Aesthetics and Sexual Politics

Painterly and Critical Pleasures

Mira Schor

In the beginning of the 1970s, you had a wonderful opportunity to participate in the Feminist Art Program at CalArts, the first program of this kind in history. The program, directed by Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro, was crucial for both challenging the patriarchal system in art and art education, and building the importance of women artists. How was your experience at CalArts, and how did it influence your artistic and theoretical work?

I had a dual experience at CalArts, and both aspects of it are equally important and deeply formative. My encounter with feminism was unique and it turned out to be a life-long commitment. However, my experience in the Feminist Art Program in Fresno was also a difficult one and I left the Program at the end of my first year. While I want to stress that I see it as a kind of "leadership training program" of political awareness that I was privileged to have participated in, there were moments when the feminist agenda, or rather, the curriculum that my female colleagues and I had to go through, was psychologically so intense that we felt more traumatized than empowered. Like any kind of new group political or social situation, even the consciousness raising as practiced by our teachers was exciting, but also dangerously tense and even manipulative. Even though most of the things we did were extremely important for grounding our feminist subjectivity, at the time I considered some of them unnecessary, and certainly very upsetting, because they involved some thought-control aspects as well.

Part of the problem might have been caused by our teachers who were both very enthusiastic, but also relatively inexperienced in dealing with certain kinds of intense psychological situations that their pedagogic experiment was likely to create. For instance, during our consciousness raising sessions – and I should say that I

think it is a very valuable and important process for any subjugated subject – we had to speak about issues such as our relationship to our mother, our father, or our own body. We all had very different social and class backgrounds, and listening to myself and to other women significantly altered my understanding of women as the "other" – and other not only to men but also to themselves. Yet, as an example of the potentially traumatizing aspect of the experience, one day, Judy Chicago decided that to get a different perspective to our mothers we should get around in a circle, and start saying "Mommy, mommy!" My father had died when I was eleven, and had never been apart from my mother before for such an extensive period of time, and I was very homesick. Just saying "mommy" aloud made me very emotional, but I joined the group and did what we were told to do. But, when Judy told us to imagine our mother's funeral, I started weeping, and another girl simply flipped out. Our art teachers wanted us to become strong women, but they were not licensed therapists to perform such psychological experiments on their students!

As I said before, while feminism has become a crucial part of my life, a lot of Feminist Program students were so traumatized by this domination that they have never been able to find a path to incorporate feminism into their lives, no matter what they do in these days (several are practicing artists and others are professional women). Only a few have grown within feminism and kept up with changes within it. And, despite my public association with feminism, I still find it hard to expand from a loose, more or less familial network of women and become part of some larger political machine of the women's movement.

It is interesting that while speaking about the beginnings of women's art movement in the States, you are pointing out another form of women's psychological subordination, this time among women themselves. It makes me think how the relatively recent feminist art history can be uncritically glorified because Chicago's and Schapiro's program is usually considered as a key event in constituting women's art movement in the States but its own bias remains unchallenged. Just look at books like The Power of Feminist Art *(1995), edited by Norma Broude and Mary Garrard, which is a wonderful source of information about the feminist art movement in California, but it also puts the legacy of CalArts on a pedestal.*

You are right to comment on an absurd discrepancy between empowerment and domination, and, as you can see, it still bothers me. It is incredibly difficult to be a leader of any movement or philosophy that is based on critiquing an existing power mechanism, because you might very likely start using the very mechanisms yourself. But without leader figures, where would feminism and other critical movements be? It is a paradox that will always be here, but we have to learn how to resist the seduction of power. As to the book you mentioned, it focuses on California, which obviously makes it very particular. For various reasons, there is much less written

about the feminist art movement that started in New York, and it is true that East Coast history was very different from the West Coast history. However, there are a lot of other books written from other geographical or theoretical points of view than *The Power of Feminist Art,* and even though this is a huge and eye-catching volume that has had great distribution, it doesn't have to be suspected of any hegemony. Besides, the history of CalArts is usually warped to favor the "post-studio" influence of John Baldessari and erase the Feminist Art Program, so it is necessary to reemphasize it.

Although one can hardly make a strict distinction between art, psychology and politics in the case of the Feminist Art Program, I still wonder what were you there taught as artists?

