had no rights under the United States Constitution and Bill of Rights which they all took for granted. I was forced to learn about them in school, but for me, these documents were empty words on worthless pieces of paper.

In May of 1954, racial segregation in public schools was declared unconstitutional by the United States Supreme Court. A ruling on four state

cases, including *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, and another involving Washington, D.C., outlawed the practice of "separate but equal" facilities in public school systems. Schools in the District of Columbia were desegregated the following year. In Virginia where I lived, the government took on a position of "massive resistance" and school districts which the courts ordered to desegregate were closed down.

As various states wrote and defended against it, the word desegregation became integration. It was supposed to be a word that was like a red flag. When waved, it was supposed to stir up Southern white rage. Therefore in many towns in many states, we had to go to court for a number of years in order to secure what was supposed to be our right under the law. As the battle grew, we kids were expected to do our part.

In 1955, I had been in the 10th grade when my mother asked me if I was willing to be in the first group of Negro[1] students to go to the white high school near our house. I could tell she really wanted me to do it. I did not want to disappoint her, so I said yes. Parents met in groups and with lawyers to strategize how to proceed with the court case.

A year went by before my Mom talked with me about it again. She asked me if I was willing to be one of the students considered as the lead plaintiff in the suit. Some of the other students were graduating. I had one more year of high school to go. They felt sure that the case would be heard over the summer, and that I would be admitted to school in the fall. My stomach felt hard and cold inside, but I told her it would be okay.

Ever since I was about twelve, or maybe even earlier, my mother had taken or sent me to NAACP conferences. If she stayed home with my younger brother, who was nine, and my younger sisters, who were four and three, I traveled in the care of a neighbor or church member. When I returned home, she expected me to tell her everything that was said, so I had to really pay attention to what was going on.

People, both Negro and white, came from chapters all over the state or country depending on whether the meeting was organized at the state or national level. The meetings always took on a sense of urgency, as community organizers, lawyers, and preachers discussed ways to break down the walls of racial segregation. There were very few youth delegate sessions. Mostly we attended workshops with the adults.

So even though I knew that this was one of the organization's goals, I really couldn't imagine that it had anything to do with me. I couldn't imagine that I'd be asked to begin to attend a white school as a twelfth grader. I did not want to leave my Black classmates, but I felt I did not have a choice in the matter. I understood what was expected of me.

For us the NAACP was also a kind of underground movement. It was against the law for Negroes and whites to be involved in any kind of "mixed race" activities in Virginia and most of the meetings we went to were held in the southern part of the state where the laws were strictly enforced. By this I mean, it was there that I saw my first colored and white

water fountains and waiting rooms in a public bus station and posted signs that said "White Only."

My Mom and Dad had whispered about the NAACP being investigated by the House Un-American Activities Committee. I heard them say that they wanted to contribute to the NAACP, but they did not want their name on a list that would end up in front of "that committee." This was during the McCarthy era. A lot of people had been "blackballed" and had lost their jobs because their name had been on such a list.

I also heard them talk about how that committee had banned Paul Robeson, the Negro opera singer, from being able to sing in this country. Mom didn't listen to opera, but she loved Paul Robeson. She said they did it mostly because white women liked him.

She also could not believe that they were going to execute the Rosenbergs because somebody said they were spies. I knew that it was a terrible thing, because all the grown ups seemed so scared. We did not talk about these things in school, but I heard Momma and a lot of the other grown ups say that the federal government was just on a witch hunt, trying to shut up a lot of Americans who did not think like they did. But Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were put to death in the electric chair in 1953.

Talking about the 50's: Here I am on the left in a photograph which was printed in the *Washington Post* and *Times Herald* on June 1, 1956. Ann Marx is on the right. I was a sixteen-year-old eleventh grader and she was an eight-year-old third grader. We were two of twenty-two students who had been named in a school desegregation suit in Arlington, Virginia. The photographer met us at Ann's house in Falls Church. Her mother was vice president of the local NAACP.

I felt really nervous. It was in a white neighborhood. It was the first and only time I went there. First, the photographer asked us to hold a book at waist level. He took a few shots. Then, he asked us to carry the book and walk toward him. I don't know how many times he shot it before he got what he wanted.

The article accompanying the photograph was entitled, "Suit Charges Bias Against White Pupils." It was about the families of the three white students who were named in the school desegregation suit. I was spoken of as the lead plaintiff. The photograph presented me as an attractive, neat, clean and smiling Negro girl. You can't see my terror or that I didn't want to be there.

After the article came out, crosses were burned on Ann Marx's mother's house. My father was afraid he would lose his government job. My school grades and behavior became public information.

Finally, it was time for us to go to court. I listened as the county school board administrators and lawyers discussed my standardized test scores, my psychological stability, my school grades, my race and socialization and the kind of school I was currently attending. They presented statistics and charts as evidence to show why I would not be able to compete with the white students. They said I would be better off in the Negro high

school. Their goal was to diminish me and to prove that I was inferior. This went on for days and days, I would get so upset that my mom finally told me I didn't have to go there and listen to it anymore.

In such a state, it was hard to remember that there were many things about my life that were good. We did not have much money, but I was pretty and smart, liked to dance, play basketball, go out on dates, neck with my boyfriend, shoot and print photographs to give to my friends, and pretend I was a lead rock and roll singer. I knew that I always had to behave a certain way in public and that it would be more than a terrible disgrace if I got pregnant or something. It seemed that to me that others always saw me as that girl in the newspaper photograph. I felt it was hard to have normal relationships with people. I did not like being "different." It has been something which has dogged me all my life.

My mom was proud of me. As a young woman, she had started out as a secretary/clerk-typist in the federal government. But after each baby, she had to re-take an entrance exam in order to regain her job. Each time it happened, she lost a little bit more of her confidence until finally she couldn't past the test at all. The temporary domestic day work she took on began to last from one year to the next. And before she knew it—she was working at a different white lady's house each day of the week. She referred to them as Mrs. Smith or Mrs. Rice. They referred to her as Ethel.

I had done well in school most of my life. It was one of the reasons I was chosen to be a lead plaintiff. My teachers were surprised when the news article came out. Some of them talked about being afraid that they would lose their jobs when integration came. I felt bad because I knew they might be right.

Despite any ambivalence they might have had, my teachers continued to give me a lot of support and encouragement in my school work and science projects. I did not want to let them down. I studied hard even though I knew I would pass my courses. I could not imagine that any white teacher would give me any support. I had visions of not doing well if I got transferred to the white school. I knew if that happened, it would not just be me failing. It would be "see I told you that Negroes are inferior."

On the Saturday morning that I was supposed to take the Scholastic Aptitude Test for college entrance application, I woke up really sick. It had been something I was dreading. One of my teachers had told me that Negro students did not usually do well. I didn't realize it at the time, but I am willing to bet that my illness was just probably a lot of terror.

On May 3, 1957, my picture was again published in the *Washington Post.* Through my science project, I had won tuition scholarships to two Black colleges in southern Virginia. The first sentence of the article read, "Clarissa Thompson, a 17-year old whose name will go down in law books because of the Arlington School Board segregation suit, has won the top award in a state-wide science contest." The article did not mention, but made it clear, that it was a Negro state-wide contest. I was happy to win, but I knew I might not be able to go because the scholarships covered only a

fraction of the expenses. As a mail room clerk at the Bureau of Engraving, my Dad's paycheck barely made ends meet.

Within a few days after the article appeared, a telephone query about me came into my school. An owning class white man wanted to interview me with my science teacher to determine if he would give me an additional scholarship. He sent his chauffeur to pick us up and bring us to his office. When he arrived, my teacher sat up front and talked with him. In the back seat of the limousine, I felt very anxious and lonely. I could not imagine what would be expected of me.

Later I learned that the chauffeur, who had had the same job for more than twenty years, had shown the newspaper photograph and article to his employer. He asked, "Why don't you send this girl to college?"

The employee responded, "I might!"

He then went into his office and called my school. After we met, he wanted me to go to his alumnus, Grinnell College. I did not want to go to a white school, and I found two excuses which he accepted. There was no room for me to live on campus and my mom thought it was too far away from home. In that way, I got to go to the school of my choice: Hampton Institute in Virginia. The financial support he provided me was enough to cover everything. For me it was a dream come true.

In a later news article, Mr. Burling was mentioned as an anonymous benefactor. But, I knew who he was. At his request, I wrote him regularly from school and visited him when I came home a couple of times each year.

In September of 1957, I left home to go to college. I was glad to get away from school desegregation issues. I wanted to bury that part of my life. Future friends were not to know about it. I did not want to be "different" anymore. Yet, at the same time I felt guilty about how I felt because my family was still in the thick of it.

In February of 1959 my younger sister, Gloria, became the only girl and one of four children to enter a white school in Virginia. As they entered the seventh grade, they became the first Negro children to desegregate schools in Virginia.

As I began to dig up the past in Washington, D.C., I realized that we had never really talked about what it had been like for her. In my interview with her, she referred to it as one of the most interesting and different times of her life.

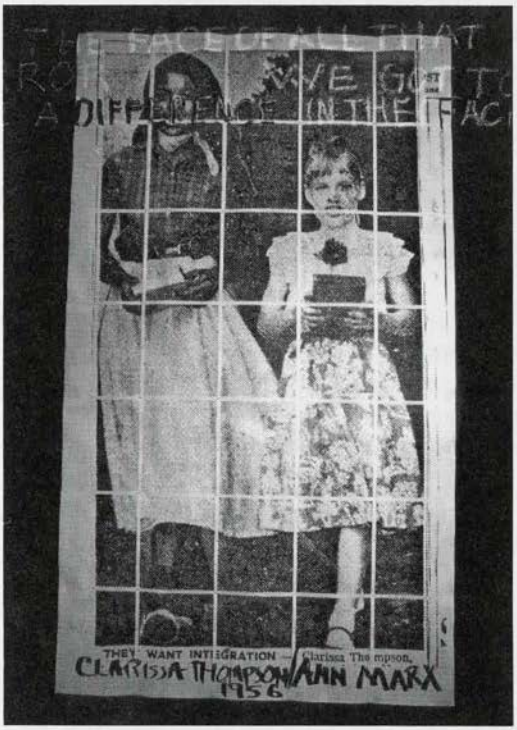
She said, "It was very exciting. The teachers at Hoffman-Boston (the Negro high school) made sure our grades were up and that we would be ready. At the Baptist church, we had enrichment (classes) to be sure we were on the same level as the other students. We were given sessions on how to behave if we were (harassed) or called names. We were told to ignore them. Momma went shopping for new clothes. Aunt Naomi paid for me to get my hair done every week—which I didn't like!

"On the first day of school, we entered through the back for security reasons. There were twenty-five police for each of us. I was twelve. It was isolating. I'm not sure I'd want to do it again."

As my sister entered that school in 1959, I was in Hampton feeling more scared than she was for herself. As I talked with her in 1991, questions began to surface. Was it worth it? What did it get us? Would we do it again?

But it got us Martin and Malcolm and a lot of ordinary people connected and involved in taking a stand about their lives.

Witness To Dissent[2] is a series of site specific installations. It has become a healing journey. I no longer have to feel like I did back then—terrified, isolated, powerless, like a pawn on a board between the forces of right and wrong. The voices of the witness testimony have helped me realize that I had never been alone during the 1960s and that I am not alone on the journey now. Testifying of those times in these days is meant to be a healing process for all of us.



"Witness to Dissent: Memory, Yearning and Struggle" CLARISSA SLIGH

Footnotes:

[1] I use the term "Negro" versus "Black" or "African American" because it was the most respectable term during most of the period that I speak of. Many people had fought, lost their blood or their lives over the right to be called a "Negro". As African countries gained measures of independence from colonialist domination, as the hopes for a nonviolent movement died, and our consciousness about how we had internalized the oppression got raised, we became "black" and after that we became "African Americans".

[2] *Witness To Dissent* has been installed at *Art In General* in New York City, Jan. 18 to Feb. 29, 1992 and at the WPA in Washington, D.C., June 22 to August 18, 1991.

GALE JACKSON

a narrative poem for phillis wheatley.

1754
senegal gambia gambia river valley

i
was born a child named in a place named
in the language at the lip of the beginning
in a year far older having counted the breaths
of many ancestors named perhaps for an ancestor
who divined from the universe the stories my mother
then told.

in a place of many tongues at the axis of many paths
in a place of wanders walking a path written
in the dust of memory walking out from where life began.

i
was born a child seeped in the sunlight
of my mother's religion cross a desert time
and again her name her jewels her prayer calling
time and again our language our song our name.

our name called or carried in a talisman our name
braided in our hair strung in our jewels imprinted on
the complexity of the path we walk from place to place.

i
was stolen a child roped or netted like a crayfish
forced to walk away from my mother and the sacred
paths worn deep into the ground where we planted foraged
or grazed forced to walk away from the passages
on the edge of an abyss over and along an ocean of time.

i
did not begin or come alone imprinted on my dreams those
women who would become my mother in her absence as the east
fell into distance and time—eight months or more—became
a ship's hold chained to the ocean's ear she whispered to me
pointing to the vast dark sky whispered "still here to pray
or dream."

i
was not alone the tongue of a woman captured but not chained
licked my wounds and held me up to the faces of my gods written
across the black black sky even as the wind grew colder and the
east receding and the sun of my mother's prayers further away.

i
dreamed
i died.

in the swirl of language in the call captive to god a pulse
a voice many one in this creature of sea and death and chains
and blood oh god of blood strong women whispered "live" though
some did not.

i
was frightened enough to be cold for life to never lose
the chill in my lungs my chest my own being lost to the tongue
dry with cries raising themselves above the ship's hold above
iron guns goods for trade and seventy nine souls beside me.

i
they
made myself a rug to keep warm and a tongue to speak
and i would
speak.

1761
great turtle island north america boston

i
and the wonder of worlds but there has long been a word
in my language for strangers not so different as they think me
trade and ports also swirl in the language of my first child's
meaning so i learned new words and wrote them in the absence
of beaten paths i made myself then set out to set that self free

i
dream a child's dreams coughing jumping at the sound of
so many shod feet i dream high above this city by sky not land
not sea in this land where all the old paths are torn at their
seams with what words i could scrape together i wrote to occum
i began to bleed when i was fourteen around me there is this
incessant talk of liberty for those who are already free.

i
watched from the windows at king street where the word liberty
is garbled by the cold and the cries from the public stocks and
the black black woman who sells her services as a chimney sweep
and the ships multiply casting their chains into port where
angry colonists cast tea and gun powder where snider is killed
and attacks a runaway slave becomes a martyr for the free.

i
god
it is cold

i
sang for the best men of boston who approve the dexterity
of my tongue
i
wrote to the commander of the continental army the countess
the lords praising the living and the dead with words
i
with words
and i met a woman
i
call her sister
sister
sister.

i
locked in the climbing crest of words am always far but near
and as always there is war here between the sailing song and
the ships chained at sea the british ransack this city as mine
once but dear dear arbor what a surprise you are dressed
in my name and speaking softly of kinship one can not be alone
and be free

sister pray
these are the words the ways the only paths here
to go towards what it must mean to be sister pray
sister pray for me.

1773
redemption

i
praise god
this book is my named name
my own name keeping death's watch
keeping the toll of the winged watch
praise god
you'll see.

i dream of any weather warmer milder of any small comfort of
kinship traveling like a gentlewoman across the sea dodging
the sailor's spit and the cold night breeze but the english
on their shores are so inviting they tell me that once i dis-
embark they tell me that i am then free.

arbor
every book that you sell will put food in my mouth death
continually shifts the patterns of these days there is war the
harbors are blocked suzanna is dying and i am free but i am not
well and every book that you sell will mean food in my mouth
while god allows for me the forces of freedom are rising but
it is hard for me simply to breathe.

i
forgive me for not having written i left boston and then return
to a battle torn city let freedom come comely black lonely
please pray please write i need so to remain singing wise with
light and blood and the water poured by my mother forgive me
for not having written i so need...

