
DISSERTATION

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By

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This research surveys ideology and iconology in the presentation of the autobiographical and biographical female nude as envisioned by American women artists in the painting, drawing and printmaking media from 1969 to 1983.

Contemporary dialogue by critics, artists and feminists on the definition of feminine content led to the articulation of the undraped nude torso as the central icon of the study. This static icon was pushed through a variety of styles into multi subtleties of iconology. The female nude by women artists is autobiographical even in biography emphasizing self-identification and authenticity.

General constraints were placed on the survey—the definability or explicit articulation of the female torso as opposed to suggestive imagery, the time frame in which the nude was created, and the chosen media for study.

Art historical methodology was employed to descriptively examine image and intent of the nude presentations in references through time as well as visual traditions of symbology.

This survey began at the turn of the century for historical background to emphasize the greater proliferation of the
nude from 1969 to 1983. There were limitations specifically associated with the earlier time frame (1900-1969)—the lack of art educational opportunities for the female student, the socio-political climate dealing with the acceptability of the nude, and a very general lack of attention from the publishing market towards women artists. Six artists were identified: Lillian Genth, Romaine Brooks, Margarite Zorach, Isobel Bishop, Louise Nevelson and Louise Bourgeois.

The coalescence of socio-political circumstances around 1969, allowing for the greater incidence of the female nude occasioned the selection of 1969 as a perimeter of research.

Within 1969-1983 a greater number of artists and a far greater number of works were evident, seventeen in all, including Alice Neel, Marisol, Mary Frank, Nancy Spero, Joan Brown, Sylvia Sleigh, Martha Mayer Erlebacher, Mary Beth Edelson, Joan Semmel, Jillian Denby, Daphne Mumford, Juanita McNeely, Martha Edelheit, Shirley Gorelick, Janet Culbertson, Anita Steckel, and Pat Steir.

The amazing diversification of the work presented is united by the female nude icon which by subtle visual manipulation and compositional placement offers ideology which expands the Twentieth century definition of female.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS</th>
<th>vi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

## Chapter

### I. INTRODUCTION

- Background
- Problem
- Purpose
- Significance of the Study
- Limitations of the Study
- Terms
- Methodology
- Illustrations
- Chapter Notes

### II. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE (1900-1969)

- Introduction
- Lillian Genth
- Marguerite Zorach
- Romaine Brooks
- Isobel Bishop
- Louise Nevelson
- Louise Bourgeois
- Summary
- Illustrations
- Chapter Notes

### III. AMERICAN WOMEN ARTISTS AND THE FEMALE NUDE IMAGE (1969-1983)

- Introduction
- Alice Neel
- Marisol
- Mary Frank
- Nancy Spero
- Joan Brown
- Sylvia Sleigh
- Martha Mayer Erlebacher
- Mary Beth Edelson
- Joan Semmel
- Jillian Denby
- Daphne Mumford
Juanita McNeeley
Martha Edelheit
Shirley Gorelick
Janet Culbertson
Anita Steckel
Pat Steir
Illustrations
Chapter Notes

IV. ARTIST COMMENTARIES.................. 334

V. SUMMATION AND CONCLUSION ................. 337

Recommendations For Further Study
Chapter Notes

Appendix ........................................ 348

A. Instrument
B. Replies

Bibliography .................................... 367
# LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mary Cassatt</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. &quot;La Toilette&quot; 1891</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah Paxton Dodson</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. &quot;The Bacïdæ&quot; 1883</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lillian Genth</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. &quot;Sunlit Dell&quot; (date unavailable)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. &quot;The Sun Maiden&quot; (date unavailable)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. &quot;The Mountain Stream&quot; (date unavailable)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. &quot;The Fountain Of Life&quot; (date unavailable)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marguerite Thompson Zorach</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. &quot;Bathers&quot; 1913-1914</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. &quot;Three Figures And Gulls&quot; 1914</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. &quot;Maine Islands&quot; 1919</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romaine Goddard Brooks</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. &quot;Azalees Blanches&quot; 1910</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. &quot;Le Trajet&quot; 1911</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. &quot;L'Archer Masque&quot; 1910-1911</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. &quot;On The Wings Of Love&quot; 1930</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. &quot;Caught&quot; 1930</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. &quot;The Foot-Stool&quot; 1930</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. &quot;Lethe&quot; 1930</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. &quot;Mother Nature&quot; 1930</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. &quot;Their Creatures&quot; 1930</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. &quot;Tomorrow Reclaims Yesterday And Today&quot; 1930</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isobel Bishop</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. &quot;Seated Nude&quot; 1934</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. &quot;Nude&quot; 1934</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. &quot;Nude By The Stream&quot; 1938</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. &quot;Small Nude&quot; 1943</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. &quot;Nude Bending&quot; 1949</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. &quot;Seated Nude&quot; 1950</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. &quot;Nude #2&quot; 1954</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. &quot;Undressing&quot; 1959</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. &quot;Undressing On The Bed&quot; 1960</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. &quot;Nude&quot; 1961</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. &quot;Nude&quot; 1963</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
33. "Small Nude" 1965
34. "Nude Holding Her Foot" 1969
35. "Nude Reaching" 1963

Louise Nevelson

36. Untitled 1930
37. Untitled 1930
38. Untitled 1930
39. Untitled 1932
40. Untitled 1932
41. Untitled 1932
42. "Flower Queen" 1953

Louise Bourgeois

43. "Femme Maison" circa 1948

Alice Neel

44. "Ethel Ashton Nude" 1930
45. "Roberta Meyers With Blue Hat" 1930
46. "Nadya Nude" 1933
47. "Nadya And Nona" 1933
48. "Isabella"
49. "Alienation" 1935
50. "Subconscious" 1942
51. "Sue Seeley" 1943
52. "Pregnant Maria" 1964
53. "Pregnant Julie And Algis" 1967
54. "Betty Homitsky" 1968
56. "Carmen And Judy" 1972
57. "Cindy Nemser And Chuck" 1975
58. "Aroyomni" 1976
59. "Elizabeth" 1977
60. "Margaret Evans Pregnant" 1978
61. "Kitty Pearson" 1979
62. "Victoria And Cat" 1981
63. "Self-Portrait" 1980

Marisol

64. "Diptych" 1971
65. "Double Flower" 1973
66. "Lick The Tire Of My Bicycle" 1974
67. "The English Are Coming" 1974
68. "All My Shoes For Ten Years" 1974

Mary Frank

69. "Woman Rider" 1970
70. "Disappearance" 1976
71. "The Forest" 1976
Figure
72.
73.
74.
75.
76.

Page
"Daphne" 1976
"Lovers" 1978
"The Storm Is Here" 1982
"The Storm Is Here" 1982
"The Storm Is Here" 1982

85.
86.

Nancy Spero
249
"Codex Artaud" detail 1971
"Normal Love" detail "Torture In Chile" 1975
"Torture Of Women" Panel 9 f 10 detail 1976
"Torture Of Women" detail "Lovers" 1976
"Torture Of Women" Panel 3 197 6
"Torture Of Women" Panel 3, 4 19 76
"Notes In Time On Women Part II . . ." detail Panel 13
1979
"Notes In Time On Women Part II . . ." detail Panel 16
1979
"The First Language" detail 1981
"The Black And The Red" detail 1983

87.
88.
89.
90.

Joan Brown
260
"Girl Sitting" 1962
"Girl In A Chair" 1962
"The Moon Casts A Shadow On A Midsummer's Night" 1962
Untitled 1973
Sylvia Sleigh
"Judith Karadish" 1969
"The Blue Dress" 1970
"Portrait Of Felicity Rainnie At Ease" 1972
"The Court Of Pan" 197 3
"Schenarazade" 1974
"Fete Champetre" 1976
"Lilith" 1975

265

91.
92.
93.
94.
95.
96.
97.

Martha Mayer Erlebacher
Nude model study circa 1978
Figure Study For Acedia 1983
"In Praise Of The Earth" 1972
"Adam And Eve" 197 5
"Sungazer" 1976
"In A Garden" 1976
"Scene From A Picnic I: IRA (Anger)" 1973

273

98.
99.
100.
101.
102.
103.
104.

Mary Beth Edelson
"Women's Lives: Blood Mysteries" 1973

281

105.

283

106.

Joan Semmel
"Intimacy-Autonomy" 1974

77.
78.
79.
80.
81.
82.
83.
84.

v m


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>107. &quot;Touch&quot; 1975</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>108. &quot;Center Hand&quot; 1976</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>109. &quot;Pink Fingertips&quot; 1977</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>110. &quot;Out Of The Process&quot; 1978</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>111. &quot;Parallels&quot; 1979</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>112. &quot;Zoom Lens&quot; 1979</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>113. &quot;Turning&quot; 1979</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>114. &quot;Double Breasted Arch&quot; 1980</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>115. &quot;Sundream&quot; 1980</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 117. "Sleeping Girl" 1974 | Jillian Denby
| 118. "Woman In A Chair" 1974 | 295 |
| 119. "The Figure Moves House" 1976 | |
| 120. "Sleep And Inspiration" 1977 | |
| 121. "Rumor" 1978 | |
| 122. "Woman With Peonies" 1981 | |
| 123. "Sleeping Forest" 1974 | Daphne Mumford
| 124. "Mother Earth" 1978 | 302 |
| 125. "Eve" | |
| 126. "Naked Summer Night" c. 1981 | |
| 127. "Woman At Window" 1975 | Juanita McNeeley
| 128. Untitled | 307 |
| 129. "Woman" | |
| 130. "NX3" 1970 | Martha Edelheit
| 131. "Womanhero" 1978 | 311 |
| 132. "Sisters IV" 1975 | Shirley Gorelick
| 133. "Sisters II" 1977 | 314 |
| 134. "The Threshold Struggle" 1975 | Janet Culbertson
| 135. "The Same Place Is No Longer The Same" 1975 | 317 |
| 136. "Creation Revisited" 1977 | Anita Steckel
| 137. "Legend" 1971 | 320 |
| | Pat Steir
| | 322 |
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

Feminist consciousness raising has contributed to the socio-political climate of the decade with far reaching cultural implications, marked by a linguistic and visual vocabulary that grew out of the feminist ideological sensibilities. For women, consciousness raising has helped articulate and expand a multi-level quest for self-identity. The visual vocabulary of this quest for self identity has emphasized autobiographical content. In the "complex social, historical, psychological and political matrix" within which art is produced, being female is at least as significant a variable as century of birth.¹

The notion that woman's experience as woman affords her a special vision of reality and unique imaginary insights, thus providing a source of specifically 'feminine' pictoral imagery is an issue that has been and continues to be hotly debated . . . . In the context of today's feminist activism such imagery has acquired potent political implications, for woman's control over her sexual destiny is now seen as a central issue in her struggle for self determination.²

Early enthusiasm with the women's movement brought postulations that identified specific iconography in reference to autobiographical ideology. These images were of a metaphorical, sexual nature and dubbed 'gyno-sensuous'
While not explicitly "gyno-sensuous," the presentation of the female nude no matter how objectified or abstracted implies sexual connotations and is specifically "feminine imagery" when done by women. It contains a dimension of self appropriation that is not present in male depictions and is autobiographical even in biography.

"Institutionally maintained discrimination" based on social mores prevented women in America from studying the nude until the turn of the century. During this past decade, the incidence of the female nude done by women artists has increased significantly.

Problem

This study deals with the problem of discerning similar or dissimilar ideology and iconographical factors in the presentation of the autobiographical and biographical female nude by American women artists in the painting, drawing and printmaking media, from 1969 to 1983. It uses an art historical approach examining descriptively both image and intent as revealed through that imagery. It seeks to interpret the image through the past uses of the nude by twentieth century American women as well as to reveal similarities and differences among present uses.

Purpose

This study surveys the autobiographical and biographi-
cal figurations of the unclothed female portrayed by American women artists of the Twentieth century from 1969-1983, to provide an addendum to the well documented tradition of the classical nude. It investigates the nude both as iconography and ideology.

Significance Of The Study

A survey of the American woman artist's depiction of the female nude both in respect to iconography and ideology which provides an addendum to the classical tradition of the nude in art is a valuable contribution to the "... more valid, complex, expansive interpretation of the past..." that the women's movement has fostered in all aspects of experience.

The diversification of the work presented, united by the female nude which through subtle visual manipulation of style and compositional placement, offers subject content which expands the twentieth century definition of female.

Limitations Of The Study

This study deals with American women based on the availability of data in reference to individual artistic works. The media is presently limited to the painting, drawing and printmaking fields because there were adequate examples of autobiographical and biographical works in these related areas.

The years of emphasis are limited to those years most
influenced by the feminist revolution because the incidence of the female nude has increased significantly during this time period. Also, William Gerdts' book, THE GREAT AMERICAN NUDE (1974) incorporates earlier twentieth century female works.

1900-1969

The women to be included in this historical section (1900-1969) were identified through the general research on nudes, as outlined. They are Lillian Genth, Marguerite Thompson Zorach, Beatrice Romaine Goddard Brooks, Isobel Bishop, Louise Nevelson, and Louise Bourgeois. These artists produced various paintings, prints, and drawings of the female nude between 1900-1969.

In all probability, these were not the only female artists who produced female nudes but they certainly were the most publicized and prolific. They are a general representation of women artists who worked during this time frame and the works discussed are representative of their individual artistic personalities. By no means was it possible to identify all of their nude endeavors, as it was impossible to identify all artists who did nudes during this time.

In an effort to simplify this representative sampling of both artists and works, I have chosen strict figurative representations of the nude torso. These artists produced multiple nude works, unencumbered by drapery—no vague suggestions and no draped forms of a classical mode. This
regrettably leads to the exclusion of such artists as Mary Cassatt (1845-1927) (Fig. 1) or Sarah Paxton Dodson (1847-1906) (Fig. 2) who draped the nude.

Two of the artists, Bourgeois and Nevelson, are, to date, actively working artists but their works to be examined were done prior to 1969, with no later examples to be found. Isobel Bishop did work in the early 1970s but her particular vision of the female nude was well established and unchanged prior to 1969. In another chapter those artists who did work prior to 1969, whose works at a later date show change, will be discussed.

1969-1983

The artists in the third chapter (1969-1983) were also identified through the general research methodology. Again for reasons of definability this segment only deals with the realistic nude female torso. It is regrettable especially for this contemporary chapter that undefined form that is sensually suggestive and evocative of female must be excluded by definition.

Other constraints, similar to those in the chapter on The Historical Perspective (1900-1969), evolved in dealing with the research. Primarily, there were limitations directly related to the publishing market. Albeit, information availability greatly improved after 1965 and a true breakthrough in literature came after 1970. By comparison, the tidal wave of female artistic heritage, instigated by
the feminist movement, is not evident until 1975 and later.

I have attempted to present these artists in relation to their birth and working dates. In a broad manner, if socio-political and aesthetic mainstream influences individual artistic growth, then the age at which each artist encounters—consciously or unconsciously these elements, is an influence on style.

The artists, whose works will follow have done the female nude predominantly post 1969. These women are, in order of presentation: Alice Neel, Marisol, Mary Frank, Nancy Spero, Joan Brown, Sylvia Sleigh, Martha Mayer Erlebacher, Mary Beth Edelson, Joan Semmel, Jillian Denby, Daphne Muma-
ford, Juanita McNeely, Martha Edelheit, Shirley Gorelick, Janet Culbertson, Anita Steckel and Pat Steir.

Terms

Iconography - The study or description of pictures, images, etc.; especially, the study of the portraits of a specific person.

Iconology - Symbolic representation

Ideology - Relationship of visual images to ideas

Self-identity - Consciousness of self

Feminist Art - "Feminist art, art that grows out of female experiences, is not just some style or movement. It's a matter of redefining the whole relationship between art and society, of altering the way we see ourselves and the world."

Methodology

The general method for identification of women artists
who have painted, drawn or printed the nude from 1900-1983 involved multiple procedural steps. It was initiated by a general review of periodical literature 1969-1983, using the *Art Index*, and beginning with the key words; erotic, figure, human, nude, woman. This was followed by a general review of exhibition catalogues 1969-1983, using the *World Wide Catalogue Index*, and beginning with the key words; American, women. The next step utilized the North Texas State University Card Catalogue for publications referenced under the key words; women artists, nude. Through this general search, the identification of American women artists who had used the female nude in painting, drawing and printmaking was made. Then a re-review of the *Art Index, World Wide Catalogue Index* and North Texas State University Card Catalogue was initiated by the name of the artist. For those contemporary artists, for whom little information had surfaced, a computer search through *Modern Art* was implemented as an adjunct.

Once the artists were identified, first hand comment was solicited from them through a form letter and questionnaire. These comments were reviewed to augment the survey but were not the basis of the survey.

The nude works for each artist that met the constraints of time frame, media and torso presentation was then examined iconographically and ideologically as they related to past traditions, similarities and differences among works of
any given artist, and ideas and feelings communicated. A summary of the information assembled and a conclusion completed the methodology. No formalized statement of literature review is presented owing to the methodology and nature of the study.
ILLUSTRATIONS

MARY CASSATT

Figure 1. "La Toilette," 1891, print, Museum of Fine Art, Boston.

SARAH PAXTON DODSON

Figure 2. "The Bacidae," (1883) oil on canvas, 79 1/2 x 61 11/16", Rubenstein, American Women Artists.
(Fig.1) "LA TOILETTE" 1891 Mary Cassatt
(Fig. 2) "THE BACIDAE" 1883 Sarah Paxton Dodson
CHAPTER NOTES


2. Ibid., pp. 170,173.

3. Judy Chicago, Miriam Schapiro and Lucy Lippard have used this term.


CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE (1900-1969)

Introduction

Nineteen hundred, the turn of the century, was chosen as a starting perimeter for this survey because around this date in America was a coalescence of factors that set the stage for the emergence of the female nude done by women.

These several factors include: changing practices in the art school setting when dealing with the nude model, and the female art student; the climate of the times of a socio-political nature dealing with women; and the then current trends and influences on artistic styles.

Changing Practices

The European cultural heritage has consistently predominated in the West. But even in the European art school, with its strong classical roots, the acceptance of the female nude model, as well as the female art student was not the general mode until post 1900. The female model was accepted prior to the female student.

Among the public academies of Europe, the Royale Academy in London allowed female models from the very first in the 1760s though they were forbidden in the Academie Royale in Paris and not allowed into other European academies until a hundred years later.
Models of the 1760 Royale Academie were clothed and only married male students or those men over twenty years of age could attend. This was the rule until Turner's (1775-1851) time.

The Philadelphia Academy (American), with its male and female models was ahead of the times. Ahead of the more or less open-minded Royal Academy of London which even then did not permit women students to face the nude until 1893 when it was not the "absolute nude" but the nude in pants. Mixed classes in London of both male and female students were not actually permitted until 1903.

In Paris, the Union of Female Painters and Sculptors founded in 1881, won the right for women to compete for the Prix de Rome, and by 1896 mixed classes at the Ecole des Beaux Arts.

In Germany, Kathe Kollowitz (1867-1945) lobbied as late as 1914 for coeducational classes in art schools. It was remarked by a classmate of Kollowitz that "... instruction in anatomy at the Vereen School (1885) consisted of a box full of bones passed around among the students. The women were never told which bones were which or how they fit together in the skeleton."

In Rome, Italy, Beatrice Romaine Goddard Brooks was the first female student at Scuolo Nationale in 1899. Brooks, Bourgeois, and briefly, Genth, Zorach, and Nevelson participated at differing times in European instruction. Isobel Bishop did not participate in formal training but did visit the continent.
American Schools, at the turn of the century, struggled in their acceptance of both female models and the female art student. A few East Coast academies paralleled the development in Europe but most lagged behind.

The Pennsylvania Academy permitted women art students life class with a fully clothed female model as early as 1869. The Philadelphia Academy, mentioned previously, was by far the more progressive on the question of the nude. Academy Director Thomas Eakins resigned in 1882 protesting the use of male "coverings" when posing male and female models together. "... The National Academy of Design in New York City opened up its Life and Antiquities School to ladies in December of 1845, (fully clothed models)."

The Socio-Political Front

Slowly, as the century mark moved on, women both as models and students gained a more general acceptance in art schools across America. This paralleled the socio-political happenings of the nation. The first twenty years or so at the turn of the century initiated changes that were long overdue, that had been brewing in America in the post Civil War days and the settlement of the far West. For these events called for independent strong spirits both male and female, affecting all facets of American life.

Women leaders emerged in a great variety of fields to gain national status. Suffrage was passed in the form of the Nineteenth Amendment by 1920. Jane Sanger led the birth
control crusade. Jeannette Rankin of Montana was elected the first woman in the U.S. Congress. Just previous to this, Esther Morris of Wyoming co-authored the first bill granting women the right to vote and had become the first woman in the United States to hold an elected office, and the first woman justice of the peace. And later Wyoming had the first woman governor.

Women were not only asserting themselves socio-politically but within the arts as well. The forefront of modern dance (app. 1906-1930) was led by Isadora Duncan, a Californian. Modern dance was free expression, done barefoot, in free flowing chemises, which more than the movement itself, shocked the public. Outstanding architect, Julia Morgan, set up practice in 1902 in San Francisco. It was an active time for women on all fronts.

With the acceptance of the female art student, the status of the female artist rose. At this point, 1925, Marquerite Thompson Zorach became the first president for the newly founded New York Society of Women Artists. So when the depression of 1929 began, women artists were accepted on a competitive footing with their male counterparts. They received 41 per cent of WPA (Work Projects Administration) funds. Isobel Bishop and Louise Nevelson were among the recipients.

The competitive equality trend continued into the For-
ties fueled further by a male shortage that the war (World War II) effort created.

Isobel Bishop had been asked to join the Art Students League Faculty in 1937, and in 1946 became the vice-president of the National Institute of Arts and Letters. She was the first woman officer since 1898.\textsuperscript{13}

No country's social structure went untouched in the wake of World War II. The leading European artists, architects, and instructors, dominated by men, immigrated to the United States in the early 1940s. Among these, the aesthetic philosophy of the Bauhaus tradition--form follows function--dominated. This emphasis on function, linked with cubist structural aesthetic, perhaps philosophically aided the analytic approach to brush stroke, line, and eventually color and space in what became the New York School of Painting. The New York School better known as Abstract Expressionism was also male dominated. The role of the woman artist became quite obscure in the public's eye.

The upheaval of the social system, caused by the war was mended and consoled quite blatantly with the traditional celebration of the family unit. The homemaker of the 1950s, subordinate to the male, propagandized and perpetuated as much by women themselves, remained philosophically unchallenged until the late 1960s.

The Aesthetic Concepts

Artistically speaking, both World War I and World War
II and perhaps the unofficial Vietnam War coincided with dividing points in the American aesthetic. Elsa Honig Fine in *Women In Art* stated, "In the years prior to World War I most American artists were by contrast (to European artists) still entrenched in nineteenth century aesthetic."\(^1^4\)

European tastes were being educated with the likes of Impressionism and Symbolism which had a firm hold on the continent by 1870. The 1870s in America saw the advent of a "new generation of wealthy Americans, post Civil War-culture vultures."\(^1^5\) These buyers helped the nineteenth century aesthetic remain the status quo as long as possible.

One must further define this nineteenth century European aesthetic which seemed to waft over America in its early twentieth century, while keeping in mind the hard core independence and regionalism of the states represented in the tradition of the American Scene and Social Realism.

The nineteenth century aesthetic of the Europeans that was to be challenged post World War II was Romanticism, i.e., stylistic period revivals predominantly, Gothic, Baroque, or classic. Romanticism often involved allusions to worlds, whether actual or fictional, beyond the picture frame. It was the day of the salon nude, nudes done from prior studies. Landscapes, though, might be done en situ a la Corbet and the Barbizon School. Like Realism, Romanticism is subject oriented. Classical revivals had been rampant since the fall of the Greek Empire, but they too were
incorporated within Romanticism. The heavy duty use of allegory within Romanticism was seen as enlivening the arts with the immediacy of the present. The symbology often failed to keep its freshness, allowing for an art form that many moderns view as trite.

The subject content of the nude was at a further disadvantage than mere allegory as the Victorian art historian Samuel Isham indicated in 1905:

Interest in a picture is apt to depend on the object represented and not on the manner of its representation, and before a painting of the nude the average beholder experiences something of the same embarrassment that he would feel before reality.

In contrast early twentieth century aestheticism in Europe evolved quickly from post-Impressionistic trends which surfaced in the 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s and were not as subject oriented as Romanticism. They involved the analysis of form, expressive application of paint and color or examinations of color and design principles. They followed the "art for art's sake" attitude of Edouard Manet or Cezanne's dictum that the canvas be a universe unto itself.

These trends were the many individualized approaches by the vanguards of Post-Impressionism; Cezanne with geometric analysis of form, Van Gogh with vivid color filled emotional brushstroke, Matisse with interplay of design and color, Gauguin with Symbolist interpretations. They all led the way for movements which opened new possibilities for art.
Very quickly these investigations of the late Nineteenth century spawned movements of reinterpretation in the early Twentieth century, that slowly were assimilated into the American art world.

The Fauve disassociation with local color; the Cubist evolution via Cezanne in analysis of form; and the Dada, surrealist philosophies were the movements to captivate Europe in the beginning of the Twentieth century.

The 1913 Armory Show in America has become a landmark of the introduction of these explorations into the American mainstream. This international show included some three hundred paintings. Of these, a mere forty-one were the works of women, and among these was the work of Marguerite Thompson (Zorach).

Within twenty years the assimilation of Post-Impressionistic inaugurated trends was so complete that the Americans were able to take control of the art world (market) with their own reinterpretations. The focus of the art world was riveted to the New York scene by post World War II. The male-dominated New York school continued the explorations in line, color application, and expression dissociated from form and subject content.

The importance of the figurative image and with it the nude form does not re-enter the art mainstream until the late 1960s, coinciding with the Vietnam War and the feminist movement.
Lillian Mathilda Genth

Lillian Mathilda Genth's work can be characterized as the American pre-World War I aesthetic, relating to European Romanticism. Just prior to World War I saw the rise of figure painting on American soil. These figurative works generally fell into two categories: a realism akin to the work of Thomas Eakins (1844-1916) or a poetic Romanticism of which Genth is exemplary.

Born in Philadelphia in July of 1876, Lillian Genth graduated from the Philadelphia School of Design in 1900, winning a fellowship to continue her education abroad.

By the turn of the century, the year Lillian graduated, Thomas Eakins, instructor at the Pennsylvania Academy also in Philadelphia, had gained a degree of notoriety in his push towards realism using male and female models together. His controversial attitudes towards total acceptance of anatomical studies from life and not plaster casts were well known throughout the art community. Even though Genth attended the all female Philadelphia School of Design, she would have been aware of Eakins and his crusade for artistic realism based on freedom to study the nude.

Genth's fellowship allowing her to study abroad must have broadened her artistic horizons further. She studied, notably in England under the American James Abbott MacNeil Whistler (1834-1903), at the Colorossi Aetlier in Paris and a total of two years in the galleries of Europe.
James Abbott MacNeil Whistler, Genth's tutor, was an outspoken advocate of the newer art philosophies of the day. Whistler had spent time in Paris among the Impressionists, even exhibiting with them in the Salon des Refuses, which Manet had assembled. When Whistler left Paris to set himself up in London, he took with him, as his creed, Manet's dictum of art for art's sake.

Because he wrote well and because he talked so wittily that his bon mots were repeated everywhere, Whistler had great influence among intellectuals and cultivated amateurs. His central idea was that of art for art's sake—the belief that abstract values in painting, such as form and color, should exist for themselves, not as accessories to the imitation of nature or especially to storytelling. He called his pictures "symphonies," "arrangements," "harmonies," or "nocturnes" in an effort to induce the public to see a painting, not as a picture of something.

Genth's study under Whistler must also have brought her into contact with other English trends and current philosophies of the day. Whistler associated himself with intellectuals and philosophers of the day.

Dante Gabrielle Rossetti, the leader and founder of the pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, had passed away in 1882, eight years prior. He left a legacy of thought within this still active brotherhood. The basic aim of art espoused was a return to subject content:

... to do battle against the frivolous of the day producing "pure transcripts... from nature" and by having "genuine ideas to express."

As the name of the brotherhood proclaims (the pre-Raphaelites), its members took their inspiration from the "primitive" masters of the fifteenth
century; to that extent, they belonged to the Gothic revival, which had long been an important aspect of the Romantic movement. What set the pre-Raphaelites apart from Romanticism pure and simple was an urge to reform the ills of modern civilization through their art...

Genth’s subject matter, the somewhat ideal female nude in nature exhibits philosophical and visual affinity with the pre-Raphaelites. Philosophically, the work is subject-content oriented, the antithesis of the machine age. The nudes portrayed gaze in full innocence at their reflections in some hidden spring. The Eden-like settings and virginal forms allude to a purer existence than the hustle-bustle of the Industrial Revolution. These paintings easily fit in with "... the revolt against materialism and stuffiness of the Victorian Age..." that the pre-Raphaelites so avowedly sought. Frederic Sherman, in Landscape And Figure Painting In America, 1917 refers to "... girlish bodies which she (Genth) habitually uses merely as symbols in the interpretation of Romantic ideas."

Genth’s choice of forms support the pre-Raphaelite neoclassical ideals of the pre-Renaissance. The young virginal nudes are lithe almost to the point of being without bone or muscle. They are reminiscent of the nudes of the pre-Raphaelite idol, Sandro Botticelli (Italian, 1444-1510). Also Genth’s work is often titled allegorically, for example, "The Sun Maiden" (Fig. 4), "The Fountain Of Life" (Fig. 6), "The Spirit Of The Earth," supporting more directly the association with classical ideals.
The Impressionists whose thoughts had so influenced Whistler had for the most part dominated the Parisian art community from 1860 to 1900. Genth's acquaintance with their style is demonstrated in her application of paint in quick dab-like strokes that translate light into color and the oblique angle of viewing that is employed. Genth adopted the immediacy of painting "en situ," both landscape and nude.

While studying in France, one day in Brittany she posed a nude figure out in the open and from that time this became her chosen field. She loves the woods, and she loves to depict human flesh, warm and glowing in the sunshine.

Her delightful country home in the Berkshires, which she named "Hermit Cliff," covers seventy acres and places at her command field, forest, and purling pool; here is her studio. Here in the open she posed her models, protected from intruders, among the trees and beside running water, the sunshine filtering through the leaves and producing a singing color of beauty, sunshine, and joy.

Frederic Sherman declares Genth "our American painter of the nude . . . the only American artist whose whole career evidences a deliberate effort to earn a reputation as a painter of the nude."\(^8\)

Lillian Genth's style is traditional but transitional. She painted a poetic ideal of a Neo-Romantic nature while utilizing Impressionistic techniques. Her work reflects early turn of the century American taste in art.

Marguerite Thompson Zorach (1887-1968)

Like Lillian Genth, Marguerite Thompson Zorach (in her
work dealing with the female nude) seems to relate a sensibility between nature and the nude. Her upper-middle class background and training also bear similarity to Genth in a progression through basic art study in America and later travel abroad, leading to the evolution of personalized artistic viewpoint. Unlike Genth, Zorach’s work is not indicative of Romantic aesthetic, the general popular mode pre-World War I in America, but ahead of the times in her Fauvist, Cubist tendencies.