We did some of the earliest work studying women artists of the past, we did a lot of work (in part, through consciousness-raising) on changing what could be appropriate subject matter and form (including the use of new, non-high art materials and performance art) for visual art. I have to admit that despite the amazing amount of energy and inspiration I received in the program, I didn't think the artistic level was very high. Yet, when I entered the program, I already knew a number of important women artists working in New York, including Pat Steir and Yvonne Jacquette, and my mother, Resia Schor, was a working artist as well, but a lot of the other students had no experience at all with women's art, or even art in general. This easily lead to a disturbingly mythifying notion that what Judy and Miriam were teaching us had no precedent or comparison in the art world when maybe the other students may have had no other framework for comparison. Any myth can be exploited, and I'm worried that that was happening in some cases in the Feminist Art Program as well.

However, the reason I left after one year was more complex. I wanted to experience other aspects of the school, which was one of the most extraordinary and experimental art education institutions in the States at that time. The Fluxus movement and the conceptual art movement with their anti-object and anti-market orientation, were very strong at CalArts. People like Allan Kaprow, Emmett Williams, Alison Knowles, Simone Forti, and John Baldessari taught there, as well as the sculptor Stephan Von Huene who I worked with after I left the Program. One didn't necessarily have to work with each one: they gave a "flavor" to the entire institution, and their conceptual and yet playful and somehow whimsical attitude towards art made a great impact on my work as well.

The first generation of feminist artists was criticized for essentialism, and Judy Chicago's theory of the central-core imagery, which was promoted at CalArts, was certainly one of the most exemplary cases of codifying a female aesthetics. Even though the character of your current work is far more complex than a somehow

reductive concept of the 1970s "vaginal art", it still carries some of its marks. How would you reflect the controversy around essentialism from your perspective today, and does anything like a feminine aesthetics exist?

Let me start with a big loop. My father, Ilya Schor, was a Polish artist who came to the U.S.A. during the World War II as a refugee from Hitler. The only recording that I have of his voice comes from an American radio program in Yiddish, which considered the question, 'Is there a Jewish art?'. Since I don't speak Yiddish, I didn't understand exactly what my father was saying. The only thing I did understand was my father's answer to this very question. He said that Jewish art is characterized by '*eine melodie*', a melody, and I believe that there is something in art done by women, preferably consciously but maybe often also unconsciously, that is a reflection of their experience in this world, and this experience cannot be shared by men. I know that this is a point in which I can get into trouble over the question of essentialism, but I think this experience is deeply embodied, but also deeply socialized.

However, these days it is hard to distinguish the work you see on the premise of gender, perhaps precisely because one of the things that were historically so significant about the feminist art that was done in the 1970s was that it opened the door to content, techniques, and materials that were not allowed into fine art during the high period of modernism - mostly non- or low-art means associated with domesticity, or corporeality. Once the new meanings and forms that feminism inaugurated were "out", then everybody was given permission to explore and use that language - including men. Both heterosexual and gay male artists started to work with this language, and since the field has expanded across genders and sexualities, to speak about "feminine" or "women's" aesthetics or subject matters could be very misleading. But the information went both ways. Back then, women artists, including myself, were intrigued by the challenging strategies of conceptual and body/performance artists, and many of these were men - Lawrence Weiner, Vito Acconci, and others; this makes the situation around the strategies of feminist art - political and body engagement, performativity, etc. - even more complicated. However, feminist art and "feminine" aesthetics are not necessarily the same thing, and they should not be mixed up. And yet, even though I would say it is hard to distinguish between the work by women and men, sometimes I am struck by characteristics of certain women artists' work that speaks so specifically about women's lives and sensibilities. The explanation for this is certainly both culturally obvious and yet beyond words.

As to the question of essentialism, I am quite sick of it after all these years, but it continues to haunt me - or dog me! I am convinced that this question is much more complex than most of its critics would want to admit. First, feminist artists in the 1970s never thought of themselves as being "essentialist", because this term was not prevalent within the feminist context in the U.S.A. at the time. Essentialism as

a term, and a condemnatory label, was applied to us by the next generation. It is a historical interpretation. Also, the practice of feminist art was very complex and diverse in the 1970s. Women artists painted or sculpted central-core images, but they also explored language, or worked in video and performance. Thus to label the whole period, or movement, with essentialism is incredibly flattening and reductive. For us, our bodies were totally interrelated with a social construction of gender (even though the very term "gender" wasn't used much back then either), and what we aimed for was social change, not a celebration of women's biological "destiny", so to speak. We considered the social to be strongly embodied, and vice versa, the body being socially constructed. Performance art was very important for many women artists in this country, and I think this was one of the most significant elements that marked the first wave of American feminist art.