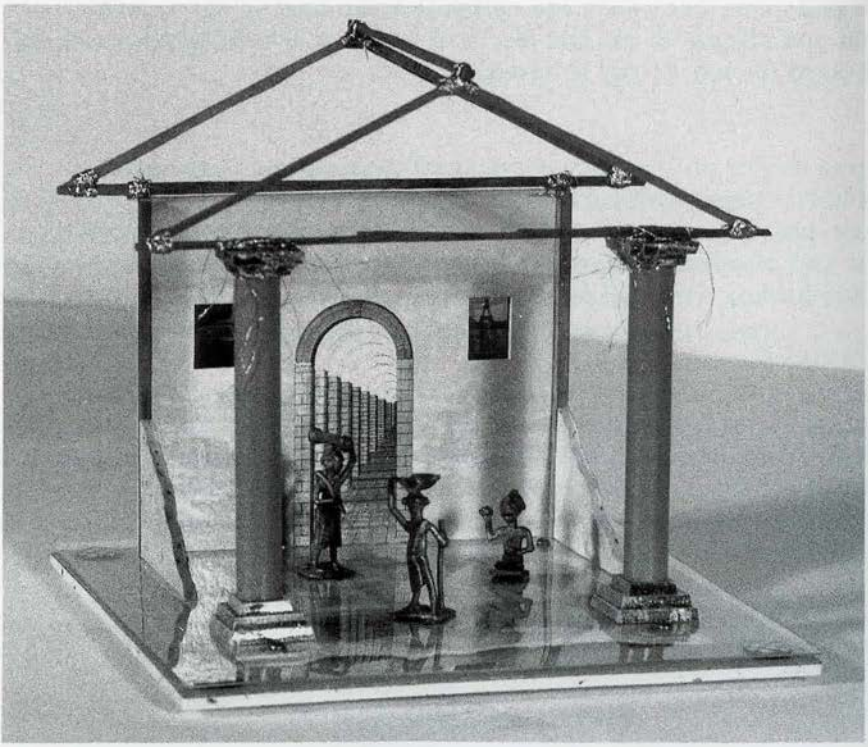
i
married that man you sent bearing your letters so much still
unspoken how free can one ever be here we live well and then not
so well dreams break ways are torn at their seams maybe it is
the cold air three times i carried and delivered a child and
prayed that they could live but they are too frail perhaps it is
the cold and the last child dies with me.

the sailing song like death
the ships chained on the sea

i
a woman an 'afric muse' weary with breaking the iron bands
again and again each morning of my living washing floors for
a living where there are no paths here imprinted no footfalls
to follow where those who have past have left nothing

i
woman and not a child an african and not a slave die
pray for my soul sister one is no one if not named in the tongue
in the lip of one's beginning

i
made myself time and again and i looked for the paths
the ways to walk to pray to be.



"Never Leave a House..." COLETTE GAITER (Box Show)

AMBER COVERDALE SUMRALL

I Want To Come Back As An Owl And Fly Through The Night

for Joyce Disney

After the mastectomy, so quick you didn't have time to think,
you refused radiation, chemotherapy, and went to Mexico:
laetrile, mega-vitamins, coffee enemas.
Five years ago the doctors pronounced you cured.
You tell me this as I weigh out herbs, cleansing formulas.
You haven't been feeling well, everyone says it's just the flu
except that after two months you still feel exhausted.

A week later you stagger into the store,
your face white as chalk.
It's in my lungs, you tell me.
We sit together in the backroom while you cry.
Tell me the herbs for cancer, you say.

I return from Santa Fe with ocotillo,
tincture of blue flag, yellow dock,
a renowned herbalist says these will heal you.
In the desert it's easy to believe,
so little is needed to sustain life.
You make a quart of tea every morning
sip it throughout the day.

I come to drive you for radiation treatments,
find you lying on the couch, wrapped in blankets.
Your naked head is covered with gauze scarves.
You lean on my arm, barely able to walk.
Tears run down your cheeks as you lie beneath the giant grey machine.
Afterwards we buy a cane, vanilla milkshakes.
You can't keep anything else down.

In the market you lean over the dairycase, suddenly vomiting.
The store empties as if you were a leper.
Refusing to let the boxboy clean up, you kneel
and wipe the shiny waxed floor.
Please, I'm so sorry, you say.

When blisters appear on your chest
you tell me it's a good sign: your body's detoxifying.
The oncologist says nothing.
You ask about a new experimental drug,
he says he'll look into it. He never does.
He is angry that you question him.
Be a good girl, he says, or I'll cut back your pain medication.

You read Deena Metzger, Audre Lorde, need to believe
in something, someone, other than yourself.
Once a Catholic, always a Catholic, you joke.
Rumors of a miracle man lead you to India.
A devotee accompanies you, pays for the flight.
The guru is busy, spewing precious gems from his mouth
and exuding holy powder from his hands.
He finally agrees to meet with a group of fifty.
Yes lady, I will cure you, he says, in a one minute encounter.

You return home elated, your life restored to you.
The owls are back in the forest, you tell me.
You heard them last night. It's a good omen.
They bring messages from the spirit world.
I want to come back as an owl and fly through the night, you say.

You call Michael in New York, someone you met in India.
He was "cured" also. His wife answers the phone,
tells you he died less than a week ago.
Call Hospice, she says, the dying need midwives too.
You refuse, refuse to believe you are dying.

Every step is an effort now.
You carry oxygen as you used to carry your handbag.
I come to take you swimming thinking exercise might help.
You stand in the shallow water, shivering,
unable to kick your legs. I feel so old, you say.
The oncologist taps your lungs, drains the fluid.
The pain is unbearable. In five days your lungs fill again.

I drive you to Berkeley, to see a respected Chinese acupuncturist.
He sends you home after a treatment for pain.
Says he can do nothing. You should have come months ago.
A famous psychic healer will see you. It will cost two hundred dollars.
His first opening is three weeks away. You take it.

I bring you a birthday cake with thirty-seven candles.
You have no breath to blow them out.
You give me your opal ring and an amethyst crystal.
Tomorrow you will enter the hospital.
In five days you will be gone.

After your memorial service, as I stand in the redwood grove
wondering how I can begin to let go of you,
an owl swoops down, brushes my hair with its wing.
Then vanishes into the gathering darkness.

First Day of School, 1951

Knees locked, arms hugged to body, the girl holds
her shiny lunchpail with its thermos of milk.
Her white uniform blouse, buttoned at the collar,
tucks into a cocoa-brown jumper. Her mother has tied
a polka-dot ribbon around the girl's short, curly hair
and crouches now, behind the lens that will capture
her daughter in this place and time.

A cross glows above the tan stucco doorway.
Her mother wants this in the photograph.
Hold still, she says.
The girl's tongue pushes against her cheek.
There is a trace of a smile. She is remembering
the black spider, big as her fist, that lives
in the ivy outside the living room window.
How it appears only to her.

She looks down at her new red shoes. Magic, like Dorothy's.
Her grandmother bought them instead of the brown oxfords.
These shoes will lift her over the fear, over the shyness.
Look at the camera, her mother is saying.
Don't move.
Dreams gather like curtains behind the girl's eyes.

I would fly through decades to wrap this child in my arms,
show her the path to the creek, its smooth marbled stones.
I would whisper of wind in redwoods, the great horned owl.
Promise hundreds of spiders in silken webs.
I would tell how all these things and more
already dwell in her, like breath.

Afternoon At Grandma's House

The door of her winter closet is glass
with a crystal knob. Inside, Grandpa's
wool shirts hang in mothballs.
I pull the yellowed windowshade up and down,
Third Floor: Linens Shoes China
Watch Your Step Going Up.
I grow tired of what is familiar
step out between the floors.

I hide beneath the massive mahogany table
protected by carved lion's feet.
She looks for me, calling my name.
I hold my breath, peer out through
the heavy lace tablecloth.
She has taken her teeth out.
She's not my Grandma anymore,
she's a witch who will eat me for supper.

I walk all the way around the house
to avoid the dark alcove
with its cobwebs, Chinese statues
and the narrow closed door.
At any moment the vacuum-dragon
could charge out with his ferocious roar.
At any moment he could suck me in like a nightmare.

Bottles of colored glass sparkle
on her dressing table.
Her red shoes drag on my feet,
the veil of her blue velvet hat
drapes my powdered face.
Gold bracelets ring my arms.
I draw circles on my cheeks
redden my lips.

Suddenly in the mirror: Mother.
"Just look at yourself!"
And I do. I do.

AMBER COVERDALE SUMRALL

ANNA FARIELLO

New Images, New Icons:
The Coast to Coast Book Project

The theories and writings of Carl Jung have influenced the arts, especially with regard to Jung's work on archetypal symbolism. In his observations across the cultural continuum, Jung theorized that there were certain symbols common to the human mind. With all due respect to Jung's work, one might consider examining the images in *Coast to Coast: A Women of Color National Artists Book Project* for new symbols which add to the significance of our collective human vocabulary. Specifically, the artists who participated in the book project have redefined symbols for *women* and *home,* adding dimensions unforeseen by past artists, historians, critics and other interpreters of culture.

One can only speculate as to why new symbols would emerge from a particular segment of the visual art world or at a particular time. Are we at a turning point in our cultural evolution? Are women of color recording their collective experience with a new perspective? Or has their experience been superseded by the mainstream ideals?

Throughout history, women have primarily been a *subject* of the arts, often defined by male artist or writer. Muse, lover, mother, Madonna, temptress and goddess were popular subjects with male artists. In contrast, artists in *Coast to Coast* define themselves and present to us an insider's view of woman and womanhood. *Face to Face* by Ginane Bacho is a double self-portrait of the artist as both woman and mother. As woman, Bacho envisions herself alone in her self portrait. Her presentation is stark, her image crisp. As mother, she is portrayed with her child in tender soft focus photographs. In contemporary society a woman's role as mother is seldom seen as an heroic accomplishment as it was in the ancient world. We do not subscribe to the powerful image of earth mother in the act of giving birth. Rather, the mother is counterpoint to another's identity. For the artist and working mother, conflict is evident in contrast to the image of the self-defined and self-sufficient singular woman.

Many other works in the exhibition have strong references to mothers and mothering. *Who Will Love my Babies when the World Dies?* by Gail Shaw-Clemons is a series of black and white images on a dark ground. Figures emerge from careful cross-hatchings. A story emerges but it is ambiguous as to its beginning and resolution. In this way the artist's narrative conforms to the ambiguity of motherhood, its surprises and expectations for the future welfare of the child. Fern Logan's *A Photobiography* memorializes a loved and loving relative, providing a picture of a mother figure from the child's perspective. Logan's grandmother, affec-

tionately called Birdie, was a self-sufficient woman who bore twelve children, raised them along with the artist and her sister and managed to build her own home. With a lifetime of such Herculean accomplishments she is, indeed, an independent symbol of mother and woman.

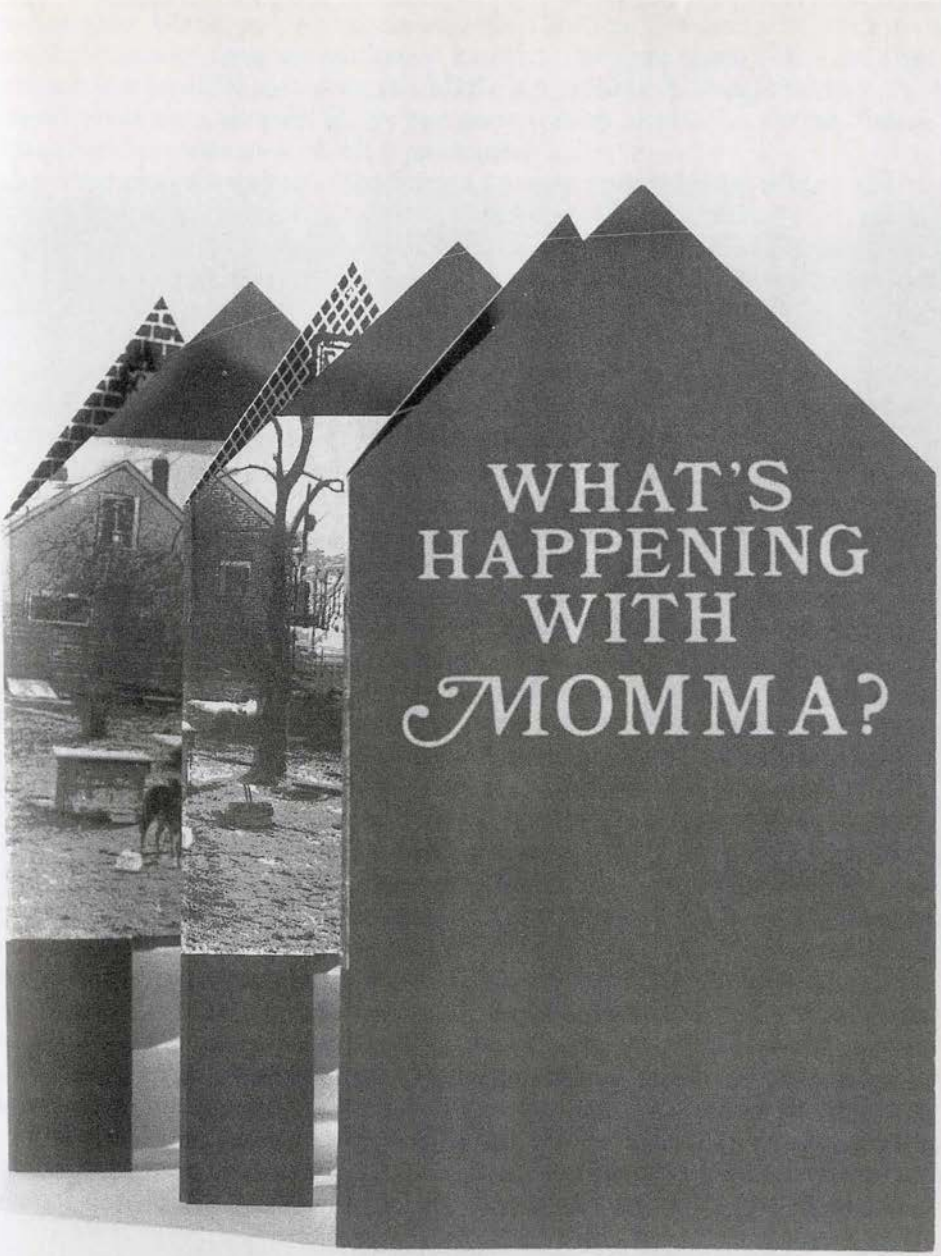
Elizabeth Catlett's *Salute to Black Woman* defines independence and strength as characteristics of womanhood. The women who people her woodcuts are monumental figures, beautiful, towering people. She shows them at work in fields and on floors without loss of dignity. Catlett is a master at conveying the character of her portraits through the difficult and non-forgiving medium of woodcut. As an artist she, too, is non-forgiving and presents her subjects as they are, in the harsh light of truth.

Many of the artists' books in *Coast to Coast* are low-tech works made of commonly available materials. Muriel Cioffi's *Fragments* is a moving autobiography contained in a series of black and white photographs on accordian-folded, colored construction paper. A snapshot of the top of her head displaying an avalanche of thick locks carries a humorous caption: "This is not a plant or a space spider." In contrast to the light humor, the artist continues with a story of her mother who, in 1930, with two years of college behind her, could only "polish someone else's silverware." Cioffi's *Fragments* is a self portrait of a woman who went to sleep from 20 to age 36...[and] woke up...pissed off." Cioffi places herself in the continuum of her mother's life, reaffirms her personal values, and moves on to a future of affirmation.