By 1908, she had produced at least one panel painting in the Fauve manner.¹ This painting was done prior to her European sojourn. Marguerite was able to undertake extensive travel throughout Europe from 1908-1911, as well as explore the Mid and Far East, 1911-1912, due to the largess of a maiden aunt. She had graduated Fresno High School in 1906 and had begun further education at Stanford University when the opportunity to travel arose.

In 1908, enroute to Paris from California she visited Chicago, New York, Holland, and Belgium. In 1909 she toured Italy and Switzerland, continuing in 1910 with travels through France, Spain, Germany as well as Belgium, Switzerland, and London. 1911 followed with further travels through France. Late 1911 found her visiting Brindisi, Cairo, Alexandría, and Palestine. Crossing the Red Sea by 1912 she extended her travels to the Orient, visiting Calcutta, Darjeeling, Mandalay, Penang, Singapore, Hong Kong,
Tsing Tau, Kobi, and Yokohama.  

Throughout her travels, Marguerite found time to draw and paint. She did brief residencies, sometimes alone, stimulated by a particular setting, sometimes under the tutelage of established artists. Occasionally her studies were undertaken at art schools, as was the case in 1911 at LaPalette, Paris. Here she studied with John Duncan Fergusson (1874-1961) and Jacques-Emile Blanche (1862-1952). Here also she met her husband to be, sculptor William Zorach.

It was at LaPalette, the school run by the English Fauve John Duncan Fergusson, that Marguerite met William Zorach. When he first looked at the pink and yellow nude boldly outlined in blue on her easel he was aghast and asked if she knew what she was doing, and why. (She did.)

In her travels Marguerite took time out to visit gallery and museum shows. In late 1908, Paris, she had seen the Salon d'Autumn which featured Matisse, Picasso, Derain, and Fergusson among others, equally as innovative.

John Duncan Fergusson managed LaPalette. He was considered a "Scottish Colourist." His early works were nude studies a la Renoir, later his work paralleled the bold color and linear rhythms of the Fauves. The Fauves had interested Marguerite even before leaving California as her 1908 painting in that manner attested. Jacques-Emile Blanche, instructor at LaPalette, also had an interest in luminous color. His work though, mostly portraiture, remained closer to Manet and Degas.
Marguerite's inherent, acute color and design sense instigated her affinity for color and design oriented works by other artists. William Zorach admired his wife's facility: "Marguerite has an extraordinary sense of design and of form and color. She often helped me work out design relationships in sculpture." Hence, Marguerite gravitated towards work whose spirit was most like her own, those of the Fauves and early Cubists.

In the first ten years of the new century, the post-Impressionist investigations had been augmented visually and philosophically, most dramatically, by Matisse and Picasso.

Cézanne's analysis of form; his intent to go Poussin over after nature; to make the canvas exist not as it relates to the real world but as a universe unto itself was followed by Picasso's quest for a new form and purity devoid of the Renaissance but a match for it--Cubism. Matisse, with images important as design form and color, artistic descendent of Gauguin and Van Gogh, excited the art world and all but stupified the lay audience.

Fauvism coalesced slightly earlier than Cubism, in 1905. It drew from Pointillism and Cézanne as well as Gauguin and Van Gogh. In it

The differing colors do not fuse into harmonious tonalities but maintain their own intense identities, clashing against one another and setting up a "movement" of their own as color, a movement that is incorporated into the more familiar kind of movement of the rather obvious swirling linear patterns.
In *Notes Of A Painter*, published in 1908, Matisse stated the intention of his work, one that could easily have been echoed as Marguerite’s intent.

The importance of feeling, of pure sensation, of the painter’s response to the world on one hand, and on the other, the means by which he may transmute these feelings into form and color . . . . The artist’s function as a creator who first responds to nature, then effects his own transmutation of nature, in such a way that his response to it takes the form of an image revealing that response to the observer.

Cubism manifested in 1907 with Picasso’s "Les Demoiselles D’Avignon." Its formative years were 1907-1909, often called the "Cezanne phrase" with its combination of geometrical simplification and faceted shapes. Its spirit, however, was at this time closer to Fauvism, exaggerating "the sense of vibrant life" through bold, harsh, angular movement, not color (as the Fauves). By the end of 1906, Picasso had begun to "... discipline his graceful figures into new sculptural forms with an imposition of decisive geometric regularities." 8

Marguerite Thompson (Zorach) returned home to Fresno in April of 1912, with her style firmly established: sculptural planes of geometric angularity interplayed with repetitive round shapes formed figurative subject matter enhanced by colors that celebrated their own beauty. Essentially Marguerite united early Cubism with Fauvist spirit.

After her return, she then spent the summer at a Sierra mountain camp, painting and drawing. Of these paintings,
she noted in a letter to future husband William:

One feels as if one wants huge canvases out here in the woods. But it does not take a big canvas to express a big idea does it? ... what are a few sketches of India, Palestine or these hills. It's but a vague groping after the reality of them .." (July 22, 1912)

These small canvases done in the mountains removed all sense of scale, used no horizon line, no normal perspective on depth. To William she also stated her goals for the work (Sept. 22, 1912): "... perfectly flat, no planes, distance, perspective, or anything." The color in these were heightened for expressive purposes. On her return to Fresno from the summer in the mountains, Marguerite had a show at the Royal Gallery in Los Angeles: "Post-Impressionist Paintings and Etchings by Marguerite Zorach." (10/21-11/2)

Quite possibly while Marguerite was in London in 1910, and later in 1912, the critic Clive Bell had organized two Post-Impressionist shows. Bell's statements in the show catalogue (1912) about post-Impressionist work could apply also to the work of Marguerite Zorach.

They do not seek to imitate form, but to create form; not to imitate life, but to find an equivalent for life. By that I mean they wish to make images which by the clearness of their logical structure, and by their closely knit unity of texture, shall appeal to our disinterested and contemplative imagination with something of the same vividness as the things of actual life appeal to our practical activities. In fact they aim not at illusion, but at reality. We all agree now, that any form in which an artist can express himself is legitimate, and the more sensitive perceive that there are things worth expressing that
could never have been expressed in traditional forms. We have ceased to ask, 'What does this picture represent?' and ask instead, 'What does it make us feel?' We expect a work of plastic art to have more in common with a piece of music than in a coloured photo . . . . These English artists are of this movement because, in choice of subject they recognize no authority but the truth that is in them; in choice of form, none but the need of expressing it. That is Post-Impressionism.

Because of her affiliations with post-Impressionism, her unique amalgamation of Cubism and Fauvism, Marguerite Zorach's work was included with a mere forty women in the prestigious international Armory Show in New York City, 1913. This show of two hundred avant-garde works later traveled to Chicago.

Marguerite had been in New York only since December of 1912 when she had married William Zorach. Her entry in the Armory Show, though not a nude, was female in subject. Her freedom of expression with color prompted a sarcastic commentary by one reviewer:

In the "Study" by Marguerite Zorach, you see at once that the lady is feeling very, very bad. She is portraying her emotions after a day's shopping. The pale yellow eyes and the purple lips of her subject indicate that the digestive organs are not functioning properly. I would advise salicylate of quinine in small doses.

For their first two summers together, the Zorachs rented a summer retreat at Chappaqua, New York. It was here that both Zorachs took up the theme of nudes in the landscape. Marguerite's "Bathers" (Fig. 7) done the first summer shows a true rhythmic empathy between the nude females' simplified
forms and the waterfall landscape. There is no horizon line, no perspective or depth as in her earlier landscapes. The rhythm of the reclining and stretching nudes is repeated in the landscape. The background shapes are important as the foreground. There is no negative space only active space. On raw canvas "... pastel blues, pinks, and purples are jarred by the harsh polarities of reds and greens."^{13}

Technically, although repeated reference is made to Fauve coloration this is not the Fauve singular complementary scheme, but a more sophisticated, more subtle exploration of color. Purple tree branches play off the true green of leaf space. The image projected is one of "joie de vivre," a celebration of life. Early Cubism's angular simplifications are abundant lending the canvas monumentality in its devotion to its own essence. The character of paint and canvas play as much of a role as the imagery. William Zorach wrote of these Chappaqua paintings:

"There were no problems in them, no gloomy forebodings, no literary solving of world's ills, only a joyous awareness of the world about us. Flowers bloomed, wildlife carried on, clouds floated, trees designed themselves in the landscapes, nude figures lay around pools, played with children, made love, dreamed."^{14}

"Three Figures And Gulls (Fig. 8), circa 1914 also depicts rhythmic nudes, this time in a seascape. Birds, fish and figures are repetitive simplified angles. The prow of the sailboat is repeated in elbow and knee shapes, and also enlarged with the angle of the sail itself."
Both William and Marguerite fell in love with Yosemite and painted there. Marguerite’s "Camp In The Woods" (Fig. 9) depicts nudes in nature. Tree branches are replaced by arms emanating from half figures behind trees. The curvilinear forms of the nudes are played against angular forms of tent and trees. Again no perspective or depth is employed.

Soon after this painting Marguerite and William began applying their knowledge of pattern design and color to large tapestries that also revered the nude with nature. These tapestries (Fig. 10) employed Marguerite’s rich color schemes. They were a collaboration between Marguerite and William beginning the summer of 1919. However, they do not meet the criteria of this study as painting, drawing, or printmaking.

Marguerite Thompson’s unique integration of nude figure and landscape employing both Cubist structure and Fauvist color boldness arrived at a synthesis of form, design, and color that contributed to the progression of American art into the Twentieth century.

Beatrice Romaine Goddard Brooks (1874-1970) The somber and subtle chords of color that Romaine Brooks explored in her portraits became her trademark. The poetic melancholy established by the presentation and composition make her work akin to nineteenth century aesthetic. Contrarily, the fact that she imposed her own order and
psyche on the work allow the works, especially in ink, to be set apart from the Nineteenth century.

Apollinaire suggested she painted her own despair,¹ in this poetic melancholy. Her early existence had been more nightmarish than poetic. Although monetarily well endowed via her maternal grandfather, Isaac Waterman,² who had amassed a fortune in the mines of Salt Lake City and Pennsylvania, the formative years of Romaine Brooks were not ones of tranquility.

Her mother early divorced her father Major Goddard, who by all accounts was an alcoholic. Ella Goddard was not a model of stability at any point. Romaine in her unpublished memoirs No Pleasant Memories (begun 1930) stated, "The atmosphere she created was that of a court ruled by a crazy queen."³ This atmosphere was heightened by a brother, St. Mars, whose sanity was questionable by puberty. Ella doted on St. Mars and rallied in harrassment of Romaine. To this end, she forbid Romaine to draw, something Romaine seemed driven to do. At age twenty-one, in 1896, Romaine became monetarily independent from her mother and was then able to pursue her career in art.

By 1899, she had decided to concentrate on painting and enrolled in the Scuola Nationale, Rome, where she was the only female student. In summer she gravitated to the quasi-artist colony on Capri to draw and paint. Here she met the English intellectual John Brooks.⁴ The following year she
attended the Academie Colorossi, pursuing her artistic studies further.

Romaine's association with John Brooks led to a brief marital contract (both were homosexual) and an interlude in London (just post-divorce). The marriage and subsequent divorce occurred in 1902, which when coupled with her brother's death in 1901 and her mother's death in 1902 was perhaps as disturbing as Romaine's childhood. Her move to London after these events was to a residence very near to the studio of James A. MacNeil Whistler (1834-1903).

The London stay seems to have been part of Romaine's artistic education, that led to her mature style. Here she became acquainted with the works of Whistler and August John. She remarked of Whistler, "I wondered at the magic subtlety of his tones but thought his 'symphonies' lacked corresponding subtlety of expression." Romaine was to adopt Whistler's tonalities of grays and blacks.

Whistler had exhibited in Paris with the 1863 Salon des Refuse, in which the works of Monet, Manet, Degas, Courbet, and Fantin Latour were also displayed. These early Impressionists were linked more through ideology than technique. It was Manet's dictum, art for art's sake, that provided the cohesive bond for the differing stylistic explorations.

Whistler's works evolved into a

... muted palette of grays and blacks, softly blended, painting misty tonalities of evening or gray days, sometimes flecked or splashed with red or golden lights, with strong
reference to Japanese prints or Oriental ink-wash drawings with their simplification and their subtle colorless gradations."

So pervasive was Romaine's adaptation to grays that by 1908 she decorated her large apartment, now in Paris in black, white, and gray. Gray walls were met with black tiled floor and black mohair furniture, offset only slightly in somber mood by many bouquets of white flowers.¹⁸

Subject wise, Romaine had always eschewed scenery for an involvement with portraiture. Her female nudes, done in oils, are not self-portraits, nor a universal conception. For the most part they appear to be dancer and actress Ida Rubenstein much revered in Paris of the day.

In 1910 Romaine had her first exhibition at the Galeries Durand-Ruel. This exhibit consisted of thirteen paintings, "... all studies of women or young girls."⁹ Parisian art critique Claude Roger-Marx commented on Romaine's works: "Her penetration is accompanied by a happy gift of cold irony derived from the humorists of her country ... the soul is identified with the flesh."¹⁰

In this first show was a female nude done in oils on canvas. It was quite large; over eight feet in length and almost five feet in height. Hence, the figure is probably close to life-size. It was titled "Azalees Blanches" (White Azaleas) (Fig. 11) or Le Filet Noir (Black Net), both items figure prominently in the nude's setting. The painting is a manipulation of the subtle and somber tonalities of black,
white, and gray. The composition is a descendant of the Japanese print that had so taken French painters for the previous fifty years.

The Japanese print was dominated by curvilinear line, flat areas of unmodulated color, and an oblique angle of viewing. The overall affect was limited depth and a decorative quality. These characteristics had been stylized in translation by the English in the secondary arts (i.e., jewelry, book plates, furnishings) into a style prevalent at the turn of the century—Art Nouveau.

But in Romaine’s composition of 1910 the dominant curvilinear lines of cloth, flora, and vase are played against the right angles and straight line of overhead wall decoration and bed structure. The figure itself is the amalgamation of curvilinear and straight line. The large flat areas of deep gray, black, and white are contrasted against the more broken, busy space of overhead decoration, bed structure and black net beneath the nude. The nude is also the mixture of simplicity and decorativeness.

Perhaps influenced by her studies in Italy, Brooks’ use of value, without color, re-examines the High Renaissance investigations of chiaroscuro—the building of form using light and dark. Structural analysis and the superimposition of personal order on the natural world is Post-Impressionistic in philosophy.

What is peculiarly Romaine Brooks is the inclusion of
details that are psychologically suggestive: bars, clouds, ships, etc. In their subtlety these work a kind of spell on the viewer. In the square decorative panels over the figure, three include ships of differing natures; one a row boat or small barge, and the two others clipper ships. All manner of associations are suggested through the boats but left unstated in specifics: pleasure boats, discovery ships, crossings from one place to another, travel into or within afterlife as across the river Styx in Dante's *Inferno*. They may be allegorically linked to the figure. The net beneath the figure similarly is suggestive: is it to ensure the nude; is she the catch of the sea; does its crisscrossing effect suggest the female triangle--(the female private area, the triangle of hair). The vertical demarcations of panels above the figure and the verticals of the bed below add to the psychological disconcerting effect. These straight rigid verticals that seem to be harmless design patterns--do they somehow suggest prison bars? Hence, is something forbidden here? Is the figure, presumably Ida Rubenstein, forbidden to Romaine? The large black shape that sets off the flowers (purity)--is there reason for its wing-like shape? Does it indicate flight or is it meant to be sinister in its density? Romaine's biographer Meryle Secrest suggests the main theme of her work to be the

... essential loneliness of the human predicament. Her figures are locked into a forbidding silence, a frozen psychic space in
which one senses, in an eerie way, the presence of violent emotions held rigidly in check.

A smaller oil on canvas, "Le Trajet" (Fig. 12), (also "The Crossing," "The Passing," "Death," "Femme Morte"), was done a year later circa 1911. Again, the somewhat idealized female nude resembles Brooks' portraits of Ida Rubenstein. Here a white wing shape bears the body of a young maiden. Her black hair merges into the background. The background of dense gray and black tones makes up three-fourths of the painting, holding the supporting wing shape in suspension. This envelopment isolates or imprisons the figure in sort of a void. The figure becomes disconnected as if once again forbidden the viewer (or Romaine). The wing tip beneath the feet can be read as a repetitive shape of the female triangle enlarged, or an arrow piercing the void. The wings of pure white also bright allude to the angelic, spiritual. The ambiguous title like the visual cues within the painting, provides possibilities of interpretation.

"The Masked Archer" (Fig. 13), (L'Archer Masque), 1910-1911, to this viewer, is more enigmatic than eerie in its psychological presentation. It is less dramatically stylized and maintains more middle tones than stark black/white contrasts. If this be cupid plying his bow, he appears satanical, not as the ideal golden babe. His mask sets a void upon his face. The woman, who resembles Ida Rubenstein in all but hair coloring, is tenaciously bound by the arm to a post. Existential space is created by water and beach and
because of it the female figure appears bound by all the emptiness surrounding her form. Like a martyr the woman is to be tortured.

Hilton Kramer who reviewed a 1971 Whitney Museum retrospective of Romaine's work is often quoted in descriptions of Romaine's work "... Her figure painting—especially the female nudes—are impressively eerie suggesting a kind of icy eroticism." In my opinion the nudes are not erotic but are almost spiritual by design implication. They represent what was for Romaine an ideal, the mature female form who was not a child bearer. Both Romaine and Natalie Barney, the poet who lived for many years with Romaine, shared the ideal of an androgyne as a type of feminine freedom.

The nude in "The Masked Archer" uses the ideal classical contraposto stance. The archer, if he be cupid, will destroy this woman as a perfect form, giving her over to man's love and consequent childbirth.

The "Weeping Venus" (Fig. 14), also an idealized Ida, has all the subtle psychological inflections of "Le Trajet" in its suggestive details. The stark, mostly black, bed setting sets off the mostly white, reclining female nude. A white cloud in the sky somewhat mimics the nude's horizontal form. The nude is blocked from the freedom of the sky by the balcony and headboard bars, somewhat suggesting a cage.

It has been suggested that these isolated figures portray Romaine Brooks' spirit. Art cannot escape being to
some extent the self-portrait of the artist.

The Italian writer Gabriel d'Annunzio, a friend of her inner circle reviewed her work for "Illustrizione" in April of 1913.

The choice of subject, the positioning of the figures, the apparently bizarre search of the details, the implacable acumen of the design, the repugnance toward any and all showy effect, the analytical study of the character reconciled with the synthetic expression of the line, a certain ironic melancholy, a certain sad cruelty, a certain discrete play of mysterious allusion; everything reveals a special nature, a lucid and free spirit, a closed and guarded sensitivity that does not wish to enrich itself—hostile toward assimilations and deforming contacts.

The disturbing unease of Romaine's paintings is offset in most of the work by the use of the curvilinear line, with its strong decorative implication. The free flowing lines of Romaine's drawings, however, are so unstructured that they seem a semi-conscious rambling, heightening the psychological implications.

The catalogue accompanying a selection of fifty drawings exhibited at the Arts Club of Chicago in January of 1935 suggested:

These drawings should be read—they evolve from the sub-conscious. Without premeditation they aspire to a maximum of expression with a minimum of means. Whether inspired by laughter, philosophy, sadness or death these introspective patterns are each imprisoned within the inevitable encircling line. But the surety of outline and apparent freedom from technique are the unconscious evolution from a more material and direct form of art.

One hundred-one of Romaine's drawings had been exhibited at
the Galerie Theodore Briant, Paris, in 1931.

Of the drawing reproductions available, seven involved the nude female form. The series might have been subtitled "Woman Interacting With Her World." All were signed by a chained wing. The single continuous line that the drawings employ often suggests a feeling of entrapment by the exterior line which is an open or closed wing-like shape.

"On The Wings Of Love" (Fig. 15), a predatory bird enfolds a nude male and female form on its back, between the wings. They lightly embrace, gazing intently at each other oblivious to their own entrapment.

In "Caught" (Emprisonée), 1930, (Fig. 16) three distorted creatures whose bodies suggest humans and whose snouts suggest wild boars (pun?) cling to or entrap a female form. There is an energy to the line that conveys pent up frustration or struggle.

The line of "Foot-Stool" ("Nature, The Stepping Stone") (Fig. 17) is quieter and slower, as if pensively drawn. Here a more lush, possibly pregnant female nude in a kneeling, reclining position stares vapidly out at a universal audience. An abbreviated snake form merges around her knees, joining hand and foot (trapped or bound). A young nude male form, smaller in size than the female steps atop her shoulder and head. He bends his head, in sadness or regret to rest on the shoulder of a cloaked female form. The cloak encircles the three forms. If the female nude is the preg-
nant Eve, she has no idea of what has taken place, hence her blank stare. Adam appears repentent. The victim, Eve is ironically unconscious. Natalie Barney, poetess and Romaine's companion, shared with Romaine a feminist theme to her work "... nature makes martyrs out of women by condemning them to reproduce, a fate from which only death can release them." The title "Foot-Stool" has literal and figurative implications. It is possibly a reference to Catholicism's mother of Christ handmaiden image. Romaine had attended convent school as a young girl.

"Lethe" (Fig. 18), 1930, whose title suggests a type of forgetfulness with sinister overtones, or more directly the river of Hades in Greek and Roman myth, whose waters cause forgetfulness. A central nude female seems to be led unwillingly to put her foot in the river by two semi-human creatures, one whose snout ironically resembles an elephant's. The inference is that she is caught between never forgetting (the elephant symbol) and oblivion (death implication). Three predatory-like birds watch with innocent expressions on a branch overhead. They appear to be a cross between vultures and pigeons.

Still more morbid is "Mother Nature" (Fig. 19), 1930. Mother Nature is the centrally seated figure. Her eyes are wide and innocent. Her positioning in this portrayal apes the triangular seated form of the Virgin Mary of Pieta renown. Monsters emanate from her lap instead of the martyred
son. Her hands are not visible, wrapped or bound by her robe. Her knees turn into large fish heads which are devouring nude female forms. Encircled above this Mother Nature as Madonna, a cloud-like mass defined by a heavier, weighted line sinisterly cradles a female form while reaching for another whose arms merge into Mother Nature's head, forming horns. Again the allusion is to the cruel fate that Mother Nature, ironically a female image, has played upon females, the childbearers. It is an ironic circular trap.

In "Their Creatures" (Fig. 20), 1930, large seemingly parental forms in rounded shapes hold in their midst a more angular female form whose arms bend as if linked to the parental heads and whose armpits hide playfully sinister creatures. It is as if both mother and father forms have equally spawned this somewhat androgynous female. Natalie Barney and komainé shared also an interest in androgyny, the complete melding of male and female to a new form of creature.

In "Tomorrow Reclaims Yesterday And Today" (Fig. 21), 1930, the personification of tomorrow whose feet turn into serpent's tails, binds a young female form to an older female form. The older nude wears the suggestion of lesbian interplay and looks directly into the eyes of tomorrow while the young female personification of yesterday hangs her head with lowered eyes in sadness or shame. This perhaps is more
explicitly autobiographical.

These drawings seemed to have evolved during the time-frame that Romaine worked on her first set of memoirs, *No Pleasant Memories*. They are ironically humorous and perhaps offered an escape for Romaine's introspections. Their essential character borders on satirical irony of the entrapment of life itself. This dominant message can only be interpreted as stemming from her early childhood traumas, which though she freed herself of by age twenty-one, she bore the scars for a lifetime.

Romaine Brooks shared the nineteenth century need for subject content, however, the psychological implications of her particular subject content give a twentieth century characteristic to her work. Its feminist overtones, in allusions to birth control correspond to the growing need and awareness of physical self-governance among the female population in general, at that time. The subtlety of her allusions are served by the subtleties of the tonalities that she employed.

Isobel Bishop (b.1902)

The work of Isobel Bishop harkens back to older sixteenth and seventeenth century European traditions, but more than this it is a portrayal of the middle class American female.

Born in Cincinnati in 1902, she first studied art in 1917 at John Wicker's Art School, Detroit and then after a
move to New York City in 1918, at the New York School of Applied Design. She spent 1920 to 1924 at the Art Student League, where she later became an instructor. Isobel’s most influential instruction was under Kenneth Hayes Miller.¹

Kenneth Hayes Miller was involved in the ongoing American tradition of realism, untouched by the Post-Impressionistic European movements, but quite respectful of older European traditions. "Miller is reported to have insisted that ‘whatever modern painters have accomplished has been the result of salvage from the painting of the Renaissance.’"²

Isobel Bishop did not study in Europe, but did visit there in 1931 accompanied by Kenneth Hayes Miller and fellow student Reginoid March.³ Her eyes must have been on the masters of past centuries. In her statement that "... movement can be represented visually without expressing mobility,"⁴ she is kin to the sentiment of Michaelangelo’s action in repose philosophy.

By the end of the High Renaissance the challenge of movement in painting had been taken on by Titian. His stop action, known as crystallized action influenced the late Baroque painters of Northern Europe, Rembrandt and Reubens, and in the Twentieth century Isobel Bishop. But where the late Baroque painters chose the highest dramatic peak for stop action, Isobel chose everyday, undramatic events of daily life—the casual stroll, the clipping of toenails. In choosing such mundane actions to crystallize, Bishop sug-
gests continuation of a daily routine untouched by historical events. We feel these women will take up where they have been interrupted so there is a continuity of movement and life cycle presented at once. Isobel has stated:

The nude is not a 'genre' subject but it can have the summing up possibility of a metaphor, if it can be made subjectively real . . . . The female nude is an unlikely subject for a female artist. But something can be said with it if the challenge to make it subjectively valid be accepted.

Isobel’s nudes do not portray the illusionistic surface textures of Late Northern Baroque paintings, nor the fleshly sensuality of Rubens’ pink fleshed females. They are weighty female forms of a solid bulk monumentality, somewhat akin to Rembrandt’s intimate portrayals of his mistress. They are presented in non-heroic poses reminiscent of Degas’ non-classical nudes. "Bishop’s nudes are Rembrandtesque in their stockiness and sensuality. And like Degas’ ‘keyhole’ nudes, they are in motion—dressing, reaching, bending, pulling. The simple act of a pedicure becomes a grand gesture."

Any immediacy that Bishop achieves via the pose is misleading as to the actual technique that the presentation involves. Isobel’s technique starts with life sketches which are translated into etchings. The drawings are sometimes ink works. They have a clarity that her paintings in their multiple transparencies seem to hide. The etchings use line and acquatint to build form but retain a linear
quality. From the etchings a photostatic print blow up is produced in a range of sizes. One of these is selected for the painting. The surface employed for painting is most importantly prepared using a Baroque method. A gessoed piece of masonite is prepared for the image by an uneven application in strips of gelatin tinted with powdered charcoal and white lead. Onto this surface a pencil or ink drawing with tempera becomes the working drawing. This is varnished over and the actual oil painting begun when the varnished surface is not completely dry but tacky. The oil application is both opaque and transparent.

The approach to painting with thin transparencies was favored by Leonardo Da Vinci whose technique was called "sfumato" or smoke in reference to the thin veils of paint. Color is a secondary consideration for the painting. "Color is not the original motif for me . . . my fundamentals are form, space, and light." The use of color creates its own pattern that complements the positioning of the figure or figures. At an early stage in the painting's development Bishop stretches intersecting strings from the corners of the canvas and at the intersecting points creates either crescendo or descendo effects. These string diagonals may actually be used as line in the background.

She uses subtle tonality with "... glowing accents of orange, turquoise, et. al." Like the Renaissance artist, Isobel seems more concerned with the building of form using
lights and darks, chiaroscuro, rather than more contemporary concerns with the optical effects of color. The use of chiaroscuro and sfumato-transparent veils allows the figure to merge with and emerge from the background.

Isobel's line drawing, "Seated Nude" (Fig. 22) of 1934 in ink done with a wash shows a semi-reclining pose that might be mistaken for a classical and purely academic pose, if the nude weren't playing with her toes. It is a multiple line drawing very similar to what Rembrandt executed in his drawings of his mistress.

Another robust female form, "Nude" (Fig. 23), of 1934, meant to be common and ordinary holds her foot in such an awkward gesture that one senses it to be momentary and anticipates movement to come. Such is Bishop's aim in the presentation. The comfortableness of the nude form heightened by the comfortableness of the bed setting counters the awkwardness of the gesture.

"Nude By The Stream" (Fig. 24), 1938, again is involved in such a temporary gesture, that of pinning her hair up, that we forgive its awkwardness and anticipate new movement. The solidity of the form is echoed by the rocks and horses.

"Small Nude" (Fig. 25) of 1943, shows a woman seated on a bed, pausing as she bends to read a newspaper or magazine on the floor. Again the pose itself is momentary, one we know cannot be held comfortably for long, so that we anticipate the next movement. This anticipation seems to involve
the viewer more intimately in the painting. Isobel Bishop's method and message were firmly established in her own tradition by the early 1930s and remained a constant throughout her career.

The 1949 "Nude Bending" (Fig. 26), shows once again the solid robust female form in a transitory position. The contrast between form and position heightens our intuitive sense that the position will change.

"Seated Nude" (Fig. 27), pen ink and wash drawing of 1950, uses a quicker multiple line, showing it to be more of a quick sketch. The quick lines overlaid on her legs give us the feeling that she is drying off her legs and feet with all due haste. They help involve us in the action. Her feet become the center of our attention.

Feet play an equally important role in "Nude #2" (Fig. 28) of 1954. Here the solid female nude clips her toenails. All diagonals, formed by legs, thighs, arms, head tilt, scissors in background lead to the foot being clipped. We are involved in the action and once again, and especially because of the tension established by merging diagonals, expect the nude to change positions.

In nudes from 1959-1965, Isobel explored the possibilities of the classical nude undressing. Many painters have done the nude, partially clothed which does not anticipate any further action. Many painters have also done a nude disrobing. But what Isobel has done cannot be called dis-
robining. They are not elegantly throwing off their clothes but involved in the last awkward struggle of the last piece. "Undressing" (Fig. 29) 1959 once again establishes diagonals with arms and legs that point to the center of interest, the last garment, heightened also with the brightest coloration. The subsequent nudes of 1960 (Fig. 30), 1961 (Fig. 31), 1963 (Fig. 32) show three different horizontal positions of the nude still struggling with the last undergarment. The body itself with bent knees reclines but is too involved in the movement to be relaxed. The seated "Small Nude" (Fig. 33) of 1965, an etching employing aquatint still utilizes a precarious pose, one leg stolidly on the ground the other lassoed in the undergarment. We are very sure she cannot hold the pose for long, we feel it in our own bodies due to the very ordinariness of the action.

The "Nude Holding Her Foot" (Fig. 34) in ink of 1969 differs from the earlier 1938 nude ink drawing. Where in the earlier work the lines of shading follow the contour of the body and help establish the weightiness of the form, in the later work the shading lines act to heighten the tension of the momentary movement by not conforming to the nude's shape.