I am not defending everything that was done during the first decade of the feminist art movement in this country. Like in any period and in any artistic tendency, some of it was powerful, and some of it was simply bad. But "bad" feminist art wasn't bad because it used a bit more "essentialist" language. As to my own work, the fact that I am often seen as an essentialist is also connected to my involvement in painting practice, because many feminist artists and critics who came a bit later see painting as a less challenging, conformist, and market-oriented medium. In their strong critique of pleasure, the 1980s feminists often attacked painting as a pleasure-based visual practice that escapes political and social issues. Of course, painting deals with, among many other things, form, color and gesture, and is more marketable than, let's say, conceptual art. Moreover, the adoration of male painters and the prices of their works have been truly ridiculous in the U.S.A. And yet, to despise or degrade painting as a site for feminist practice is a dogma as well.

You said that the women's art movement influenced male artists. Yet most art historians or art critics make us believe that it is almost exclusively men from whose art other artists' work derive. It is men, not women, whose work is taken as a referential point in history. In one of your essays, you called this a historical patrilineage...

I wrote an essay entitled "Patrilineage" for *Art Journal* back in 1991, which pointed to gendered flaws in art history and critical methodologies, but reading contemporary art criticism and history, I don't think that this male-oriented reading of our past and present has improved much. I updated the essay once already, in 1994, for republication in an anthology called *New Feminist Criticism: Art/Identity/Action.* Unfortunately, I could probably write still another update with a futuristic note "To be continued...".

In 1996, you participated in a highly controversial show Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago's Dinner Party in Feminist Art History *that was curated by Amelia Jones and*

presented at the Armand Hammer Museum in Los Angeles. The show was accused of being pornographic and essentialist, of heroizing Chicago, and many other "bad" things. However, what is much more interesting to me than discussing these accusations is the relationship between sexuality and politics that was incorporated into the title of the show. After I saw more of your pieces today I realized that it is this alliance that plays a crucial role in your work. How do sexuality and politics come together?

For me this relationship is totally natural. One of the positive things that came out of the philosophy of the last twenty years is an analysis of culture as having an ideological dimension. Thus according to this concept, and I deeply believe in it, everything is political. The most frequently quoted thought of the Women's Liberation Movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s was 'The Personal is the Political'. The "neutrality" of art and art history before the 1970s, when it was radically called into question for the first time, was strongly political because even terms such as "universal", "timeless", or "neutral" are ideological.

Art and art history have always had sexual politics. Just look at the most obvious example of the tremendous amount of female nudes in Western art. The only difference is that it was not perceived or interpreted as such. Instead, all sorts of apolitical, asexual, genderless, and thus also ahistorical models were applied to culture. Not only has art always dealt with sexual politics but it also has had a strong sexualized aspect, which is particularly important for painting. Historically, only one sex was privileged to experience and enact the sexualized aspect of painting, but it shouldn't mean that this dimension has to be destroyed, just problematized and redeployed. The sexual and other bodily energies that painting provokes so strongly should also be explored and used by women painters. I simply see no way how to strictly separate a gendered agenda from sexuality. We have to work with both social construction and corporeality.

The exhibition Sexual Politics *included only women artists. On the one hand, "women-only" shows are often criticized for a separatism that reinforces the dominance of gender dichotomy. On the other hand, feminist artists included in mostly male shows risk once again being incorporated into the masculine ideology. Is the category "woman" an efficient and meaningful premise for grouping art works in a museum or a gallery, and how do you as an artist feel about it?*

I don't mind being included in all-women shows. My work has often been displayed in such a context, and even though it can be problematic, I usually tend to accept this because it reflects both my personal and my professional history. When *The Power of Feminist Art* came out, the editor of *Ms.* magazine asked me to consider why there wasn't a museum exhibition that would show an equally extensive and

diverse amount of work by feminist artists. She suggested that I, as an author of one of the essays in the book, could write a piece that would address this issue. And I did in a piece called "Waiting for the Big Show" where I tried to imagine what this hypothetical exhibition would be like, what problems it would examine and if it could be done at all.