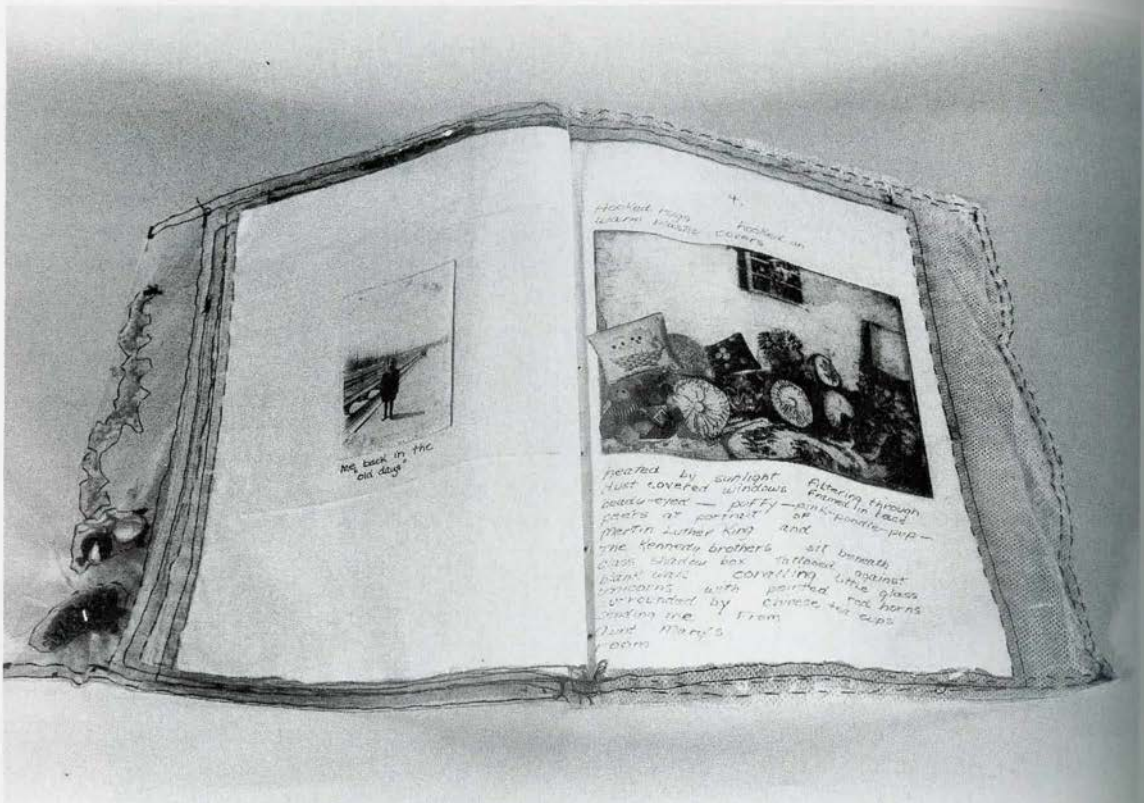
Home appears a dominant and recurrent image in *A Women of Color National Artist's Book Project*. At home a woman like Fern Logan's grandmother was able to express her true nature as a strong and able matriarch, while in the world outside, Muriel Cioffi's educated mother was limited to serving others. Historic and contemporary patriarchies consistently overlook the domestic arena in favor of seductive social power wielded in the public domain. It is women, especially women of color, who look to home as a safe haven in which to thrive, particularly because they have not benefited from a fair share of socio-political power. While many feminist critics eschew domestic images as retrograde, these artists have chosen to redefine their relationship to home and environment.

Tomie Arai's *Album for the Homeless* presents a series of simple images printed on dark board. Objects taken for granted by most of us—clothes hanger, telephone, cooking pot—are isolated and subjects for contemplation. These are common household items that most people would not attach any value to. That they are inexpensive, common and dispensable is all the more testimony to our privilege. Yet couched in the context of the homeless, one can more appreciate them as the symbols of contemporary comfort that they are.

Clarissa Sligh's *What's Happening with Momma?* is at once book, photograph and sculpture. the artist cleverly constructed a pop-up house with porch steps which fold out to make a three-dimensional, free-standing paper house. Sepia-toned photographs of children sitting on the top step



"What's Happening With Momma?" CLARISSA SLIGH (Book Show)



"Aunt Mary's Room" LINDA HIWOT (Book Show)

take us back to childhood memories of home. Sligh's use of brown-tones rather than black and white photographs softens the contrast, creates a mood of nostalgia and more closely matches the skin tones of the children who sit (patiently?) awaiting the birth of a sibling. If Jung identified the closed form as a shelter, Sligh has gone a step further to define "home" inhabited by memories of life's passages.

Another characteristic of the home is containment. Home is both shelter for out bodies and container for our possessions. *Hagar's Folly* by Nadine Delawrence-Maine is an aluminum box filled with tangled wires, bits of shells, beads and the cast-off shards from a china doll. Small treasures are partly hidden, partly exposed, spilling over the sides of the box. *Hagar's Folly* is a metaphor for the human experience, female and male alike. Our lives are a composite of our experiences and memories. The piece is a symbol of home, cradling souvenirs of our lives which accumulate within.

Four Corners by Texas artists Hatz, Liu, Meek and Munoz is about home in a broader context. The piece is composed of four small accordion-folded books with snake skin covers. The books stand like fences pointing to the four cardinal directions—North, East, South, West—enclosing a space related to the greater space around them. Theirs is a microcosm of the planet, home for all of us.

Communication is a major component of *Coast to Coast: A Women of Color National Artists Book Project,* underscored by the use of the book as format throughout. Historically, books contained information to be shared, to be disseminated among people separated by time and/or distance. Books are also repositories of carefully kept records, for tracking a process at various stages of its particular evolution. By implication books are not meant to be possessed in the same way one can claim exclusive right to a singular masterpiece.

The artists in *Coast to Coast* are storytellers. Theirs is a collective history which sheds light on history around them. Prior historians ignored their contributions both as women and as minor-ities, while current history-makers favor the sensational, still overlooking poignant moments in the everyday. The women in *Coast to Coast* are intent on ensuring that future historians will not forget their stories. They are re-defining themselves and their world, disseminating their message via a particularly creative channel. They are writing their own history using a new symbolic language.

ARLENE RAVEN

The L Word

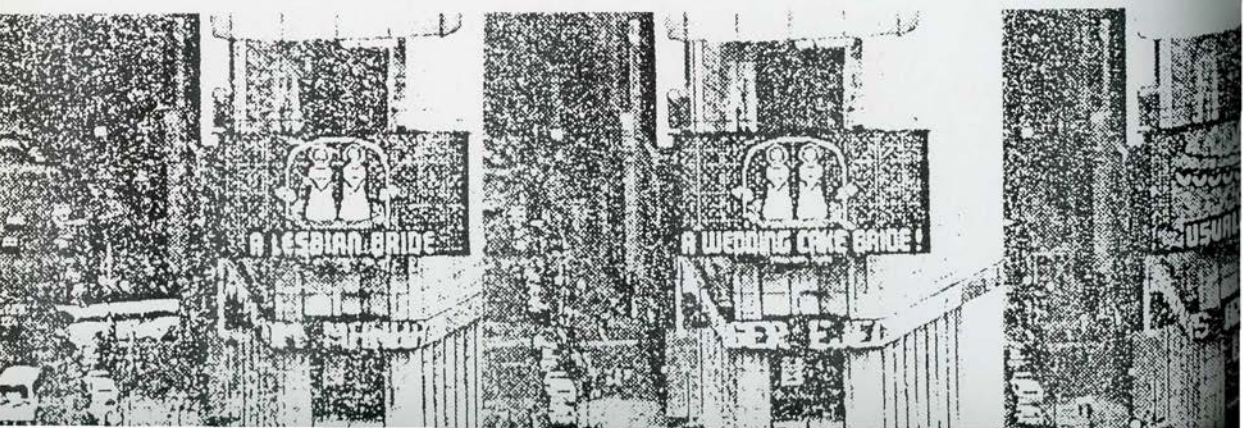
Jerri Allyn and I are hanging around Times Square the first day her computer-animated *A Lesbian Bride* played for thirty seconds every twenty minutes among the ads on Spectacolor lightboard. *Who is this monument to love perched on an elegant cake usually next to a groom who can now be next to a lesbian bride at alternative lifestyle weddings?* This appears on the screen in two-word intervals as layers of the cake are revealed from the bottom up. Finally, two brides flanked by bells exclaim, *A Wedding Cake Bride!*

"Hey, a lesbian!" (I try for audience response). Two tourists ask me to take their picture, but no one looks up except a man who has been trailing Jerri from the Museum of Modern Art. As soon as the word "lesbian" looms, he looks away from the sign and toward Jerri:

"Are *you* a lesbian bride?"

We expect "Messages to the Public" to be persuasive propaganda. Allyn's projects and performances have often been designed for public places, from Los Angeles City Hall to Malta's Ministry of Culture, and in demonstrations on city streets in the U.S. and Europe. But she makes public politics from wholly private, autobiographical sources.

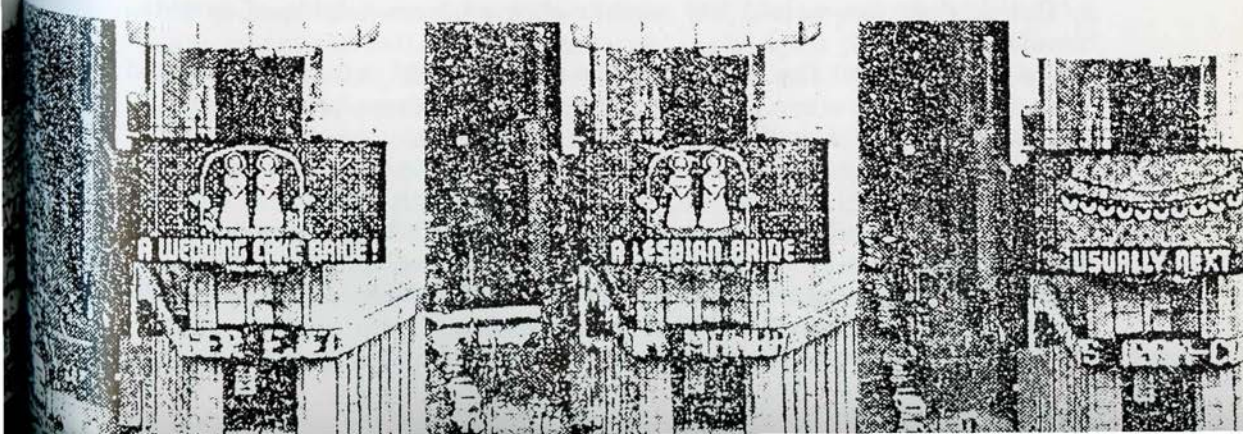
Gang-raped at seven, Allyn views rape and incest of girls as their first oppression as well as their first encounter with love and death. *Love Novellas* addressed her romances, in texts that examined the nature of love. *Cancer Madness* was a week-long self-healing ritual about Allyn's mother's cancer at 43 and the peculiar "women madness" of her 80-year-old grandmother. "My mother's most profound legacy was her death," she told me. "I learned I could continue living."



A Lesbian Bride is a tribute to friends Sue and Cheri, married in the alternative ceremony to which Allyn refers. The possibility of a living commitment in the face of death—by women whose commitment is trivialized and limited in American society—is what Allyn, inspired by gay men's response to AIDS, wants to put forth.

Meanwhile, the media, represented by the moving lights of a *A Lesbian Bride*, are busy pushing traditional heterosexual marriage as necessary to health and happiness. Warnings of the diminishing possibilities of single females landing on top of any wedding cake have claimed the covers of *People* and *Newsweek*. Parables of isolation have replaced career women's success stories in women's magazines and even mainstream newspapers.

A Lesbian Bride introduces *American Dining: Labor in the '80s*, which opened at a New York diner and the New Museum in the fall of 1987. Allyn knows this subject from the inside out. After all, the Waitresses, a public performance art group (which she cofounded in 1977), boasted fourteen years of collective waitressing experience when they started. For the last decade Allyn has presented the plight of the waitress—wonder-worker, goddess, or wife—as a metaphor for women and work, money, food, power; the diner as a setting in which human predicaments engendered in a class- and gender-biased nation unfold. Dropping by for a cup of coffee on a "Name That Dame" placemat, you find, among Famous Food Women, the "Wedding Cake Bride."



MARY M. SLECHTA

HAIRDO

Elvirita was in the city for her first grown-up hairdo. The two hated braids hung behind her ears like thick chains, so black they shimmered with purple under the fluorescent lights. She wanted to go immediately to the hairdressing school. But her mother had different plans. Shopping first, then chili dogs for lunch, and still more shopping.

All day long Elvirita watched her reflection passing mirror after mirror. With the long braids tucked up under themselves, she could imagine the short bob, cute and bouncy like a shampoo commercial or the cover of *Ebony*. But never for too long.

"You think you're cute," her mother would say cuttingly. "Just keep your eyes on the bags and forget that nappy head."

"Bitch, bitch, bitch," Elvirita thought, staring hard into her mother's back.

But finally Elvirita wearied of caring about the hairdo. She bit down hard on her lower lip and felt the utter futility of a long day in the city. It was late. Many shoppers were already heading for the elevators to the main parking garage. Saturday was almost over and she was willing to go another week in braids if only to be home soon.

In Fox's her mother hauled a bright floral comforter to the register. Elvirita trudged close behind. In her head she continued to count the bags over and over in case any had been left behind. The saleslady stretched over the counter. She smiled at Elvirita.

"I wonder who's getting a pretty new comforter for her bed," she said.

Elvirita gave her a little smile. As always, her mother ignored the saleslady. After carefully counting her change, she gave Elvirita a quarter to buy a big shopping bag with handles. Elvirita panicked when she got up close to the machine. She dropped the money in a slot and waited. This was the first time she'd been asked to get the bag. "Bastard," she screamed to herself. An old woman walked by very slowly, staring. She stopped at a table of sheets nearby.

"Pull it over the metal," her mother shouted from a table of curtains several feet away.

Elvirita tugged at the handle but the machine held it fast. She pressed a button for coin return. Nothing. The old woman came back.

"Let me," she said, and easily pulled the bag free.

"Thank you," her mother said as she walked up to them. "Tell the lady thank you, Rita."

"Thank you," Elvirita muttered. She added "damn bitch" way down low in her throat.

After the lady went away, Elvirita helped her mother load all the little bags and the comforter into the shopping bag.

"Don't you know how to use a simple machine?" her mother said in a voice reserved for Elvirita. "Don't tell me I raised a dummy!"

Elvirita dug her nails deep into her own palms, hating her mother with all her strength. "Same to you," her mother said without looking at her. "And you keep wising off, you can just forget that haircut."

Elvirita put a hand in her pocket. She stuck out her middle finger and aimed it at her mother's back. She held it like that all the time they were heading out the store. By now she had totally given up on the hairdo. But instead of entering the parking garage as they always did, her mother took a turn off Main Street and brought them to the front of a tall building. A big sign over their heads read Institute of Beauty.

"Last chance to change your mind," her mother said, but Elvirita was already hauling the shopping bag towards the revolving doors.

Elvirita's mother went down the directory at the elevator until she found the Institute. They went up to the eighth floor and stared down a long empty hall. It smelled badly of things burning and being washed. Her mother pulled open a door marked simply "Salon. No appointments necessary." Elvirita's nose instantly stung from the smell of permanents. Her mother settled them into the plastic chairs with coats and purses balled up on their laps. Elvirita heard her mother start to let out a tired breath and then hold it. They both stared out at a long row of white women in cushy pink rollers. For a second the room stood stock still. The only sound was the high pitched hum of the hairdryers. Around them the few women in the waiting room stopped reading to stare. And then as Elvirita stared back in horror the faces went soft like putty and everybody resumed their business. Elvirita's mother showed her an open magazine.

"This is a cute style," she said loudly. "What do you say, Rita?"

"Can we leave," Elvirita whispered.

"Too short?" her mother said.

A tall red-head came over with a book. She studied whatever was written there.

"Do you have an appointment today, ma'am?" she asked without looking up. "We're only taking customers with appointments today. Everybody wants a perm for Easter, you know."

Elvirita saw her mother's fingers pinch hard into the still open magazine. "We were referred here by a relative," her mother said.