"Nude Reaching" (Fig. 35), 1963, etching and aquatint plays rhythmic patterns across the small plate, awakening our response and involvement to the stooping nude. Not quite certain if she stumbles or intentionally stoops we are
further involved.

The style of Isobel Bishop has been categorized by her desire to paint the subjects around her, the working women who passed through Union Square, which the view from her studio afforded her. She is considered a genre painter of the American scene.

The term "American Scene" has been given to these genre paintings that capture the daily lives of rural/urban America without bearing a message of protest against the economic and social condition of the "ordinary" Americans . . . neutrality toward social mores and economic values;¹⁰

Isobel Bishop, a traditionalist to technique, is unique in her almost exclusive presentation of the American female clothed and nude as a suggestion of a continuum of movement and gesture, life force.

Louise Nevelson (b. 1899-__)

Louise Nevelson joined the urban art milieu that spawned the American scene painters of the 1920s and 1930s when she began studies at the Art Students' League in 1928. Louise was not stimulated by the contemporary classicism of Kenneth Hayes Miller, but by the new European aesthetic of the post Cezanne moderns. So it was an imperative for her to explore contemporary European instruction. In 1931 she studied in Munich with Hans Hofmann and she visited Paris, where she saw an exhibition of African art at the Musée de l'Homme. African art inspired her at it had Picasso and other European moderns. She returned to Paris and Italy
again in the summer of 1932. Later when Hofmann immigrated to America, she again studied with him at the Art Students' League.

Louise says of Cubism, which she studied with Hofmann, that "It gave me definition for the rest of my life about the world." The structural organization of Cubism appealed to Nevelson, as it had Hofmann. Their thinking was on the same level. Hofmann espoused a theory of push and pull, the interaction of elements within the canvas. His analysis included positive and negative space and the importance of shape to form. Cubism was a redefinition of three-dimensional form within the two-dimensional surface of the canvas. In Louise's later work, she re-examined three-dimensional form as it was translated through two-dimensional Cubism. It involved light and shadow, changing positive and negative space in actual space.

Nevelson was involved with the WPA (Work Projects Administration) in the late 1930s. She helped with the execution of murals at the Rand School and Rockefeller Center under Diego Rivera, the Mexican muralist. Three realizations came out of this involvement. One was an awareness of scale and monumentality. Another was an increased concern for the immediacy of execution "... there was no life in an art that has no immediacy." The third realization involved her association and friendship with Diego and his wife Freida Kahlo. Visiting them in 1951, she discovered in
the Yucatan that East met West, and a world of geometry and magic existed there. 3

American Indian art had also fascinated Nevelson.

... I identified with the Indian things. If I were reincarnated I would want to be an American Indian . . . . I love the geometry of their form and the shallowness of their space. They only work in terms of positive space.

Nevelson evolved into an artist of assemblage but she feels strongly that line is the key to these assemblages.

Of course, I have never left two-dimensional, because I've always been doing etchings and lithographs and drawing. I'm drawing all the time . . . . It's really the line between two objects . . . . Now when I take these old woods that have nails in them or are scratched and have texture, that to me is drawing. Where they're dented—that's a drawing, or where it sucks up space and becomes darker . . when I put pieces together that means I'm applying drawing as well. Every piece is not just a piece, it's a connection. It seems I make all my work "just to draw."

Louise’s first works were in pure line, and some of these were nude female forms. "Once in class at the League he (Hans Hofmann) picked up one of my abstract figures and said to the class, 'You see this, this is bigger than life.'" 6

It is coincidental that inherent in the early line drawings she made from '30-'36 is a sensibility compatible more with sculpture than with painting. Lines traverse and intersect to describe the space. Eccentric scale and proportion are invoked, and usually the head, feet, or hands are deleted for the sake of the composition. In these automatic works, Nevelson is concerned with the relationship of mass to rectangle rather than with the formal anatomical considerations of life class. To her the figure was clearly the presentation of a complex flexible form to be rearranged
or packaged into the rectilinear format of the page. Seemingly influenced by Matisse, whose work was stressed by Hofmann . . . . These drawings are unique to Nevelson, dated only by the simplistic overtones of 1930s style.

These 1930s life drawings have the anonymity of Cubist nudes. They are universals as opposed to intimate specific form. All space within the composition is active space, much like a Matisse work. Hence, there is no negative or dead space. The line is a very active contour line that gives monumentality and power to the form.

Of the three 1930 drawings (Fig. 36, 37, 38), two are executed in ink and one in pencil. None show the entire body but all give an overwhelming feeling of mass through an almost contradictory whimsical line. Female nudes are forever likened to landscapes yet Nevelson’s female nudes have the character of faces. Each pair of breasts has its own rhythm and definition, so as stylized as one might read them, they are all individualistic and autobiographical. In the drawings presented no pair is alike. It is the total acceptance of the nude body as a design form that allows one to allude to Matisse as a predecessor of Nevelson. No breast pair is alike. They may be suggested in baby bottle fashion or as in the standing nude of 1930, simply as dots. Nevelson describes her restless mind as

 Searching for that one line that would hold everything, and that line may just be a dot. Why not? You finish a sentence and you just take your pen or pencil . . . you make a dot. And look what it does to the mind! It arrests that place. And that’s what I do in my work.
The 1932 sketch (Fig. 39) of the crosslegged seated nude becomes an Indian totem in the unconscious presentation within boxlike form.

Nevelson has said "... a creative mind is virginal and projects into another realm, where we look at it as if we've never seen it. All objects are retranslated—that's the magic. It's a translation and transformation, both."

Louise's interest in the line has kept her exploration of possibilities constant. In 1947 she studied etching at Stanley William Hayter's Atelier 17 and later in 1963 lithography at June Wayne's Tamarind litho workshop when it was first established under a Ford Foundation grant in Los Angeles.

About the Atelier she has remarked, "There were so many tools to use on this line and that field I wondered if I was learning to make etchings or to be a surgeon." The 1953 "Flower Queen" etching (Fig. 42) makes use of both line, loose playful line and aquatint. Again the body especially the breasts and belly are playfully done. The composition actively utilizes all space. Like Matisse, background and foreground are given equal importance, the figure becomes a relationship of ovals and circles with interconnecting linear stems.

There is a freshness to Nevelson's insights on the female form. Perhaps it is women done by a woman. They are an honest dealing with the form, not inhibitions or sexual-
ity involving the form. Though sensuality is implied from
the volume of the contour line it does not disturb the pur-
ity of the image. By comparison, the nudes of the Cubists
are tainted.

Louise Bourgeois (b. 1911-)

"Everything I do was inspired by my early life." 1 The
eyears for Louise Bourgeois were a complex suppression
of anxieties dealing with: the sexual arrogance of her
father; her mother's emotional turmoil in marital betrayal;
and her own feelings as a pawn wedged between the two.
Those years were further complicated by a live-in mistress
whose position as a tutor should have been the traditional
friend of respect.

During these unsettling early years, Louise's stabili-
zing enjoyment came when she was allowed to redraw incom-
plete tapestry patterns that her family utilized in their
Aubusson tapestry business.

Perhaps as a reaction to those emotionally draining
times, Louise sought the discipline and structure of logic
in her education, studying both philosophy and geometry be-
fore turning to art.

I went to Lycee. Later at the Sorbonne, I
studied geometry. I was able to see in mathe-
matics some relationship between the point, the
line, and the plane, some relation among them that
could be the equivalent, that could symbolize the
complicated and difficult relationships that I had
with members of my family. For me, geometry be-
came a symbol for human relations, except it was
better, because in geometry things never go bad."²

Louise Bourgeois brings her emotional side and her reasoning powers together to formulate her art. The background in geometry prompted her, indirectly towards the second generation Cubists. She studied in the studio of Amedee Ozenfant and Charles Edouard Jeanneret (Le Corbusier)³ and later with Fernand Leger.

... the two architect-painter-theorist-writers (Ozenfant and Le Corbusier) added a third variation to the investigation of geometrical abstract art calling it Purism... Above all, the forms of Purism were to be of a mechanical clarity that would symbolize the Twentieth century as the age of the machine. Leger, of course, held this same theory, but he applied it with a great deal of bounce in his brightly colored mechanistic conventionalizations.

Louise credits Leger with insisting "... that an artist mustn't be afraid to push geometry around."⁵ An instruction that eventually led her to sculpture.

On leaving the Atelier Fernand Leger in 1938, Louise married and moved to New York City. By the early 1940s a coterie of French Surrealists had also settled in New York City: Andre Breton, Max Ernst, Andre Masson, and Marcel Duchamp.

Some similarity exists in the philosophical underpinning of Louise's work and the Surrealist:

... a responsiveness to conflicting psychological impulses ... a capacity to use the ideologically loaded notion of "alienation" and its qualifier "ambivalence" while returning them to their matter of fact human meaning.⁶

however Louise herself discries this group. "It was
the Left Bank again, and although I was now close to them I objected to them violently. They were so lordly and pontifical."

There is such a sympatico to materials in Bourgeois' work and conversely more of a conceptual ready-made approach among these Surrealists that the philosophical relationship cannot be said to also relate to technique.

Bourgeois' work deals with her inner psyche, enmeshed with both sexuality and sensuality. The later expressed in a shamanistic use of the materials by softening them to biomorphic and hence anthropomorphic forms in a primordial manner. Her work has run in themes, albeit erratically, spanning her artistic career and using diverse materials. The sometimes illusive and always multilevel interpretations of the work seem to diametrically increase as the theme progresses through time.

Such is the case with the "Femme Maison" theme: woman and house fused physically and psychologically. These works date from the late 1940s to the present. Starting with clear images of a two-dimensional nature and progressing to sculpture where . . . "Ideas of habitat, container, prison, abstract explorations and erotic reversals of interior and exterior become central." A presentation of the "Femme Maison" works occurred in 1981 at the Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago. The arrangement of the show by curator J. Patrice Marandel sought to educate the viewing
audience to the particular language and thought of Louise Bourgeois. The exhibition included five paintings, a series of etchings and twenty-five sculptures.

Two drawings (Fig. 43) executed in the late 1940s, composites of the female nude and houses are the epitomy of "Femme Maison." Using an elongated format, the two drawings present one front and one side view of an erect standing female with a complete and irreversible melding of house and figure from the waist up. The pictures are simple and complex at the very same time. In the frontal pose, the line used to describe breasts and knees reiterates the arc of the house's arched entrances. Three of these entries are open, two dangle in space, and one appears shut tight with bars. They remind one of openings in a bird cage, a feeling intensified by a smaller circular opening on one side. Bird cages were incorporated into surrealist iconography of the 1930s and 1940s. The breast lines appear to function simultaneously as breasts, closed eyelids, and again as cheeks to a door that appears as a nose between the breast curves. A stairway leading to this mid-door/nose becomes a gaping mouth perhaps leading to the womb or heart. Multiple rectangular windows, eleven distributed unevenly on three "floors" of the house, also appear open and shut. Two windows placed above the cheeks/breasts can be read as winking eyes. The multiple lines of the roof take on the characteristic of hair. Two tiny arms protrude from the house, one
saluting or signaling for help, the other at ease by the side. They have the character of incomplete arcs. The virginal vee form is more of an arc, half in repetitive lines that can be read as bars. The figure stands within shallow space created by floor boards which project a feeling of entrapment, with a suggestion of cage bars. The shadow lines on the floor anchor the figure, as if movement would be impossible. Both legs being stiffly engaged in the stance and supporting equal weight do preclude any feeling of potential movement. The horizontal line of floor-stories heighten the caged feeling. There is little space surrounding the form, also mitigating any suggestion of freedom. What negative area exists offers a subliminal suggestion of side-view breasts forming a pinched waist. The "Femme Maison" ironically is the "Little Homemaker" the pride of American civilizatoin perpetuated in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

"Are we at last the audience competent to receive Louise Bourgeois?" 9

**Summary (1900-1969)**

This chapter underscores the artistic diversification of women artists even when sharing a common image, that of the female nude.

Lillian Genth’s works are representative of a return to nature, a rebellion from the machine age. Nude and nature share a oneness of young virginal purity. Her realism, of both figure and landscape done en situ, shares philosophy
with the forerunner of Impressionism, Courbet. Her technique itself has much in common with the Impressionists.

The symbiosis of nature and nude was also perpetrated by the art of Marguerite Thompson Zorach, but in a much different manner. She was excited by the new art of the Europeans, and quested in her work for the same vibrancy and freshness. Her work is a unique amalgamation of aspects of both Cubism and Fauvism.

Beatrice Romaine Goddard Brooks' individualized approach to the nude is an offshoot of European trends at the turn of the century: the tonalism of Whistler; the strong design sense of Matisse; and the literary-artistic movement of the Symbolist who justified the reality of the subconscious and whose philosophy pre-dates Surrealism. Romaine's females exist in existential isolation or antagonistic withdrawal. They are trapped by the very Mother Nature that the work of Zorach and Genth celebrate.

Isobel Bishop presents a continuum of common existence through the nude female. Using awkward gesture to involve the viewer in a sense of movement she contemporized the painting techniques of the European fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth century. She may be categorized as an American scene painter giving the viewer a realistic slice of life.

Louise Nevelson gives a whimsical character portrait through the nude female body. She is a modern, initiated
through Cubism. Her approach to the female body is a celebration of that form.

A psychic sensuality pervades the work of Louise Bourgeois. She is able to portray the irony of femaleness with multiple layers of fascination for the viewer.

For these female artists the ideology behind the image of the female nude is autobiographical by inference. Autobiography prompts and initiates our philosophical approach to life and inevitably to artistic expression, no matter how far removed. Each artist has honed to subtleties the female body as imagery. No matter how explicit the nude, it is the nude used to elicit response to the world around them and not the nude itself.
ILLUSTRATIONS

LILLIAN MATHILDE GENTH

Figure 3. "Sunlight Dell," oil on canvas.
Figure 4. "The Sun Maiden," oil on canvas.
Figure 5. "The Mountain Stream," oil on canvas.
Figure 6. "The Fountain Of Life," oil on canvas.

No dates were available, however these photos were published in 1917 in Sherman's Landscape and Figure Painters of America.
MARGUERITE THOMPSON ZORACH

Figure 7. "Bathers," 1913-1914, Tarbell, Marguerite Zorach: The Early Years.

Figure 8. "Three Figures And Gulls," Circa 1914, Tarbell, Marguerite Zorach: The Early Years.

Figure 9. "Camp In The Woods, Yosemite," 1920, Tarbell, Marguerite Zorach: The Early Years.

Figure 10. "Maine Islands," 1919 (in collaboration with William Zorach) 1919, Tarbell, Marguerite Zorach: The Early Years.
(Fig. 7)
"Bathers", 1913-1914  Marguerite Zorach
(Fig. 6)
"THREE FIGURES AND GULLS", 1914 Marguerite Zorach
"CAMP IN THE WOODS", 1920 Marguerite Zorach
"MAINE ISLANDS", 1919 Marguerite/William Zorach
BEATRICE ROMAINE GODDARD BROOKS

Figure 11. "Azalees Blanches," 1910, oil on canvas, Secrest, Between Me And Life.

Figure 12. "Le Trajet," 1911, oil on canvas, Fine, Women And Art.

Figure 13. "L'Archer Masque," 1910-1911, Secrest, Between Me And Life.

Figure 14. "Weeping Venus," 1916-1918, Secrest, Between Me And Life.

Figure 15. "On The Wings Of Love," 1930, ink drawing, Secrest, Between Me And Life.

Figure 16. "Caught," 1930, pencil on paper, Secrest, Between Me And Life.

Figure 17. "The Foot-Stool," 1930, pencil on paper, Secrest, Between Me And Life.

Figure 18. "Lethe," 1930, pencil on paper, Secrest, Between Me And Life.

Figure 19. "Mother Nature," 1930, pencil on paper, Secrest, Between Me And Life.

Figure 20. "Their Creatures," 1930, pencil on paper, Secrest, Between Me And Life.

Figure 21. "Tomorrow Reclaims Yesterday And Today," 1930, Secrest, Between Me And Life.
(Fig. 11) "AZALEES BLANCHES" 1910  Romaine Brooks
(Fig. 12) "LE TRAJET" 1911 Romaine Brooks
(Fig. 13)
"L'ARCHER MASQUE", 1910-1911 Romaine Brooks
(Fig. 14) "WEEPING VENUS" 1916-1918 Romaine Brooks
(Fig. 15)
"ON WINGS OF LOVE", 1930  Romaine Brooks
(Fig. 16) "CAUGHT" 1930 Romaine Brooks
(Fig. 17) "FOOT-STOOL" 1930 Romaine Brooks
(Fig. 18) "LETHE" 1930 Romaine Brooks
(Fig. 19) "MOTHER NATURE" 1930 Romaine Brooks
(Fig. 20) "THEIR CREATURES" 1930 Romaine Brooks
(Fig. 21) "TOMORROW RECLAIMS YESTERDAY AND TODAY" 1930
Romaine Brooks
Figure 22. "Seated Nude," 1934, ink and wash, 5 3/4 x 6 1/2".

Figure 23. "Nude," 1934, 33 x 40".

Figure 24. "Nude By The Stream," 1938, oil/tempera on gesso panel, 25 1/2 x 19 3/4".

Figure 25. "Small Nude," 1943, oil on gesso panel, 15 x 13 3/4".

Figure 26. "Nude Bending," 1949, oil/tempera on gesso panel, 21 x 24".

Figure 27. "Seated Nude," 1950, pen, ink, and wash, 7 x 6 1/2".

Figure 28. "Nude #2," 1954, tempera on gesso panel, 31 3/4 x 21 1/2".

Figure 29. "Undressing," 1959, oil/tempera on gesso panel, 28 x 24 1/2".

Figure 30. "Undressing On The Bed," 1960, oil/tempera on gesso panel, 18 1/2 x 37".

Figure 31. "Nude," 1961, etching and aquatint, 3 1/2 x 6".

Figure 32. "Nude," 1963, oil/tempera on gesso panel, 21 x 35".

Figure 33. "Small Nude," 1965, etching and aquatint, 5 3/4 x 5".

Figure 34. "Nude Holding Foot," 1969, pen and ink, 5 3/4 x 8 1/4".

Figure 35. "Nude Reaching," 1963, etching and aquatint, 4 3/4 x 6 3/4".

All reproductions are from Lunde, Isobel Bishop.
(Fig. 22) "SEATED NUDE", 1934  Isobel Bishop
(Fig. 23) "NUDE" 1934 Isobel Bishop
(Fig. 24) "NUDE BY THE STREAM" 1938 Isobel Bishop
(Fig. 27) "SEATED NUDE" 1950 Isobel Bishop
(Fig. 29) "UNDRESSING" 1959 Isobel Bishop
(Fig. 30) "UNDRESSING ON THE BED" 1960 Isobel Bishop
(Fig. 31) "NUDE" 1961 Isobel Bishop
(Fig. 32) "NUDE" 1963 Isobel Bishop
"SMALL NUDE", 1965 Isobel Bishop

(Fig. 33)
(Fig. 35) "NUDE REACHING" 1963 Isobel Bishop
LOUISE NEVELSON

Figure 36. Untitled, 1930, ink on paper, 14 3/4 x 12 3/4", (seated nude), Glimcher, Louise Nevelson.

Figure 37. Untitled, 1930, ink on paper, 14 1/8 x 21", (seated nude with head), Nevelson/MacKowan, Dawns And Dusks.

Figure 38. Untitled, 1930, pencil on paper, 10 3/4 x 11 1/2", Nevelson/MacKowan, Dawns And Dusks.

Figure 39. Untitled, 1932, pencil on paper, 14 x 13 1/4", (crosslegged seated nude), Nevelson/MacKowan, Dawns And Dusks.

Figure 40. Untitled, 1932, ink on paper, 9 x 11 1/4", (front view), Nevelson/MacKowan, Dawns And Dusks.

Figure 41. Untitled, 1932, ink on paper, 10 3/4 x 7 3/4", (3/4 view), Glimcher, Louise Nevelson.

Figure 42. "Flower Queen," 1953, etching and aquatint, 20 x 15 1/4", Glimcher, Louise Nevelson.
UNTITLED. 1930 Louise Nevelson

(Fig. 36)
(Fig. 37) UNTITLED, 1930 Louise Nevelson
(Fig. 38) UNTITLED, 1930 (copy) Louise Nevelson
(Fig. 39) UNTITLED 1932 (copy) Louise Nevelson
(Fig.40) UNTITLED, 1932 Louise Nevelson
UNTITLED, 1932 Louise Nevelson

(Fig. 41)
(Fig. 42) "FLOWER QUEEN", 1953 Louise Nevelson
LOUISE BOURGEOIS

Figure 43. "Femme Maison," circa 1948, (front view), Lippard, *From The Center*, (cover).
"FEMME MAISON", circa 1948 Louise Bourgeois

(Fig. 43)
CHAPTER NOTES

INTRODUCTION

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16. Ibid., p. 104.
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6. Frederic Sherman, *Landscape and Figure Painting of America*, p.44.
8. Frederic Sherman, *Landscape and Figure Painting of America*, p.43.

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8. Ibid., pp.457, 453.
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10. Ibid., p.28.
13. Ibid., p.40.

BEATRICE ROMAINE GODDARD BROOKS

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15. Breeskin, p.27.
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**LOUISE NEVELSON**

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**LOUISE BOURGEOIS**


CHAPTER III

AMERICAN WOMEN ARTISTS AND THE FEMALE NUDE IMAGE

(1969-1983)

Introduction

Just as 1900 seemed a logical starting point for the perimeter of this survey, due to the coalescence of factors facilitating the emergence of the female nude done by women, 1969 is a starting point. It appears the logical demarcation for the organization of this survey both within the socio-political arena and the aesthetic mainstream.

The Socio-Political Front

The whiplash of American involvement in World War II brought direct and indirect repercussions within the social system. Technology, sped up in the service of war, never slowed down again. On-going advances in the communication and media industry made the new, old, in flashes. Space became a viable concept, marked forever by man's first steps on the moon in the summer of 1969. Technology entered the home in domestic and industrial advances, freeing time in such a way as to redefine home-life.

A relocation of geographic distribution, begun when "G.I.'s" were trained and stationed away from home, continued in a resettlement trend, heightening the sense of new
new beginnings, calling to the fore American individualism while lessening regionalism and the extended family ties.

The celebration and reaffirmation of life, home and the immediate family nucleus became visibly apparent in the baby boom. The baby boomers emerged as adults in recent history. They have been linked with the counter culture of the late 1960s, vociferous challengers on many fronts. This veritable population explosion coupled with the new technology to sharpen the competitive edge of capitalism in the 1970s.

Civil rights for Blacks was the single most pervasive social issue to emerge from World War II. The equality of military service was restated and rewon within the society as a whole. This movement inherently served as a consciousness raising of basic human rights on all fronts. Freedom of speech and woman's rights are directly associated.

True impetus for the rights movement, in the seeming prosperity of the 1960s, came out of the Vietnam Conflict. The basic propaganda of World War I and World War II, as wars of justice, for peace on earth, met fullface with the Vietnam involvement. The discrepancies of actualities and government psychology, prosperity and suffering, individualism as opposed to mass thought, prompted social turmoil.

By the mid-sixties, the civil rights movement and the free-speech movement were flourishing. The Kennedy assassination, the shooting of Martin Luther King and protests against the Vietnam War sent a shudder through American Society.

The mid-sixties brought a cultural revolution of tech-
nology, free time, and the rights movements.

The almost unspoken revolution of the 1960s was the sexual revolution. It was an intensified awareness of body and self in all aspects. It's freedoms harkened the Women's Liberation movement.

In this climate, a re-examination of status quo in all areas including art was inevitable. "America's political and social upheavals of the 1960's gave impetus to the Feminist Art Movement."²

Artists, both male and female, involved themselves in the Art Workers Coalition in the late 1960s to protest government action from Vietnam to the Arts. They examined museum policies, still controlled by European aesthetic and a male dominated aristocracy of artists. It was inevitable that women artists assumed responsibility for their own rights, coalescing in (WAR) Women Artists in Revolution.

... women Artists in Revolution (WAR) sought funds for a center from which to direct their activities. (artistic) With a grant from the New York State Council on the Arts (received after much picketing), they opened the Women's Interart Center. ... 

This group of women artists activists instigated other groups. An Ad Hoc Committee of women artists protested the limited representation of women artists in major museums. First to be picketed was the Whitney Museum of American Art whose 1969 Annual, a supposed representative sampling of American Art, featured work, only 5 per cent of which was done by women.⁴ This was the infamous eggs and tampax on-
slaught, intentionally used to arouse the public. Other museums, were picketed throughout the nation by similar groups in a two to three year period.

American art schools, according to a 1972 survey, were composed of 75 per cent women. Yet in a national survey of commercial galleries only 18 per cent exhibited the work of women. Among museums that collected contemporary works only 6 to 10 per cent of their purchases were from women artists.

Alternate exhibition space and cooperative galleries were positive implementation of this new awareness. They became a support system for women artists by the early to mid 1970s, albeit more ego boosting than monetarily lucrative.

An insistence of female heritage within the arts instigated a literary and verbal dialogue that by the mid-1970s provided greater publication opportunity for biography and autobiography of women artists. Like the red ochre hand on the cave wall at Lascaux dating from 30,000 B.C., women felt the basic need to insist on their own presence. "... the invisible women had become visible..."

What was initiated politically was absorbed into aesthetics.

The Aesthetic Concepts

In the American mainstream of art in the 1950s, Jackson Pollock gained international recognition pointing new directions to artist and public in both attitude and form within
Abstract Expressionism. He was credited with having freed line from representation and the philosophical statement "I am nature." The door was opened for further exploration, but the redefinition of nature was technologically the integrity of the brushstroke, color, canvas. Even the act of painting itself, reigned supreme for most of the 1960s. Along the way angst was removed from Abstract Expressionism and substituted with an explicit theoretical base. Thus evolved a simultaneous succession of Post-Painterly Abstractions: Colorfield, Emblematic, Systemic, etc. to eventually find an absolute within the cool aesthetic of Minimal Art.

The '60s popularity of systemic procedures, serial ordering echo of logic and methodology of applied science and the business man . . . an 'aesthetic of cleanliness' exemplifying the middleclass values of tidiness and security." formalist theory's heavy emphasis on materials and materialism had eliminated all personality, or life content, from the art object.

Pop Art, evolving also in the first half of the 1960s, utilized the images of technology, industry and the commercial culture. It's life blood was the spoof it played with itself. Andy Warhol restated Pollock's claim--"I am a machine". In visual structure it utilized the serial and systemic and the historical in spoof resulting in almost an equally cool aesthetic as Minimal. Even though employing a return to subject content, when the figure was used it was in "... mock mechanical techniques as depersonalized media events." Warhol's statement epitomizes more than just
Pop. The negation of the self as expressive content had become the avant garde status quo.

Very limited numbers of women were acknowledged within the mainstream of art during its advance into the Seventies; the movements were overwhelmingly dominated by a male star system.

At this juncture, the consciousness raising of the feminist movement was a boon to women artists. "... women benefitted by the energizing effect of self discovery..."\(^{12}\)

Feminism's greatest contribution to the future of art has probably been precisely its lack of contribution to modernism. Feminist methods and theories have instead offered a socially concerned alternative to the increasingly mechanical "evolution" of art about art.\(^{13}\)

More than one commentary on the art of the 1970s has noted that women's autobiographical self-discovery of the early 1970s influenced male artists. "Women made subject matter legitimate again. Having done so, they also made it legitimate for men."\(^{14}\) Personalization and content emphasis were not exclusive to a re-evaluation of materials.

Suzanne Torre suggests that perhaps women, unable to identify with historical styles, are really more interested in art itself, in self expression and its collective history and communication, differing from the traditional notion of the avant garde by opposing not styles and forms but ideologies.\(^{15}\)

A new respect for craft images, the acceptable outlet and market for the creativity of generations of nameless females, blossomed through the feminist movement. By the
late 1970s "decorative" began to be taken more seriously.

In the past few years, women have sought out non-western design, narratives and story telling, diaries and symbols, body art and goddess-incarnations, as well as methods of painting, dying, joining and decorating previously considered anathema for "serious artists." What happened in the Seventies was totally unanticipated. Women artists appropriated formerly disreputable media, fabrics and ceramics, and deliberately embraced a maximalism that discredited the monastic minimalism which had preceded it.

In the early 1980s the recognition for shaministic use of tools has not gone to those who have initiated it in a pure form but to the male assimilator.

Women pointed out the double standard of believing that when women do it, it's unconscious craft, and when men do it, it's consciously vanguard art.

The feminist movement, expressed in art, is a factor in bringing the figure and figurative art back into the mainstream.

Photography, the direct link between technology and the retinal image has also spurred the artist to re-examine realism, and is another factor in the return to the figure of the 1980s.

At the roots of the feminist movement is the sense of ownership of body and self that had snowballed out of the sexual revolution of the 1960s.

Post modern art is a direct consequence of feminism, and whether they acknowledge it or not (most of them do) the male artists during this period were profoundly affected by the autobi-
graphical, diaristic, confessional, and expressionistic modes of woman artists, which aimed to expand rather than contract the popular notion of art.

Whatever the impetus, figure and subject content have very definitely re-emerged in the art of the Eighties. "... The human figure over the last ten years, has once again been permitted access to the center of art." 20

The female nude done by females is embodied with an added honesty in intent. It is a heightened sense of self exploration appropriately noted by Carolee Schneeman in reference to her body works of 1963 and remarked upon by critic Carter Ratcliff:

The image values of my flesh (provide) the materials I choose to work with . . . . I claim my body as visual territory . . . . The strongly implied claim is that such commitment is a model of the way to achieve inward 'authenticity' of feeling, meaning, intention—perhaps even being . . . . Feminism as a new ideology posits a goal of outward 'authenticity.' 21

Alice Neel (1900-1984)

The female nudes of painter Alice Neel, brilliantly span the confining dates of both chapter two and chapter three. Because of this range of work, Alice Neel has become the central figure for this study.

Neel's art, in her own interpretation and frequently mentioned in studies of her work, strived to create the moment while presenting the zeitgeist or spirit of the times. She achieved this goal throughout her career. She left us as a painter reflecting the 1980s.
Like many artists, the times had to catch up with Alice Neel, finally accepting her style, years later than its initiation. Artistic recognition began to reach Neel in the 1960s. By the mid 1970s her acclaim became more apparent. Neel connected this recognition though never the instigation for her work, with women's activism which called for a greater visibility of women in all fields. She stated, "I have only become known in the 1960s because, before, I could not defend myself."¹

Alice Neel has characterized painting as a supreme act of freedom, a freedom to create and discover on canvas. At much personal cost, she pursued the discovery of freedom in her own life as well. In her 1971 Honorary Doctorate of Fine Arts address at her alma mater, Moore College of Art,² Neel stated,

"... women must first be free and live and discover what they want. ... All experience you can have is good for your work because it broadens you as a person. Unless you get killed by it, and then you’ve gone too far."

Neel’s life was a cacophony of experiences.