One of the topics I dealt with was whether men should be involved in such a survey exhibition, which also led me to consider the phenomenon of feminist art made by men. For me, however, the trouble with including men in a feminist art show is that, traditionally, the male presence makes women either peripheral once again, or weakens the political agenda of feminism as a movement of women's liberation, or, simply, reduces the importance of women's legacy and women's linkages in art history. Yet a good feminist art show could be done both ways – with or without men, but the curator would have to be very aware of the risk of eliminating the feminist content. Moreover, not every all-women show is necessarily feminist.

You asked if the category "woman" is enough to hold together a show? No, as a selection criterion it is as insufficient and illegitimate as the category "man". As anywhere else, there is good and bad art among women, or feminist artists, and so too in their shows.

In your essay 'Backlash and Appropriation' published in the book The Power of Feminist Art, *you wrote that 'one of the major lessons of the feminist revision of the discipline of art history is the degree to which what had been put forth as an objective canon is in reality subjective and personal, riven with the prejudices and idiosyncrasies of individual art historians. For any art writer, developments in art history are crystallized in particular art works and events.' Then, how can art history be written with the notion that it will always be only a fragmentary or a "lacking" story? And, moreover, how is art by women and other marginalized groups to be represented in this new art history without aspiring to becoming new masters and geniuses?*

The situation is very difficult because there has by now been established a sort of "secondary" canon of marginalized groups, including women, in art history, and I believe that this canon, coming out of poststructuralism, feminism, or even postcolonial studies, often turns to be as inflexible as the "first" canon. But instead of positioning the periphery into the existing discourse, and claiming their "mastership", our aim should be to dismantle this very discourse of mastery, shouldn't it? That was one initial goal of the feminist critique. Yet, knowledge of the traditional canon is the foundation of any challenging and constructive critique. We have to know well enough what we criticize before accepting criticism as the major tool of our work. Even though it might sound like a truism, using secondary sources and critical studies often forestalls knowing the primary sources and the

discourses that are targets of such criticism in this country. Also the art world is increasingly involved with emulating the celebrity structure of the broader cultural world, including popular mass media entertainment, and this only further encourages the notion of the "great artist," whether it is a woman or a man. Writing the history of art is a discursive practice, and any change of perspective, or any attempt to introduce new "subjects" into it, calls for a new discourse. If we accept this, we also have to accept that the historical narrative will never be completed.

From 1986 to 1996, you and Susan Bee published a magazine called M/E/A/N/I/N/G *that, as you put it, was supposed to bridge the gap between the language of critical theory and the art object. We seem to agree that art can hardly be seen solely in the context of pure aesthetics, located outside of discursive practices. You just claimed that theories can be very self-centered, but without them many cultural stereotypes would remain compact and unquestioned. What is, in your opinion, the most effective bridge between theory, criticism, and art?*

Many artists read, write and do their art work at the same time. Also it doesn't have to be only theory that theorizes art and contains a discourse – art is not "dumb", it produces by itself an amazing amount of ideas and discourses, and even though in most cases they are not explicitly verbally or textually pronounced, they are there. Through *M/E/A/N/I/N/G*, we wanted to explore this two-folded process of theorizing art. We wanted to be very critical, but not for criticism's own sake. Thus our contributors were visual artists, poets as well as art critics and art historians, and it should be noted that this second group of contributors was given a chance to publish in our magazine what they couldn't publish elsewhere.

When *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* started, we didn't have enough money to print pictures. The primacy of textuality of a visual art magazine is rather ironic, but this condition led to a significant emphasis on description of art works in the text. Thus the meaning, theory, or criticism emerged from "reading" the visuality, and through this process of coding and decoding allowed language and the visual to come together. As an editor, I found artists writing about art being more eclectic in their interests and references, since most of them were autodidacts in this discipline, their attitude seemed to be less dogmatic and more flexible than the attitude of many renowned scholars. Their openness and absence of academic "burden" let them both make unexpected connections and be more sensually oriented. They could theorize without forgetting the experience of seeing, or touching, or smelling art – this sensual dimension is often lacking in the views of professionals in art history and theory. The most effective bridge between theory and art is hard to articulate strictly, but I believe it's related to trying to see and to think art every time anew. It's not about an innocent eye or mind; rather, it's about a combination of both sensual and intellectual experience that gives birth to criticality.

This is a very pragmatic question, but how did you fund the magazine?