"Of course," the woman said nervously. "Of course you might try down at the end of the hall. They might be able to squeeze you in down there."

Rising to her feet, Elvirita's mother gathered up their belongings in one armful. She even took the big bag from Elvirita.

"Go to hell," she told the red-headed woman.

Elvirita tried to look back to see that they hadn't left anything, but her mother managed with one free finger to jab her straight to the door. Out they went and down the hall to an identical door that said. "Salon. No appointments necessary." Elvirita didn't have a chance to say that she didn't want her new hairdo anymore, didn't want her braids cut after all.

They stepped into a steamy room that smelled of hair burning. An unsmiling beautician used a straightening comb to point them towards

some scattered chairs. There were no magazines to read. No coke machine. And there they waited, for nearly three-quarters of an hour, without speaking and without anyone coming over. The silence was occasionally interrupted by low laughter, although Elvirita could never find the source among this room of solemn faced women.

Finally the first beautician stood back from the stool where an elderly patron examined her perfectly molded hairdo. The old lady reached into her bag and handed over some folded money. It seemed to Elvirita as though something shameful had happened, but the beautician smiled. When the woman left, she pulled a candy bar from her smock and slowly ate it from the peeled back wrapper. After awhile she glanced over at Elvirita and her mother.

"Ya'll next," she said with a mouthful.

"Don't wait all day, Rita," her mother said.

Elvirita felt herself being pumped higher and higher on the stool. She took only one peek at the brightly lit mirror that magnified her crinkly bangs that shot off in all directions. Her mother and the hairdresser stood on either side of her. The hairdresser lifted a braid from behind her ears.

"Ummm, ummm, umm," she hummed. "Girl, now why you wanna go cut off this purty long hair?"

"Just cut," Elvirita's mother said. "Cut it all off!"

Through blurry eyes, Elvirita counted great wiry spirals as they tumbled from her shoulders.

DEBORAH PINTONELLI

Ruth

One minute it's all clear, the next it all goes black. Back in my room I think about the baby, his thumb so close to his mouth, his body thick with slime, dead. He was too pure, my light, my jewel, my meteor. Such beautiful throes, the indelible kiss of lost innocence. I still feel him in my hands. What was on TV that night? We were alone and something ripped at my stomach. We were alone and I expelled centuries, unable to stop, unable to escape. I thought: eventually something will take me. Golden or glass ship, miraculous waters; I will be carried away.

I try to sleep, but I can smell each fiber in the carpet and the bedding, all swollen with sour minutes. My hair is soaked and my nightgown too. I can hear vacuuming down the hall. I feel so hot! Why aren't you here Rudy, you bastard? BASTARD!! I yell it out loud, I don't care who hears.

Listen! Look at my beautiful clothes: my Chanel suit trimmed with mink that I used to wear with the cherry red pumps. The silk kimono. The peach satin bras and slips. No heavy jewelry, everything in good taste. My look was perfect. Everything was perfect. Then.

Someone bangs on the wall and yells. It seems that I should shut up and keep still. When I was little that's what they used to say to me, "Ruthie Marie, shut up and keep still." But I am so frightened. I am the canary crushed songless, the thrown-out boot. I frighten my own self, standing in front of the mirror in the semi-darkness with the long red fall and the droopy shoulders and the flabby white face and black-ringed eyes looking like something I never wanted to be. Ever. "Boo. Here comes Ruth. Boo."

It is nothing but a miracle to me that I've changed from one thing to another, gone bad, like a piece of old cheese or meat. I speak to some children on the street and they laugh and cry. I fondle myself when I'm alone and then *I* cry. A few months ago I paid the man at the paper stand to come and see me. He brought his lunch and ate it afterwards. Hey, it's not that I don't have a sense of humor. When did I ever not laugh? I was always gravy and gay. "Slap'er on the back and she'll cough up pearls," they used to say.

They used to say a lot of things about me. She. Her. Yakkety-yak about what I did, wore, said. "Her legs aren't done right, too much make-up, too many men, smells under her perfume." They used to say I made up the whole story about being married and having a family, that all I did was lie, that I never did nothing but lie. "Where's your husband now, Ruthie B.?" they'd scream. Well, maybe I'm better off away from their words, so many of them piled up one after the other, so meaningless. Funny, the more I am alone the more I think about what I know. I guess I know more than I thought I did. But not nearly enough.

I go over to the Salvation Army. One or another goddamned Frank Sinatra tune on the radio every time. Can't get away from the old songs. I go there before my Deliverance, my cocktail hour; don't want to scare the young check-out girls any more than I have to. Oh, I know they look at me in fear. I want to yell at them, "Honey, take a powder!" That's how my girlfriend Shirley used to say it, with such authority, "Honey!" But they wouldn't understand. All they have to do is comb their hair and streak on some lipstick and they look like a million bucks. Me, I'm like a bad painting: too many layers.

I remember the things the men used to like about me. I never had a pretty face, but I was petite, with a big bust. All those cramped spaces, and then that mouthful that they loved. I could never carry any pregnancy to term, so I didn't have to worry. After the trip up to the room we'd stomp right down to the bar and join the crowd. I'd want to see MaryLou and Betty, have a few laughs. Both of them are dead now. I can't imagine MaryLou dead: her screaming laugh, her small blonde head. She could put on Coty #35 in a moving car and have it come out perfect.

I make my way to the bar and before I have that first drink the place seems sordid and sorry to me. Stinks, too. Cracked covering on stools, roaches roaming along the bar gutter. The light coming in through the windows blinds me a little and I turn my head away. Like it better when it gets dark and the neon signs get turned on and the Johnnie works its magic...

What was it I used to say in those days when I was high? Something that made everyone laugh. Then I'd get up and dance, throw my tush around. Tits jiggle, jiggle. Tush jiggle, jiggle. Ruthie B. Goode. What was in my head?? Nothing. My brain always was and still is ready to receive the precious liquid that used to transform me into stardust, moonbeam, cloud. I bounced off of everyone like a wild pool ball desperately trying to click into a good time. Everyday at four we had to play "Laura" on the jukebox just as twilight set in. This made us feel classy, moody, poetic. Now, even though the Johnnie makes me feel good, I never, ever feel poetic.

After the daily Deliverance it's home to the dogs and the TV. Cook up some chow. Sheba looks at me sideways, don't know what she wants to say. Someday, they'll find me dead, a pile of butts in the ashtray, the dogs all sad and hungry. The only one that comes to see me now is that poor girl next door. That Mona. Smart girl, but real dumb, too, in a way. Going with Carter, now that was *dumb*. Couldn't she see him for the two-bit pervert that he is? I've known Carter for ages, and even when I was young I didn't fall for his lines. This Mona is desperate in a way, though. She sits alone in that room for days waiting for her boyfriend to come back from God knows where. Doesn't have money for food. It's pitiful.

So I let her come in and cozy up with me sometimes. I tell her the story of my life. I know she thinks I'm a freak, but she's a freak too, so it's all right. She's such a skinny little thing, I do feel awfully sorry for her, kind of like a surrogate mother. Only I don't get into that drug stuff. She can

bring her bottle of whisky or whatever in here and we can share that, but I don't want to see, hear, or know anything about the other. Have the police up here before you know it or some dead body on my hands. And she's too sweet to be dead, really. Especially when she wipes some of that make-up off and washes her hair. But then I should talk! But I know how to put the cosmetics on properly. I was taught by professionals over at the Beauty School on Madison Avenue. This one puts the eyeliner on like she was in the circus or something! And black nail polish! And all that crazy jewelry!

We make a wonderful pair. She and I curled up on the bed with Sheba at the foot, watching some old movie. It's almost like a family. Sometimes we get Chinese delivered or she runs out to get something (with my money). And Mona doesn't mind my smoking so much, just says I should be careful because that's how so many people die, in bed with their loathsome cigarettes. I don't know, I just got onto the habit early. That and the drinking are the only things in life that bring me any comfort. The rest is shit and more shit, as you can see.

Oh, I'm confused as to where my story is going—it's harder to tell it in my head than to tell someone like that Mona. When I say it in words it all sounds so true and right. When it's in my head the facts all buzz around and try to confuse me. The years and the people tend to get mixed up and I don't know if I'm coming or going.

Sheba's still looking at me and I wonder if she knows what I'm thinking. She remembers Rudy! "Don't you, girl?" I pet her and she wags that ugly old stub of a tail of hers. "My girlie girl remembers daddy Rudy, doesn't she?" Yes she does. So there, MaryLou.

Well, one of my points is that I don't know how I got from that woman sitting on the edge of a man's bed, her skin clear and fairly fresh and desirable to what I am now. And I'm not suggesting that I look the way I do today because of anything terrible I might have done. That's just nonsense. I mean we all know it's the drinking, pure and simple, the drinking is what's made me ugly, or what's ruined whatever niceness I had to my looks. So that's why I say, why stop now? What's the diff? But that doesn't mean I can't and don't moan about it. Oh how I moan! It's what's done me in, really, what's pushed me to the border and threatens to see me off.

That's why I tell this Mona to watch her step. A woman, after all, is only the sum total of her looks, period. Even if she's not beautiful, she's *got* to keep herself attractive. Ugliness just doesn't cut it in this world, honey, said the wise old woman with the long tits who knows so much better. There, see, I made my own self laugh. I have to go up to the mirror to see Ruthie B. Goode yuk it up. You know it sounds awful when I do, though, with that roll of phlegmy thunder starting deep in my chest and making its way into my throat and then up comes a stringy gusher that I have to hack and hack at until I get it out and into the sink. It's so slippery, though, it wants to slip back down into my lungs but I won't let it.

It's times like these that I'm glad I'm alone. I mean who in the hell wants to hear it? I feel like some old car that people just look at and say, "That thing's still running?" I can hardly believe it myself. But, and if you'll pardon my saying so, Fuck 'em. Fuck 'em all. That's one thing I've learned from Mona Girl, something MaryLou and I never knew how to say. Problem is, though Mona knows how to say it she don't yet know how to act on that impulse, doesn't know when to take the trash out, if you know what I mean. Because if there's one thing I was taught is to never let a man sponge off of you or you're dead. Once he starts he'll never stop and you'll be on your knees scrubbing some goddamned floor and he'll be at home with his feet up watching the football game or such. It's just the way it goes.

So you're thinking, if I know so much how come I am where I am? Well, honey, I ask myself the same thing everyday. But really it's as simple as pie. I just had too much fun, too little education, and not enough sense, that's all. It's no big tragedy. No need to get the cloak and dagger out. Like I say, the only thing I regret is Rudy and my looks going. All the rest is par for the course, like *C'est la vie*, maybe next time!

If I had been a better girl I could go down for my cocktails with some respect for myself. As it is I know I'm clinging to the glass with the claws of the desperate, and that's no fun, not what I used to call fun, anyway. Gone are all of the colored fantasy lights and the trips to stardust lane when I floated just above the ground in the grip of some gent's arms. Gone is the excitement of buying that perfect dress and then wearing it to some event. Gone is the time when I wanted nothing more than to feel that man's hand run through my hair...

Well, I don't know how many times you can knock on a door and get no answer and still think somebody's there. But I kept going back because it was so regular, so predictable, I could depend on him to "love" me in the same way everyday and it satisfied just that bit that needed that, just that one place that wanted to be touched all the time. That sounds bad, I know, a woman admitting that she wants that. But why not? I admit it. And it's the thing that always got me in trouble, why they always ragged on me like they did, because they didn't want to hear it. The girls wanted to talk about what they could get off the men in the way of clothes and the guys wanted to talk about what they could get off the women if they bought them things. Nobody wanted to talk about need or want or desire except me. Or, that's the way I see it now.

That's how I glorify myself.

So that's how I see me and Mona Girl. Two saps in a trap. I think that explains my attraction to Mr. S., too. I thought it was incredibly sexy the way he wore his hurt on his face, for everyone to see. Not that it stopped him from drinking himself into a hole, but at least it was out there for the world to see, not in some closet to be dragged out only when no one was looking. I just thought that was the sexiest thing in the world. But I never got a chance to tell him so.

YONG SOON MIN

TERRITORIAL WATERS: Mapping Asian American Cultural Identity

We all come from somewhere, usually somewhere else. (*street wisdom)*

At the end of every year, hundreds of South Africans successfully petition the Government for racial reclassification. For example, in 1987, 89 Blacks became "coloreds" (those of mixed races), 518 coloreds became whites, 7 Chinese became whites, and so on.... The slightest variation in skin shade determines not only where a person can live and what jobs are available, but how one is regarded by others. What began as a form of bureaucratic stratification has blurred into the individual South African's sense of identity.[1]

Our white sisters...should be able to see that political views held by women of color are often misconstrued as being personal rather than ideological. Views critical of the system held by a person angers against the dominant society. (If they hate it so much here, why don't they go back?)...Many of us are now third and fourth generation Americans, but this makes no difference: periodic conflicts involving Third World peoples can abruptly change white Americans' attitudes toward us...We found our status as true-blooded Americans was only an illusion in 1942 when we were singled out to be imprisoned for the duration of the war by our own government....When I hear my students say. "We're not against the Iranians here who are mindful of their own business. We're just against those ungrateful ones who overstep our hospitality by demonstrating and badmouthing our government." I know they speak about me.

—*Mitsuye Yamada*[2]

The sea-change created by the emergence of other cultures, in the role of historical protagonists, has required Western intellectuals to fashion different perceptual modes (and theoretical models). The post-modern phenomenon may be the consequence, not a description, of a universe realigned by social praxis in "peripheral" societies, necessitating in its turn a theory of displacement.

—*Geeta Kapur*[3]

Geopolitics: the arbitrary carving up of lands of people into convenient spheres of influence. The spoils of war. Winner(s) take(s) all. Monopoly! "The Real Estate of Things" (a title of one of my artworks). Prop up a puppet head of state who'll play your game. It doesn't matter if he's a son of a bitch or a tin soldier, just as long as he's our son of a bitch et cetera. And just as a little safety net in case something fouls up or per chance the natives start getting restless, station a gang of our troops there to keep the order, or better yet, kill two birds with one stone or some missiles, and set up a military base in that god forsaken place so that we can keep our eyes on our superpower rival at the same time. Or if the presence of our military is unnecessary or too sensitive to bother with, just give 'em the hardware and/or the bucks to take care of the job themselves. Might Makes Right. Anything for and in our "interest." Does this sound all too familiar, too *au courant*? Especially in the painful aftermath of a certain recent "surgical" Operation Just Cause? Just play around with the details here and there a bit and it essentially describes our "relationship" with the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, Pakistan, Israel, Egypt, Turkey, El Salvador and of course, Panama, to name a few of our foremost "partners."

Geopolitics: displacement. All over the face of this earth. In the old bygone era, lots of folks, particularly the Chinese, left their motherland out of economic desperation to find work as temporary (at least in intention) laborers, often indentured. Economic necessity still figures as a strong contributing factor to the movements of people. However in recent times, a significant portion of immigrants to the States including Asians have been political refugees or exiles or the displaced for varied reasons, less out of economic necessity as for socio-political considerations. For example, one south Korean mother explained that her family immigrated here so that their college age son would not have to endure compulsory military service for a government which she finds repressive. She also expressed concern that this son may have also involved himself in a student anti-government movement and thereby jeopardized his well-being.

Geopolitics: Just today, I heard an old Joni Mitchell song, the one with this plaintive line: "I drew a map of Canada." It struck a chord in me. I too have been drawing a lot of maps, some actualized in my artworks but many of them are just mental construction of a place, or a longing for a place. I remember that I was highly praised in my junior high school history class, not necessarily for my grasp of European history but for the great coloring jobs on the numerous maps detailing all the everchanging configurations of the rises and falls of empires and states. Perhaps because it served as the only outlet in this class for my frustrated artistic inclination. I still recall with fondness my free-wheeling use of color in relation to the various abstract shapes of territory. It's only quite recently that I came to the realization of just how abstract those shapes really were. Of course at some point after

Magritte and a semiotics fling, I was fond of repeating just for the sake of it that a map is not the territory. How true is this truism and yet why didn't any of those French theorists just for once deconstruct a Mercator projection and project a Peters? It would have saved me a lot of time and headaches. Oh Canadaah! Oh, home land....