"... living in a society that defined women by the male company they kept, by moving from man to man and from subject to subject she could elude classification and have it all: career, art, sex and family."³

Hers was a rebellion against the American "W.A.S.P." middle class and its social mores, against her own anglo-saxon looks which didn’t interest her, and most importantly against non-thinkers. This rebellion was not always con-
scious, nor overt. But Neel "... has never missed a
chance to take a stand not only against injustice in poli-
tics and society, but also against bourgeois convention and
mores." 5

She was raised in the matriarchy of a well educated
mother of D.A.R. (Daughters of the American Revolution)
descendancy, and a docile, genteel railroad clerk in the
Philadelphia area. She attended the Philadelphia School of
Design for Women and her choice of this institute was very
deliberate. She had abandoned the brief beginnings of a
secretarial career for art school, choosing specifically the
School of Design because it was a girl's school.

"... so I could concentrate on art 6 and
because it was not quite as rigid in its heritage
as the Pennsylvania Academy of Art... because I
didn't like the impressionist methods they taught
there. Besides at the School of Design, they gave
you more freedom": 8 I didn't see life as a
'Picnic on the Grass'. 8

At the School of Design she readily accepted drawing as
the discipline of all art and was most impressed by the
drawing instructor, Paula Balano, whose moonlight career was
in stain glass windows. 9

She graduated in 1925 and immediately married a young
Cuban painter, who she had met the previous summer at a
session of the Pennsylvania Academy. They moved to Cuba for
a two year period, of which Neel stated: "My life in Cuba
had much to do with my later psychology. It conditioned me
a lot." 10 In Cuba, Neel came into first hand contact with
the Latin view of existence—that death is the governing agent of life and must be recognized.

Under this shadow her first child, a daughter, was born and died of diptheria within its first year (1927). This death anticipated and contributed to an agonizing four year period of mental and physical anguish in which a second child, Isabella, was born, and lost along with her husband and marriage. Neel suffered a nervous breakdown and was institutionalized for suicidal tendencies. In a poem, at the time, she wrote:

i've lost my child my love my life and all
the goddamn business that makes life worth living.

This scar did not impair Neel's later art, but often guided her choice of model, the pregnant or nursing female nude.

Recovering with friends, she met and began living with a violent, radical intellectual, Kenneth Doolittle. And almost simultaneously to her live-in status with Doolittle, she developed a liaison with a wealthy travel agent, John Rothschild, which continued until his death in 1975.

Through the Public Works of Arts Projects (PWAP) (1933), Neel was able to achieve some artistic independence. She worked for PWAP until June of 1934 and from 1935 to 1943 on the Cultural Project of the later WPA.

Neel abandoned her violent lover by the mid-1930s but not before many paintings were slashed and drawings torn up.
Her next attempt at a household was with a Puerto Rican guitarist in Spanish Harlem. Her twenty year residency there outlived her relationship by eighteen years. However, through this brief union, her son Richard was born (1939). Neel spent the eighteen years in a spasmodic but violent relationship with a filmmaker, who fathered her son Hartley in 1941.

At this juncture, the beginning of the 1960s and the end of her second violent relationship, Neel was convinced by the urges of her psychologist to make greater efforts to show her work. The greater freedom to paint, coupled with the changing times, brought fresh dynamics to Neel's style.

The 1960s brought greater opportunity for recognition, by the 1970s Neel was able to elatedly comment: "Life begins at 70! Better late than never!"12

In the 1960s, Neel's subjects, those who had interested her enough to paint, changed from abused and often passive candidates of fate, to focus on the art world and those dear to her. Formal changes also evolved. She began to employ a sort of artistic "double-take, a first portrait followed by a second quicker one, disclosing a deeper more radical aspect and heightening spontaneity."13

By the 1970s, the canvases were almost four times larger than those of the 1930s. Her palette brightened and lightened in all aspects; background, clothing—even flesh. She began to gravitate towards leaving large areas of the
canvas unpainted, controlled only by her sketch line and allowing two-dimensional shape to play against three-dimensional form in a more obvious manner.

These changes in format and coloring increased the power of her psychological dissections of her sitters. Neel avowed that this dissection was only a response to what the sitter dictated but at one point roguishly added "I pick out the chairs in which my victims sit."^{14}

And so the process was initiated: "... typically she begins by choosing a canvas that seems appropriate to the size and nature of the subject."^{15} Neel then talked to her sitters, allowing them to settle in while she appraised their body language. The pose of the "non-pose" was just as important as color selection.

In a half hour they're bound to take their most characteristic pose. This involves all their character and social standing--what the world has done to them and their retaliation--and I put them in that.^{16}

Then she used a placement line of thinned ultramarine paint outlining and positioning on the canvas, designing both positive and negative elements. This was her favorite step--dividing up the canvas, beginning in

... all different places. If I'm worried about getting them on completely, I might begin with the feet and then do the head, or I might start just with something that appeals to me in the person . . . . I hate those frozen pictures of people. People may look very interesting but when they think they're going to get their portrait painted, all of a sudden they sit very stiff and look very boring, so I just talk to them so they keep loose.^{17}
The most memorable portion of the work for Neel involved capturing the face.

'It's an aesthetic trip like an LSD trip... I become the person for a couple of hours, so when they leave and I'm finished, I feel disorientated. I have no self... because of this powerful identification I make with the person. But that's what makes a good portrait'.

Her type casting, her blue contour line, her distortions, her witty repetition of forms, her editing of what we are to notice through her juxtaposition of painted and unpainted areas, her disturbing green shading—all her controls are in the service of an empathic understanding of the person seated before her.

No place is empathy more involved than in her work with the female form, the majority of which are pregnant. She draws upon her own experiences to experience the sitter. But aside from her own life, the artistic influences and comparisons to Neel's works are many.

All my life the Classic and Egyptian collections of the Metropolitan Museum had more influence on me than the painters. Also the African things. Not that I copied them, I admired them.

As unlikely as one might imagine at first glance, the Renaissance concepts of both Michaelangelo and DaVinci are evident in Neel's work. Michaelangelo is noted for having sought action in repose, through subtle physical contradictions of opposing tensions, i.e., a relaxed arm as opposed to a tense hand. DaVinci sought to portray the intent of man's soul. The work of Alice Neel clearly and overtly uses the tension of physical contradictions to portray what lies behind the face. Her summations are twentieth century
exposes too accurate to be ignored. For example, she is prone to paint two different sides to a face, or two different hands, even to use transposition of forms in which a breast may become a fish.

While philosophy and goals may be shared with these Renaissance Italians, Neel's application of paint is the antithesis of the layered process of "sfumato" that DaVinci espoused.

It is more akin to the German Expressionists whose raw vital portrayals of humanity also offer a psychycological disturbing interpretation. Neel admired these painters but was unfamiliar with their work when she began her own interpretation of humanity.

The violence of application of the German Expressionists was adopted and reinterpreted by Abstract Expressionism of the late 1940s and early 1950s. Neel's energy, spontaneity and immediacy of application pivots also around Expressionism. But her work never lost its figurative underpinnings. Neel's life long dedication to the human form despite the dictates of the modern art world is admirable. In 1960 she bemoaned the fate of the figure, but never wavered in her belief in the figure.

When I go to a show today of modern work I feel that my world has been swept away--and yet I can't think it can be so . . . that the human creature will be forever verboten . . . . I'm not against abstraction. Do you know what I'm against? Saying that man himself has no importan-
those women it was great. You know why? I think he had something the matter with him sexually and he was afraid of women. He probably saw teeth in vaginas... every good work has abstract elements... all my favorite painters are abstractionists: Morris Louis and Clyfford Still. I don't do Realism. I do a combination of realism and expressionism. It's never just realism. I hate the New Realism. The work of the New Realists is boring to me because of no psychological acumen. They don't show a soul out in the world doing things.

Of the early American realists, she most admired the dreams and visions of Albert Pinkham Ryder (1847-1917), the early works of John Sloan (1871-1951), "... before he was ruined by Renoir...," and the buildings of Edward Hopper (1898-app. 1950).

Cézanne (1839-1906) impressed Neel, not for his analytic technique of paint application, but his ability to perceive the human form and soul as one.

I went to see a big show of Cézanne's, at least 25-30 years ago at the Metropolitan. He had a lot of portraits there; and I was amazed at his psychological depth... and guess what he said 'I love to paint people who have grown old naturally in the country.' But you know what I can say? I love to paint people torn by all the things that they are torn by today in the rat race in New York... I also think that if I had not been an artist, I could have been a psychiatrist. Only I wouldn't have known what to tell them to do, but they don't know either.

The common bond to those artists that Neel admired most seems to be those primitivists, realists, abstractionists or expressionists whose honesty in perception, color or form, is most basic, and most probing.

At no time was Alice Neel's dedication, involvement and
empathy with the human form greater than when working with the nude female form.

In 1930, having suffered the loss of her first born and the absence of her husband and second daughter, Isabella, Neel threw herself into painting, working at the studio of a friend, Ethel Ashton. Here she painted a number of female nudes, including one of Ethel and one of Roberta Myers.

She painted the nude Ethel (Fig. 44) in dramatic shapes and forms, and somber, ashen colors. Neel later commented:

Don’t you like her left leg on the right, that straightline? You see, it’s very uncom-promising. I can assure you, there was no one in the country doing nudes like this. And also, it’s great for women’s lib, because she’s almost apolo-gizing for living. And look at all that furniture she has to carry all the time. There was another great one of Ethel that later was slashed up . . .

Neel used a black defining line, that alternately confines, defines and invades the body giving a sense of nakedness and vulnerability. Ethel’s face, downcast with huge almost pleading eyes heightens this feeling of submissive invasion. The black line was perhaps the influence of Paula Balano, the School of Design drawing instructor who Neel admired and who made an additional living at Stainglass work. This line boldly undulates from thick to thin forming and molding space, dividing the canvas up. The shapes become a series of triangles of various sizes. The nose works as an implied triangle or arrow, pointing downward to the dark triangle of pubic hair. The heavy weighted figure, by both
form and color, is anchored to her chintz furniture, as im-
mobile and solid as any Egyptian sculpture with its intrin-
sic hope of lasting forever.

The suggestion of psychological drama is as expressive
and overt as any of the German Expressionist's work. Her
bold lines do divide the picture plane into both positive
and negative space causing a sort of contradictory play be-
tween two-dimensional shape and three-dimensional form.
Though Neel has never been accused of having been decora-
tive, Neel was aware of design but said of Matisse, who also
divided the plane intricately with bold line:

He didn't satisfy me. He is a wonderful art-
ist, but there was no character there, no psycho-
logical impact. That I found out when I was
twenty-two. For me he was therefore of just lim-
ited importance. You see Picasso, no matter how
destructive he is, he does have the human race
torn to pieces. He has a great importance because
he sees—he dismembers it. Matisse beautiful as
his work is remains more or less decorative.
Persian really.26

Neel is somewhat similar to Matisse in technique. Her
division of the canvas is reminiscent of early Matisse por-
traits of himself or Madame Matisse "Woman With The Green
Line, 1907.

"Roberta Meyers With Blue Hat" (Fig. 45) was also
painted in 1930 at the studio of Ethel Ashton. It also
employs a relatively small canvas size (27 1/2 x 23 1/2")
and the somber palette of her pre-1960s work.

Here the shapes and forms that Neel chose to articulate
are circles; circles of the full breasts and smaller nipples
are emphasized by repetition; the small round shapes of Roberta's beads, the great circles of her hat, her nose, chin, belly button and eyes, and circles scattered about in the furniture tapestry. This repetition and the slightly brighter coloring gives the painting a more light-hearted almost carnival flavor as compared to the Ashton painting. Neel's comment corroborates this:

"This is a striptease painting in a sense, as she took her clothing off piece by piece."

Of the work done in Ashton's studio in 1930, Neel remembered: "One of these I couldn't even get photographed. Exposed pubic areas were taboo."

Alice Neel's attempt to ward off the crushing emotional repercussions of her personal life, through painting, were to no avail. Neel's headlong nervous breakdown, later that same year, kept her institutionalized, at the edge of suicide, for months.

Upon leaving the sanitarium in September of 1931, Neel spent time recuperating with a friend, Nadya, a graphologist living in New Jersey. Here she began her relationship with Doolittle. In 1933 she did two nude portraits of her friend Nadya. Of Nadya, and consequently her visual interpretations Neel commented: "She represented decadence to me."

"Nadya Nude," 1933 (Fig. 46) on the white rumpled bed, spreads her legs in blatant sexuality but her face remains sad and impassive as if unrelated to body and gesture. "I always said that there was a struggle between her head and
her central section, and the head is losing.\(^{30}\) Also in 1933, Neel painted "Nadya and Nona" (Fig. 47).

"Nadya and Nona" which I also called "Two Little Tarts", I painted later (than 1931), in 1933. Once some doctor said to me: "What a wonderful rear to sit on," that rear, on the far one. And I thought he meant for him to sit on, and I said, "Why, doctor!" But he meant for her to sit on.

"Nadya and Nona" lie side by side on a dark moss green bedspread that becomes a sea of wrinkles with the suggestion of moon or sun in mist at the upper left corner. The bed takes on an aspect of mountains because of the juxtaposition of the moon. An intense red pillow (scarlet red) provides a prop for the two ladies' heads. They are not physically united but are aligned together on this "sea" of wrinkled cloth, a burnt umber line contours the forms and the overall palette is somber. Nadya's gaping pubic hair echos her tight curly hair-do, suggestive of Nadya's intellect/flesh struggle. Nadya's face is dark, sad and weak looking. Nona is guileless with the eyes of a Barbie doll.

Neel's subject matter whether male, female or child was always sensually alive.

In 1934, Neel's daughter, Isabetta (nee Isabella) (Fig. 48) returned briefly from Cuba to visit, then almost six years old. Neel painted the young girl, nude.

My mother and father spent the summer with me in Belmar, and Isabetta came from Cuba to visit. She would be 6 in November. She is standing on a homemade Bulgarian rug. The galleries would not show it, as they said it was indecent; by the time they showed it, they said it was Lolita.\(^{32}\)
Consciously or subliminally, Neel has used bars, incorporated within the wall structure of the limited space background and on the rug pattern beneath the child's feet to suggest that this young vibrant creature is unavailable to her. The wall and carpet are pinks and red, the color of love. Not only are the colors more lively, than Neel's other canvases of the day but the child's face and body are more subtly and softly modeled. The pose is standing and central to the painting, much like a young general's. The feet are planted firmly on the rug and the arms are on the hips, a pose of someone very much in control.

Neel spent the majority of her summers at Belmar and Spring Lake, New Jersey. In 1935, she did a series of small watercolors there, which allegorically or literally as in "Alienation" (Fig. 49) portrayed her relationship with the wealthy realtor, John Rothschild.

I didn't realize until just lately, until 1978, when I had the show of my watercolors at Graham Gallery what the title should be. It had nothing to do with sex. It was alienation. He had just left his wife and a couple of children.  

Neel's watercolor retitled "Alienation" (Fig. 49) reveals her inclination for the drawn image. Using a fluid outline of darker paint, she shows herself nonchalantly reclining on a bed, while her friend John stands above her, back to the viewer, both arms and legs crossed in front of his body as if not wishing to be invaded. An image of bars is subtly but emphatically created; by three towels
equidistant from each other on the back wall, the wall itself—a series of three panels which become progressively darker, the metal bars of the bedstead, and the floorboards upon which John stands. These all contribute to the feeling of imprisonment and control which contradicts Neel’s nonchalance. This contradiction of free form within rigid lines seems to support the basic ambivalence that characterized her relationship with Rothschild.

"Subconscious" (Fig. 50), 1942, is more abstract in form than most of Neel’s work but the psychological poignancy is still very much in operation. The central imagery is the more expressive nude of herself clutching and melding with the form of her young son Richard. The sadistic and bloodstained image of her then current companion, the filmmaker, but not Richard’s father, looms large at the canvas edge, while a beatific bust of her wealthy companion remains on a corner table. The anguish expressed here was elicited by her lover’s unkind treatment of Richard, who Neel saw as part of her. 34

This is how I felt in 1942 when Sam was Out West. I did this in the winter nights in Harlem. I am holding Richard, whose head is about to roll off. I then felt that children were physically attached to you until about the age of two. It was a definite physical attachment. Right out in front is Sam with that chin, reduced to an idiot. At the right is John as a statue, discreetly turning his head away. There are a couple of little blood marks on the sheet. On the edges of the canvas are the gods of sickness. The color—lavender—means insanity. 35

"Sue Seeley" (Fig. 51) was done in 1943. There is a
contradiction presented in the upright rigid position of the woman's head and its almost rectangular shape as compared to the round voluminous forms of the nude body itself. These round forms are echoed in the clouds. She becomes a pensive mother earth figure, more a universal figure than most of Neel's portraits to this time, though the facial portrait remains very individual and specific.

Progressing into the 1960s, the theme of pregnant or nursing mothers as nudes occurs with greater frequency. The theme itself has a Chekovian aspect, a suspension in time where the beginning and ending are implied. Some event has occurred to alter the nude of tradition and we anticipate a return to that form.

I thought the whole picture of a woman without pregnancy was . . . trivial . . . it's treating woman as sex object. But, you know sex results in something . . . . It isn't what appeals to me, it's just a fact of life. It's a very important part of life and it was neglected. I feel as a subject it's perfectly legitimate, and people out of a false modesty, or being sissies, never showed it, but it's a basic fact of life. Also plastically, it is very exciting.  

In these full length nudes Neel . . . "shows the way a woman's body is invaded, how the belly and breasts are swollen, the arms and legs looking thinner than usual by contrast . . . ."  

"Pregnant Maria" (Fig. 52), 1964, is the classical, reclining nude female form with the startling alteration of pregnancy. Maria's face which remains the central focus, employs an oft-seen Neel device, that is, there are two very
different natures expressed. One side is smooth and unlined, the other tired, more worn but more perceptive, the eye more sharply focused.

Another reclining pregnant nude was done in 1967, "Pregnant Julie and Algis" (Fig. 53).

I had a show at the Maxwell Gallery in San Francisco in June, 1967. It lasted a month and Hartley, who had come with me, and I stayed at friends of his in Berkeley where this painting was done. Late in the afternoons, from four until seven, the light in Berkeley is just marvelous. And that's when I did this. It was the fashion to have the mattress on the floor. Julie was pregnant, and one of the things I liked about the composition was the heads above each other and also the scissor-shaped legs.

Here Neel presents the fully clothed male beside the nude female form. Both figures recline and the male, slightly above the female so that her head rests on his shoulders, appears to protect her. His questioning stare also seems to be protective, while her eyes seem wide with innocence and some confusion as to what is happening. By the positioning of their legs Neel has formed a triangle whose apex is the woman's belly.

By the late 1960s Neel's mature style evolved, the full utilization of an expressionist psychoanalytic style.

Her blue contour line, her distortions, her witty repetition of forms, her editing what we are to notice through her juxtaposition of painted and unpainted areas, her disturbing green shading—all her controls are in the sense of an emphatic understanding of the person seated before her. 

The frail yet elegant arms and legs play against the
swollen forms of belly and breasts in the figure of "Pregnant Betty Homitsky" (Fig. 54), 1968. She sits, yet the positioning of her hands suggests she is only there momentarily. Her upward gaze is almost pleading.

"Pregnant Woman" (Fig. 55), 1971, is Neel’s son Hartley’s wife Nancy, who tensely lies upon a couch in a quasi-fetal position. The head of Hartley looms watchfully over her head, behind the couch. Neel noted "it’s almost tragic the way the top part of her body is pulling the ribs." Nancy’s head is severed from her body by the lack of neck and shares this trait with Hartley’s head. Hartley and Nancy are mentally united while physically separated.

"Carmen and Judy" (Fig. 56), 1972, is a double portrait of Neel’s Haitian housekeeper and her sickly retarded child. Here, as in much of Neel’s work, a very specific portrait takes on universality at once classical and Twentieth century. Carmen and Judy are a madonna and child set within the traditional triangular structure as of church symbology. The "sweet sadness" of Carmen’s face echoes that of Italian early Renaissance Madonnas. Carmen’s face is resigned. Her exposed breast is unused. The child is flacid and sick with no future. This female child is bare and exposed to the world.

The double portrait of husband and wife, "Cindy Nemser And Chuck" (Fig. 57) portrays their relationship and personalities through their pose. They are seated together
on a Victorian couch (Edwardian). Chuck semi-reclines, while Cindy sits with body weight forward. They hold hands, loosely but definitely bonded together. In Cindy Nemser's words:

My image disclosed an unexpected sensuosity, coupled with sadness and vulnerability, while my husband's portrait underscored his healthy sensuality and basic generosity of spirit. These traits were not only delineated by the rendering of our facial expressions, but were also to be read in the pose we had chosen for ourselves which Alice then transferred to her canvas. We sat close together, holding hands in an attitude of mutual support. My body concealed Chuck's sexual parts while his hand rested on my waist in a gesture of affectionate protectiveness. In this double portrait, Alice had psyched us out as individuals and had also arrived at the essence of our relationship.

"Aroyomni" (Fig. 58), 1976, is a seated nude exemplary of Neel's mature work. Her palette is brighter with greater contrasts. The thinned blue ultramarine line in which the painting was sketched, predominates. Areas of the canvas are left open, unpainted. The line repeats shapes within the modeled form of the figure and takes on subtle meaning in plant and fish forms. The shapes of the flacid breasts, abused from breast feeding, are repeated as both leaves and fish. The face is the focal point. This European face is sensitive and non-aggressive, as are the hands. The rounded back of the chair emphasizes the rounded shoulders. The two-dimensionality of shapes play against and echo the three dimensional forms within this composition.

"Elizabeth" (Fig. 59), 1977, is also in Neel's
later palette of vibrant tones and color and complements—here exclusively violet and yellow as complements and mixed color. The violet line is embued with energy as it vibrates against the yellow, portraying a child who looks to be a veritable "bundle of energy." The stance, very similar to the straight-legged contrapostto of "Isabetta", endows the girl with a wonderful sense of self-confidence and energy.

"Margaret Evans Pregnant" (Fig. 60), 1978, carries on Neel's tradition of the pregnant nude. Using violet and yellow complements and a somewhat softened line drawing Neel described the somewhat wide-eyed woman about to give birth, seated uncomfortably in a forced rigidity or tense waiting pose. The central image is played against a thin gray shadow on the left (a former Margaret perhaps) and a mirrored partial image on the right which offers an older or future Margaret.

"Kitty Pearson" (Fig. 61) of 1979, shows a healthy, young female nude. Her femininity is an earthiness and strength captured against broad shoulders, a man's hat and mexican serape. It is the melding of male and female--the new woman, with potential.

"Victoria And Cat" (Fig. 62), 1980, like "Elizabeth" of 1977 is another portrait of a granddaughter. The child and cat are one. The child's face is old as if having seen the future. The cat is clutched to her, so as not to have to expose herself, as if she did not want to stand alone; it is
a very different personality than portrayed in "Elizabeth" (Fig. 59).

Neel did relatively few self portraits and most of these allegorically. At age eighty (1980), when she felt that she was more likely to be accused of "insanity than of vanity" she painted a life-size seated nude of herself, brush in hand (Fig. 63). The color complements of blue and orange dominate, providing an enlivening contrast. The orange of the nude form is played against the drawn blue line, the blue shadow, and the blue striped chair. Again as in prior works, stripes may be interpreted as bars. Neel could not easily and freely stand or walk at this point in her life. She further emphasized this interpretation by shadowing her front leg and its foot which seems incapable of bearing weight. She said she tried to show "... the flesh dropping off the bones." Like the pregnant nudes this picture suggests transition from one stage of life to another. The commentary is in selection of the subject matter, and pose.

Neel’s characteristic unposed poses charged her work with expressive life which stroke, color and shape further emphasized. Neel sought out the contradictions of internal tensions to portray as physical characteristics. The tensions themselves are universals though they belonged to very specific subjects.

At a glance, Neel’s pregnant females in their rounded
swollen forms are more reminiscent of primitive figures, such as the Paleolithic fertility goddess, the "Venus of Willendorf," than the present. But the faces of Neel's women are Twentieth century. They express either ambivalence or bewilderment to their condition, their heads merely surviving what has happened to their bodies. Neel challenged the myth of complacency that is attached to pregnancy. The staring faces suggest quasi-bewilderment or glazed acceptance, but never total complacency. The face remains the focal point of the painting. Pregnancy becomes a mode of expressing female interaction with the world, by its implication of social contact.

Although Neel's technique changed as it matured, the intent and content of her paintings did not drastically alter. Using friends and family as subject matter remained a constant, though her collection of interesting strangers gradually was replaced with artworld characters.

The nude female seen in Alice Neel's work is the ultimate universal, an amalgamation of specifics.

Marisol (b. 1930–

Born in Paris of well to do Venezuelan parents, Marisol did not reside in the United States until her high school years. Her mother died when Marisol was only eleven and perhaps this fact and her father's early encouragement strengthened her involvement with the arts.

While attending the prestigious Los Angeles high school,
the West Lake School for girls, in 1946, Marisol also attended the Jepson School where she studied with Rico LeBrun and H. Warshaw. After high school, Marisol continued her art studies in Paris at the Academie Julian and the L’Ecole des Beaux Arts. By 1950 she returned to the states, this time to New York. Her art instruction here continued at the Art Student’s League where she came into contact with Yasuo Kuniyoshi. Kuniyoshi’s work is expressive with juxtaposition of surreal elements. From 1951-1954, Marisol studied with Hans Hofmann, his theories of push-pull interactivity. Marisol, like Alice Neel, holds a Doctorate of Fine Arts from Moore College of Art in Philadelphia. Marisol’s travels through Europe, the Far East, Venezuela and America have encouraged her insights into American society, a sort of comparative encounter.

Marisol’s earliest works, terracotta figures, were likened to pre-Columbian and Folk Art, but her sophistication of subject content has always made these associations peripheral. "...I’m not really a folk artist—that’s ridiculous--It’s like saying that Picasso is an African Artist." Her most recent major showing, "Artists And Artists," 1981, at the Sidney Janis Gallery, New York, depicted portraits of twentieth century figures who have influenced her thinking, whose intellectual approach corresponded with her own. Her father, and Martha Graham, the modern dance pioneer, were among the few non-visual artists
represented. Her father gave constant support to Marisol in the arts. Martha Graham brought the drama of contemporary existence to dance.

These sculptured and assembled icons revered Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), Louise Nevelson (b.1900), William deKooning (b.1904) and Georgia O'Keefe (1887-1986), all artists with whom Marisol felt kinship. While adopting no one's style she realized the importance and influence of the surrealist and readymade approach of Duchamp, the assemblage and irony of Picasso, the love of nature of O'Keefe, the ethereal light and dark shadow boxes of Nevelson, and the totemic frontal assault of deKooning.

In content, Marisol's work has been likened to the biting satire and black humor of Francesco Goya (1746-1828) while stylistically her often fine draftsmanship is at times reminiscent of Albrecht Durer (1471-1528). Marisol's initial fame came in the early 1960s as the only woman involved in a public manner with Pop Art. Her work was a critique of the social ambience surrounding her. She stated then that her main influence "has been the street and bars and not school and books".

She is a self taught sculptor whose box-like images eerily fluctuate from three-dimensional to two-dimensional. She employs ready-mades as well as sculpture and drawn forms. Many of her works even at this earlier stage, contained replicas of her own body.
Engaged in an endless quest for self-identification, the artist makes multiple casts, drawings, and prints of her face, her hands, and her entire body. She uses her own image not only because she is the most convenient model but also to establish her identification with everything she represents. As Marisol has stated, "whatever the artist makes, it is always a kind of representation of self—even when it is a painting of an apple or an abstraction. A work of art is like a dream where all the characters, no matter in what disguise, are part of the dreamer. Besides, when I want to make a face or hands for one of my figures, I'm usually the only person around to use as a model."

Marisol also very definitely states that her work is social criticism.

She is a self-taught sculptor who works in any materials that suit her purpose. She gravitates toward box forms but does not use wood exclusively. She often incorporates plaster casts, transfer images, readymades, and her own fine draftsmanship. "She juggles with realities. The reality of illusion, the reality of tangible substance, and the reality of the symbol."

Within her compositions of two-dimensional art that concern the female nude, her own body is used as readymade reference. The box-like form of the litho stone became the container of her body form, for "Diptych," 1971, (Fig. 64). Using two separate stones for a life-sized double page print, Marisol used her own nude body as a transfer print.

If she wants a body, she makes an impression of her own body by coating it with oil and lying on a lithographic stone and then adds outlining contours to suggest volume—but not to adjust the print’s accidental nature. By the simplest but not the most obvious means she achieves a syn-
thesis of subject and treatment in two-dimensions without consorting to the artificial Pop solutions of photo-reality as subject of yet another flat reality print.

The initial body impression on this print, incomplete shadows of high body points are linked by fine contour line and line shading to present a complete frontal image as if the body were trapped within the stone pressing to emerge. A set of foot prints, one a three-quarter foot, the other half a foot, walk off the bottom print.

The evenly balanced, static, nude figure stares out into the confronting void with all the deadpan inscrutability and determination of a sphinx. Extra hands invade a pre-Raphaelite profusion of hair . . . . An ironic little heart pierced with an arrow of the type that lovers carve on trees hangs on the throat. Teeth appear in a Christlike wound on the left side in a gesture of rage. The right hand holds an inverted foot and shoe, an echo of the themes of the earlier prints. A couple of brash but serious notes of disturbingly mingled disgust and black humor appear: A small swastika sitting like a crab-louse in the pubic hairs and a freak finger and thumb growing out of the left knee and ankle like useless vestigial appendages . . . (the top half is printed in silver-gray).

In juxtaposing elements that function as symbols with the realistic imagery of the body, a type of metaphoric expressionism evolves. Marisol's "Double Flower" (Fig. 65) of 1973 utilizes traced imagery of her spread legs manipulated to a full body sequence by employing the negative space as positive space. The three sets of leg tracings become other than what they are: the topmost set involves the central image of smiling mouth and teeth; the middle set whose upper limits double as
breasts, have hands holding open the central section at once
the lower opening and a wound to the heart; the lower set of
spread legs hold a flower as a central image with banded
fingers of varying sizes and colors traveling down each side
of the leg. The image is worked with colored pencils and
crayons on black paper contributing to an erotic and exotic
ambience.

Three large drawings, done also with colored pencils
and crayons, were executed in 1974 and also utilized self-
tracings. However, they are not static frontal poses. They
flail, kick or thrash in "ecstasy or anguish, but protesting
violently as they participate in dark ceremonies to which
the viewer is given only the most abbreviated access. Some
figures flee--one on a bicycle." 14

"Lick The Tire Of My Bicycle" (Fig. 66) contains the
central imagery of a nude female body fleeing on bicycle.
What heightens the drama is the many multiple body parts
that emerge from negative areas. The bike itself rolls over
terrain that becomes breast and hip. The spokes of the bi-
cycle wheel become hands reaching but not grasping. Ahead
of the central figure a fully extended arm and hand evolve
into the barrel and handle of a gun. A fish swims above
this "hand-gun" pun. An extra female torso from the waist
to knees merges at the spine of the central figure. The
cyclist's backside leg is flipped up in a contorted position
and merged with head fingers, hand imagery and udders,
pushing the figure ever onward.