We started the magazine by supporting it ourselves. Each of us, Susan and I, put $500 into the first issue, and we did all the work: calling for papers, typing, graphic layout, etc. We were lucky because the first issue sold fairly well – mostly through subscriptions, and we made some of our money back. The next two issues were done in the same way. We did not publish any advertising. Later on, when the magazine started to have some impact on the artistic scene, we got grants from the New York State Council on the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts. Yet, during all the ten years when *M/E/A/N/I/N/G* was published, we kept the budget very low. We chose these circumstances to keep our independence and personal touch with artists and writers who worked with us, even though, for instance, we could have found a university press that would have taken over a lot of the paper work and distribution. A real sense of community was absolutely crucial for us, and we didn't want to lose it.

Even though you said that it is hard for you to become part of a huge machine of organized feminism, your work has reached a lot of people through M/E/A/N/I/N/G or otherwise. Criticality is in the center of all your activities, and you apply it to any kind of authority exercise, including feminism itself. Many times you convincingly pointed out that while attempting to dismantle male universalism, feminism often runs a risk of ending up in the trap of the same, 'replacing one system of exclusion with another.' I would add that as most new critical theories, feminism also runs another risk – of being appropriated by the mainstream. Is it possible to be rebellious and visible, or acknowledged, at the same time? In other words, can our work ever escape academicization, or institutionalization that usually disparages its critical edge?

Any person who cannot help him/herself from critiquing power also cannot prevent him/herself from wishing to get some recognition. That's not only about the impossibility of completely escaping ideology, that's also about human nature. Whether we like it or not, to be critical in one's time and also to receive some sort of acknowledgement always requires a negotiation – with ourselves as well as with institutions that are in power. However, what I find as dangerous as being swallowed by the mainstream, is the arrogation of intellectual ownership of ideas by certain influential institutions that think of themselves as critical.

For instance *October* may be a bastion of poststructuralist and Marxist criticism, but it has become a power force as well. People connected to this magazine would certainly wish to deny that they have any power or are involved with deploying power in the art world. If most of *October's* contributors are recruited from circles that started to put cultural stereotypes and power mechanisms into question in the

1970s and 1980s, how do they deal with the fact that they gradually proposed themselves as owners of the most powerful intellectual "truth" and also that they exercised considerable influence on major mainstream art institutions? It is a signal problem of the 1968 generation. It's the same as people who lose weight but still think they are fat – their self-image is an illusion, but for them it will always be reality! The question of who owns intellectual "truth" and thus dictates rules to the rest remains for me one of the most important questions of any critical discourse.

The reconsideration of the legacy of Clement Greenberg, who promoted formalism and for whom painting was, among other things, also as an expression of male eroticism, became one of the key tasks for feminist artists, historians, and critics. However, it should also be noted that not only feminists but also many scholars connected to postmodernism and poststructuralism disowned, to a large extent, painting in the name of photography, video, or installation art. You seem to be one of a few feminist writers for whom the visual pleasure in painting is not necessarily in contradiction with undermining the patriarchal values in art. Could you explain it?

Visuality is a much bigger phenomenon than the feminist critique of visual pleasure suggests – here I mainly refer to Laura Mulvey's legacy. As a feminist, I am keen on analyzing and dismantling all the stereotypes of visual representation of the female body in history, which, undoubtedly, is closely linked to subjugation to women in society. However, even feminists occasionally admit that women do experience some pleasures in the traditional specular economy! They may not appreciate being exploited and denied subjectivity, but they do enjoy sexuality and beauty.

As a painter, I don't care so much whether Courbet was expressing his – male – sexuality in his work: my own sexuality can interact with his vision. There is great energy in Courbet, and his paintings are fantastic. I appreciate what his paint strokes say about sexuality in general and especially about painting as a language. As a painter, I can get a lot of inspiration, material and energy from many male artists' work, and, metaphorically speaking, genetically alter it back into my artistic pleasure. What I am trying to do is to "captivate" you into looking at my paintings because of the way they are painted so that you can then be permeated by the pleasure I am talking about. I am very aware that by saying this I am indirectly asking to be marked not only as an essentialist, but as a formalist as well – the critique of painting seems to link the two. However, I believe that a physical or psychosomatic sensation that a painting transmits through its very facticity can be as liberating as a work of art using explicitly feminist slogans. What's at stake is to enable women to see differently, to gain their own gaze (as supposed to being gazed at), to reach a visual and even sexual pleasure from pure looking, and not only to follow didactic manuals.