As I said earlier, it's only recently that I got my hands on a copy of the Peters Projection World Map (it's not so easy to find). Rarely are wall maps accompanied by a narrative and certainly not any that I would read with such rewarded attention as I did this one. In pointing out that this map shows equal area, equal axis, equal positions and "fairness to all peoples," it declares that this new map corrects most common world maps which reflect "the work of map-makers of the age when Europe dominated and exploited the world.... In this complex and interdependent world in which the nations now live, the peoples of the world deserve the most accurate possible portrayal of their world....Nothing less than our world view is at stake." Powerful words for what is quite a powerful image—this new world, one that at first seemed distorted as it so strongly contradicted the world view of all those colored maps that my teachers thought of so highly.

Our world view is changing. We're still reeling from the phenomenal pace of changes in Europe as it still unfolds and the apparent easing of Cold War tensions. However, it is the growing emergence and assertions of the Third World* struggle for self-determination and independence that continues to have a most profound effect on us all. Now that Namibia, one of the last officially designated European colonies in Africa has finally achieved independence, a post-colonial Third World identity challenges the Eurocentric legacy and the exercise of Western power that is a powerful everyday reality for all of us to confront.

Along with other people of color, Asian Americans constitute the Third World within the First World in the sense of this often cited quotation of Vietnamese filmmaker/writer/composer Trin T. Minh-ha, who lives and works in the States: "...there is a Third World in every First World and vice versa." The struggles waged by people of color here for socio-economic and cultural parity have pushed the more progressive sectors within our institutions to question their basic assumptions and privileges in relation to the rest of the world. As Minh-ha further elaborates, "The Master is bound to recognize that His Culture is not as homogeneous, as monolithic as He believed it to be. He discovers, with much reluctance, He is just an other among others."[4] It appears, however, that His reluctance overcomes His recognition as He still clings to the crude assumptions that fine art is the art of pale wealthy people, folk art the art of pale poor people, and primitive art the art of dark people. Another variant of this assumption still harder to dispel holds that Western culture is modern, dynamic and "universal" whereas its non-Western counterpart is traditional, static and too damn political!

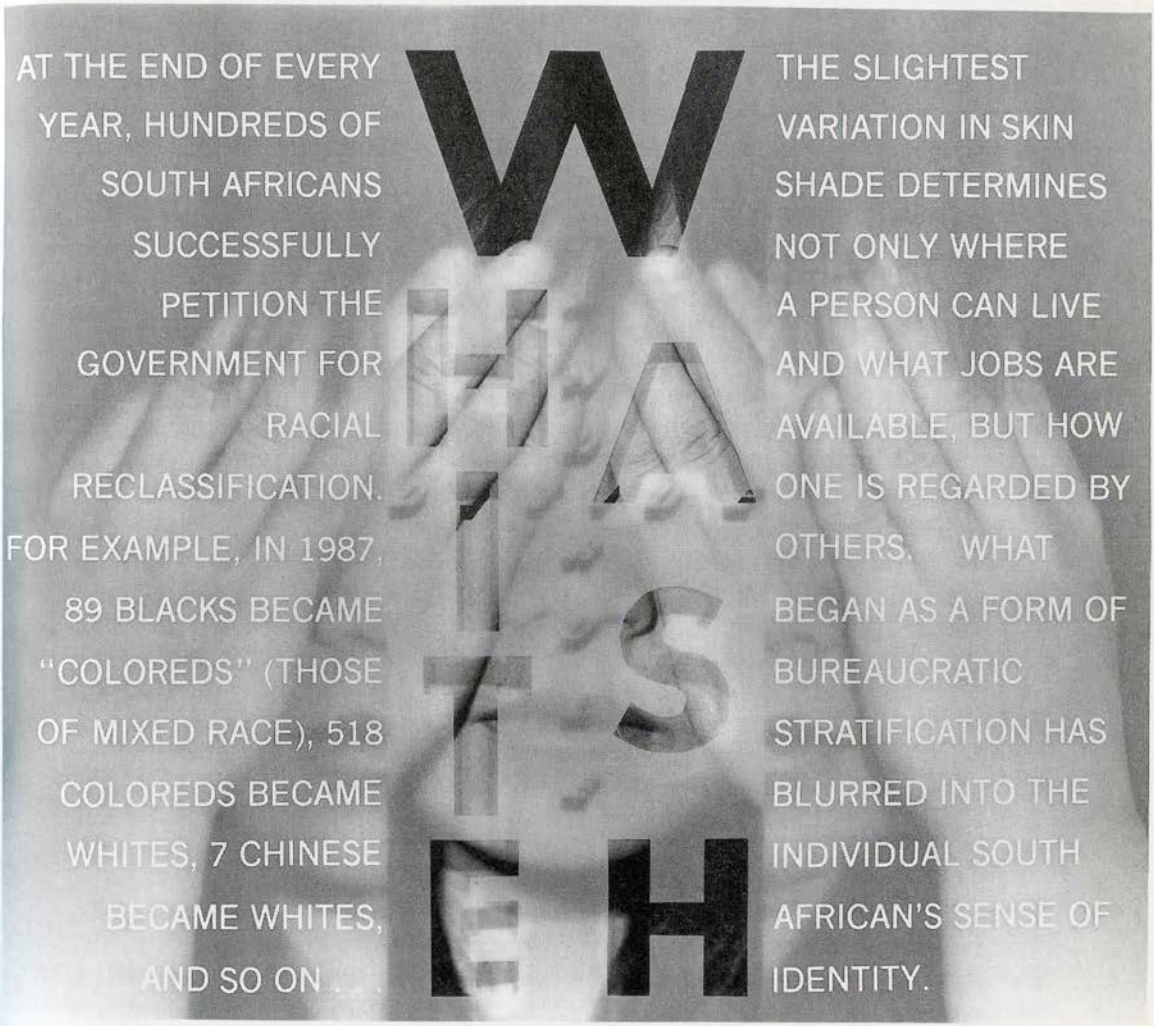
* I use this term as an empowering polemic to refer to a diverse range of countries and people who share the legacy of colonialism and imperialistic exploitation.

Given this untenable state of affairs, there is much at stake in an attempt to address the issue of cultural identity of a marginalized group such as Asian Americans and specifically, the artists and the cultural workers of this group who may perhaps be considered to be doubly marginalized. It is not simply a matter of describing the make-up and characteristics of the individual and/or collective identity of Asian Americans and their cultural production. Our cultural identity has become ever more a contested entity inundated with complex and contradictory claims of authority, authenticity and ownership from a myriad of sources, expected and unexpected. In so far as much of the primary struggles of Third World people are about land rights and self-determination, our own determination of cultural identity here necessarily also involves a struggle for territory—claiming a place and asserting a position in relation to dominant cultural forces—for our own cultural integrity and well-being. Fully aware that power concedes nothing without a demand, our position is necessarily oppositional, one that seeks to change the order of things.

(Easier said than done. Like a lot of other artists of color, I feel beleaguered when I have to deal with this "business" of cultural identity. I'm wary of the inevitable commodification effect in which my racial difference is constantly spotlighted for any number of purposes and interests, not my own. It's not that I want to evade my racial identity—I'm understandably proud of and obsessed with it; I just don't want it predigested and packaged for someone else's profit. Especially when I know how voracious yet fickle their consumerist appetite is. I may be their exotic minority of the day only to be replaced by the next minority who gets "discovered." They seem to have reserved a mere closet sized space fit for only a few of us at a time. And, when these few of us are singled out to speak for and about the collective identity of our people/community, how are we to avoid totalizing and meaningless generalizations? We're wise to when others trip and fall but our own efforts to steer clear of the trap of "Orientalism," caricaturing ourselves in the process of trying to define ourselves, often leaves us teetering high on a tightrope.)

Over There/Here/Out There

As I see it, through my tunnel vision of unverified impressions, a noticeable shift in Asian American identity and perceptions of self-identity has been taking place since the early 80s. There seems to be a reconsideration and a renewed questioning of the Asian American equation, resulting in a greater attention and weight given to the Asian component. Various factors contribute to this increased recognition of the Asia connection—from the dramatic political upheavals and developments in the East such as the Filipino "people power" that toppled Marcos, the unresolved reunification issue in the divided Koreas and the Tiananmen massacre, to the recent influx of immigrants. For many of us Asian Americans, the distance between our communities here and the East continues to diminish.



"Colorblind" YONG SOON MIN

These new Asian immigrants have injected new monies, a broader geographic and a more complex socio-political profile. Japan's emergence as a dominant economic superpower as well as the economic ascendance of both Korea and Taiwan has had a great impact here as elsewhere. The recognition of this global economic shift as well as the perceived change in consumer interests of Asian Americans has prompted one glossy magazine catering to the growing Asian American yuppy set to change its name and image from *AsiAm* to *Transpacific*. A competing magazine, *Rice*, which appealed to the same readership folded last year due to a perceived uncertainty of image by its advertisers. *Transpacific* is promoting its new image by expanding its coverage of Asian Americans here to include the Pacific Basin exchange.

This enlarged presence of the recent immigrants in all facets of Asian American life hit home during my participation at the first symposium of the Korean American Women Artists and Writers Association held at Mills College in October, 1989. Of the fifteen participating artists, only one artist was born here; the rest were immigrants. Among this majority, I've been here the longest—nearly thirty years, while the others have been here around or under ten years and felt more comfortable speaking in Korean. Almost everyone spoke about the importance of holding on to their heritage as well as the desire to be able to fully pursue their careers as artists here.

The confidence with which these Korean artists asserted their difference as well as their individuality stands in stark contrast to previous generations of immigrant's efforts to whitewash their ethnicity. The movement for cultural pluralism or multiculturalism which is gaining momentum in theory at least if not in actual practice, and perhaps more importantly, the sheer strength in numbers that comes from large immigrant communities help to create a buffer zone of sorts, of more space and time from the compelling pressures to conform and assimilate into a new culture.

An immigrant's experience of long-term contact with a different culture lies somewhere, probably unfixed and variable, as in the notion of "ad hoc engagements" that James Clifford posits in *The Predicament of Cultures*, in the continuum between total assimilation and total resistance. Western culture's pervasive dominance and overlay onto other cultures enhances the relevance and the significance of comparing, for example, the experience of cultures for a Hmong* teenager living in Milwaukee and the sense cultural identity of a third- generation Chinese American counterpart from Los Angeles, to that of a teenager from New Delhi. In my own relationships with recent Korean immigrants, I'm always conscious of finding varying degrees of both similarities and differences. I'm aware of how "Americanized" I've become by comparison, and how the loss of mother

* The Hmong are about 65,000 Laotian refugees from the northern mountain region of Laos who aided U.S. armed forces during the Vietnam War who fled to Thailand after the war fearing Vietnamese reprisal and were relocated in various parts of the States. (Information from *Amerasia Journal* (UCLA), vol. 14 #1, 1988.)

tongue creates enormously painful barriers. Yet in many areas where I expect to encounter difference, I'm continually surprised by its absence or mitigated presence. In spite of my far greater experience and knowledge of the intricacies of Western culture, the depth of my "Koreanness" is undeniable.

These attenuated comparisons of a crosscultural nexus cannot be isolated from a socio-political understanding of the impact of race, class and gender upon cultural identity. In our context here, race is and has always been the source of most conflict and change. Our identity as Asian American, however varied and complex, is both homogenized and unified by racism. With regard to the distorting affect of racism on the construction of a cultural identity, there is a revealing history of two sisters, Edith and Winnifred Eaton (daughters of an Englishman and a Chinese woman) who were the first Asian American writers during the turn of the Century, an extremely hostile time for Asian Americans, particularly the Chinese.[5] Edith wrote under the pseudonym of Sui Sin Far which courageously revealed and embraced her Chinese identity while the younger sister Winnifred chose the pen name Onoto Watanna in order to distance herself and her work from the strong anti-Chinese sentiment of her time. It's necessary to note here that the Japanese here were not perceived as a threat, economic or otherwise during this period as they were far fewer in number than the Chinese and, before Pearl Harbor, were even admired for their military prowess stemming from their defeat of China and Russia and their Samurai tradition. Rather predictably, Edith won the acceptance and recognition of the Chinese community with works which championed the plight of the Chinese and did not achieve much success with the large audience while Winnifred had many bestsellers published by Harper's to her credit.

Now that Japan does pose a threat as a dominant economic competitor and Japan bashing is on the rise, one wonders what other identity Winnifred would adopt were she writing today. The heart of the problem is not Winnifred or others like the South Africans who petition their government for racial reclassification, as her sister Edith astutely noted when she rhetorically asked "are not those who compel them to thus cringe more to be blamed than they?"[6] Winnifred was also an exception rather than the rule in attaining her high level of success in the publishing world. While the public sector is slowly responding to the pressures for cultural equity, the private sector remains a bastion of privilege and exclusiveness. In this arena, many Asian Americans fall victim to the "glass ceiling" syndrome in which those who seem to successfully cross-over encounter "invisible" barriers to a higher level of achievement/acceptance in the mainstream. For example, take the case of Wifredo Lam, a Cuban national of Afro-Cuban Chinese descent. His painting, "The Jungle" is in the Museum of Modern Art's permanent collection, hung in the hallway leading to the Museum's coatroom. This inconspicuous placement reflected the then director of the Museum's department of painting and art historian William Rubin's estimation of Lam as an epigone of Picasso and other

European surrealists. In Rubin's linear and formalist reading of art history, Lam's assertion of difference evident in the specific iconographic references to his heritage is irrelevant and lacks "originality."[7]

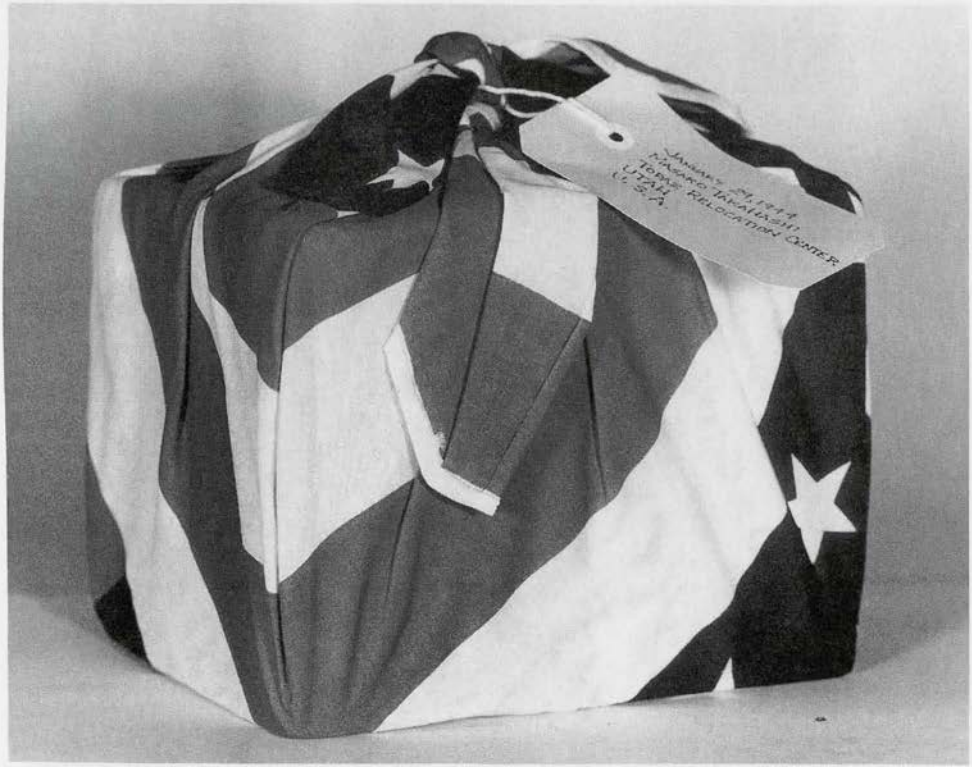
Contradictions abound in the distorted racist logic of Eurocentrism. Asia's enduring rich cultural heritage has long been treasured and emulated for its incomparable high aesthetic achievements. And yet, Asian artists who work in the pluralist contemporary mode are considered by Westerners and often by our own traditionalists alike to be a breed apart, or as strays who trespassed on someone's turf where we don't belong. We're perceived to lack the zeitgeist that Westerners alone are privy to. With further peculiar logic, the divisive stereotype that's meant to complement Asian Americans as the "model minority" is turned against us in the creative fields. As one of its harmful byproducts, we're considered to be technical and science whizzes who lack that certain innovative verve, passion, pizzazz or spontaneity like "them blacks" or Hispanics. Once again, divide and conquer.