Defined by refined hatchings of both the negative and positive spaces, a male nude rides a sprawled, writhing female nude in "The English Are Coming" (Fig. 67). The male nude's face and arm are both frontal and side. The frontal face and arm are open, in expression and the hand's palm. While in the side view, the hand becomes the pistol. The female is pinned, the picture exudes not sado-masochism ("S&M"), but frustration.

Hand and gun imagery abounds in both positive and negative space of "All My Shoes For Ten Years" (Fig. 68), 1974. There are however no feet but multiple imagery of shoes, boots and shoe prints defined as much but the negative area hatchings as internal lines. The powder trail of a bullet rips across the figures on a diagonal, a foot becomes a hand and a hand becomes a shoe.

Her vocabulary abounds with basics both in style and imagery, and there are the artifacts that seem to her significant of diverse fascinations in culture and personality. She records with them not only their simplicity but the inherent strangeness, wonder, and at times terror they inspire when put in the context of primal urges and feelings. As she says 'there is the shock of being around; for me it is exotic—like traveling to another country and finding things exotic that people didn't notice in their daily lives.'

Marisol's elusive subject content, ordinary but erotic, foot and hand fetishes are translated in dimensional yet suggestive forms. There is a transitional, permutated energy that erases any Renaissance tradition associated with
a delineated nude female form.

Mary Frank (b. (1933- )

Mary Frank’s themes and images evolve around the female form, at once autobiographical and universal.

In adolescence I was intensely romantic, I lived in a fair amount of fantasy. I remember often drawing a woman standing on the edge of something... in a sense the subject matter was not very different than it is today.

Her techniques and materials have consistently altered and expanded to better express her subject matter. The locus of the search has been for the equivalent and the fluidity and immediacy of drawing in three-dimensional form. Drawing, itself, was the only formalized art training Mary participated in.

In 1940, at the age of seven, Mary Frank and her mother, Eleanor Lockspeiser, a painter, arrived in New York from England on a refugee evacuation ship. Her father, a prominent musicologist and critic, remained in England, divorcing her mother at the end of the war.

Mary had attended boarding schools in England and in America she was enrolled at The Children’s Professional School. The peak experience of her teen years was four years of dance instruction with Martha Graham.

It wasn’t so much what I learned about dance—it was something to be in the presence of a passionate person... (she remembers Graham)... ferocious and overwhelming, a tremendous, powerful presence. Sometimes she (Graham) made references to sculpture—to Greek art and to Henry Moore.
The kinesthetic involvement in dance carried over into Frank's art in the love of transitions; in the spatial design of her three-dimensional forms that incorporate the setting in a Baroque manner; and in the complete awareness of body movement through space.

I understand so well those Degas drawings of the dancers while they moved--what is it that is so exquisite about the attempt even though I know it is impossible? Maybe it's like being a hunter, seizing on the immediacy.

Contemporary stage dramas are an occasional source of inspiration for Frank's work. This is a natural extension from Frank's involvement with Graham Dance which is itself based non-traditionally on drama.

Immediately upon graduation in 1950 from the Children's Professional School, Mary married Robert Frank, a Swiss photographer. Her children Pablo and Andrea were born in 1951 and 1954. Her marriage lasted until 1969, and provided the opportunity to travel throughout Europe for extended periods of time. During these travels she frequented museums whenever possible, especially responding to the Oriental Art of the Musee Guimet, Paris, and the Egyptian section of the Louvre. This was a continuation of an interest initiated as a child, poring over her mother's old copies of Verve which were full of Chinese and Japanese art and reproductions of Indian and Persian miniatures. Her interest and respect for Picasso was also developed through her mother's books during her youth.
Aside from absorbing Picasso and Oriental images at a young age, Mary Frank grew up drawing. "I've been drawing ever since I can remember." Drawing is the only formalized area of her visual art background. She studied for brief spans of time, from the age of seventeen on; in the studio of Alfred Loen; at the little known American Art School, Harlem, with Max Beckmann (1884-1950); and evenings, life drawing with Hans Hofmann (1880-1966).

She acknowledges as mentors a great variety of masters, past and contemporary, who have inspired and instructed her. This myriad includes the unknown artists of the ancient civilizations of Egypt and the Orient.

She is a self-taught sculptor, unorthodoxed in technique. She began with small, smooth serpentine wooden figures that showed affinity to Egyptian art, Giacometti (1901-1966) and Henry Moore (b. 1898), but specifically resembling none of them.

Henry Moore was the primary influence. His conception of woman as landscape, his reverence for the sensuousness of materials and his insistence on primordial or mythic content impressed her deeply.

Her sculpture changed in technique from these early pieces, becoming larger, rougher, yet more fluid. Her early influences continue but with additions; Raoul Hague, Constantin Brancusi (1876-1957), Henry Matisse (1869-1954) and Edward Degas (1834-1917). When she turned to clay as her medium, she was influenced by ceramists Margaret Israel and
Reuben Nakian (b. 1897— ). Picasso (1881-1973), the Cubist-Constructivists, and the early art of non-western civilizations remain inspirational to her work.  

Nature, like movement and the female form, emerged in her work as the total integration of a response to existence. She is an inveterate gardener who enjoys her sculpture placed outside to interact first hand with nature "where rains wash it and snakes crawl in and out." She is a concerned environmentalist as well as a naturalist. She donated 5 per cent of her share of art sales, from a 1979 show, to the Mobilization For Survival and the War Resisters League.

In three-dimensional form, using stoneware, Mary Frank fragments the human figure, most often female, into multiple metaphors intellectually and visually. These multi-transitions impact into the whole. The construction aspects of the piece are allowed to represent themselves. Torn edges, cuts, folds; the slab construction itself even finger impressions are allowed to survive through the finished piece. The process is ever present in both three-dimensional and two-dimensional works. Fragmentation gives them an inherent sense of simultaneously emerging and dissolving. Simultaneity, as in the work of Picasso and the Cubist Constructivists seems to physically portray motion. Her . . . "abrupt juxtapositions of elements which do not obviously or ordinarily relate to one another" . . . are defined as a "collage
attitude.\textsuperscript{11}

Scale is used indifferently, in descriptive non-traditional placement. Her sense of scale comes, she says

\ldots from experiencing certain kinds of landscape. On the beach I would lie with my head on the sand and make drawings from this low perspective. I'd see my own hand or somebody else's feet nearby. Between their legs I might see figures way down the beach. Those figures looked a sixteenth of an inch high. And I drew those figures as they would approach, recede, approach--always there entrances and departures and change in scale.\textsuperscript{12}

These scale changes are physical differences that create psychological expression in their manipulations.

In the cave paintings things went in all directions, north, south, up, down, sideways, diagonally. There wasn't this idea that things have to be horizontal . . . . I don't think that anyone feels their head to be necessarily the size it actually is. It depends on mood, on what one is doing, on the time of day. I don't see my scale as a fantasy scale. At the time I'm doing it, that's really how I see it. It feels like a real scale to me.\textsuperscript{13}

Juxtaposition of scale, fragmentation, process imprints are all evidences of the contemporary aesthetic in Mary Frank's works.

In contradiction to the contemporary, her intense involvement with the female-nature relationship, her choice of clay as her prime medium, the use of seals and repeated symbolism as stencils, or impressed leaves within a given piece, and from piece to piece, awaken a sense of ritual and cult that harkens back to the earliest civilizations.

Certain elemental things interest me a lot;
a standing, walking or running figure. Maybe it
comes from studying dance. Gestures for me are
very charged. The woman with her hands on her
breasts shows an intimate gesture that woman do.14

Frank's female themes are composite stimuli of her own
existence, legends, myths and both Eastern and Western his-
tory.

After Mary's daughter's death, in an airplane crash in
1975, the anguish and sorrow was incorporated into her
pieces, revealed in faces or skeletal inclusions. She felt
driven, possessed by this angst which revealed itself in her
work.

Whether two or three-dimensional, her themes are re-
occuring: walking woman, reclining-landscape woman, arched
woman, lovers, large split heads.

Her works on paper are adjunctive to her sculpture
pieces though they are often finished works in and of them-
selves. "I often feel," she says of her work on paper, "as if
I'm doing sculpture when I'm drawing or making prints . . ."15

As in her sculpture, there is the contemporary tech-
nique mixed with evocative subject matter, approached with
intellectual diversity, managing to subtly harken back to
primitive essences. Frank never stops seeking new drawing
approaches or mediums or making every effort to exploit each
to the fullest potential.

She keeps her models moving around her
studio, doing what seems natural to them, and she
often sketches them reflected in a full-length
mirror so that she has two images of them. Beaches, natural history museums, zoos, botanical gardens and parks provide most of the rest of her source material. She tends to favor fast-moving birds and animals, especially horses, goats, antelopes, gulls and cranes. "It's very hard to catch them in motion like that, you have to work so fast. It's a never-ending struggle, but when you come near it your work is injected with the life they have."

"Woman Rider" (Fig. 69), 1970, a black and white litho of a running horse with a sprawled female nude rider on its back uses multiple views. Front and side views of the rider's head, plus a double view of the closest leg and double view of the far foot suggest a feeling of the motion of the figure being tossed about precariously. The very temporary angle of the back leg further heightens movement and indicates less than total control of the rushing movement caused by the horse. The horse also is two-headed with legs akimbo in a suspended rush. The similarity of the positioning of horse and rider portrays a oneness at the climax of sensation.

Woman as a heroic figure is the major theme of Mary Frank's work. She depicts woman in a state of ecstatic union with the forces of nature. Mary Frank portrays woman at the supreme moment of her self-awareness, whether that moment is one of pain or ecstasy.

Mary Frank has worked with monotypes, inked unetched plates, since 1969.

I use etching ink, litho ink, or oil paint on the plate . . . . I also use a lot of stencils and, for me, the whole interest in the process is to continue as far as I can go with one plate, because these are all ghost images left, and the possibility of change. Say you have a kind of
past and future which you don't have when you
paint or sculpt because there the changes are
gone; whenever you reform, rethink, you lose the
rest that's underneath. Maybe it's pentimento,
but it's not really there anymore, so I try to
push the plate as far as I can, which becomes very
mysterious and sometimes very subtle.  

Since her first explorations in the medium, her work
has altered. They are

... larger, more colorful and more complex. She often groups a number of similar points taken
from the same plate, in one work developing a
filmic sense—changes and continuities of light,
color, texture and shape from print to print, mov-
ing through space and time. The multiple inkings
and printings on the same plate lead to shapes and
colors that suggest the artist's process, but they
are so complex that the actual stages by which the
image was produced are camouflaged. The addition
of cut or torn paper stencils gives a sculptural
effect like a collage, where the collage itself
becomes the printing plate.

As in her three-dimensional pieces, Frank pushes the
process to gain immediacy of happenings within the medium
itself.

When Frank desires an image larger than the press phys-
ically allows, she will use a sequence of plates, which are
fragments of a whole, in theory similar to the piecemeal
firing of her ceramic sculptures, that do not fit in entire-
ty into the kiln. She uses logical anatomical breaking
points. The arrangement of her paper fragments are often
asymmetrical as in the three part "Disappearance" (Fig. 70)
monotype (1976), or the six piece "The Forest" (Fig. 71),
1976. The single plate, "Daphne" (Fig. 72), 1976, is pre-
cursor to the three plate "Disappearance". These monoprints
bear witness to the anguish of her daughter's premature death in 1975.

"Disappearance" can be grouped with the Daphne theme in Mary Frank's work. The image of a woman, whose punishment for the natural inclination of love, is to be turned into a tree, survives from Greek Mythology. In its own time the theme was meant to be instructional.

The Daphne image of both prints possesses only one leg and with arms spread wide appears in crucifix form, an idea made stronger in the positioning of the plates. In "Disappearance" the face, mouth agape, eyes wide in terror portrays a horror of this crystallized moment of which the figure has no control. The intensity of the strong frozen brush stroke heightens this angst. The female form "appears out of the swirl of gesture without ever completely detaching itself."20

The Daphne images, like the monoprint technique began earlier, are a complex intermingling of stimuli. They were instigated initially as Frank states by "... a feeling about trees in movement and the whole sense of what it is to be human or what I think it might be like to be a tree. It's about becoming nature, and learning nature too."21

Two of the female figures of "The Forest" (Fig. 71) crouch beneath trees that form a prison bar pattern across the grouping of prints. There is a sense of alienation in this fetal position. The third figure on her knees and bent
over forward appears either rising upward or being pressed downward. This "Forest" grouping is composed of six sheets—three sets of two. They have been printed from the same plate, altered slightly but also fading with each successive print. The darkest is at the left subtly suggesting we read the grouping from left to right. In the third set a second figure is added. The figure bent forward in fetal crouch gradually has become ghost-like. The background trees of "The Forest" hint at the female torso as if Daphne has become fully transformed.

The nude female bonded to the male figure appears as the recurrent theme of lovers in Frank's work. A 1978 "Lovers" (Fig. 73) series uniquely incorporates stencil forms. In this instance, the stencils were the couples limbs, made from cardboard, that could be manipulated through placement and utilization of image and afterimage of the technique itself. The first print was printed in bright red on a black background. The ghost image, created by this first print, remained when printed a second time. Here as in "Woman Rider" (Fig. 69) the multiple positionings of the limbs suggest movement.

Colors, like the lovers' limbs, have become scrambled by flipping and reinking the plate and the stencil. In the third print, the lovers and the background are luminous blue-green and a pattern of frost crystals sparkles in the dream-like space.22

"Frost crystals" are caused by the beading of an under-
coat of ink on the plate. Accidents of this nature make the monotype medium appealing to Frank. "... the process itself is extremely exciting to me. I love working in reverse like that, and not being sure of the results."23

In all process, Frank seeks chance effects. The Shadow Papers Series of 1978 (for which no illustration was available) has been deemed "intimate and gentle" by reviewers. Simply using a contour line cut with a knife and no wider, the paper is hung before a light box. The lightweight paper is physically susceptible to alterations caused by air disturbances. These cause the line to open wider, throwing shadow and changing the form in a momentary effect of movement. The images of The Shadow Paper Series, male and female nudes alone or together are "... tentative because of transitions from lighting ... thus contorted poses seem both the cause and the symptom of their vulnerability ... the struggle of these people to live with their bodies, themselves."24

In the monotype series "The Storm Is Here" (Fig. 74, 75, 76), 1982, nine to ten images were taken from the same plate. The content was instigated by Peter Schumann's contemporary theater performance of the "Bread and Puppet Production," which Frank had viewed. In this instance the imagery and intent evolved in Frank's words,

... as a kind of intention of wonder and questioning and horror about what's being done to
and on the earth—that was why I then used the title. The title isn't very important. And the actual doing and working is very exciting because it is almost a feeling of theater or forms sometimes, the way figures appear and disappear and reappear in another guise almost... the figure changed color many times, originally, she was all red and later, green, sap green, and white... and she also had a kind of cloth or skirt over her legs so then that line was sort of a duplication of her leg moving, and then when I used it separately, then of course it does become like blood, and I only realized that after, actually... 

Expressive autobiography related to a universal past and present, incorporating nature and movement, and presented in fluid techniques that underscore process and transitions, make the female form a working icon of contemporary imagery in the art of Mary Frank.

Nancy Spero (b.1926-)

The horrific verbalizations contained within Nancy Spero's work in tandem to visual imagery that borders on ideography discomfortingly portrays intense rage.

Nancy Spero spent the years of America's engagement in World War II at The Art Institute of Chicago (A.I.C.). Transplanted European instructors and architects such as Mies Van der Rohe and Marcel Rothe, who were to influence the design of the school's new facility, upheld the aesthetic philosophy of the Bauhaus. The original facility was housed in the Museum of Natural History, an intriguing collection of artifacts that left an impression on Spero.

Chicago was under two influences at the time I was a student. From the late Thirties on there
was an influx of people from the Bauhaus establishing the Institute of Design. Art at the Institute of Design was design functional and pure. I and my friends were interested in German Expressionism, Pre-Columbian Art, Oceanic Art, Insane Art, etc. We used to haunt the Museum of Natural History. ‘Primitive Art’ was piled in cases. It was as if the Art was just pouring out of the place, it was so rich in artifacts.

After graduating A.I.C. in 1949, Spero with husband and fellow artist Leon Golub, spent a year in Paris, attending the Atelier André L'Hôte and the Ecole des Beaux Arts. They returned to the Chicago area for a few years but soon left permanently. They felt as if they had outgrown their surroundings.

For all the art activity in Chicago, I always felt trapped in its provincial responses. I left Chicago for good in 1956. I disassociated myself and my work from what was going on there. I disassociated myself from the history of Chicago Art. For instance, my husband, Leon Golub, is very much a part of the history of Chicago, because he was considered of prime importance in spurring the so-called "monster school" of painting. Because of my attitude to many (male) assumptions in this group, I opted out—partly out of resentment perhaps, but primarily I was looking for different options of how to function. We both wanted out for different reasons—we found Chicago stifling. . . . We went to Paris really to bypass New York, to bypass Abstract Expressionism.

In the sixties, in the midst of the Vietnam turmoil, Nancy Spero returned to the states and did settle in New York. "When I came back to the United States, the war struck me forcibly at both a personal and political level."³

The return to the United States, coincided with Spero’s maturation in approach to art making; i.e., expressive and
intellectual content found the appropriate visual means on paper.

The Bauhaus tradition and the artifact displays of the Natural History Museum continued to form a base for Spero’s art to emerge. The single most influential aspect of the Bauhaus tradition to become a tool for Spero was the deletion of extraneous visual detail.

Egyptian hieroglyphics, stereotypes, and monumentality: early myths of Greece and Babylon; medieval thought and manuscript illumination provide a wealth of visual imagery through which Spero interprets her immediate society. These visual ties to antiquity are overpowered by a psycho-expressive manipulation of potent content that involves rage and indignation.

Spero’s work is displayed in scrolls that band and envelop the gallery space in tiers. These scrolls are assemblages of handmade papers providing subtle surface changes throughout a given piece.

I work on hand-molded paper. The sheets are pasted. Each sheet is attached to the next to make nine-foot-long panels. This started with the war series when I bought some Japanese rice paper, and I found I couldn’t work on it scratching and rubbing, reworking the images. I kept ruining the papers, so I decided I would have to transfer images and glue them to the rice paper . . . . This technique freed me to move the images or type around, to cut and vary the disposition of forms, making the format changeable or nonstatic . . . .

Words in inconsistent type, some handwritten, some in block print from printer’s type, are applied to the surfaces
with uneven pressure causing value changes. Other inconsistencies from the multiple scale changes in figures and letters, and the handmade surface itself contribute to the disturbing expression of the words, even more disquieting in its visual subtlety. The impact of the visualizations runs concurrent with the significance of the words but one does not illustrate the other.

I've used language on and off all along. I even have stuff from art school that has language on it. But not with the great consistency of the past few years. I rely on it. I find language essential, direct verbal communicators.

Spero's mode of intellectual interpretation has a definite affinity for existentialism. It, also, is the antithesis of heroic romanticism and blind faith in traditions. The philosophy of existentialism has gripped Paris intellectuals for this decade and influenced Spero. As a result, this intellectual approach, there is some visual carry over of existential symbology in Spero's work. Most notably is the white field of open suspended space where words and figures float or hang in contradictory freedom.

From 1951 to 1965, encompassing her Paris stay, Spero's work was by her own admission more existential in subject. Her expression of rage in these pieces was less focused than in later works.

I was still oil painting: tarot cards, lovers, whores, 'canopic' figures and tomblike figures--disembodied figures influenced in part by antiquity .... I made oil paintings of mostly lovers, sometimes mothers and children (earlier
there are more ferocious images). Many are elegiac. Some of the paintings approach violence, sexual or otherwise; some of the mothers are pretty extreme. I painted a mother with two children around 1956, an image of protection, but it also looks like she's going to eat her children. Another is titled 'La Mere Feroce', the ferocious mother. I did several 'Fuck You' paintings on paper. Just kind of heads like the victims in the war series, emerging violently, tongues extended, yelling 'Fuck You'. It's just general rage. In a way it was probably beamed at the art world. I didn't realize that there are certain rages directly focused on the art world until the coming of the women's art movement.

The multi source work of Spero has many messages to communicate in any particular work. One of these undercurrents is continually sexual, another strongly political, another a more personal indignation but fronted always through historical "finds."

From the existential subject matter of the Paris oils, Spero moved on to a war series prompted by Vietnam, and venting her rage towards the ineptitude of the political system. The images of bombs are male and phallic while the victim is female. The man-made opposes the natural, categorically. The first cycle within the series centered on the A-bomb, the second, the helicopter.

From 1966 on I worked exclusively on paper. 1966-1970: I made a series of over 100 war paintings. The paintings have messages, inscriptions, graffiti, i.e., S.E.A.R.C.H. and D.E.S.T.R.O.Y., L.O.V.E. TO H.A.N.O.I., etc. Victims are thrown from planes, the helicopter consumes victims. 'The Bomb', a human torso with obscene phallic heads spitting blood or fire--technological war.

This war series was executed in a quick colorful manner
defying and contradicting subject matter; sexual—political abominations. Tongue imagery is everywhere--bomb tongues lash their victims, victims lick their destroyers. Tongue imagery, the initiation of speech is often projected in Spero's work.

The detail (Fig. 77) of the quasi-female torso of "Codex Artaud," Spero's work from 1971-1972, uses strong tongue imagery. The Artaud series began with paintings in 1969. By 1971 they evolved into scrolls, utilizing the writings of Antonin Artaud.

In 1969 I started working on Artaud, who was absolutely obsessed with pain in his body and mind. He was incarcerated for mental illness nine years before his death. Pain is all that he wrote about, the subject that I quoted from him, that I fractured from his fractured writing. The Artaud paintings become a personal political statement. I reacted to his description of physical pain, and his anger and anguish as an artist in a bourgeois society, his position as a pariah, he couldn't fit into society. . . . I used his writings because they are violent, and there is nothing like them that I know. They express brilliantly extreme states of mind, extreme states of existence . . . . I dared to transmit the ravings of a man (a man shunted aside from human intercourse) to personify how I, a woman, view lack of power.

The process isn't totally direct: it is layered. There are allusions to art things and art situations. There are all kinds of signals; it isn't a straight kind of reportage or quoting of Artaud. Also it isn't supposed to be illustrative, but it is supposed to show the effects of dismemberment, isolation, and violence. It is intended as political statement.

In Figure 77, a four-breasted headless figure merges physically with a headless male figure; a disembodied head desperately seeks with open mouth to grasp onto the male
figure. This freak posturing is a self-frustrated animal. Both ends are sexually active but by their joining impotent. The visual images of "Codex Artaud" are as fractured as the writings. They occur concurrent to the verbal images but are disassociated from them.

In 1974, after the Artaud series, Spero "decided to represent man only through images of women"¹ making her work somewhat more obvious in its autobiographical rage. The detail "Normal Love" (Fig. 78) from "Explicit Explanations", 1974, is itself from "Torture In Chile" which documents the torture of women political prisoners, and is predecessor to "The Torture Of Women" of 1976. The detail has the appearance of the classical female nude contradicted by a human appendage that is at once behind and merged to the standing, gesturing figure. The gesture of the larger portion is commandeering while the appendage displays anger and fright simultaneously.

The larger scroll, "The Torture Of Women," of 1976, takes on the character of manuscript illumination. Limited palette, murky figures that become silhouettes much in the manner Egyptian hieroglyphics are interplayed with writings and gilded figures. Some figures are multi-breasted, multi-headed or multi-limbed.

The exquisitely executed scroll primarily describes the tortures of women prisoners in politically strife-ridden countries making references in writing to actual journals or
newspaper articles. It intersperses tortures of legends and ancient myth, commandeering repetitive symbols such as the stamped polybreasted elongated female figure.\textsuperscript{11}

I had an aluminum plate made from one of my drawings for 'Torture Of Women.' An image of a woman bending over, inspired by Egyptian art. It is a protective gesture, but it is also a vulnerable position. She has four breasts . . . . Its animal like . . . yet protective, the goddess hovering.\textsuperscript{12}

The detail of panel 9, 10 (Fig. 79) of this scroll exhibits the four-breasted figure aside a passage describing the suffocated death of a teacher, and a crouching female silhouette voyaging on a winged line. The bird symbol alludes in many Romance countries to the parting of a soul into another world.

In another section of the panel, detail (Fig. 80) torture is further described as a process of the state and juxtaposed with the words is a Medusa image, a disembodied goddess head and two merged lovers. The lovers image subliminally equates male sexual oppression to state control.

The only line from Artaud incorporated into the scroll also makes reference to this simultaneous oppression: "I saw the corpse of my daughter Annie, incinerated and her sexual organs squandered and divided after her death by the police of France."\textsuperscript{13} On a monumental scale (20″h x 125′1), historical blunders, current and near recent events pertaining to women, are woven with ancient mythological tortures. The Babylonian Myth of the formation of the heavens
from the body of a female which Marduk split assunder is both worded and depicted in panels 3, 4 (Fig. 81, 82). The female figure is suspended by the gesture of Marduk.

In 'Torture Of Women' I am treating women with the seriousness with which men are usually treated as the subject. The painting depicts the near-universal subjugation and sexual abuse of women from Babylonian mythology to the fascists of South America.  

Universal, timeless events from diverse societies pertaining to females were further explored in the larger (20"h x 225'1), 1978-1980, scroll "Notes in Time on Women Part II--Women: Appraisals, Dance and Active Histories" (Fig. 83, 84). Described by Spero as

. . . a range of variously scaled hand-printed and collaged painted images weave through and interact with the ninety-six quotations and references, assembled from many cultures up to the protagonist, and independent and positive force in a male-controlled world.

"Notes in Time on Women" relates the double role of women as man's scourge and victim through a multiplicity of themes that defy simplistic summaries. Panel 1 begins with childbirth reading "certainly, childbirth is our mortality, we who are women, for it is our battle" (Aztec). The writings on menstruation are celebrated in a North American Indian girl's puberty song, the effects of divorce in America are the writings of a personal letter from a friend in 1978.

The themes presented in this scroll through such diverse sources are all encompassing: Childbirth, Our Battle,
Dancing figures, Artemis and Appolusa, the American Girl, Woman's Role in Revolution, Black Women, Torture of Women, Helen by the poet Doolittle, Literary History and Goddesses, Male Appraisals of Women, Menstruation, Divorce, et al. 17

The figures (Fig. 81, 82) are animated participants in this sequence. Some rely only on outline, others are silhouettes. Their classical forms become stamps of varying scales. The words are not optimistic, they either state fact or male interpretations of events, contradicting the dancing nature of the presentation of visual forms. Repetition creates a not unpleasant rhythm. It is a celebration of life even given the darkest of circumstances which women bear.

Spero's next work "The First Language," 1981 (Fig. 85), also presents both positive and negative viewpoints. In her words; "The First Language," . . . moves from war and rape to women's power, sexuality, grace and strength. There is no text in this piece, since gesture and movement are "the earliest forms of human communication." 18

The early Christian illuminations relied solely on glance and gesture to educate the populace.

Figure 83 depicts on white hand-molded paper a classical or Renaissance female, unclassically without drapery; a line drawing of Artemis, twin sister of Apollo, the goddess of the moon, wild animals, and the hunt; and an unconfen-
tional female satyr who usurps the tradition of maleness and reinvents myth.

The more recent, 1983, "Black And The Red (Fig. 86), (41 x 112") collages printed stamps of a quasi-running-leap-
ing-dancing figure in an irregular repetition of complete and incomplete imagery. The repetition of figures in sing-
les, overprints, or multiples, applied in uneven pressures creates a rhythm that alternates between quick and slow. The figures are printed with slight variations of position-
ing, contributing to the impression of motion. They are printed on, for what has come to be for Spero, a traditional white field. They allude to primitive history and artifacts as a sort of cave inscription in reds and blacks of varying intensities. The inconsistencies of what could be a regular pattern give expression to the piece. As in "The First Language" of 1981, the ritualistic imagery of "Black And The Red" is complete without verbal juxtaposition seeming in spirit to predate words. Cave imagery of the stone age is hypothesized to be as spiritual magic, taking possession of what the image represents by the very act of simulation. Spero assumes ownership in her act of printing of the pos-
itive potential of these very alive leaping figures.

Nancy Spero's work has consistently used the nude female form in an approbation of femaleness. Through the nude modeled, silhouetted or outlined she has expressed her indignity and rage at contemporary society's abuse and non-
acceptance of the value of the female whether in the métier of art or socio-political systems.

Artistically and politically she has emersed herself in avowing the worth of the female. In 1969 she marched with WAR (Women Artists in Revolution) on the Whitney Museum. Later, in 1971 she helped establish AIR gallery, a cooperative showing space initiated for and by women to compete with gallery system and market.

Nancy Spero has built her work on her unwillingness to deny the importance of her own femaleness or to ignore the existence of historical and spiritual predecessors: she refuses to allow male definitions and interpretations within art to supercede those of women. Her vehicle has been the female form.

Joan Brown (b.1938—)

Joan Brown's art has experienced a radical technique change over the twenty years following her art school graduation (1960) and its unusual immediate acceptance into the art scene of the Bay area.

After attending parochial high school in San Francisco, Brown enrolled at the California School of Fine Arts (now San Francisco Art Institute) receiving a Bachelor of Fine Arts (B.F.A.) in 1959 and Masters of Fine Arts (M.F.A.) in 1960. Graduation and acclaim coincided with her divorce from William Brown. She was married to painter Manuel Neri from 1962 to 1966, and has been married to Gordon Look since
1968. She has one son by her marriage to Neri.

Following World War II, the Bay Area was inundated with a population explosion. Capitalizing on the possibilities of increased enrollment, California School of Fine Arts implemented a series of residencies by prominent contemporary New York Artists. These artists, most notably Clyfford Still, brought the search for pure essences and the immediacy and spontaneity of Abstract Expressionism to the San Francisco area. More importantly, this legacy in years to follow was open to regional reinterpretation and redefinition.

Joan Brown's introduction to the philosophical approaches of contemporary art of the late 1940s and early 1950s was through the reinterpretations of Elmer Bischoff and David Park, both teachers at the California School of Fine Arts and students of Still.

... a great part of the Still legacy in San Francisco is a mistrust of verbalization which easily became a mistrust of intellectuality; an entire complex of anti-intellectual attitudes remains characteristic of San Francisco Art and artists.

This attitude of anti-intellectualism promulgated by Still, broadened through time to become anti-art establishment, especially Eastern art establishment. This sentiment was expressed by Brown:

Those New York artists. All they do is visit each other's studios and talk a lot of baloney about art.

This distrust helped solidify a San Francisco second
generation abstractionist style that employed referential notation in a deliberate naive manner. Joan Brown's early work reflects this type of statement.

On another level, Brown does admit to creative affinity with the aesthetics of such New York school masters as Gorky (1904-1948), deKooning (b.1904-) and Pollock (1912-1956). Like these artists Brown explores formalist concerns. Unlike them, the concerns are undertaken concurrent to questions directed both at the art establishment and society in general.

Her paintings of the early 1960s done in vivid color with palette knives celebrate the surface. "Girl Sitting" (Fig. 87), "Girl In A Chair" (Fig. 88), and "The Moon Casts A Shadow On A Midsummer's Night" (Fig. 89) all involve the female nude to reflect these early aesthetics.

Unlike later works, these paintings rely on the nude as formal design contrasted against harsh paint application, an impasto often four inches thick, and jarring color to effect a re-examination of the banal and at the time (1962) unacceptable representational subject content.

In Brown's nude female drawing of 1973 (Fig. 90), the figure again seated, she plays with surface application of the tool marks to explore the form in a manner antagonistic to the traditions implied in the seated nude form.

In Brown's more recent works and anticipated in earlier works, color, design interests, figure-ground relationships
reopen questions posed by Matisse's earlier explorations. Her surfaces have changed radically. The paint application has thinned to the consistency of house paint. Personal experience has become iconography used to question contemporary rituals (for example the night club scene). Decorative shapes, pattern distortions, question not only surface, but the unacceptability of "decorative" as concept.

Brown summarizes:

Throughout the twenty-five years that I've been painting, my work has dealt with introspection. It can result from observation, actual experiences, feelings, thoughts, ideas, and/or intuition . . . . My paint handling changes to whichever technique I feel will best describe what I am trying to express. I strive for that delicate balance between reason and feeling . . . . I hope to share with other people who view my pictures my own inward journeys, to which I hope they can relate on some level as being similar to their own.3

Sylvia Sleigh (birthdate unavailable)

Sylvia Sleigh met husband, art historian Lawrence Alloway, while attending evening classes at the National Gallery in London.1 She married and resettled in New York by the late 1960s. In New York, she became an activist for women's recognition in the art world. With friend Nance Spero, she joined the Ad-Hoc Committee for Women in the Arts, formed in 1970. She also has fostered and participates in alternate showing spaces for women such as AIR or SOHO 20 galleries.

Her belief in the need to pressure the art establishment for the recognition and equality of women within the
arts stemmed from art training at Brighton School of the Arts in Sussex, England. There, she had constantly felt her work denigrated by all male faculty:

I was so discouraged when I graduated that I abandoned painting entirely for a while, thinking it was futile, and went to work as a dressmaker.

Sleigh's work questions with subtle irony, male, female roles.

She shares her husband's interest in art history, firmly believing that "... to ignore art history is to cut oneself off from culture and an important part of one's visual vocabulary." Her continual references to art's past in her works are adapted through female eyes.

Sleigh's specialty, portraiture, is in a sense part of the art historical tradition but her approach is unorthodox, twisting and playing with that tradition. She is master of the single and group portrait, albeit nude. Her subjects are individualized through facial and physical features though they stand, recline or sit in classical poses culled from the history of art. She paints with oils in small sensuous strokes, only her friends, both male and female, whose relationships embue her life with greater meaning. In this sense her portraits are autobiographical.

I've come to the conclusion that portraits are really and truly what most interest me. If I paint anything, it's a portrait of it—a fish, flower, anything ... I hardly ever paint people unless I'm rather in love with them. I choose sitters for their rapport with me.
Subtle illusions and references place her friends within the history of art. She concentrates on nudes generally within an interior setting such as those of the Renaissance, Neo-classical and Romantic periods. Her diffusely lit interiors, filled with everyday details, form environments for her figures reminiscent of the Pre-Raphaelite era in England.\(^5\)

I feel in my portraits that I need to make the most beautiful settings for my people who are like jewels.

The alert seated figure of "Judith Kardish" (Fig. 91), 1969, responds to both viewer and artist. Her setting, though Twentieth century, crosses over to classical Greece in a subliminal manner. The vertical forms of drapery and books are just suggestive enough of temple columns and the reflected vision of the background mirror appears as draped seated goddess. These subtle allusions to antiquity are contrasted to the geometrics of the figure's actual pose: two right angles emphasized by the crossing X of the chairs support structure. The pose of this contemporary goddess is embued with the strength associated with masculine angularity.

The environment plays a supporting role for character portrayal in Sleigh's work. A large standing mirror maintains both shallow and deep space in the double self-portrait "The Blue Dress" (Fig. 92), 1970. Paradoxically the "real" figure wears her environment—garden flowers,
described in her dress—while the nude, reflected in the mirror is surrounded by her environment, plants. Geometric forms, i.e., window, architecture, books, furniture parts, the mirror supports, are played against organics not unlike the human body. The angle versus the curve is subtle reference to male, female contrast. The shapes within the dress are curved whereas the nude image is, in stance, emphasizing elbows and knees, angular, implying ownership of both masculinity and femininity.

"Portrait Of Felicity Rainnie At Ease" (Fig. 93), 1972, is whimsically ironic. Her intricate environment of wallpaper pattern a' la William Morris (1834-1896), has gotten quite out of hand. It is done in simple cartoon lines and seems to have crawled upon the bed. Within this cartoon-like scenerio a Barbie doll figure reclines in classical pose. The figure, unlike the setting, is fully modeled, down to bikini marks. Very dark pubic hair is contrasted to blonde head hair. Her "au natural" is jokingly implied as unnatural. It is the figure's own body that poses questions of what is real.

"The Court Of Pan" (Fig. 94), 1973, is a large (76" x 113") group portrait based on an extant Fifteenth century Signorelli. Signorelli mixed myth and reality honoring his contemporary Florentines by associating them with the gods. Here Sleigh not only places her friends within the context of art history but poses them as gods as well. Five nude
males and two females, one fully nude, the other draped, inhabit Sleigh's version. These are very specific nudes whose bodies' intimate details provide as much portrait as facial features.

"Scheharazade (Cynthia Mailmen)" (Fig. 95), 1974, incorporates legend into the intimate world of Sleigh's friends. Fellow artist, Cynthia Mailmen, is portrayed in a tile shaped canvas, surrounded by Persian motifs, lushly colored and intricately patterned to instill the ambience of a Turkish harem. The legendary heroine, Scheharazade, kept the wilfull sword of the ruler at bay by relating tales for a thousand and one nights. So doing, she saved the lives of those who were forced to give pleasure on command. The alertness and intelligence of the face, contrary to the lushness of the body, embues the legend with truth. Sleigh portrays this female artist just as capable as the legend while twisting popular art historical imagery of the languishing fated Odalisque.

"Fete Champetre" (Fig. 96), 1976, like "The Court Of Pan" makes reference to art history. In this instance, the work re-does a Giorgione, High Renaissance masterwork. The poses and composition remain relatively close to the Giorgione piece of the same name, but Sleigh has introduced equality. The men previously dressed in elegant court attire, are now as nude as the females. Specific portraiture of body and face are evident. Textures are emphasized in a
manner that sets the mood of the painting. Brushstrokes enliven grass, vegetation, water and body hair. The original "Fete Champetree" was meant to titillate a pre-playboy audience by posing nude women with clothed men. Sleigh's "Fete Champetree" displays imagery for both female and male mind to play with.

Sleigh was one of thirteen artists who participated in the traveling, environmental work "Sister Chapel," 1975. The thirteen large panels brought together not only the collective energies of thirteen artists but thirteen female images, totems of spiritual strength in women's struggle for more overt equality. Among those depicted were Betty Friedan, Freida Khalo, Bella Abzug, and Superwoman, tributes to women's collective history. Some panels were philosophical composites such as Martha Edelheit's "Woman Hero" or Sylvia Sleigh's "Lilith" (Fig. 97). Though, at first glance, maintaining the female nude form, "Lilith" is androgynous, having both male and female parts. "Lilith" is an ancient myth that has traveled through time. Sleigh has reclaimed Lilith in her statement for contemporary western culture. Medieval Jewish Folklore identifies Lilith as the first wife of Adam, before the creation of Eve. Eve, in religious lore, came from Adam's rib and this version shows the two as still one, "Lilith." The background environment suggests the tropical lushness of Eden by its scale.

"Lilith" is an appropriate summation of Sylvia Sleigh's
works. She has painted male nudes with unexpected sensuality, flowing hair and classical reclining poses reserved in traditional art for the female nude. Conversely she has painted female nudes with the angularity of pose and alertness usually reserved for the male nude to suggest heroic character. The equation of equality suggestive in Lilith is implied throughout Sleigh's work.

Martha Mayer Erlebacher (1937-)

Martha Mayer Erlebacher, a first generation Hungarian American, began her painting career after graduation from Pratt Institute (New York City) in 1960 in the then prevailing mode of Abstract Expressionism.

I came out of a tradition of abstraction, with an understanding that, without a notion of abstract composition, representational composition doesn't work either. And without an understanding of the abstract relationships of the body and the abstract ideas of proportion, you can't do anything representational. I was brought up believing that the real content of art is ideas, but it has to be ideas made manifest through some kind of humanistic subject matter.

Her painting style underwent drastic revision within the decade following her graduation, turning from abstraction to a very highly delineated realism.

Growing up in nearby New Jersey, Erlebacher was able to attend once a week art classes at The Art Students League during her high school years. She received a scholarship from her high school to further her art education and chose Pratt Institute. Here, beginning in 1956, she worked towards
a Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) in industrial design rather than a fine arts or painting degree, prompted solely by practical considerations.

I knew I had to earn a living . . . studying painting was out of the question from that point of view. Industrial design was the most disciplined of the courses at Pratt; it had the strictest standard of drawing . . . . I really didn’t have the right mind-set for industrial design. If we were told to design a new traffic light, my reaction was, ‘What’s wrong with the old one’.

Erlebacher did profit indirectly from her industrial design experience; in the intense drawing instruction, and her subsequent marriage to a fellow industrial design graduate (1958) and Pratt faculty member. Her husband’s re-directed interests in sculpture encouraged her own return to the fine arts curriculum. She received an Masters of Fine Arts (M.F.A.) in painting and education (1963) after a brief try at commercial design.

Erlebacher and her husband, Walter, share a common interest in anatomy a subject they felt their own training lacked. Both feel that to understand anatomy enables them to portray the figure in motion, freeing the figure from being a mere still life object. Together they study the human form through life drawing and painting (Fig. 98) and masterworks of the Renaissance. The drawings and paintings of Piero della Francesca (1424-1492), Sandro Botticelli (1445-1510) and Albrecht Durer (1471-1528) especially have intrigued Martha Erlebacher, fully realizing that she is not
"de rigour" in her affiliations.

When you say 'Renaissance Painting', people groan, 'oh boring'. I hope my figures will look contemporary but still be rooted in tradition from the point of view of structure, not perception. . . The subject matter for those days is not the subject matter for today. People haven't changed, but the emphasis of their concerns has, . . .

Erlebacher's artistic admiration includes work of the contemporary realists as well as the old masters. She admires the detailed work of Chuck Close and Phillip Pearlstein. Chuck Close has found irony in the notion of the human camera, scientific art. Phillip Pearlstein's work is characterized by an acute design sense in which the nude happens to be included with intentional banality.

Like Pearlstein and Close, Erlebacher uses a methodology of precisely executed technique. She initiates a project with a smaller detailed drawing of each figure to be used in the grouping. "Figure For Acedia" (Fig. 99) is an example of one such drawing. The drawing is photographed and projected onto a larger sheet of paper which will contain the entire grouping of figures. Scale, placement, and overlapping is manipulated through the projection for a total integration of composition. This composite drawing is then photographed in quarters and reprojected and redrawn on a primed white canvas of monumental scale. Through the use of the original detailed drawings, she corrects and clarifies the images on this final canvas. From this point she utilizes the traditions of the old masters, redoing the
drawing in india ink or raw umber diluted with turpentine. She washes the canvas with earthtones before attempting the full color overpainting. In this manner the chiaroscuro, the form built to show three dimensions using light and dark values without color, is established.

While sharing an obsessive exactitude of technique with contemporary realists, Erlebacher’s goal is neither like Pearlstein, a design statement that incidentally includes the nude, nor as Close, a scientific curiosity. Instead, she utilizes the nude in intricate detail as a philosophical tool.

She explored the figure as an end in itself until 1970, when she introduced allegorical content. "... my principal interest has been content and meaning... although it varies from subject to subject."Ironically, her approach is not unlike neo-platonism of the Renaissance, when the forbidden classical nude was justified by expressing Christian doctrine. The classical nude, forbidden to the tastes of contemporary art is used by Erlebacher to question contemporary mores.

The 1972 "In Praise Of The Earth" (Fig. 100) places three nude females and three nude males in a botanical setting. The setting’s delineated detailed description and use of atmospheric perspective are reminiscent of the Northern Renaissance investigations of Albrecht Durer. Erlebacher similarly investigates both flora and figure.
I really studied foliage using very detailed botanical specimens as devices to define space. I put the figures in first; then you can play God, painting a plant here or there.

Further, Erlebacher feels her work shares Renaissance intent of presenting a private vision to the world. But the content of this vision, Erlebacher states, must be contemporary, infusing vitality into the work.

The way I see it . . . Renaissance Art is an art constructed from the mind. Those paintings have realistic figures, pieces of the painting are taken from life, but the entire work is a construct of the imagination. It's essentially a work of the mind rather than the eye; it is a vision, but a structured vision . . . . In those days they never worried whether the earth was going to be poisoned. That is probably one of the deepest concerns of people today. Killing nature is killing life. I worry all the time about future generations.

In the monumental (72 x 100") "In Praise Of The Earth" Erlebacher subtly suggests the inter-relationship and corelation between earth and humankind. The six reclining bodies are sensually exposed to the earth's surface. They are carpeted by it's lush growth and supported by it's intricate surface as opposed to the vast ephemeral sea beyond, which would not support the structures. Each figure assumes it's own pose. The three women sleep in varied poses; an open torso, a semi-opened torso and bosom buried into the earth. All three are young females of contemporary thinness and idealism. Somnolence controls the picture, as if it would be impossible to awaken the figures and tear them from earth's gravity. Thus the sleeping, reclining nudes are
subtly bound to the earth's surface.

Erlebacher's 1975 diptych "Adam And Eve" (Fig. 101) also is suggestive of the work of Albrecht Durer. Here the figures are presented with the delineation of Durer, in the Renaissance diptych format with the presentation perspective coinciding with the actual viewing perspective, and traditional dark background. The figures themselves are not the Northern Renaissance body type used by Durer in his illustration of the Christian Humanist doctrine but suggest a contemporary figure type. The face of Eve suggests Erlebacher's self portrait. The differences between Renaissance versions and Erlebacher's "Adam And Eve" are numerous. Here Adam and Eve exist in an existential space, the confusing freedom of contemporary society. The facial features express more confusion and bewilderment than the traditional shame. The figures are about to flee, yet do not clutch themselves and try to hide their nudity. They still reach for each other but have a sense of directionless intent by their stance and tilt. Eve proffers an apple to Adam, not at the behest of the snake but of her own violition, as if not knowing what to do once it was taken. The aura emanating from Erlebacher's version is disorientation and confusion. Again Erlebacher utilizes tradition to interpret twentieth century life.

Existential symbology is employed in "Sun Gazer" (Fig. 102) and "In A Garden" (Fig. 103) both completed in 1976.
The all revealing sun and empty freedom of space are pictorially implemented in "Sun Gazer". Sun Gazer does not gaze at the sun, instead the nude female is suspended, standing arms raised, face shielded by hands in a pose intimating some ancient ritual. The figures rigidity is trance-like, as if only semi-conscious to her environment.

The centralized female nude of "In A Garden" (Fig. 103) looks upward as if searching for the sun where no sun exists. The garden has but one live plant. Two draped reclining female nudes lay on barren rocky surface complemented by the stark vertical of a dead tree in the background. The drapes of the figures suggest the biblical shroud in which the cleansed corpse was entombed. The inference is that the dead earth will be tomb for the bodies about to expire. The strong posture of the standing nude pleas and protests against this occurrence. Of the painting, Erlebacher states:

> The subject of this painting is despair, the models were posed and set in a context to evoke a sense of loss and desolation (regarding personal values and the state of nature). The title is ironic. By means of the following—the three-dimensional character of the figures, the organization of the figures and composition, the clarity of execution, and the accuracy of the drawing and anatomy—I wanted to convey a triumph of order and beauty over despair and to create a harmony which in itself would transcend despair.

Erlebacher's concern over the spiritual, moral and physical environment of contemporary society are further examined in the recent undertaking of a still incomplete series, "The Seven Deadly Sins".
In format (103 1/2 x 64") each piece is based on the "Golden Section", a theory of perfection first espoused circa 300 B.C.\textsuperscript{10}

The impression of the completed "Scene From A Picnic I: IRA (Anger)" (Fig. 104) is chaotic. The barren rocks and dead tree landscape of "In A Garden" remain. Here, seven nude figures, just as ironically as the barren garden, picnic. Unlike previous works modern accoutrements of civilization are present; a camp type fry pan, plates, spoons and plastic cups are spewed upon the ground. Successively, three seated nudes, two of which are female cower from the raised arm of a nude standing male. Three other nudes, take more upright postures against this wrath; standing and supplicating the heavens with raised fists, bending, or hanging over the lower torso. All three of these nudes turn their backs to the angry male. The standing supplicant is female, and she, as the other two females reveals her face. At the same time, the poses of all these figures react with or to the anger, they appear ritualistic, influenced by the bottom center placement of a still smoldering fire. In the far background a tornado menaces, enforcing in spirit the uplifted arm of the angry man. Also behind this man, at mid-ground, runs the smaller distant figure of a draped male, in a cowboy hat pierced with an arrow, who seems to visually force the angry man into motion. The viewer immediately responds to the anger and questions why.
Erlebacher sums up her concerns in this series, as she might all of her work with the nude.

Today's environment is so overly stimulating that people tune everything out, . . . . There's a great lack of moral concern today. The whole idea of the 'me generation' is so revolting, the idea of self-fulfillment. Whatever happened to hard work and a life of dedication to something other than oneself? Our whole society has gone haywire. That's what this series of paintings is about.

The work of Martha Mayer Erlebacher causes the viewer anxiety. This effect emanates from the interjection of traditional classical forms and means into the mainstream of looser, freer twentieth century art forms, to express the spiritual, emotional turmoil of present existence in a conflicting restrained manner.

Erlebacher's work is included in major American collections such as the Art Institute of Chicago, the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Yale University Art Gallery and the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Mary Beth Edelson (birthdate unavailable)

What I am most concerned with at this moment is spirituality as it manifests itself in our bodies/minds and how this effects how we see/feel about our being, and a feminist awakening to the 'greater self' (italics) as female. The first self-portraits I made as a young woman had to do with looking at myself and saying 'who are you?' Now that I have some clues to answer that question, I concern my self with 'who are we?'

Mary Beth Edelson's art forms have questioned and explored the essence of female through collective and individual investigation. She has concentrated on performance art
and photographic documentation, to reinvolve and experience collective myth and reality of what it is to be female. It is inevitable that this investigation would center around the female physical presence.

In 1971 Edelson initiated "22 Others," in an avowed effort to tap the collective unconscious. She asked, twenty-two men and women, most of them Washington (D.C.) art establishment, to suggest projects which she would interpret and execute. Her desire, as stated below, to utilize the collective unconscious became the mode of her future works.

.. . to fuse my creative energies with another's and come up with a third energy. These communications take place on an everyday level, but my object was to deepen and then formalize the experience.

In 1973, but begun in 1972 as an on-going process piece, Edelson presented a project of collective energy between artist and audience at a Henri Gallery exhibition in Washington, D.C. The exhibition was entitled "Women's Lives". Each work involved a different aspect of female presence and solicited from the audience of viewers by means of "story gathering boxes" experiences and myths with specific implications for women; in her words, she sought "... personal stories from the public that help to reveal our mythology."

The basis of the exhibition, which was reactivated in a five-year retrospective in 1975 upon moving to New York City, were large drawings, that incorporated written text.
Placed in front and under the drawings were table, stool, writing materials and wooden file box. The viewer was expected to respond to the drawings "... then sit down and write or draw out her own story leaving it in the box to become part of the ongrowing exhibit." 4

Each file box contained four bins of related topics concerning that particular exhibit, and two subtopics in each bin; old myths—(from childhood) and new myths (current mythology). The file boxes with their visual settings extrapolated on "Blood Mysteries," "Sexual Fantasies," "Artists Dreams," "Mother Stories," "Father Stories," "Traveling Stories." 5 Commenting on involving collective energy in this particular project, Edelson states:

One aspect is a self educating process that shares, but I am also searching for essences, primary matter mysteries—to make some sense and order out of it all. Sometimes I feel that I must be reinventing the wheel when I work with such comprehensive systems, but then I also know that isn't likely to be true since previous systems were not exactly kind enough to include the feminine mind. 6

Edelson's work is often tinged with sardonic irony. In this series, she was prompted to define every woman as having been left undefined by the term everyman.

"Blood Mysteries" (Fig. 105) was evoked with a larger than life, drawing of a female nude. Edelson's own interpretations and impressions of old myths and new, on the subject: menstruation, menopause, birth and blood taboos, were handprinted on either side of the nude, in vertical
sequence. These were also the topics of the four part file box of "Blood Mysteries," placed on a table at the height of the figure's knees. The nude faces directly outwards, in a vertically suspended pose that tilts back. The arms are raised to just above the head, elbows bent, palms outward. Edelson has referred to this position as "evoking" or "calling," it intimates an allusion of ritual participation.

The hair encircles the head in swirls that function both as flower petals and flames. The tilt of the body as it extends upward exposes the private area for inspection. The inner circle of the womb projects outward in concentric circles becoming both target-like and central emphasis. It is directly connected to the vagina. The repeated circles emanating from the womb emphasize the other circles present within the form; the breasts and head. The figure's stance, legs separated, suggests strength heightened by the triangular form articulated by the legs and accentuating the smaller, darker, inverted triangle of the female private region.

By examining the collective core surrounding women's rituals and sanctities, Edelson strengthens and clarifies her involvement with the female essence and presence. In this instance, she has used her examination of the nude female form to connect these energies.

Joan Semmel (b.1932)

Joan Semmel was born and raised in New York. She at-
tended the High School of Music and Art, Cooper Union, and the Art Students League, before receiving a Bachelor of Fine Arts (B.F.A.) from Pratt in 1963. At this juncture, her husband's work displaced them to Spain for a seven year stay. Her education in New York had been under the prevailing mode of Abstract Expressionism, which has resurfaced in her mature work though adapted to her personal style and expressive needs. The sojourn in Spain she credits with tinging her early abstraction with Surrealism.¹

The formulation, but not final resolution of Semmel's mature style, was prompted by her return to New York City and re-enrollment at Pratt. Her reaction to New York was that of the outside observer:

The girlie magazines, the sexploitation all over was a shocker . . . . It wasn't even sexual. It was just hard sell . . . demeaning of women.²

Rebellion to this put down of women prompted her to want to express with frank honesty what women actually think and feel.

After obtaining a Masters of Fine Arts (M.F.A.) (1972) from Pratt, Semmel then divorced and raising two sons, embarked on her painting and teaching career. She taught first at the Brooklynn Museum School and later (to the present) at Rutgers University.

My emphasis with students, largely because of my own feminist experience, has been to search out their own personal sources, without worrying about whether or not the 'current' is right. I suppose that in some ways that fits right into the present
autobiographical trend. Be that as it may, the recent rapid rise and fall of stylistic conformities has proved the unreliability of aesthetic 'truth.' A strong grounding in the old-fashioned verities of composition, color, etc., is, of course, an essential tool in order to enable students to realize their aims. However, the connections of the content areas of their work to themselves and to the world must be an ever-present consideration if they are to enter into the making of art rather than simply being grist for the mill of art-industry production. The unity of plastic form and content is therefore a major concern.

Semmel's painting and drawing evolved through human form as subject content. Initially she chose to paint magnified views of anonymous interlocking couples on a large scale, their intimate poses distanced and cooled by their sculpturesque form. More personalized statements followed, involving herself and her lovers. Then single portraits of herself.

... I went into the identification of myself as I experience myself, my own view of myself. What I was trying to get there (self-portrait) was first of all the self, the feeling of self and of the experiences of oneself; secondly, the feeling of intimacy, of how I really relate to another individual, to another person, to another situation. The real quality of contact, of touch, of the eroticism of touch.

Figuratively and literally the perspective of Semmel's work emanates from herself, causing abrupt and somewhat disorientating foreshortening effects as she looks down upon her own form. At first her explorations of couples and self, utilized black and white photography for compositional reference. Her technique was realistic though not the hard
edge of total photo realism. From black and white photography, she eventually became involved with color slides and lastly color xerox manipulations for image transfers. In these more recent pieces (from 1979), Semmel introduced an abstractionist approach to the form. Exactitudes of the mechanical process she had been using, are questioned by an interplay with painterly, pastel and crayon abstractions of the form within the same canvas. The magnified articulated body parts are echoed and overshadowed by heightened areas of brushwork and color abstraction.

In each painting the realistic and abstract forms relate differently, and some element of flesh—a warm yellow modeled with purple, green, blue, pink or earthy orange—is restated in lighter, brighter color, freer brushstrokes and flatter planes. The two ways are an active dynamic, mountainous landscape.

Semmel’s closeups of the nude body, albeit subjective, become objective landscapes, fleshcapes, as her 1976 painting, "Fleshscape," suggested.

The 1974 "Intimacy-Autonomy" (Fig. 106) is a straightforward photographic adaptation displaying the exaggerated foreshortening of two nudes, a male and female, as they lie side by side. The view is impartial, equalitarian, as it evenly divides the bed in half, male and female sides, as if the bodies had but one head. The softly modeled forms become simplistically geometric in design, by working with the negative areas, which are also geometrics. The explicit imagery of the forms becomes secondary to the design.
The self ownership theme defined in these early couples works, often contained statements in reaction to the female role of passivity documented as acceptable within the history of Art. "Touch" (Fig. 107), 1975, allows the female to dominate within the picture frame. Semmel has stated:

Women have never allowed themselves to admit their sexual fantasies. They have been encouraged to create themselves in terms of male fantasy. I wanted to make imagery that would respond to female feelings. My paintings deal with communication, how a hand touches a body, rather than male or female domination. 

By 1976, Semmel’s canvases were exploring, in a photo realistic manner, solely the female self. "Center Hand" (Fig. 108), 1976, "Pink Fingertips" (Fig. 109), 1977, and "Out Of The Process" (Fig. 110), 1978, are all part of this single realistic figure period. These three paintings could be a sequence in a momentary progression of movement, so similar are the underlying structures of the compositions. Diagonals formed by legs, arms, hands and feet focus the imagery, relatively centrally, on the interrelationship between hand and private area. The upper body incorporating only one sloping breast and positioned at the lower portion of the canvases appears as a rolling landscape leading to and from the focal point.

Juxtaposition of shifting scales, painterly brushwork and expressionist color, enters into Semmel’s work about 1979. "Parallels" (Fig. 111), 1979, "Zoom Lens" (Fig. 112), 1979, "Turning" (Fig. 113), 1979, "Double Breasted Arch"
(Fig. 114), 1980, "Sundream" (Fig. 115), 1980, and "Toehold" (Fig. 116), 1980, capitalize on the seeming transmutation between painterly and precise realism. The loose, unfinished brushwork areas are larger than life and the more controlled forms. They act as auras emanating from the precise forms, setting them apart from the viewer.

The energy of the loose brushstroke embues a powerful monumentality into the semi-abstracted form, contrasting to the restrained precise delineation.

Joan Semmel endowed these more recent works with expressive energy by the addition of the semi-abstract self, more fully expressing a totality of the female experience.

Jillian Denby (B.1944–)

I don't feel that my work is particularly realistic, it is just that I am drawn to expressing certain attitudes of form in as clear a manner as my mind's eye sees it. The way I paint is the manner most suited to the atmosphere I wish to suggest.

Jillian Denby's work espouses a classical revival, in the languid poses, precisely executed in spare and subdued flesh tones, enhanced by drapery. In fact, one might suggest that Denby attempts to contemporize the classics. To this end her female nudes, painted not sculpted, reveal themselves en toto, as specific portraits. Their theatrical accoutrements puzzle and allegorize their settings. These, as much as specific facial expression, suggest some deeper psychology at play. The mystery with which the viewer is
intentionally led into is a satisfying aura often missing from today's "expose all" existence. Denby wishes to cast such a spell and states:

In antiquity, art was judged by its ability to move you and invoke some internal harmony that left you less deadened to the world than you were before. This expression may last only a few moments, however, it may also be the only reason art really survives at all. It is after all not a finite experience. This may ultimately be why representational art has drawn the kind of attention it has in these days. It seems to have the bravura and courage to simply jump in and celebrate all the mysteries that have always been around us, and still try to continue the innovative in pictorial tradition.

"Sleeping Girl" (Fig. 117), 1974, is a precisely rendered, mastery of chiaroscuro heightened by artificial spotlighting of a girl sprawled from chair to table. The back wall and table are draped, more stiffly then the girl herself is draped upon the chair. The strong diagonal of the girl's body leads us to the face as the off-center focal point for the painting. The spot light effect is heightened in "Woman In A Chair" (Fig. 118), 1974. Seemingly the same woman in the same chair as "Sleeping Girl," the ambiance of lightening and drama is starkly different. A deep gash of black shadow directly behind the seated figure hints at some dark portent. An unknown symbol appears at the apex of the dark shadow's triangular form. The girl herself cast no shadow on the drapery.

Even more illumination is cast upon "The Figure Moves House" (Fig. 119), 1976, whose generic title of "Figure"
belies the specific facial and figure portrait so precisely rendered. Backed into a corner the standing figure prepares to cart off a wheelbarrel full of incongruous items, from a bamboo umbrella to a rolled up carpet. Since the classical nude does not do anything but languidly symbolize something else, this more active involvement puzzles the viewer.

In multiple figure paintings the relationship between figures contributes to the ambiance of intrigue. In "Sleep And Inspiration" (Fig. 120), 1977, a seated clothed sleeping figure, rests her head and upper torso upon a table in the foreground while a fully nude female walks off into the darkened background pulling a wheelbarrel full of pumpkins. It appears that this figure has left behind three small pumpkins which are placed on the table opposite the figure. The total composition has an interesting zig-zag structure from the top of the nudes classical hairdo, whose ribbons flutter as if in movement, through the pumpkins on the table, which become a pivotal point, across the sleeping woman's outstretched arm which unconsciously reaches towards the pumpkins, and through the strong diagonal of the sleeping woman's lower torso. The zig-zag is repeated clearly in the hanging drapery and suggested in the hanging plant. The plumpness of the nude, the classical hairdo, the plant and pumpkins suggest Ceres, mother earth. The sleeping figure wears an artist's apron, and is barefoot as one stepping on holy ground. The generally darkened background behind the
nude contrast as otherworldly to the more academic studio backdrop, wood wall and drape behind the sleeping figure.

An elliptical structure evolved through lighting and figure positioning underpins "Rumor" (Fig. 121), 1978. Five nude seated female figures are engrossed in conversation in the background, the middle ground nude sprawls in sleep, head upon the table contributing to the barrier effect between foreground and background figures. The two foreground nudes, one standing, the other seated, are presented in front of an ivy hung wooden screen. The standing figure presses a finger to her lips as if to indicate the need for silence to the seated figure, as she tries to overhear the background conversation.