Encouraging signs that Third World artists are redefining the spirit of the times abound. The most illuminating cultural critique and production is beginning to assert itself from the Third World and from Third World immigrants in the First World countries. Internationally prominent exhibitions such as the Havana Bienal—the largest showcase of Third World art and France's "Magiciens de la Terre" and its attendant critique best articulated in *Third Text,* a journal based in Britain as well as the works of Black Artists from Britain, a coalition of Southeast Asians and African British artists all have contributed significantly to the crossfertilization of Third World cultural issues. On the homefront, works which straddle the two worlds such as Trin T. Minh-ha's film, "Surname Viet Given Name Nam," Sara Suleri's novel *Meatless Days,* an autobiographic history interwoven with the history of contemporary Pakistan and the painting installations of Hung Liu reveal a pivotal vantage point of the immigrant subject. Hung Liu, who emigrated from the Peoples Republic of China less than a decade ago is quoted in a review of her recent Soho exhibition as saying that one of her images comments "on the true condition of liberty in China as seen through the voyeuristic lens of the Western media." Her works such as this one reflect an expansive sense of identity which is informed by multiple perspectives and realities.

Connecting Currents

Nearing the end of the multidirectional (or perhaps just plain rambling) journey to locate the evolving identity of Asian Americans, I find that our strongest anchor in these turbulent waters is the enduring fact of our immigrant legacy. This is our great source of strength. The superficial old adage that immigrants can take advantage of the best of both worlds can perhaps be injected with a new meaning and relevance if we're fully aware of the realities of the two worlds and their interrelationship. For Asian Americans to assert the notion of Third World solidarity is less a sentimental rhetoric than an empowering strategy to subvert the status quo.

Even apart from the fact that Asia is part of the Third World, Asian Americans have much common cause with the Third World. Our struggles here for the empowerment of people of color is the flip side of the struggle in the Third World to remake history and to reinvent its culture on its own terms. Asian American identity can now claim a global context, no longer confined to a "minority" status.



"Topaz Relocation Center, Utah USA" MASAKO TAKAHASHI (Box Show)

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[1]Tony Eprile, *New York Times Book Review* of "Selected Short Stories" by Richard Rive, January 21, 1990.

[2] Mitsuye Yamada, "Asian Pacific American Women and Feminism," *This Bridge Called My Back*, eds. Moraga & Anzaldua. pp. 74-75.

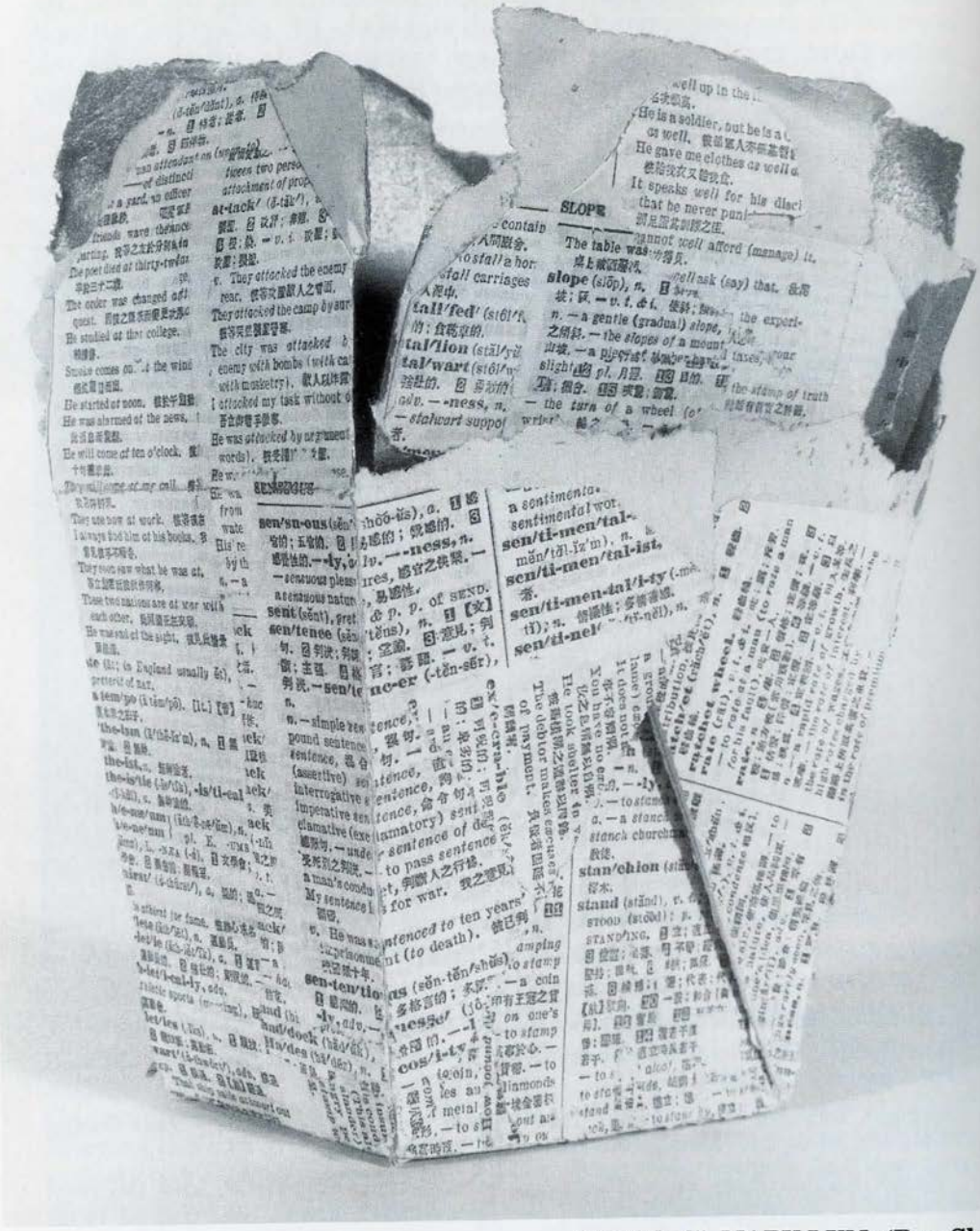
[3] Geeta Kapur, from an unpublished manuscript, "Tradition and Contemporaneity in Third World Fine Arts," delivered at the Third Havana Bienal, 1989.

[4] Trin T. Minh-ha, 1989, *Woman Native Other* (Indiana University Press), pp. 98-99.

[5] Amy Ling, "Revelation and Mask: Autobiographies of the Eaton Sisters," *IKON #9: Without Ceremony*, 1988, pp. 54-59.

[6] Ibid., p. 55

[7] John Yau, "Please Wait by the Coatroom, Wifredo Lam in the Museum of Modern Art," *Arts Magazine*, December 1988, pp. 56-59.



"Untitled" MARY LUM (Box Show)

MARY LUM

100 Fortunes: Theme and **Variations**

YOU WILL INHERIT MONEY AND JEWELRY **OBJECTS OF DESIRE** YOU WILL RECEIVE SOME HIGH PRIZE OR AWARD **DREAM REALITY** YOU WILL BE SUCCESSFUL IN LOVE **SPELLBOUND** HOPE FOR THE BEST BUT PREPARE FOR THE WORST **STRANGE ATTRACTORS:SIGNS OF CHAOS** YOUR LOVE LIFE WILL BE HAPPY AND HARMONIOUS **FATAL ABSTRACTION** YOU HAVE A NATURAL GRACE AND A GREAT CONSIDERATION FOR OTHERS **TOKEN GESTURES** BE MODERATE WHERE PLEASURE IS CONCERNED, AVOID FATIGUE **ENDGAME** TOO MUCH CONFIDENCE HAS DECEIVED MANY A ONE **IMAGE WORLD** FROM LISTENING COMES WISDOM AND FROM SPEAKING COMES REPENTANCE **THE SILENT BAROQUE** YOU WILL BE WISE NOT TO SEEK TOO MUCH FROM OTHERS **ART AT THE END OF THE SOCIAL** YOU HAVE HAD LONG TERM STIMULATION RELATIVE TO BUSINESS **GREAT ACTIVITY** YOU HAVE A WISE SPIRIT, AND ADVANCED INTELLECT, AND FAITH IN HUMAN NATURE **THE CHARADE OF MASTERY** YOU CANNOT DEMONSTRATE AN EMOTION OR PROVE AN ASPIRATION **STATE OF SIEGE** STICK TO THINGS AS THEY ARE, DISTRUST NOVELTIES **REPETITION** HOW YOU LOOK DEPENDS ON WHERE YOU GO, GUIDE YOURSELF ACCORDINGLY **STRATEGIES FOR THE LAST PAINTING** COURAGE IS YOUR GREATEST PRESENT NEED **FAKE** FAMILY PROSPERITY AND CONTENTMENT **SOLID CONCEPT** COMPLIMENTS AND SOCIAL PLEASURES **AGAINST NATURE** YOU MAY LOSE YOUR LOVE THROUGH FALSE REPORTS **THE POWER OF WORDS** A VISIT TO A STRANGE PLACE WILL BRING YOU FRESH WORK **ROUNDTRIP** ADVICE WILL BE GIVEN TO YOU WELL WORTH FOLLOWING **FACE IT** DO NOT OVERTAX YOUR POWERS **VIRTUOSO** THIS PERSON IS SERIOUS AND TRUE AND DESERVES TO BE RESPECTED **WITNESS** A VERY GOOD NATURED FELLOW WHO WILL GET LOTS OF MONEY **AMERICAN ECCENTRIC ABSTRACTION** THIS IS THE FORERUNNER OF WEALTH, HAPPINESS, AND PROSPERITY **CONSTRUCTED ILLUSIONS** A COMFORTABLE SALARY AND A GOOD POSITION WILL BE YOURS **SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE, EVERYTHING FOR NO ONE** YOUR CHIVALRY AND COMPASSION ARE ADMIRABLE QUALITIES **EXPRESSIVE GEOMETRIES**

YOU WILL BE ASKED TO A WEDDING SOON **FAMILY STORIES** GOOD NEWS OF SOMEONE DEAR **HOME SHOW** YOU WILL LIVE LONG AND ENJOY LIFE **PRE-POP POST- APPROPRIATION** MANY CHANGES BUT A HAPPY OLD AGE **GEO-FIGURATION** BE CAREFUL IN YOUR ACTIONS **DISAPPEARANCES** BEWARE OF THOSE WHO WOULD APPEAR TO BEFRIEND YOU WITHOUT REASON **A FOREST OF SIGNS** THOUGHTS ABOUT LOVE MAY STIR YOUR IMAGINATION **THE RADIANT PRINCIPLE** A FRIENDSHIP WILL PROVE THE FOUNDATION OF YOUR SUCCESS IN LIFE **NOT PAINTING** YOU WILL BE SUCCESSFUL IN BUSINESS AND MARRIED LIFE **AMERICAN EXPRESS** SUCCESS, REASON, AND FUTURE HAPPINESS **DISARMING IMAGES** A TRIP TO EUROPE AWAITS YOU **MAGICIENS DE LA TERRE** SOCIAL PLEASURE AND A MOST FORTUNATE FUTURE **THE ART OF MEMORY THE LOSS OF HISTORY** YOUR MISUNDERSTANDING WILL BE CLEARED UP IN TIME **POST GRAFFITI** YOUR CHEERFULNESS WILL WIN SUCCESS **THE LAST LAUGH** YOU WILL REALIZE YOUR DREAMS BY YOUR OWN EFFORTS **PERSISTENCE OF VISION** TRY TO DEVELOP YOUR OWN PERSONALITY **FILLING IN THE GAP** A MESSAGE FROM A DISTANCE IS SOON TO BE RECEIVED **SCIENTIFIC METAPHYSICS** A JOURNEY WILL BE TAKEN BY SEA OR RIVER **WANDERERS** YOU WILL BE SUCCESSFUL IN A BUSINESS OF YOUR OWN **EXPENSIVE ART** USE YOUR GIFTS WISELY AND THEY WILL BE ENLARGED **OUTER LIMITS** NOT AT PRESENT BUT PERHAPS SOON **PROCESS** A MERRY NIGHT: DO NOT FORGET **TERRITORY OF DESIRE** A CHANGE FOR THE BETTER **NEW ACQUISITIONS** YES, GO AHEAD WITH CONFIDENCE **WALK OUT TO WINTER** YOUR IDEAS MAY TAKE A PHILOSOPHICAL TURN TODAY **METAMODERN** WEALTH AND RENOWN, A BEAUTIFUL PERSON AND A HAPPY MARRIAGE **IMAGES OF PERCEPTION** YOUR PERSONAL FINANCES WILL BE GREATLY IMPROVED **COMING ATTRACTIONS** YOU WILL PROSPER IN A FEW YEARS **GATHERING FORCES** YOUR EFFORTS WILL RESULT IN MUCH PROFIT **HORN OF PLENTY** BE TRUE AND TRUST EACH OTHER AND ALL WILL BE WELL **POETIC OBJECTIVES** YOU WILL GAIN MONEY BY A SPECULATION OR LOTTERY **10 + 10** NO FLOWERY ROADS LEAD TO GLORY **UP THE GARDEN PATH** YOUR NAME WILL BE FAMOUS IN THE FUTURE **MY NAME & MY ACT** AN OPEN DOOR IS NOT ALWAYS AN INVITATION TO ENTER **COMPLEXITY AND CONTRIDICTION** NEWS OF AN OLD FRIEND **LOVING CORRESPONDANCE** AN AFFECTIONATE MESSAGE, GOOD TIDINGS WILL COME SHORTLY **TEMPERANCE** VAST WEALTH **GLOSSSOLALIA** YOU ARE ABOUT TO MAKE A MOST VALUABLE DISCOVERY **COMPLEX OBJECTS**