"Woman With Peonies I" (Fig. 122), 1981, poses a single nude female against a backdrop of peony scattered wallpaper. She is seated cross-legged on a floor or tabletop, blowing up a green balloon. In front of the figure a small rug or placemat is decorated with two birds drinking from a fountain. The positioning and accoutrements, in this instance, have a bizarre whimsical tone, suggested by the decorative-ness of the elements and the inclusion of the green balloon.

The precision of rendering with which Denby executes her canvases insists that the viewer take no detail for granted. The calculated aura of intrigue and mystery surrounding the nude form elevates it from mere still life object or everyday triviality.
Daphne Mumford (birthdate unavailable)

Daphne Mumford's idyllic nude females, seem to be personifications of their settings. In "Sleeping Forest" (Fig. 123), 1974, twilight silhouettes the varied trees and reflects their image on the still surface of a small pond. Three birch trunks are seen in detail. Two graceful reclining nudes, one front and one back to the viewer become part of the earth's surface, personifications of the earth itself. The tree trunks become masculine symbols countering the exposed femaleness of the sleeping forms.

The female nudes of "Mother-Earth" (Fig. 124), 1978, take fetal positions within the womb of the earth. The forest branches nest about the figures whose contrasting whiteness becomes egglike. The figures of this large diptych are not out of place but in their natural home.

In "Eve" (Fig. 125) nature again poses the idyllic setting in which female nudes languish. The clothed central figure rests idly against a tree, languidly holding a twig, a nude reclines at the waters edge, and another sits contemplatively against the base of the tree. All appear natural and comfortable with their setting, enjoying their oneness.

The four nudes of "Naked Summer Night" (Fig. 126), 1981, float nestled in clouds very much a part of the atmosphere, drifting above guardhouse gate below. They are the clouds, so natural are they in their deep sleep. The viewer wonders
how or why they have never been seen before.

Mumford acts as a medium for the female soul that identifies with nature. Her forms are clearly and precisely executed bringing realism to fantasy.

Juanita McNeeley (b.1936)

Juanita McNeeley's expressionist art uses women's emotional and psychological anguish as matrix for her subject matter.

Naked explosions of pain and anger in the work of Juanita McNeeley relate sexuality to death and madness. She openly confronts abortion, menstruation and forced intercourse, subject matter previously considered taboo.

"Woman At Window" (Fig. 127), 1975, uses a flat unmoded background of a window full of plants to create the feeling of a spinning, reeling room in which a fully modeled nude figure violently gesticulates. The distortion of the figure is disquieting as the room maintains reference to realism. The window slants at a sharp unrealistic diagonal, while the head of the figure, on backwards, peers over her own shoulder.

The same diagonally placed rectangle, as the window, but blankly white, forms the backdrop for a 1980 (Fig. 128) frontal image of almost the same gesticulating "Woman At Window" of 1975. Only the back of her head, dark hair swinging can be seen as she rushes headlong towards the viewer.

A later "Woman" (Fig. 129) is more explicit . . . "a
terrifying vision of women's physical vulnerability since she is depicted bleeding from facial as well as vaginal openings."^2 The woman presses her bleeding form pathetically to the ground, crushed by some unseen weight.

Unseen forces interact in a violent manner with McNeeley's nudes. They are terrifying in the helplessness, victims of forces they cannot control.

Martha Edelheit (birthdate unavailable)

The work of film maker and painter, Martha Edelheit often seeks to redefine and rethink the accepted role-myths of contemporary American society. Her work, uncomfortable depending on the viewpoint of the viewer, is not widely acclaimed nor accepted. In reviewing a 1966 exhibition of her work Allen Kaprow made the following summation:

Female art in general plays no games as men's art does; no one wins, there are no victims or protagonists. It is thoughtful, but not intellectual insofar as intellectuality is a game. It is not editorial either, insofar as discriminations between degrees of moral good and bad are also a game. Female fantasy is pervasive, boundless, unconcerned with definitions and measure. When sex is its primary involvement the involvement is total and therefore shameless. It is for this reason terrifying to men, not because it implies the loss of their status, but because it implies the loss of the game (which is their life). \]

Edelheit's "NX3" (Fig. 130), 1970, and "Womenhero" (Fig. 131), 1978, both take role reversal, with irony and whimsy, as their stance.

"NX3" (Fig. 130) though sounding like a new missile,
actually is three poses of a nude sleeping female. They are witnessed from above, much as an overhead bed mirror, an accoutrement of male fantasy, would display them. Rumpled satin sheets and tossed hair were also stolen from some male myth.

"Womanhero" (Fig. 131) is a panel from the collaborative environmental work "Sisterchapel." It is one of thirteen panels painted by thirteen different women artists for this traveling work. Sisterchapel attacked "... the traditional patriarchal view of the world," by presenting women's ancestry as important and separate from those of men. Sylvia Sleigh had done "Lilith" for this exhibition. "Womanhero" appropriates the term hero in all it's strength and courage for the female gender. The term heroine does not have the same connotation as hero. The nude "Womanhero" takes the classical contraposto stance of Michaelangelo's David, assaulting two legends at once: David the young giant killer of the Bible, and David the civic symbol for the young city of Florence. She is tattooed on her thigh with the prophets of the old testament. Her stomach and chest tattoos allude to Greek mythology. Listed behind "Womanhero" are the names of strong women who displayed courage and were elevated to myth in other cultures and times.

Edelheit's work is a conscious statement of reclamation of the female body for the female mind.
Shirley Gorelick (b.1924- )

Shirley Gorelick began her painting career in the Fifties as an Abstract Expressionist. She had studied with Hans Hofmann and well understood competing forces within the picture frame—Hofmann's theories of "push and pull." However, she became increasingly orientated toward subject content and the need for greater visual articulation to manipulate a subtler ideology. She sought to rediscover figurative art through a closer examination of the masters. The process of learning the figure to truly portray soul as well as flesh became ongoing.

Each subject Gorelick works with, she studies from life through sculptures, drawings, silverpoints and photography. She states, "I'll do anything, use everything I can get."²

The purpose of these investigations goes beyond simple figure studies, revealing deeper psychological realms; the subject's attitude toward self, toward the world, or toward those he/she may share the composition with. Gorelick most often investigates through a series of compositions over an extended period of time, interfamily relationships. "Three Sisters IV" (Fig. 132), 1975, and "Three Sisters II" (Fig. 133), 1977, allow us candid views of the three girls.

In "Three Sisters IV" (Fig. 132), the three sisters are detailed in close range, standing nude in an outdoor setting of intricate shrubbery. They are a portion of a family tree. They display their personality types, and sibling placement
within the family heirarchy by posture and eye contact. The oldest sister one assumes, poses with hands on waist, thumbs out, in control of the situation. She is just off center in a directly frontal, somewhat challenging stance. The middle figure appears complacent, the go between, in a more casual but slightly uneasy or timid frontal stance. The third figure, head cast downward is in side view with only a third of the body visible as if retiring into the picture frame.

In "Three Sisters II" (Fig. 133), 1977, the same three are portrayed in double portraiture both nude and robed. Here their interaction is more concerned with viewer relationship and less with each other.

Gorelick's study of "Three Sisters II" (1977), based on models ranging in age from seventeen to twenty-one, is a blunt, almost repellently honest portrayal of female adolescence ... The young women, robed and nude, in a leaf-patterned garden, are shown filled with varying degrees of pain, questioning, anger, and confusion, which are communicated by nuances of position, gesture or facial expression.

The background is an intricate tapestry of detailed flora that allows no escape for the freize of figures. The sisters are like the leaves, each the same but different. Gorelick's apt and intricate characterizations go beyond photo realism in their quest for a multilevel psychological interplay.

Janet Culbertson (b.1932- )

Janet Culbertson received her Bachelor of Fine Arts
(B.F.A.) (1953) from Carnegie Institute, Pennsylvania and promptly moved to New York City. There she studied at the Art Students League (1954) and graphics at Atelier 17 (1955). She received a Master of Arts (M.A.) from New York University (1963) and continued her exploration of graphic techniques at Pratt (1964-65).

She has evolved a unique technique more immediate than printmaking but maintaining the black and stark contrasts possible in that medium. Making a basic sketch of her idea, she masks off those areas to be left white. Then ink is sprayed onto the paper surface before immersion into a water bath. Accidentals created by this process of water dispersion will be utilized in the final redrawing.

In drawing a picture, I like to repeat the organic process of nature, taping out the whites, spraying the paper and then immersing it in water. The immersion is a letting go of control, letting the water and ink merge and contradict each other before I draw into it.

The masked areas reveal the virgin paper surface, creating bright whites which are read as strong lighting effects, and heightening drama through contrast. Her use of light, in her words takes on an existential interpretation "... as a force that unifies the person or material things with atmosphere, reducing them all to the same substance... sometimes light blinds and obscures from too great a brilliance."^3

Culbertson completed a series of twenty-two drawings, "Woman: A New Myth" (1975) done in this manner of sprayed ink
and charcoal rendition. The series depicts various stages of a woman’s search for identity. It is roughly subdivided into works on Departure, Trials and Initiation, and Return. In it ". . . the hero, woman travels alone through an unfamiliar, underdeveloped, and barren world” countering internal and external forces.  

The traveler, a tiny vulnerably nude figure is placed in vast landscapes.

"The Threshold Struggle" (Fig. 134), 1975, illuminates the tiny nude crouched between rocks, balancing a massive boulder on her frail form. The intricacy of the technique causes us to read the rock and figure form as wonderfully organic elements. The darkly shadowed figure appears not so much bowed under the weight as in the process of pushing off the huge stone. This we discern through the use of light. Culbertson uses spatial tension to create emotional tension.

"The Same Place Is No Longer The Same" (Fig. 135), 1975, also from the "New Myth" series depicts the protagonist’s furtive return to her former bedroom. The image of the former self is burned brilliant white into the bedding, while the same brilliant self peers out from the bureau mirror with a larger dark shadow of a man behind it.

Culbertson’s Myth does not so much have the feel of fantasy but of surrealism, reality juxtaposed for statement value. Her imagery is undistorted in form, it quivers with life from its mottled surface. Ideology is made tangible reality.
Drawing her myth in the heroic style, tinged by her tremendous talent as a Surrealist she emphasizes the difficulties that women face in their struggle for freedom.

Anita Steckel (birthdate unavailable)

Anita Steckel's sexual-political interpretations fluctuate through violence, erotica and/or humor, sometimes simultaneously. In them, a female protagonist alternates between being victim and crusader.

Steckel draws, photocopies, photographs and collages existing images and icons of the social system to revamp traditional ideology to encompass the politics of feminism, statements that articulate her acerbically candid view of the female in society.

"Creation Revisited" (Fig. 136), 1977, is a glimpse of a series of works in which a female nude straddles an eagle as it soars above recognizable landmarks of society and western culture, be they Picasso, New York skyscrapers or in this instance the Sistine Chapel.

This epic journey occurred on a xerox machine... A master cut-out of woman and eagle is laid atop photographs or reproductions of paintings and the disparate elements are fused together. Sometimes the cut-out is moved to blur the image, accentuating the dream quality.

In the swoop over the Sistine Chapel imagery, the female nude displaces the god figure who is about to ignite Adam with life: Instead, the female now administers the spark. In this instance, Steckel's female nude is a crusader, displacing the patriarchal symbol of God for a
Pat Steir (birthdate unavailable)

In her work, Pat Steir seeks multi-levels of communication, levels that express differing realities. To that end, she explores visual imagery as symbol and icon of communication.

Her education, which concentrated on painting and printmaking, was completed in the late Fifties at Pratt Institute and Boston University. Her earlier works were image intense, gradually evolving through abstraction and isolated marks, and finally coalescing into a reverence for the integrity of all symbology, be it the image, the word, the line, the mark or the color.

I think that the straight line is what the monkey made, an impulse, and the curved line is manmade, a desire . . . figurative image is actually more abstract than the straight line or the curved line because it requires more abstract thinking. We think so-called abstract painting is more abstract than an image because we only recently dared to think of it as anything at all other than a patch of paint. If one makes a painting that is only red, it is not a picture of red; it is not an abstraction but the thing itself . . . figurative seems like truth for the figurative painter and abstract seems like truth for the abstract painter, but if they are the same then neither seems like truth.

Steir’s vast range of symbols is employed to record a personalized history of events, feelings, dreams and fantasies. Ultimately proffering to her audience an intimate journal. Her work, Steir has stated denotes "... how we are grafted to the universal by that which is most our own."
The multi-double-entendre that can be perceived in Steir's work due to the variety of reference symbols and icons, are only part of the art. To Steir, the piece may just as well "... have no context in terms of the rest of the world, to be not a picture of anything but the thing itself, made by me." The sensations of the process regardless of ideology or iconography are of importance; lush yet delicate color, fluid forms, precious draftsmanship, the stroke and twist of the brush as paint is applied. Steir unifies process, ideology and iconography.

Painting is the art that is most related to magic. Magic is to make something transcend what it is. The best painting is not only pure paint but it has a spirit that transcends itself. This is done by the addition and subtraction of signs and signals and symbols, and by one's skill and lack of skill.

The large (6 x 9') painting "Legend" (Fig. 137), 1971, whimsically inscribes correlations of symbols in a deadly serious manner (The legend or chart of the scientist). "Legend" charts visual relationships between the bird and the female vulva, that is the reality of the subject content. Visually, the vocabulary includes: realistic imagery of the female torso, the sky and birds; process imagery of stroke and color; and chart manipulations of the canvas field of line, marks, and even the paint "droppings" of the drawn bird. Steir does not desire an exact reading from her works: "In the past, I was interested in the images because I was interested in meaning. Now, I'm more interested in
illusion . . . \textsuperscript{6}

The way up is the way down, the way forward is the way back . . . and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time. \textsuperscript{7} 

T.S. Eliot
ILLUSTRATIONS

ALICE NEEL

Figure 44. "Ethel Ashton", (1930), o/c, Alice Neel, p.31

Figure 45. "Roberta Myers In Blue Hat", (1930), Alice Neel, p.34

Figure 46. "Nadya Nude", (1933), o/c, 24 x 31", Alice Neel, p.44

Figure 47. "Nadya And Nona", (1933), o/c, 26 x 35 1/2", Alice Neel

Figure 48. "Isabetta", Alice Neel

Figure 49. "Alienation", (1935), Watercolor on paper, app. 6 x 8", Alice Neel, p.55

Figure 50. "Subconscious", (1942), o/c, 28 x 24", Alice Neel, p.75

Figure 51. "Sue Seeley", (1943), o/c, 30 x 48", Alice Neel

Figure 52. "Pregnant Maria", (1964), o/c, 32 x 17", Alice Neel, p.120

Figure 53. "Pregnant Julie And Algis", (1967), o/c, 42 x 64" Alice Neel

Figure 54. "Betty Homitsky", (1968), o/c, 36 x 60" Alice Neel, p.133

Figure 55. "Pregnant Woman", (1970/71), o/c, 40 x 60", Alice Neel, p.162

Figure 56. "Carmen And Judy", (1972), Alice Neel

Figure 57. "Cindy Nemser And Chuck", (1975), o/c, 4 1/2 x 59 3/4", Alice Neel

Figure 58. "Aroyowmi", (1976), o/c, 46 x 38" Alice Neel, p.141

Figure 59. "Elizabeth", (1977), o/c, 40 x 24", Alice Neel, p.158

212
Figure 60. "Margaret Evans Pregnant", (1978), Alice Neel, p.163

Figure 61. "Kitty Pearson", (1979), Lives And Works

Figure 62. "Victoria And Cat", (1981), Artnews, March 1981, p.103, screenprinting and lithography

Figure 63. "Self Portrait", (1980), o/c, 54 x 40", Alice Neel, p.182
(Fig. 44) "ETHEL ASHTON NUDE" 1930 Alice Neel
(Fig. 45) "ROBERTA MEYERS WITH BLUE HAT" 1930  Alice Neel
(Fig. 46) "NADYA NUDE"  1933 Alice Neel
(Fig. 47) "NADYA AND NONA" • 1933 Alice Neel
(Fig. 48) "ISABETTA"  Alice Neel
(Fig.49) "ALIENATION" 1935 Alice Neel
(Fig.50) "SUBCONSCIOUS" 1942 Alice Neel
(Fig. 51) "SUE SEELEY" 1943 Alice Neel
(Fig. 52) "PREGNANT MARIA" 1964 Alice Neel
(Fig. 53) "PREGNANT JULIE AND ALGIS" 1967 Alice Neel
(Fig. 54) "BETTY HOMITSKY" 1968 Alice Neel
(Fig.55) "PREGNANT WOMAN" 1970/71  Alice Neel
(Fig. 56) "CARMEN AND JUDY" 1972 Alice Neel
(Fig. 57) "CINDY NEMSER AND CHUCK" 1975 Alice Neel
(Fig.58) "AROYOMNI" 1976 Alice Neel
(Fig. 59) "ELIZABETH" 1977 Alice Neel
(Fig. 60) "MARGARET EVANS PREGNANT" 1978 Alice Neel
(Fig. 61) "KITTY PEARSON" 1979 Alice Neel
(Fig. 62) "VICTORIA AND CAT" 1981 Alice Neel
(Fig. 63) "SELF-PORTRAIT" 1980 Alice Neel
MARISOL

Figure 64. "Diptych", (1971), Lithograph reprint from Arts Magazine, April 1973, p.70

Figure 65. "Double Flower", (1973), Arts Magazine, March 1975, p.67

Figure 66. "Lick The Tire Of My Bicycle", (1974), Arts Magazine, March 1975, p.67

Figure 67. "The English Are Coming", (1974), Arts Magazine, March 1975, p.66

Figure 68. "All My Shoes For Ten Years", (1974), Arts Magazine, March 1975, p.66
(Fig. 64) "DIPTYCH" 1971 Marisol
(Fig.65) "DOUBLE FLOWER" 1973 Marisol
(Fig. 66) "LICK THE TIRE OF MY BICYCLE" 1974 Marisol
(Fig. 67) "The English Are Coming" 1974 Marisol
(Fig. 68) "ALL MY SHOES FOR TEN YEARS" 1974 Marisol
MARY FRANK

Figure 69. "Woman Rider", (1970), Lithograph, (19" x 24 1/2"), Works On Paper. Herrera. 1978

Figure 70. "Disappearance", (1976), Monoprint, (53 x 45"), 3 parts, Print Collector's Newsletter. Ratcliff, Mary Frank's Monotypes, 1978

Figure 71. "The Forest", (1976), Monoprint, (ea 22 x 30"), 6 parts, Print Collector's Newsletter. Ratcliff. Mary Frank's Monotypes

Figure 72. "Daphne", (1976), Monoprint, (31" x 23"), Originals. Monroe

Figure 73. "Lovers", (1978), Monoprint, (26 1/4 x 37 1/2"), Works On Paper. Herrera. 1978

Figure 74, 75, 76. "The Storm is Here" series, (1982), (25 x 35"), Helicon 9. Weymouth. 1983
(Fig. 69) "WOMAN RIDER" 1970 Mary Frank
(Fig. 70) "DISAPPEARANCE" 1976 Mary Frank
(Fig. 71) "THE FOREST" 1976 Mary Frank
(Fig. 72) "DAPHNE" 1976 Mary Frank
(Fig. 73) "LOVERS" 1978 Mary Frank
(Fig. 74) From "THE STORM IS HERE" 1982 Mary Frank
(Fig. 75) From "THE STORM IS HERE" 1982 Mary Frank
(Fig. 76) FROM "THE STORM IS HERE" 1982 Mary Frank
NANCY SPERO

Figure 77. "Codex Artaud", (1971), Detail, (20" x 125")

Figure 78. "Normal Love", (1974), (detail "Torture In Chile"), (27 1/2" x 39"), Art In America, July 1975

Figure 79. "Torture Of Women", (1976), (detail Panel 9, 10), Contemporary Artists

Figure 80. "Torture of Women", (detail "Lovers"), Artnews, November 1976

Figure 81. "Torture of Women", (detail Panel 3), Arts Magazine, November 1976

Figure 82. "Torture of Women", (detail Panel 3/4) Arts Magazine, December 1978

Figure 83. "Notes In Time On Women Part II . . .", (1979), (detail Panel 13), (20" x 225")

Figure 84. "Notes In Time On Women Part II . . .", (detail Panel 16)

Figure 85. "The First Language", (1981), (detail), Arts In America, p.

Figure 86. "Black And The Red", (1983), (detail), (41" x 112"), Artnews, February 1983, p.163
FIG. 77  "CODEX ARTAUD" Detail 1971  Nancy Spero
(Fig. 78) "NORMAL LOVE" Detail "TORTURE IN CHILE" 1975
Nancy Spero
(Fig. 79)
"TORTURE OF WOMEN" Pam 9, 10 Detail 1976

Nancy Spero

The torture and deaths of women and girls in Montevideo on June 29, 1974 is a chilling example of human rights abuse.

A 24-year-old teacher, who was arrested in Montevideo on June 29, 1974 and taken to a military unit, regimiento no. 5 de ingenieros, where she died after being subjected to the 'dry submarine' method of suffocation with a plastic bag over the head. Ten hours after arrest, relatives were informed that she had committed suicide.
Torture today is essentially a state activity. The precondition for torture makes it almost the exclusive province of the state. Torture requires that the victim be kept under the physical control of the torturer.

Her bowels, and crushed her skull with his club. On her body he took his stand, and with his knife he split it like a flat fish into two halves, and of one of these he made a covering for the heavens.

(Fig. 80) "TORTURE OF WOMAN" Detail "LOVERS" 1976
Nancy Spero
(Fig. 81) "TORTURE OF WOMEN" Panel 3 Detail 1976
Nancy Spero
marduk caught
was thus distended
her skull with
halves and of

(Fig. 82) "TORTURE OF WOMEN" Panel 3,4 Detail 1976
Nancy Spero
(Fig. 83) "NOTES IN TIME ON WOMEN PART II..." Panel 13 Detail
Nancy Spero
(Fig. 84) "NOTES IN TIME ON WOMEN PART II..." Panel 16 Detail
Nancy Spero
(Fig. 85) "THE FIRST LANGUAGE" Detail 1981 Nancy Spero
(Fig. 86) "THE BLACK AND THE RED" Detail 1983 Nancy Spero
Figure 87. "Girl Sitting", (1962), o/c, (60" x 47 3/4"), Richardson, reprint, p.7

Figure 88. "Girl In Chair", (1962), o/c, (60" x 47 3/4"), Richardson, reprint, p.8

Figure 89. "The Moon Casts A Shadow On A Midsummer's Night", (1962), (6' x 12'), Leider, p.29

Figure 90. "Untitled", (1973), Acrylic/pencil on paper, (42 1/2" x 35 1/4"), Richardson, p.35
(Fig. 87) "GIRL SITTING"  1962  Joan Brown
(Fig. 88) "GIRL IN A CHAIR" 1962 Joan Brown
(Fig. 90) UNTITLED 1973 Joan Brown
SYLVIA SLEIGH

Figure 91. "Judy Kardish", (1969), o/c, (60" x 40"),
Arts Magazine, November 1969, p.68

Figure 92. "The Blue Dress", (1970), o/c, (66" x 34"),
Arts Magazine, February 1971

Figure 93. "Portrait Of Felicity Rainnie At Ease", (1972),
o/c, (42" x 60"), Art International,
Summer 1972, p.

Figure 94. "The Court Of Pan", (1973), o/c, (76" x 113"),
Art International, September 1973, p.41

Figure 95. "Scheharazade (Cynthia Mailmen)", (1974), o/c,
(52" x 56"), Art In America, November/December 1974

Figure 96. "Fete Champetre", (1976), o/c, (72 x 80"),
Paintings By Three American Realists:
Alice Neel, Sylvia Sleigh, May Stevens,
p.12

Figure 97. "Sister Chapel: Lilith", (1975), Artnews,
October 1980, p.60
(Fig. 91) "JUDITH KARDISH" 1969 Slyvia Sleigh
(Fig. 92) "THE BLUE DRESS" 1970 Slyvia Sleigh
(Fig. 93) "PORTRAIT OF FELICITY RAINKIE AT EASE" 1972
Sylvia Sleigh
(Fig. 94) "The Court of Pan" 1973 Sylvia Sleigh
(Fig. 95) "SCHERAZADE" 1974 Sylvia Sleigh
(Fig. 96) "FÊTE CHAMPERE" 1976 Sylvia Sleigh
(Fig. 97) "LILITH" 1975 Sylvia Sleigh
MARTHA MAYER ERLEBACHER

Figure 98. Nude Model Study, *Artnews*, May 1978

Figure 99. "Figure For Acedia", (1983), (19 x 24 1/2"), *American Artist*, January 1985, p.92

Figure 100. "In Praise Of The Earth", (1972), o/c, (72" x 100"), *Artnews*, May 1985

Figure 101. "Adam And Eve", (1975), o/c, diptych, (64 x 40" each), *Artnews*, May 1985

Figure 102. "Sun Gazer", (1976), o/c, (64 x 52"), *Arts Magazine*, November 1978, p.137

Figure 103. "In A Garden", (1976), o/c, (64 x 64"), *Artnews*, May 1985, p.95

Figure 104. "Scene From A Picnic I: IRA (Anger)", (1984), (103 1/2 x 64"), *Artnews*, May 1985, p.94
(Fig. 98) NUDE MODEL STUDY circa 1978 Martha Mayer
Erlebacher
(Fig. 94) STUDY FOR ACEDIA 1983 Martha Mayer Erlebacher
(Fig. 100) "IN PRAISE OF THE EARTH" 1972

Martha Mayer Erlebacher
(Fig. 101) "ADAM AND EVE" 1975 Martha Mayer Erlebacher
(Fig. 102) "SUNGAZER" 1976 Martha Mayer Erlebacher
(Fig. 103) "IN A GARDEN" 1976 Martha Mayer Erlebacher
(Fig. 104) "SCENE FROM A PICNIC I: IRA(ANGER)"  1984
Martha Mayer Erlebacher
MARY BETH EDELSON

Figure 105. "Women's Lives: Blood Mysteries", (1973), Peterson/Wilson, Women Artists, p.139
(Fig.105) "WOMEN'S LIVES: BLOOD MYSTERIES" 1973
Mary Beth Edelson
JOAN SEMMEL

Figure 106. "Intimacy-Autonomy", (1974), o/c, (50 x 98"), Art International, March 1977, p.61

Figure 107. "Touch", (1975), (72 x 72"), Women's Art Journal, Spring/Summer 1980

Figure 108. "Center Hand", (1976), (72 x 72"), Arts Magazine

Figure 109. "Pink Pingtertips", (1977), o/c, (49 x 56"), American Women Artists, p.391

Figure 110. "Out Of The Process", (1978), o/c, (49 x 67"), Arts, November 1978, p.12

Figure 111. "Parallels", (1979), o/c, (96 x 70"), Artnews, January 1980, p.172

Figure 112. "Zoom Lens", (1979), (78 x 107"), Joan Semmel, Exhibition catalogue, October-December 1980, unpaged

Figure 113. "Turning", (1979), (78 x 107"), Joan Semmel, Exhibition catalogue, October-December 1980, unpaged

Figure 114. "Double Breasted Arch", (1980), (90 x 70"), Joan Semmel, Exhibition catalogue, October-December 1980, unpaged

Figure 115. "Sundream", (1980), (78 x 108"), Joan Semmel, Exhibition catalogue, October-December 1980, unpaged

Figure 116. "Toehold", (1980), (78 x 104"), Joan Semmel, Exhibition catalogue, October-December 1980, unpaged
(Fig. 107) "TOUCH" 1975 Joan Semmel
(Fig. 108) "CENTER HAND" 1976 Joan Semmel
(Fig. 109) "PINK FINGERTIPS" 1977 Joan Semmel
(Fig. 110) "OUT OF THE PROCESS" 1978 Joan Semmel
(Fig. 111) "PARALLELS" 1979  Joan Semmel
(Fig. 112) "ZOOM LENS" 1979 Joan Semmel
(Fig. 113) "TURNING" 1979 Joan Semmel
(Fig.114) "DOUBLE BREASTED ARCH" 1980 Joan Semmel
(Fig. 115) "SUNDREAM" 1980 Joan Semmel
(Fig. 116) "TOE HOLD" Joan Semmel 1980
JILLIAN DENBY

Figure 117. "Sleeping Girl", (1974), Art In America, May/June 1976, p.71

Figure 118. "Woman In Oak Chair", (1974), o/c, (64 x 48"), Art International, May 1975, p.70

Figure 119. "The Figure Moves House", (1976), o/c, (72 x 60"), Arts, October 1976

Figure 120. "Sleep And Inspiration", (1977), o/c, (96 x 72"), Art International, July/August 1977, p.81

Figure 121. "Rumour", (1978), oil on linen, (80 x 70"), Arts, 1981

Figure 122. "Woman With Peonies I", Art In America, 1981
(Fig. 117) "SLEEPING GIRL" 1974 Jillian Denby
(Fig. 118) "WOMAN IN A CHAIR" 1974 Jillian Denby
(Fig. 119) "THE FIGURE MOVES HOUSE" 1976  Jillian Denby
(Fig. 120) "SLEEP AND INSPIRATION" 1977 Jillian Denby
(Fig. 121) "RUMOR" 1978 Jillian Denby
Figure 123. "Sleeping Forest", (1974), o/c, (60 x 72"), Arts, May 1975

Figure 124. "Mother-Earth", (1978), o/c, (50 x 120"), Arts, March 1979, p.11

Figure 125. "Eve", o/c, (65 x 110"

Figure 126. "Naked Summer Night", o/c, Artforum, February 1981
(Fig. 123) "SLEEPING FOREST" 1974 Daphne Mumford
(Fig. 124) "MOTHER EARTH" 1978 Daphne Mumford
(Fig. 125) "EVE"  Daphne Mumford
(Fig. 126)
"NAKED SUMMER NIGHT"
circa 1981
Daphne Mumford
Figure 127. "Woman At Window", (1975), Art In America, May/June 1976, p. 71

Figure 128. Untitled, (1980), Arts, September 1980

Figure 129. "Woman", o/c (52 x 72"), Women Artists In, America (1970-1980)
(Fig. 128) UNTITLED  Juanita McNealley
(Fig. 129) "WOMAN" Juanita McNeely
MARTHA EDELHEIT

Figure 130. "NX3", (1970), (54 x 72"), *Art In America*, May/June 1976, p.71

Figure 131. "Woman Hero" from "Sisterchapel", (1978), *Artnews*, October 1980, p.60
(Fig. 130) "NX3" 1970 Martha Edelheit
(Fig. 131) "WOMANHERO" 1978 Martha Edelheit
SHIRLEY GORELICK

Figure 132. "Three Sisters IV", (1975), (55 x 67"), Arts, March 1977, p.39

Figure 133. "Three Sisters II", (1977), (80 x 90")
(Fig. 132) "SISTERS IV" 1975 Shirley Gorelick
(Fig. 133) "SISTERS II"  1977 Shirley Gorelick
JANET CULBERTSON

Figure 134. "The Threshold Struggle", (1975), Ink and charcoal on paper, (28 1/8 x 41"), Arts, October 1975, p.18

Figure 135. "The Same Place Is No Longer The Same", (1975), Ink and charcoal on paper, (40 x 58"), Arts, September 1975, p.22
(Fig. 134) "THE THRESHOLD STRUGGLE" 1975
Janet Culbertson
(Fig. 135) THE SAME PLACE IS NO LONGER THE SAME 1975
Janet Culbertson
ANITA STECKEL

Figure 136. "Creation Revisited", (1977), Collage, Arts September 1977, p.34
(Fig. 136) "CREATION REVISITED" 1977 Anita Steckel
(Fig. 137) "LEGEND" 1971 Pat Steir
CHAPTER NOTES

INTRODUCTION (1969-1983)

1. Rubenstein, American Women Artists, p. 325.
2. Fine, Women and Art, p. 146.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
7. Fine, p. 146.
8. Rubenstein, p. 325.
14. Lippard, From the Center, p. 6.
15. Larsen quoting Joyce Kozloff, p. 66.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.


ALICE NEEL


2. Formerly the Philadelphia School of Design for Women.


4. Ibid., p. 189.


10. Ibid., p. 21.

11. Ibid., p. 41, "the great renunciation."


13. Ibid., p. 77.


15. Hills, p. 189.


17. Ibid., p. 78.

18. Ibid.
20. Harris, p. 71.
22. Higgins, p. 76.
24. Ibid., p. 100.
26. Ibid., p. 16.
27. Ibid., p. 35.
30. Ibid., p. 42.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid., p. 50.
33. Ibid., p. 55.
34. Ibid., p. 75.
35. Harris, *Portfolio*, p. 75.
36. Hills, p. 162.
37. Harris, p. 75.
38. Hills, p. 126.
40. Hills, p. 162.
41. Ibid., p. 190 (*"Alice Neel--Teller of Truth" from Alice Neel: The Woman and Her Work, Georgia Museum of Art, 1975, unpaged)*.
43. Higgins, p. 79.
MARISOL

5. Rubenstein, American Women Artists, p. 349.
12. Ibid., p. 70.
15. Ibid., p. 67.

MARY FRANK

2. Ibid.
6. Ibid., p. 66.
7. Ibid.
10. Weymouth, "Interview ...," *Helicon 9*, p. 31.
17. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
27. Weymouth, *Helicon 9*, p. 27.
28. Turning the plate, making directional changes, side becoming bottom, etc.
29. Weymouth, pp. 27, 30.

**NANCY SPERO**

2. Ibid., pp. 204, 205.
3. Ibid., p. 208.
4. Ibid., p. 209.
5. Ibid., p. 207.
8. Spero, Contemporary Artists, p. 87.
10. Spero, Contemporary Artists, p. 87.
15. Spero, Contemporary Artists, p. 87.
17. Ibid., p. 104.

JOAN BROWN

2. Ibid., p. 31.
3. Henry Hopkins, 50 West Coast Artists, p. 35 (Joan Brown quote).

SYLVIA SLEIGH

1. Birthdate was unavailable, but information from Women Artists in America (1790-1980), indicated her birthplace to be Llandudno, Wales.


5. Rubenstein, p. 402.


MARTHA MAYER ERLEBACHER


2. Ibid., p. 92.

3. Ibid., p. 93.


5. Wilson, p. 93.

6. Ibid., p. 94.

7. Ibid., p. 93.

8. Ibid., p. 96.


10. Wilson, p. 96.

11. Ibid.

MARY BETH EDELSON


JOAN SEMMEL


2. Ibid.


JILLIAN DENBY


2. Ibid.

JUANITA MCNEELEY


2. Ibid.
MARTHA EDELHEIT


SHIRLEY GORELICK


3. Rubenstein, pp. 403, 404.

JANET CULBERTSON


ANITA STECKEL


PAT STEIR


2. Ibid., p. 53.

4. Ibid., p. 71.

5. Castle, p. 54.

6. Ibid., p. 55.

7. Tucker, p. 70.
CHAPTER IV

ARTIST’S COMMENTARIES

The questionnaire, (Appendix A), was initiated as a non-statistical adjunct to the survey, to in fact verify to a degree, interpretations and assumptions made within the survey. Statements, for the questionnaire, were culled generically from the review of general literature on nudes, representing differing viewpoints about the nude, to which the artist was asked to respond.

This dissertation survey was written from research on exhibition reviews, or first hand interviews by reviewers, and was not dependent in the least, on the questionnaire.

From the general lack of response, (Appendix B), it can be inferred perhaps that the questionnaire was too cumbersome and may not have been relevant either because of the source (a doctoral candidate) or the subject matter.

Though nineteen living artists were used in the survey, twenty-nine questionnaires were sent out. As in the case of Judy Chicago and Nancy Grossman, a few were used as letters of inquiry to ascertain if in fact they had done nudes within the time frame, that the research had failed to turn up. A few, as Faith Bromberg or Barbara Rodgers, were sent to from leads of the general research and on which specific
research had failed to turn up anything but limited information.

Four letters—Joan Brown, Daphne Mumford, Juanita McNeely and Martha Mayer Erlebacher—had been sent in care of galleries where they regularly show, their home address or married names having been unavailable. These were all returned as incorrect addresses.

Louise Bourgeois called to say she could not fill out the survey because of constraints on her time. She, like the four women who wrote back, was generous with encouragement.

Of the four respondents, Judy Chicago did not answer directly but her executive director Mary Ross Taylor stated that "None of Judy Chicago's work could be considered 'female nudes'...", verifying the original conclusion of the general research.

Nancy Spero, understandably, did not have enough time between shows to answer the questionnaire but returned a poster and outline of her artistic endeavors to date.

Janet Culbertson and Mary Beth Edelson in actuality were the only respondents to the questionnaire itself. They very definitely state, that their nude female image, with which they strongly identified and learned through, was an icon for ideology. This was stated in their own words and corresponded to the only conclusions that can be drawn from a survey of this nature. Quite overtly, these two artists
unwittingly stated that style and elements of design were secondary to the ideology, and that the ideology expressed was meant to push the boundaries of the Twentieth century concept of female.
CHAPTER V
SUMMATION AND CONCLUSION

The content of this survey, the definable female torso done by women artists, dictated its nature as realistic and more intensely autobiographical than general subject matter. Art, to a great extent, is an autobiographical outpouring, so inter-related is the artist to his/her work. The obvious relationship of the female body to the female artist heightens this inter-relationship and the authenticity of the art.

Whether utilized by male or female artist, the nude female form is inherently laden with content of symbol and icon be it fertility goddess, maiden virtue, classical sensibility, sexual inference or less obvious social references dependent on pose and placement within the composition or environment.

All representational art is an art of engagement and all representational art makes particular demands on the viewer. That representational art which makes the most complex demands is figurative art--the art of the figure.¹

That both figure and content regained respectability in the early 1970s is in part due to the women's movement. "The women's movement brought focus on women and subject matter."² Certainly women artists, as a matter of record, demanded more attention through collective works, and collective showing
spaces that at least publicized their art, though did not gain it market recognition. Sylvia Sleigh and Nancy Spero were both East Coast leaders in the setting up of collective exhibition spaces for women. Mary Beth Edelson is still very much involved in art engendered by the collective spirit. Martha Edelheit and Sylvia Sleigh both participated in "Sister Chapel" (1978) a tribute to female existence.

In this survey, the iconology, the image of female, remained a constant throughout the works, which allowed for even better display of the variety of intent done by subtle image manipulation.

The dilemma in realist figurative art is that the image must be recognizable which implies a common ground (and a common ground considerably cuts down imagination) and at the same time the image must be challenging, which implies some assault on commonality.

Despite this dilemma, the female artist's response to the same stimuli, as it was perceived in this study, is a tribute to the infinite vastness and subtlety of interpretation within art.

The historical perspective of this study (Chapter II) was limited by the times (1900-1969), i.e., the acceptability or unacceptability of the subject matter (the nude), the educational opportunities in the early part of the century for women artists when dealing with life models, and the lack of publication or notoriety of female artists in general. However, the six women presented in this portion of the survey, though lacking in numbers, proved just as di-
verse in ideology as the greater spectrum of the later seventeen women of Chapter III. They, like the women that followed, were influenced by aesthetic trends and socio-political settings of their respective time frames. These trends and settings were generally more restrictive than those of the post 1969 period, perhaps, inhibiting the variety of presentation and certainly confirming the incidence of nude works.

Lillian Genth worked within academic traditions to present the nude in arcadian settings, done en situ, out of the studio. Marguerite Thompson Zorach combined Fauve vibrant coloration with Cubist interpretations of form to also associate the female nude with nature, but in a much less classical manner of pose or setting. The nudes of Romaine Brooks, transcended classical illusionism to surreal implications. All three artists used a lithe, fairly young maiden form.

Isobel Bishop chose the nude and drapes of classical implication to focus on the American working class woman. She projected the classical reclining nude into new poses and contemporary reality. The usually robust nudes of Bishop's work clip their toenails or vigorously rub themselves down after a bath--intimate glimpses of a non-classical reality.

The artistically active time frame of both Louise Nevelson and Louise Bourgeois spans the dates of this study.
However, their work included in this study confined them to the pre-1969 grouping. The full figured forms of Louise Nevelson are whimsically contoured to enliven their seated classical forms. Louise Bourgeois offered surrealist whimsy rooted in the everyday existence of the post World War II female; house, home and woman all in one.

Post 1969, diversity and proliferation of women artists and their works on the nude began increasing, owing again to the mood of the times and urged on by the feminist movement to recognize women.

It has been noted that artistic "perception is in part determined by context, history, biography and even mood . . . the soup of chemicals and electric charges that we carry around behind our eyes." Impetus and opportunity to implement such perceptions was more available to women by the end of the Sixties.

Marisol's intentionally autobiographical nudes manipulate an introspective surrealism that maintains a pop character by the inclusion of banal accoutrements; shoes, purses, bicycles and the like. Her drawings and prints involving the nude are highly refined yet loosely contoured images of female forms, rich with double entendre.

Mary Frank isolates the lone female nude in reference to movement and the environment. The idealized figure conception of her nudes imposes an atmosphere of fantasy on her images that borders more on surreal connotation than whimsy.
Janet Culbertson's single nude protagonist, is suggested as young and vulnerable through the exposed form but radiates light as a source of power. It is diminished in size as compared to the ecological system it struggles through.

Anita Steckel's female nudes vacillate from crusader to victimized sacrifice as they witness inherent socio-cultural discrepancies between male and female.

The nudes of Nancy Spero bear witness to actual and mythical events of the victimization of women. Their cult-like classically stereotyped images belie the anguished abuse verbalized in varied scripts. They are frustrated creatures suspended in time and space, an addendum to existential ideology.

Juanita McNeeley, like Nancy Spero, displays women as victims, vulnerably nude, but names no assaulting force except time and space. The nude's energetic struggle, slightly distorting form and environment, poses questions which are dependent on the viewer for articulation of both question and answer.

Mary Beth Edelson actively seeks, through a regenerative collective spirit to call attention to cultural stigma and myths used to manipulate women, hoping by awareness to discredit and obliterate the myth. Her nude female image is an active, larger than life participation in new rituals.

Martha Edelheit focuses on myths involving women by assumption of traditional male roles. As a female artist, she
usurps the supposed male privilege of portraying the female as sex object. Further, through her art, she re-analyzes the role of women in history and legend. She, like Sylvia Sleigh, equalizes and neutralizes the interpretation of male and female within the context of art and history.

Sylvia Sleigh's nudes are imbued with a tactile sensuousness that individualized them as specific portraits. Those portrayed are then elevated through the traditional and historical schema of masterworks, challenging and replacing the earlier works.

Daphne Mumford's nudes are seemingly non-specific portraits. Her nude females are inactive personifications within their realm of earth and sky. They are the idealized spirit and essence of a timeless nature.

Jillian Denby also creates contemporary goddess forms but as specific physical and facial portraits of twentieth century women whose stage-set trappings contradict their nudity. They are at ease and in control of their finely delineated environment.

Martha Mayer Erlebacher's Renaissance women are fraught with twentieth century harrassments. The fine detailing contradicts the emotional drama played out within their expression, pose and setting. They are tense with disturbed energy.

Like Erlebacher, Shirley Gorelick utilizes placement, setting and pose to illicit subject content. Ordinary set-
tions, replete with nothing unusual, the comfortable environment of her subjects, build insights of inter- and intra-familial bondings. Her female nudes are very specific portraits, a manipulated photo realism.

Pat Steir successfully melds Minimalism, abstract notation and autobiographical content to make personal history. Her nude torso of "Legend" combines realism with whimsy and irony emphasizing sexuality in a non-erotic manner.

Joan Brown alludes to personal history in an entirely different manner, often employing a single figure in her pieces. Her journeys, social experiences and interactions are all basis for art interpreted in a playful yet concisely apt manner. Color and stroke enhance her non-classical approach to the female nude.

Color and stroke promote the raw expressive imagery of Alice Neel's female nude portraits. They are touched with whimsy or aspects of irony, truly human portraits. The body, pose and placement express the character more fully than the facial features alone. Yet the face remains the center of attention. Her pregnant nudes are fertility goddesses of the Twentieth century. All of Neel's nudes are sensually energized portraits of flesh and soul, powerful in their uncompromising honesty.

The figure in art has been called the primal art experience, that connects one kind of memory with another, reverberating backward and forward.

The multiplicity of imagery and intent that these art-
ists have delved into through the icon of the female nude engenders waves of dialogue in which style is second to content-ideology. Reviewing the nude, Carter Ratcliff stated:

Of all things visible with which art attempts to deal, the body is perhaps the most important. It is in the body—in our expression of it and by means of it—that we come as close as we ever do to 'absolutes' or 'universals' that are (italics) absolute or universals. It is the body if I may put it this way, that is most likely to escape from culture. It's acculturation is a constant project. Art reveals its cultural purposes—its ideological thrust—never more fully than when it takes part in this project. And when it pretends not to be taking part, it reveals a duplicity.9

The iconology of the female nude, authenticated through the female artist, strengthens the transmission of ideology taking part in the acculturation process. Essentially all of the artists whose works were discussed participated in this process regardless of time frame.

The pre-1969 art market and consequent publicity was less accessible to women. This contributed to the lack of recognition of more women who may have painted, printed or drawn the female nude during this time. Also in the later years of this period, abstract styles then reigning, discouraged figurative subject content of this nature. Post 1969 the recognition of women artists and their works was encouraged through feminist conscious raising. This aspect of the feminist movement seems to have strongly contributed to the autobiographical focus that in the end has supported a re-definition of female.
The artists presented within this paper relate personal ideology affected through individual style to define some aspect of female, thereby stretching connotative and denotative limits of the concept of female. In the greater definition of female each artist fulfills a private and sometimes intimate need of expression that is not clearly available or readable within the culture as a whole. The greater definition of femaleness is a very contemporary endeavor to which this study aspires to contribute.

Recommendations For Further Study

The art of women artists has been neglected by media and market for so many years that the field itself is wide open for review. It might be suggested, given the number of women artists, that until regionalism is acknowledged as an acceptable art form, the female artist will never be truly recognized. Fewer female artists, than male artists, relocate to specific art centers. Instead, they make art wherever they make their homes.

This paper limited the identification of artist and works by the perimeters of research and these might be expanded at some future date. The paper was constrained to the nude female torso, painted, drawn or printed by nationally recognized American women within a given time frame. For the sake of comparison, the work of male artists under the same constraints might be examined. Restricted subject matter, and that in a traditional vein, does not encourage
total analysis of the style of any given artist. There are other less traditional mediums, such as photography, which contribute to expanding the concept of art. Internationally and regionally, women artists need to be discovered. Every step in the neglected acknowledgment of the contributions of women artists is a culturally enriching process.
CHAPTER NOTES

1. R. Godfrey, The Figure In Recent American Painting, Exhibition catalogue, (unpaged).

2. Edward Lucie-Smith, Art In The Seventies, p.67.


5. Godfrey, (unpaged).

APPENDIX A

Dear Artist:

I am currently a graduate student in art at North Texas State University where I am working on a research project which deals with the autobiographical and biographical female nude done by American women between 1969 and 1983. The dissertation project will be limited to painting, drawing, and printmaking (1969 to 1983). I chose this topic because my own work deals with the nude in semi-abstract form. The artists involved in this study were identified through periodical literature from that time period. As an adjunct to the synthesis of my own visual interpretation and the critical comments of historians and reviewers, I would like to present personal comments by the artists on their specific works dealing with the nude.

An outline for responding to specific questions is enclosed. The format consists of two parts: Part A dealing with your specific works, and Part B seeking indirectly to better understand your answers by responding to comments by historians, critics, and other artists. The quotes in Part B do not represent my views. They were culled from preliminary research on the general topic. A stamped, self-addressed envelope is enclosed for return of the information.

Your personal response is very important to the successful completion of this research project. Let me thank you in advance for your time and effort.

Sincerely,

Florence R. McEwin
Assistant Professor, Art

Enclosures
PART A

I. Title of work, dealing with the female nude and approximate date.

II. Please comment on the work listed above. Was there a specific event that initiated the inclusion of the nude in your work?

PART B

III. Respond to the following remarks as briefly or elaborately as desired:

1. ...being female is at least as significant a variable as century of birth... (L. Nochlin. "American Women Artists of the 20th Century". STUDIO. May/June 1977.)

2. "A tit by itself loses its titness. If she's on her back the tit looks like a mountain..." (Tom Wesselman, quoted in ARTVOICES. "Wesselman's Fancy Footwork". Summer 1966.)
3. "...to put back into art all the painting that the Modernists took out by restoring the practice of pre-20th century painting—straightforward, unequivocal, and with a pervasive moral, even didactic tone." (Alfred Leslie quoted by Edward Lucie-Smith, Art in the 70s, 1980.)

4. "...artistic self-consciousness becomes a way of exploring a deeper consciousness of self." (Edward Lucie-Smith, Art in the 70s, 1980.)

IV. Works by other women you would like to see included. (1969-1983)
APPENDIX B

Through the Flower

A corporation dedicated to social change through art

Florence R. McEwin
Assistant Professor, Art
Western Wyoming College
P.O. Box 478
Rock Springs, WY 82901

Dear Professor McEwin:

I am a co-worker of Judy Chicago and handle research and correspondence such as your project questionnaire. That questionnaire is a big undertaking for the recipient.

None of Judy Chicago's work would be considered "female nude" from an art historical standpoint. I hope you included Alice Neel in your survey - but I hope you amended the questionnaire - listing all her female nudes would be a major task in itself, and question A-I would be unanswerable as presented! This is also true of Joan Semmel.

I am enclosing an interview with Judy which speaks to the quotations you included for comment. I marked the most pertinent section.

Thank you for undertaking this project on behalf of all the people who are interested in women's presentations of their own experiences and their world.

All best,

Mary Ross Taylor
Executive Director

[Signature]

Mary Ross Taylor
Executive Director

JUDY CHICAGO

September 22, 1983

MET/MAH
Inc.
Judy Chicago Describes Her Struggle as a Woman Artist

BY ROBERT A. COHN

Judy Chicago is the artist who created the "Dinner Party," an enormous 3D mosaic that tells the story of 1,074 women who have made significant contributions to history. Chicago's work has been controversial, but her dedication to exploring women's roles and experiences is evident in her art. 

In this interview, Chicago reflects on her personal journey and the challenges she faced as a woman artist. She discusses her upbringing, her education, and her decision to pursue art against the expectations of her family and community. Chicago also shares insights into her creative process and the inspiration behind her work. 

Chicago's comments highlight the struggles and triumphs of being a female artist in a male-dominated field and the importance of creating art that reflects the diverse experiences of women and all human beings. 

The interview begins with Chicago describing her childhood and the influence of her grandmother on her artistic journey. She shares her earliest memories of art and the moments that fueled her passion for creating. Chicago's perspective on her artistic evolution is grounded in her personal experiences and her commitment to exploring the history and contributions of women.

Throughout the interview, Chicago underscores the importance of representation and the impact of her work on the art world and the broader culture. She reflects on the significance of her "Dinner Party" and the ways in which it has challenged traditional narratives. Chicago's remarks also touch on the challenges faced by artists in general, particularly those working in underrepresented communities.

The interview concludes with Chicago offering advice to aspiring artists and reflecting on the role of art in shaping society. Her words serve as a testament to the power of art to inspire and challenge, and to the importance of continuing to explore and express diverse perspectives.
Dear My McEwan

Thank you for your interest.

I'm unable at the moment to take the time to answer your question about our 3 show coming up in Oct.

Having reviewed some of the slides, I'm sending you a poster of 11 shows (in alternating Space) I had in April.

Enclosed a statement outlining my work.

Good luck on your project,

Sincerely,

Nancy Spero
Statement

Nancy Spero

From 1951 until 1965 I worked in oils on canvas. This group of existential works included lovers, prostitutes, mythological great mothers, etc.

From 1966 on I have worked exclusively on paper. 1966 to 1970: I made a series of over 100 war paintings. The paintings have messages, inscriptions, graffiti, i.e., S.E.A.R.C.H. AND D.E.S.T.R.O.Y., L.O.V.E. TO H.A.N.O.I., etc. Victims are thrown from planes, the helicopter consumes its victims. "The Bomb", a human torso with obscene phallic heads spitting blood or fire - technological war.

The "Codex Artaud", 1971-72, have a cinematic quality - through extension (2 feet high and from 8 to 15 feet in length) - a fragmented and staccato positioning of the images and quotations. One has to change location, move in or distance oneself according to the scale of the images to follow the action, for the rhythm of the whole seems discordant and incomplete, relative to fractured time.

"Torture in Chile", 1974, documents the torture of women political prisoners.

From this work on I decided to represent "man" only through images of women.

"Torture of Women", 1976, extends in a continuous linear band, 20 inches high by 125 feet in length and contains case histories of women political prisoners from Latin America, Turkey, Iran, etc. (information from Amnesty International, etc.) combined with major references to mythological examples of the repression of women. The text is hand-printed with wood type alphabets and collaged bulletin type. Figures are collaged in to document and transcend the horror of immediate external realities.

"Notes in Time on Women II - Women: Appraisals, Dance and Active Histories", 1979, is 20 inches high by 225 feet in length. A range of variously scaled, hand-printed and collaged painted images weave through and interact with the 96 quotations and references, assembled from many cultures up to the present, defining aspects of existence with woman as the protagonist, an independent

NANCY SPERO
and positive force in a male controlled world.

"The First Language", 1981, 20 inches high by 190 feet long, moves from war and rape to women's power, sexuality, grace and strength. There is no text in this piece since gesture and movement are the earliest forms of human communication.

NYC 1982

NANCY SPERO
NANCY SPERO

TO THE MUS
VAGINAS HAIR

GALLERY IN A HOT SOIL THE COTTON FABRIC
New York, NY 10016
Telephone: (212) 941-0200

April 14 to June 1

356
PART A

I. Title of work, dealing with the female nude and approximate date.

A series of drawings all dealing with the female nude. (late 20). The title of the show was "Front Line," a new trend in art. "93. The title was inspired by the idea of giving the woman a new role."

II. Please comment on the work listed above. Was there a specific event that initiated the inclusion of the nude in your work?

The inclusion of the nude as a heroine, not a victim, not a woman, but a transformable being, was the main influence. I took the idea from the work of female artists, who use the nude as a symbol of their collection, their own women, and their own independence in their work.

PART B

III. Respond to the following remarks as briefly or elaborately as desired:

1. "Being female is at least as significant a variable as century of birth... L. Nochlin, "American Women Artists of the 20th Century". Studio. May/June 1977.)

I agree.

2. "A tit by itself loses its fitness. If she's on her back the tit looks like a mountain..." (Tom Messmer, quoted in ArtVoices. "Female Artists' Fancy Footwork". Summer 1996.)

A loving attention getting remark.

JANET CULBERTSON
3. "...to put back into art all the painting that the Modernists took out by restoring the practice of pre-20th century painting—straightforward, unequivocal, and with a pervasive moral, even didactic tone." (Alfred Leslie quoted by Edward Lucie-Smith, ART IN THE 70s. 1980.)

This became the philosophy of some artists—and in my case the Myth Series was a more, even didactic story.

5. "...artists' self-consciousness became a way of exploring a deeper self image of self." (Edward Lucie-Smith, ART IN THE 70s. 1980.)

I would have to think about this...
Janet Culbertson's series of twenty-two recent ink and charcoal drawings entitled "Women A New Myth" depicts various stages of women's search for identity. The universal and eternal mythic journey is divided into three parts: Departure, Transformation, and Initiation.

Although the drawings were conceived as a series and the images are closely related, materially and technically, the exhibit is not arranged in sequence, each drawing can be viewed independently or as a whole. The fusion of the perceptual and the conceptual, the universal and the personal, is an underlying theme of the exhibition. The drawings reflect the artist's search for a new mythological framework for women's self-expression.

In many of the drawings, the traveler is a tiny figure in vast cosmic landscapes. For example, in "Threshold" a figure is depicted as a rock, supporting the weight of another enormous boulder. In "Inbound," a mysterious nocturnal vision, she hangs onto a rope—a minute creature suspended in space. However, in "Beginning," one of the last drawings in the series, the hero is a monumental kneeling figure whose body is covered with a curious pebbled texture, thus underscoring her new strength and her integration with the physical environment. Dramatic contrasts of light and dark areas and the rock-like sprayed surface quality are used expressionistically throughout the work.
Janet Culbertson (in S.F.) works in charcoal and ink on paper, and creates infinite landscapes against which she pits a tiny heroine. The story of her struggles through mythical lands and escapes is presented in no linear sequence of drawings. Each piece works alone, though there is a certain illustrative sense to some which only feels complete as part of a series. Two of the most exciting drawings are "The Dragon Confronted" and "The Dragon Tamed." Here, our heroine confronts the "monsters" of herself, her sexuality, and ultimately gains a sense of wholeness and satisfaction. Denney's technique is highly disciplined in its complexity of shadow, form, and detail. From a distance, the paper seems actually pierced or stippled—an alarming effect for so sensuous a style. Closer inspection increases the depth of shadowy illusion and one is drawn inevitably into the realm of the artist; for me, an ultimately satisfying journey.

CHRIS CRR

PLEXUS FEB. 1976
A woman traveller, longing for resonance, expression, and wholeness, chooses a path, a path traditionally tread by the male-hero. The path, when chosen, becomes a journey and the journey becomes a myth. And that myth signifies the eternal struggle for identity and selfhood.

Janet Culbertson the artist, chooses such a path. Her series of 24 drawings in ink and charcoal explore the hero-path with a woman-heart. The drawings reveal the often terrifying, awesome journey to regain roots by pursuing the threads of the real and the unreal. A myth is created by the unraveling of the artist's dreams, dramas, and haunting visions, from her inner landscape.

Having no woman's myth as a guide, Culbertson makes use of Joseph Campbell's research. The myth, in Campbell's *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, is always the same: From birth, whether an infant or now, born by successive self-forgotten what he has known whether it be inheritance or learning. He does not discover the call, but rather receives it from a mysterious voice, but without the knowledge of his being. As her heart's most wondered, the voice unknown, is the voice of the myth which she will follow to the limit of her strength. To her, it is a challenge to the world of a journey. For her, it is an experience.

What may grow out of this call? Realization, renewed relationships, and a new being.

Culbertson draws an inner map of this journey, the interior expressed by a subtle spaciousness. The background presses toward the limit of their behind and the foreground seems sucked back by a force behind the surface. Gravity has become an absence among presence. The inside and the outside exchange places as a new, two-region place begins. In this place, the emptiness of her body is transformed into a space of her body.

The surface of the drawings is burnished volcanic rock which upon closer examination appears made up of holes. Holes are everywhere as a recurring imagery. Tiny, small, and sometimes momentous images of a hole in the surface, a crack on the surface, and sometimes a hole with a hole in it. The surface is found to be a place of new space and new place.

Culbertson has found a secret opening through the myth of myth. What pours out is a vital struggle. A beautiful struggle to become spontaneously, creatively, intuitively, and that is timeless. And for myths may well serve as a signal for future travellers.

Judith Carter
PART A

MARY BETH EDELSON

1. Title of work, dealing with the female nude and approximate date.

"From Within" from "Women's Wear" Series

I do not think of myself as dealing with the female nude - because that term is "remote from me - it suggests the other." I am or was instead dealing with my own body - my naked body.

II. Please comment on the work listed above. Was there a specific event that initiated the inclusion of the nude in your work?

I feel that, while the body is red and the face is red, I have not yet learned how to paint. I am trying to paint a woman who, in the nude, is red. I am trying to paint a woman who is red. I am trying to paint a woman who is red, but I am not yet dealing with a woman who is red and naked. I am trying to paint a woman who is red and naked. I am trying to paint a woman who is red and naked, but I am not yet dealing with a woman who is red and naked.

III. Additional remarks as briefly or elaborately as desired:

1. "The art of the nude is at least as significant a variable as century of birth..." (S. Kochlin, "American Women Artists of the 20th Century" STUDIO. May/June 1977.)

2. "A picture of a woman the art of the nude is at least as significant a variable as century of birth..." (S. Kochlin, "American Women Artists of the 20th Century" STUDIO. May/June 1977.)

3. "A picture of a woman the art of the nude is at least as significant a variable as century of birth..." (S. Kochlin, "American Women Artists of the 20th Century" STUDIO. May/June 1977.)

4. "A picture of a woman the art of the nude is at least as significant a variable as century of birth..." (S. Kochlin, "American Women Artists of the 20th Century" STUDIO. May/June 1977.)

MARY BETH EDELSON
3. "...to put back into art all the painting that the Modernists took out by restoring the practice of pre-20th century painting—straightforward, unequivocal, and with a pervasive moral, even didactic tone." (Alfred Leslie quoted by Edward Lucie-Smith, ART IN THE 70s. 1980.)

4. "...artistic self-consciousness becomes a way of exploring a deeper consciousness of self." (Edward Lucie-Smith, ART IN THE 70s. 1980.)

IV. Works by other women you would like to see included. (1969-1983)

MARY BETH EDELSON
MARY BETH EDELSON
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

BOOKS


**PERIODICALS**

**ART AND ARTISTS**


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NAEA


STUDIO


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LILLIAN MATHILDE GENTH

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SAN FRANCISCO EXAMINER


BEATRICE ROMAINE GODDARD GROOKS

BOOKS


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Women Artists In Washington Collections, Withers, Josephine, Delaware, University of Maryland, 1979, 1/18-2/25.

ISOBEL BISHOP

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**STUDIO**

WOMEN'S SPHERE


LOUISE NEVELSON

BOOKS


PERIODICALS

ART INTERNATIONAL


ARTNEWS

LOUISE BOURGEOISE

BOOKS


EXHIBITION CATALOGUES


PERIODICALS

*ART FORUM*


*ART IN AMERICA*


*ART JOURNAL*


*ARTNEWS*


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ART WEEK


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NEW YORKER


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VILLAGE VOICE


ALICE NEEL

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