YOU WILL PROSPER IN A FEW YEARS **MIND OVER MATTER** YOU HAVE A FORTUNATE SIGN **THE THING ITSELF** FRESH WORK IN NEW SCENES **NOTIONS OF PLACE** MUCH DISCUSSION AND PLANNING **FRAMES OF REFERENCE** SOCIAL PLEASURE AND A MOST FORTUNATE FUTURE **PERFECT VEHICLES** RICHES AND HONOR **THE NEW FABRICANTS** TEMPTATION WILL COME YOUR WAY, BE ON YOUR GUARD **SEVEN OBSESSIONS** GOOD NEWS WILL BE RECEIVED IN A LETTER **CULTURE AND COMMENTARY** A PLEASANT JOURNEY TO PLACES FAR AWAY **HIGH AND LOW** MANY CHANGES OF MIND AND MOOD, DO NOT HESITATE TOO LONG **TELL IT LIKE IT IS** REVISE YOUR PLANS AT ONCE AND GUARD AGAINST MISTAKES **EXPOSED** YOU ARE APT TO GIVE TOO MUCH THOUGHT TO APPEARANCES **ART AND ITS DOUBLE** GOOD NEWS **A DIFFERENT CORNER** A GIFT OF FLOWER WILL SOON BE MADE TO YOU **THE (UN)MAKING OF NATURE** YOUR TROUBLES WILL CEASE AND FORTUNE WILL SMILE UPON YOU **DOUBLE FEATURE** YOU SOON WILL RECOVER VALUABLES THOUGHT LOST **SEMI-OBJECTS** YOU WILL HAVE AN UNEXPECTED TREASURE **PAINTBALL** YOU ARE HAPPIER ASSUMING OTHER CARES **THE PRESENCE OF ABSENCE** YOU WILL OVERCOME OBSTACLES TO ACHIEVE SUCCESS **INVESTIGATIONS** ONE OF YOUR DREAMS WILL PROVE PROFITABLE **STORYLINE** IMPORTANT NEWS FROM AN UNEXPECTED SOURCE **INSIDE WORLD** SMALL WORRIES WILL VANISH IF YOU TACKLE THEM BRAVELY **OBJECT OF STRATIFICATION** QUARRELS CAN BE AVOIDED IF YOU ARE TACTFUL **ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT?** A PROPOSITION WILL BE ACCEPTED **BLIND DATE** A LETTER OR PAPER OF GREAT IMPORTANCE **DIALECTIC MATERIAL** IF YOU DO NOT TRUST ENOUGH YOU WILL NOT BE TRUSTED **THE INSIDE OF THE OUTSIDE** ONE OF YOUR SCHEMES WILL PROVE PROFITABLE **ART OF FASHION** A LEGACY FROM AN UNKNOWN RELATIVE **PUBLIC DOMAIN** BE CAREFUL OF EXTRAVAGANCE **THE DARK SUBLIME** YOU MAY EXPECT A CHANGE IN RESIDENCE SOON **DISPLACEMENT** DO NOT DESPAIR FOR YOU WILL BE HAPPY **OF EVER-EVER LAND I SPEAK** YOU WILL PROSPER **MINIMAL WORKS** YOU WILL HAVE MANY BRIGHT DAYS SOON **TECHNO-METAPHYSICS** THE FUTURE HOLDS GREAT THINGS FOR YOU **INCONSOLABLE**

BESSY REYNA

And This Blue Surrounding Me Again

At times, the simplest of things becomes even simpler. Like calling someone who lives far away, just to say "I miss you." Simple gestures, like opening a door and entering a room we have been in so many times before. Like the night I went back to her house and entered that blue room for the first time in five years. It was hot and the clothes I was wearing, long-sleeve shirt and heavy pants, made it so much worse. She opened the door, wearing a tank-top and baggy shorts. I walked in pretending not to be uncomfortable, and we sat making small talk, looking at each other and trying to guess if we really had become immune to one another. Without a word, she got up and walked away. I sat, listening to the jazz record she had been playing when I walked in. —Here, why don't you change into these clothes, you will be more comfortable,— she said, handing me a pair of old shorts and a T-shirt. A simple gesture. The simple gestures of this person I once loved who was now handing me clothes, her hand touching mine when I reached for the clothes, as if nothing had happened. As if time had not been. As if the years in between never existed.

I wanted to believe it was the simple gesture of her love surfacing when she smiled. Me, wanted again, years later in this room where I now sat surveying my surroundings making an inventory of things replaced, remembering lying here on the same worn-out blue carpet, blue light, blue furniture. I never really paid attention then to how blue this room was. Even the paintings hanging on the walls are done in blues. The wallpaper used to be light blue but now, covered with water stains, is mostly peeling pieces of blue. The moonlight coming in from two sides makes the room look even bluer.

I want to stop all the memories flashing in front of me, aware of how this room is affecting me, merging with my mood, infecting me. Can I fight this? She probably wants me here tonight because there is no one else around, what has she done in the last five years? I found clues in her bedroom when I went to change my clothes, new faces smiling from elaborate picture frames. I found myself smiling back at me from one of them, each frame carefully placed like those in a gallery. Did she love them?

The night I left her bedroom, five years ago, I thought would be the last time I would be in that room. Did she plan for the hate? for the dryness of her sex? Lifting her body abruptly in the middle of making love, looking amused, —You think for a moment that I enjoy sex with you? You must be kidding!— Her face was so full of contempt —I am fed up with you, I have

someone else now— she shouted at me, —You are just like nothing to me now— she kept saying while I was still panting from make-believe love-making that a short time back had seemed like caring. After that, every movement hurt me, getting dressed and leaving seemed to take place in slow motion.

Earlier that day, we had gone to visit some friends for dinner, only I didn't know I was supposed to be the chef. They had bought lobsters, —We hear you are a great cook— they told me, daring me. —Sure! just give me a cookbook and I can do anything!— I never believed they would take me seriously. I had never cooked a lobster before and this one was alive. I chose the fanciest French recipe I could find, one with cognac, hoping they wouldn't have the ingredients I needed, but they did. We were all impressed when I lit the sauce at the table. The meal was a great success, but I just couldn't eat it, not after cleaning it and letting all the gunk spill out into my hands. I didn't even taste it.

After dinner we sat talking to each other, the way people do when they get together, not wanting to sound too controversial or too boring. She got up from the living room, went to make a phone call and stayed away for the longest time. Who was she whispering to on the phone? I sat pretending to enjoy my after-dinner drink. —Sorry it took so long,— she said casually, trying to smile, sitting next to me, touching me. I resisted her touch wondering who it was at the other end of the phone. Was I so jealous because I recognized the signs?

It was not the first time we broke up, this time it took longer for me to return, that's all. We like pretending it was entirely the other's fault. Can I hate and keep on wanting? (She was right, these clothes are more comfortable.) The simplest gestures making the hurt come back.

It is so still outside. I turned off the light and sat in the darkest corner, she will probably notice my absence after a while and will try to talk me into returning to her bed. I can't, not tonight, tonight I want to be part of this blue room which my mind converts into a stage where, at the end of the play, one character moves away to another city.

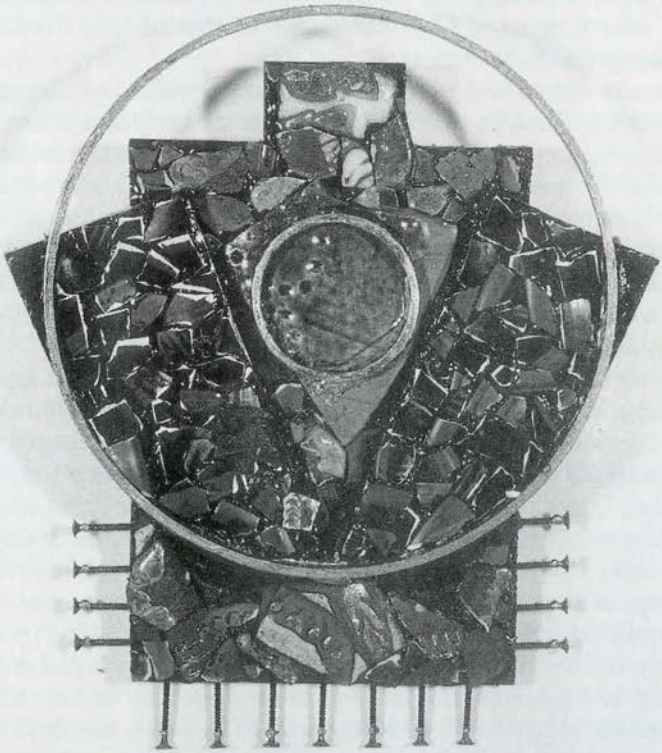
I didn't hear her walk into the blue room. Next thing I knew her hands were caressing me and our fingers were searching and I couldn't stop this need from developing inside of me once again as if nothing else mattered, as if I had stopped caring about anything but feeling her touch. On again, off again love, like changing radio stations when you don't like the music. Only it was me this time, me being changed. Does it really matter here in this blue room? Fingers not daring to rush, to be too obvious, to get too carried away, centering on each touch, because nothing else matters but the blue warmth surrounding us and the room encouraging us to touch and to forget having left it, to forget I now have someone else who loves me, and who I am loving most of the time, except for this one moment when all this blueness surrounds me and I must find out why she left me, and why she hurt me so much and she is not going to tell me, just like before, and

it does not matter because in this blue room nothing matters but her touch and the warmth around us.

She had carefully orchestrated my return, planning how to get me back. She searched for me, found me and brought me back. A message left on an answering machine, reaching out, —I had to talk to you, no one else would understand, you are the only one who understands, I have to see you— The past skillfully avoided, coming back to entice me.

She glides expertly next to me, as if she owns the space I occupy, her body surrounds me, overcomes me and I follow her rhythms losing myself for an instant and then I struggle to recapture my body as if it had been invaded. But it wasn't really, I let it happen. She was giving me something I wanted but didn't want to have, because I was used to knowing how it felt when I didn't have it and now I wish I didn't know how it feels having it again. But now I do.

I had to find out, no, didn't have to, simply wanted to.



"Sacred Hoop" MARY IRON EYES HATZ (Box Show)

COAST TO COAST:
National Women Artists of Color

Coast to Coast: National Women Artists of Color is the only national repository of information about women artists of color in the United States, collecting and disseminating information otherwise unavailable, including geographical listings of artists and their work. Working with cultural institutions, universities and colleges, *COAST TO COAST* has also sponsored panel discussions, lectures, and workshops, providing artists the opportunity to exchange ideas across cultures, as well as working to overcome centuries of ethnic misinformation.

COAST TO COAST's first exhibition opened in 1988 at Diverse Works in Houston, Texas. Two hundred artists from thirty states participated in the national exhibition. Asked to create artists' books, women from Latina, Native American, African, Far and Middle Eastern backgrounds expressed and celebrated the complex experience of being women of color in the United States. Working individually and collaboratively, the artists used unusual and varied materials, including audio tape, leather, quilts, gourd skin, photographs, bags, and paper.

On January 20th, *Ancestors Known and Unknown: Box Works*, the group's second exhibition, opened at the Art in General Gallery in New York City. Along with the exhibition, a panel discussion/performance event "It Matters Who We Are From Coast to Coast" was presented which included dialogue, music, movement and performance by twenty women of color artists who share positive cross-cultural similarities.

The Steering Committee of *COAST TO COAST* has begun planning for its next exhibition: "The Traveling Medicine Show: Healing the Wounds of the Nation" (working title) slated for 1994. More information on this show or on *COAST TO COAST* can be obtained by writing *COAST TO COAST: National Women Artists of Color* c/o Regine Leys, P.O. Box 961, Jamaica, NY 11431.

Current active members of the Steering Committee of *COAST TO COAST* are: Tomie Arai, Carole Byard, Regina A. Corritore, Carolina Escobar, Maria Terersa Giancoli, Michele Godwin, Maria E. Gonzalez, Miriam Hernández, Wen Yi Hou, Sharon Jaddis, Regine Leys, Janet Lin, Donna Lindo, Beverly R. Singer, Clarissa Sligh, Elaine Soto, Diosa Summers-Fitzgerald, and Lisa Yi.

The following artists have included work in the two COAST TO COAST exhibitions:

Nadema Agard
Chris Albertson
Emma Amos
Tomie Arai
Sharon Ajuba Douglas
Regina Araujo Corritore
Babu
Baby Faith
Ginane Bacho
Michelle Barnes
Santa Contreras Barraza
Aleta A. Bass
Mercedes Romero Bell
Pena Bonita
Kabuya P. Bowens
Lisa Bradley
Brenda Branch
Nailah Brathwaite
Claudine K. Brown
Vanessa Brown
Vivian E. Browne
Beverly Buchanan
Joy Dai Buell
Millie Burns
Lilian T. Burwell
Carole Byard
Catherine Cajandig
Carol Ann Carter
Ivy Carter
Nanette Carter

Yvonne Pickering Carter
Josely Carvalho
Elizabeth Catlett
Mal Pina M. Chan
Martha Chavez
Barbara Chavous
Julia Nee Chu
Muriel Cioffi
Carmen Clemens-Spears
Karita Coffey
Hortensia Colorado
Vira Colorado
Joan Criswell
Catherine Crowell
Ada Cruz
Dolores Cruz
Maria Daliz
Yolanda Daliz
Maritza Davila
Nadine Delawrence-Maine
Oletha DeVane
Alexis DeVeaux
Maria Theresa Dingus
Lotus Do-Brooks
Maria Dominguez
Terry Duffy
Joan Eda
Lynda D. Edwards
Carolina Escobar
Helen Evans Ramsaran
Susan Fateh
Tina Fuentes
Aida Fuma de Noche
Kathy Gallegos
Margaret W. Gallegos
Diane Gamboa
Colette Gaiter
Elizabeth Garcia
Maria Theresa Giancoli
Ye Kyung Gil
Michele Godwin
Maria E. Gonzalez
Sharol Graves
Renee Green
Carmen de Novais Guerrero
Sheila Hamanaka
Kim Hardiman
Zarina Hashmi
Maren Hassinger
Mary Iron Eyes Hatz
Safiya Henderson-Holmes
Caryl Henry
Janet O. Henry
Miriam Hernàndez
Linda Hiwot
Dorothy Holden
Robin Holder
Anita Holguin
Jacqui Holmes
Mari Holmes
Wen Yi Hou
Michi Itami
Zapora Jacobs
Martha Jackson-Jarvis
Sharon Jaddis
Jamillah Jennings
Kyong Sook Jo
Harriet Forte Kennedy
Young-Im Kim
Kumi Korf
Nina Kuo
Kimberly Lakes
Jean LaMarr
Carmen Lazo
Viola Leak
Beatriz Ledesman
Kyung-Kim Lee
Lanie Lee
Regine Leys
Janet M. Lin
Kay Lindsay
Carm Little Turtle
Hung Liu
Fern Logan
Linda Lomahaftewa
Gloria Longval
Lotus
C. Love
Alice Lovelace
Mary Lum
Stefani Mar
Soledad Marjon
Paula Martinez
Onipese Rere Mawusi
Valerie Maynard
Lisa Mayo
Patricia McMillan
Marica McNair
Vicki Meek
Rosalyn Mesquita
Gloria Miguel
Damali Miller
Yong Soon Min
Patricia Catherine Mora
Celia Munoz
Sana Musasama
Senga Nengudi
Maria Elena Orona
Laurie Ourlicht
Danna Pao
Gloria Patton
Roxanne Perinchief
Mai-Ly Pham
Howardena Pindell
Adrian Piper
Rhonda Rhodes
Jacqueline Richards
Faith Ringgold
Sophie Rivera
Patricia Rodriguez
Sandra Rowe
Alyce Sadongei
Carmen Sanchez
Marta Sanchez
Meg Henson Scales
Joyce Scott
Cheryl A. Shackleton
Gail Shaw-Clemons
Coreen Simpson
Beverly R. Singer
Clarissa Sligh
Andetrie Smith
Jaune Quick-to-See Smith
Gilda Snowden
Elaine Soto
Leslee Stradford-Grant
Sharon E. Sutton
Diosa Summers-Fitzgerald
Lisa Suzuki
Masako Takahashi
Barbara Takenaga
D.J. Tatsumi
Evelyn Patricia Terry
Freida High Tesfagiorgis
Lillian Thompson
Phyllis Thompson
Susan Thompson
Mary Ting
Johnetta Tinker
Charlotte Torres
Charleen Touchette
Gail Trembley
Sarah Trotty
Nancy Uyemura
Linda Vallejo
Gwendolyn Verner
Eleanor Wagner-Simpson
Barbara Wallace
Denise Ward-Brown
Alvia Wardlaw
Carolyn Warfield
Bisa Washington
Shirley Waterhouse
Jean Kondo Weigl
Kathleen Westcott
Emmi Whitehorse
Nashormeh Norma Wilkie
Laura Williams
Deborah Willis
Shirley Woodson
Emoretta Yang
Lisa Yi
Mirtes Zwierzynski

CONTRIBUTORS:

MEENA ALEXANDER is a poet and novelist, and, most recently, author of *Nampally Road* (Mercury House, 1991). She lives in Manhattan, is the mother of two children, rides the subways, teaches at Hunter and the Graduate Center, CUNY. Her autobiography *Fault Lines* is forthcoming from the Feminist Press.

EMMA AMOS, painter, printmaker and professor at the Mason Gross School of the Arts, Rutgers University, New Jersey, was born in Atlanta, Georgia. She is a member of the *Heresies* magazine collective, a Governor of the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Maine and a winner of an NEA Fellowship in Drawing and a New York Foundation Fellowship in Painting. Her paintings and prints are in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, The Newark Museum, The New Jersey State Museum and many others and has had numerous solo exhibitions, nationally and internationally.

TOMIE ARAI is a Japanese American visual artist who lives and works in New York City. Her works on paper are in the print collections of the Museum of Modern Art, the Washington State Arts Commission and the Library of Congress. She has exhibited in galleries and museums across the country, including the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Museum of Modern Art and is a recipient of a 1991 New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship in Printmaking and a 1991-92 National Endowment for the Arts Interarts grant.

MARITZA ARRASTIA is a writer of poetry, fiction, videoplays and journalism. She has curated reading series at BACA Downtown, YOMOMA Arts and the TRIPLEX Theatre. Her works include: *Tripartita,* a collection of mythopoetic, magic realist and science fiction poetry and narrative done in collaboration with writers Myrna Nieves and Ana Betancourt; *Exile,* a novel; *Yaravi,* a collection of poems; *Mating in the 80s,* a live videoplay that uses theatre and cine-matic forms; and *Community Literature: the Road to Authentic Literacy.*

MICHELLE BARNES is Executive Director of the Community Artists' Collective in Houston, Texas and Director of the Barnes-Blackman Gallery. Her work has appeared in many exhibitions including North Harris County Community College, Houston, Texas; the Women's Caucus for the Arts National Tour; University of Houston, Clear Lake Campus and the George R. Brown Convention Center.

ALETA BASS lives and works in her studio in the Bronx. She is developing collages whose language explores subtleties as they relate to contrast, which include unexpected jolts.

CAROLE BYARD, a painter, sculptor, muralist, illustrator and earthworks artist, lives in New York. "Byard's subject in all of her media has long been 'social madness and inner strength' survival and persistence, and the transcendence of the human spirit over material obstacles."—Lucy R. Lippard, *Mixed Blessings.* Byard is a faculty member of Parsons School of Design and co-coordinator of *Coast to Coast: Ancestors Known & Unknown Box Show.* Her most recent solo exhibit *The Perception of Presence* is an installation at Art in General in New York City, March 1-April 18, 1992.

JOSELY CARVALHO is a Brazilian artist, poet and activist living in New York City. She works with silkscreen printing, painting, installations, performance, book art and video. She has been the recipient of NYSCA, NYFA, Creative Time and NEA grants. She is currently a visiting artist in the Painting Department at SUNY (Purchase). She participated in the 3rd Biennial of Painting, Cuenca, Ecuador as part of the U.S. selection. Her latest solo exhibit was *My Body is My Country* at Real Art Ways, Hartford.

JOY DAI BUELL: "An archaeologist of the present, I scan the abandoned wealth of our/their society in constant amazement. Objects strewn from a passing car—detritus found on walks—all find their way into handmade paper to be refound—refined, reborn in time.

REGINA ARAUJO CORRITORE was born in 1958, in the Bronx, New York City. She received an MFA from the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque. She is the co-founder of Vistas Latinas, president of the Womens Caucus for Art, New York City Chapter, and an exhibiting member of SOHO 20 Gallery.

RACHEL GUIDO deVRIES is director of the Community Writers Project in Syracuse, N.Y. and the author of *Tender Warriors* (Firebrand). Most recently, she has had poems published in *Frontiers* and *Voices in Italian Americana.* Her work will appear in two Crossing Press anthologies: *My Father's Daughter* and *My Mother's Daughter.*

ANNA FARIELLO is Director of Radford University Galleries, which produced a catalog for the *Coast to Coast* touring exhibition. Formally an art historian, Fariello writes frequently on

the arts and produces site specific sculpture in cast ceramic.

COLETTE GAITER: "Never leave a house by a different door from that by which you entered it. You will be carrying away the good luck of the place." (Creole Proverb) "Never Leave a House..." is a piece about reconciling the past and present and filling in unknown gaps of personal history. Before doing my own personal creative work, I was a graphic designer for many years. I now teach computer graphics at the Minneapolis College of Art & Design. In my current personal work, I am exploring sexual/social/racial issues using multi-media software on a Macintosh computer.

LOIS GRIFFITH: My stories have appeared in the *Iowa Review, IKON Magazine, Confirmations: An Anthology of Black Women Writers, Heresies* and *Between C&D* Magazine. Currently I am at work on a collection of stories, tentatively entitled, *Under The Skin.* I teach writing at Borough of Manhattan Community College. I am co-director of the Nuyorican Poets Cafe.

SHEILA HAMANAKA is a third generation Japanese-American. She writes and illustrates childrens' books. She created *The Journey: Japanese Americans, Racism & Renewal* (Orchard Books, 1990), the story of the Japanese American internment in concentration camps during World War II which is based on a mural she painted. She lives in Tappan, N.Y.

MARY IRON EYES HATZ lives in Dallas, Texas where she is co-chair of the Richland College art department. She holds an MFA (Cum Laude), a BA and a BFA from Texas Women's University. Her work has been shown at Art in General, Tech Terrance Park, D-Art Visual Art Center and the San Antonio Art Institute and is in the Nelson Rockefeller Collection, and the Margaret Mead Collection. She was curator of the Edward Curtis Exhibition at the Allen Street Gallery, Dallas, a recipiant of a Texas Commission on the Arts project grant, Chairperson of the Dallas, Texas Intertribal Center.

ELIZABETH HAY is a Canadian living in New York. Her first book was *Crossing the Snow Line* (Black Moss Press, 1989). Her story, "A Snowball from China" is from her second book, *The Only Snow in Havana* (Cormorant Books), which will be published in the Fall of 1992.

MIRIAM HERNÁNDEZ was born in Puerto Rico and received an MFA from the Maryland Institute Graduate School of Painting. She has had Solo Exhibitions at Soho 20, Taller Boricua and L'Ambiente Gallery. Her work has appeared in such diverse venues as the Museum of the City of New York, Art in General, Dallas City Hall Ceres Gallery, Islip Art Museum, El Museo del Barrio, the Port Authority Bus Terminal Windows, and the Art Tower in Baltimore, Maryland She was Co-Curator of the "Vistas Latinas" Exhibitions.

LINDA HIWOT is a native of Providence, Rhode Island. She studied at Pratt Institute and acquired a BFA in painting and received an MA from New York University. In addition to being a painter, she is an art educator and free lance illustrator. She has shown her work extensively in New York and across the United States. She presently resides in Brooklyn, N.Y.

BELL HOOKS, writer, feminist theorist, and cultural critic, is associate professor at Oberlin College. She speaks widely on the issues of race, class, gender, and is author of *Ain't I a Woman, Black Women and Feminism, Feminist Theory from Margin to Center, Talking Black: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* and *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics.*

SAFIYA HENDERSON HOLMES is a writer of poetry and fiction. Her work has appeared in numerous literary magazines and anthologies. She is a recipient of CAPS and NYFA grants for poetry. Her fiction appears in *The Breaking Ice,* an anthology edited by Terri McMillen. Her book of poems *Madness and A Bit of Hope* was published by Writers and Readers/Harlem River Press. She currently teaches in the creative writing department of Syracuse University.

CHRISTIAN X. HUNTER, in addition to writing, has sung and played guitar with The Nairobi Combo and Barking Colony. Published regularly in *Vital Pulse, The National Poetry Magazine of the Lower East Side* and *What Happens Next* Magazine, Christian's short stories are currently featured in *Red Tape* and in an upcoming *Semiotext* anthology.

GALE JACKSON works in the book arts. She is a poet, a writer, a storyteller, a librarian and an organizer in cultural education. Her work has been published in a number of journals and her latest book is a collaborative volume of poetry with Susan Sherman and Kimiko Hahn entitled *We Stand Our Ground.*

SHARON JADDIS received her MFA in sculpture and multi-media as a Ruff Bonge fellow from the Mason Gross School of Fine & Performing Arts at

Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey.

LUCY R. LIPPARD is a writer and activist, author of fifteen books, including *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art, Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory,* and *Get the Message? A Decade of Art for Social Change.* Her latest book is *Mixed Blessings* (Pantheon). She has done political comics, performances and street theater and has curated and organized over forty exhibitions in the United States, Europe, and Latin America. She lives in New York City and Boulder, Colorado.

MARY LUM is a painter and writer who teaches at the New York State College of Ceramics, a SUNY school at Alfred University. She has received fellowships from the NEA, the New York Foundation for the Arts, as well as a project grant from NYSCA. Her work often deals with intertextuality. The piece "100 Fortunes: theme and **Variations"** combines fortune cookie prophesy with the names of group exhibitions as gleaned from art magazines.

MARGO MACHIDA is a New York-based artist, independent curator and writer specializing in contemporary Asian American visual art. She has curated a number of exhibitions, including *Street of Gold* at the Jamaica Arts Center (1990); and *Invented Selves: Images of Asian American Identity* at Asian American Arts Centre (1988). Among her recent awards are a Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship in the Humanities (1989-90) and a New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship in Painting (1991-92). She is a founding member of *Godzilla: Asian American Art Network.*

YONG SOON MIN received a 1989-90 National Endowment for the Arts Visual Artists Fellowship and is included in the newest edition of *Who's Who in American Art.* Her essay comparing contemporary art in Cuba, South Korea and among Asian American artists will appear in *Asian Americans: Comparative and Global Perspectives* (Washington State University Press).

THERESE ON is a writer living in New York City. Her latest work has appeared in *The Portable Lower East Side* and *A. Magazine,* an Asian American publication.

EVE PACKER is a poet/performance artist and coordinator of "what happens next" poetry/performance collective based in the Lower East Side of Manhattan. Two recently published chapbooks by Apathy Press (balt) are *this is personal* (Spring, '91) and *paradise square* (Fall, 1991). A word/jazz performance piece with the Future is a current project.

DEBORAH PINTONELLI is the co-founder and former editor of *Letter eX,* a poetry newspaper based in Chicago, and the author of *Meat and Memory* and *Ego Monkey.* She is working on a new book, *Some Heart,* of which "Ruth" is an excerpt.

ADRIAN PIPER is a conceptual artist whose work in a variety of media has focused on issues of racism, racial stereotyping and xenophobia for over two decades. Piper teaches metaethics and Kant's metaphysics at Wellesley College where she is professor of philosophy.

MARGARET RANDALL lives and writes in New Mexico, on land reclaimed with the help of many friends when she won her case against the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service in 1989. Lately she has been writing about ways in which the different socialist experiments proved unwilling or unable to address a feminist agenda, and how that failure may have helped Bush and company bring them down. Her most recent book is *Walking to the Edge: Essays of Resistance* (South End, Boston, 1990).

ARLENE RAVEN is an art historian writing criticism in New York for the *Village Voice* and a variety of art magazines and academic journals. She is the New York editor of *High Performance,* and general editor of the series "Art of the Edge" for UMI Research Press. Her selected essays were published as *Crossing Over: Feminism and Art of Social Concern* (1988). She was an editor and contributor to *Feminist Art Criticism: An Anthology* (1988), which won the Susan Koppelman Award. *Exposures: Women and Their Art* was published by NewSage Press in 1989.

BESSY REYNA: Born in Cuba, she grew up in Panama and came to this country in 1968 to study at Mt. Holyoke College. She is the author of *Terrarium* (Poetry, 1975) and *Ab Ovo* (Short stories, 1978). In 1990, she received an individual writer's award from the Connecticut Commission on the Arts and is presently working on a book about Panama.

FAITH RINGGOLD is a painter, mixed media sculptor, performance artist, and writer. She is a professor of art at the University of California (San Diego). Her first book, *Tar Beach* (1991, Crown) is based on the story quilt, *Tar Beach* from *The Women on the Bridge Series* painted in 1988 which is in the permanent collection of the Guggenheim Museum. Some

of her recent awards include a National Endowment for the Arts award for painting (1989), a New York Foundation for the Arts award for painting (1988), a Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship for Painting (1987).

CARMEN SANCHEZ is a multi-media artist who was born into the rich cultural history of Peru. In her work, she combines an early education and exposure to the Pre-Columbian art of her native land with a focus on the artistic mileau of today's developed cultures and the critical social issues of our times. Sanchez is a specialist in ceramics and is now involved in a study of indigenious peoples of the Americas and the wealth of information presented in the technique and aesthetic of their work in clay. She lives and works in New York City.

SUSAN SHERMAN, poet, essayist, and editor of IKON magazine was awarded a New York Foundation for the Arts fellowship in Poetry (1990), a CAPS poetry grant (1976) and editors' awards from the New York State Council on the Arts and CCLM. Her most recent book, *The Color of the Heart: Writing from Struggle & Change 1959-1990* (Curbstone Press) is a collection of essays, poetry and short prose. She is currently working on a memoir and a new play which will be presented in the Fall. She teaches philosophy at Parsons School of Design.

BEVERLY R. SINGER is a member of the Santa Clara Pueblo located in New Mexico. She has combined her personal interest in art and professional experiences in social work as a lecturer at New York University and Parsons School of Design, as a developer of curriculum programs for Native American youth and international students, and is an advocate for realistic contemporary images of Native Americans. She is an independent video producer and co-editor of an upcoming book, *Rising Voices: Writings by Native American Youth* (Scribners, Spring 1992).

MARY McLAUGHLIN SLECHTA is a poet and fiction writer who lives in Syracuse, New York with her husband and two sons. She works with the Community Writer's Project. This is her first published story. It comes out of a gnawing remembrance of growing up as an African-American female ("little colored girl") in Connecticut during the 1960s.

CLARISSA SLIGH, born in Washington D.C., has a BS in mathematics from Hampton Institute, a BFA in painting from Howard University, and an MBA in finance from the University of Pennsylvania. National Coordinator of *Coast to Coast: Women of Color National Artists' Projects*, she has been the recipient of NEA and NYFA fellowships in 1988 and a NYSCA project grant in 1990. Her work has been widely exhibited and collected.

ELAINE SOTO is a Puerto-Rican woman born in New York City and raised in the South Bronx. She has a Ph.D in Clinical Psychology and she studied art at the School of Visual Arts. As a psychologist and as an artist, her goal is to expand consciousness both in herself and in others. She has had one-woman shows at Taller Boricua and at the Broadway Gallery of Passaic College.

DIOSA SUMMERS is a Mississippi Band Choctaw/Northeast Woodland Algonquin woman, a mother and a grandmother. She is a self-taught artist working in water color, collage and printmaking; although she was trained in all traditional Native American art forms by her natural mother. She has an MA in education from Harvard University and a BA in Latin American Studies from the State University College at Buffalo, N.Y.

AMBER COVERDALL SUMRALL is co-editor of *Touching Fire: Erotic Writings by Women* (Carroll & Graf, 1989), *Women of the 14th Moon: Writings on Menopause* (Crossing Press, 1991) and *Catholic Girls* (Penguin/-NAL, 1992). She is editor of *Lovers* (Crossing Press, 1992) and *Sexual Harassment: Women Speak Out* (Crossing Press, 1992).

MASAKO TAKAHASHI was born in 1944 in a Utah internment camp for Japanese-Americans. " For the last five years I've had a studio in Mexico as well as in L.A. This encounter between my Japanese-American upbringing, my American art education, and Mexican passion and traditional iconography has been one of surprising force. My attention has focused on manifesting those invisible energies we seem to understand independent of language and background. My recent solo show, *Ladders and Beyond* reflected these preoccupations."

BISA WASHINGTON works with mixed media, primarily fiber and found objects. Two one person shows of her work have been recently exhibited at Farleigh Dickinson University—ten years worth of work on *Art Against Apartheid* at the Rutherford Campus and recent work at the Hackensack campus. She will have a show, *Tar Babies, Rag Dolls & Corregated* in July at the Newark Museum where her work is in the permanent collection. She has work on exhibit there now in a show called *New Jersey African American Artists.*