Abstract painting has not been an area of feminist intervention. It seems that to explore non-representational painting in order to reclaim female authorship for abstraction is much more difficult than for "issue-based" art. You said just now that looking enables women to reach pleasure, but it does not necessarily arouse criticality. If abstract painting is inherently connected to pure visuality, how can it constitute a feminist critical practice?

Unfortunately abstract painting has been disqualified by many feminists because feminism started as a political movement which favoured the critical analysis of iconography for its immediate political usefulness. Feminists who are abstract painters still complain that they are rarely included in major feminist art surveys, which shows that not much has changed about this disqualification. This phenomenon is partially related to the narrative structures that feminist writers need to articulate their arguments against patriarchal systems as it is much easier and appropriate to use "issue-based" art that allows for clear description and iconographic analysis than to use abstraction for the same purpose. Also abstraction leads one back to the essentialist problem through the Greenbergian legacy of essentialist ideas about the purity of disciplines, such as painting, and also through the sense of physical embodiment abstraction can suggest – through formal devices such as pouring, for example. Although no one seems to mind as much the spermatic interpretation of Pollock's drips! I find this very problematic especially because such writing and interpretation usually deploys traditional narratives instead of calling them into question. What also could have helped to maintain the polarization between abstraction and feminism were some important early women abstract painters, such as Helen Frankenthaler, who were relentlessly uninterested in being in any way connected to feminism.

I think I begin to understand what do you mean when you speak about visual pleasure entering into feminist consciousness. Your last comment also reminds me of a wonderful retrospective of Lee Krasner I recently saw in Los Angeles County Museum. Her refusal to fully adopt the dominant, and largely masculine language of Abstract Expressionism led her to remarkable experiments with collage and recycling her own work. Even though the character of these experiments might seem very formal and abstract, their meaning is much more complex – it reflects both dramatic events in Krasner's own life, corporeality, mythology… In a way, some of her work anticipated postmodern semantic layering and multiplicity, and, unlike Frankenthaler, she sympathized with feminism. Commenting on her relationship with Jackson Pollock, she once angrily said that it is outrageous that people have easily appropriated the cliché that she is overshadowed by her husband, and don't question it any more. To see her abstract work in that retrospective was truly revealing for me not only from a visual, but also from a feminist perspective.

Abstraction and feminism are not as contradictory as it might first seem. Pleasure in painting, as I understand it, has nothing to do with beauty; it is a thrilling relationship between the visual and the conceptual that allows to see and to understand the world anew.

With a recent revival of conservatism in this country, feminism has become again a dirty word for many people, or, as you put it, 'the ism that dare not speak its name'. Many young women artists do not associate themselves with feminism, even though their work challenges stereotypes related to patriarchal culture and society. The number of works by women artists in the collections of American museums is still very small, their market prices are far lower than the prices of male artists' work, and many other aspects of the dominant art apparatus give a clear sign that women are still discriminated. Isn't that rather ironic?

It's tragic and frustrating. On the other hand, you have some six thousand years of repression against about one hundred and fifty years of development towards women having agency and subjectivity. We still live in a patriarchal society, we are still trained to be part of the system, and therefore we still pay a terrible price. Women have made enormous progress, especially in the last thirty years, but self-censorship that allows for recuperation continues to exist. The younger generation of women artists in the U.S.A. today is in a strange position. They have gained a lot from earlier women's movements, but they are also part of increasing professionalization of the field – they have skills and confidence that an earlier generation maybe didn't have. This combination makes them able to be "inside" in a relatively smooth way, and yet paradoxically their sense of entitlement reduces their critical potential and political consciousness.

If feminism is a critique of the center, then to be in the center naturally diminishes the meaning of feminism. For a young woman, distancing herself from feminism is a good career move, in part because it is a way of saying to the establishment, whether it is a public museum or a private art dealer, 'Don't worry, I won't question your power'. Recently, I saw a show of a young woman artist who claimed in her artist's statement, 'My work presents an apolitical world'. But there is no such a thing as an apolitical world – it's an oxymoron! For me, such a proclamation promises that the artist will be a good girl, maintaining the status quo. I think such women feel they are in control of the situation, because of their sense that so much has changed for the better that there is real equality of opportunity. Unfortunately, what most of young women artists don't realize is that there is still plenty of gender bias in this society, and however much I don't like numbers, the statistics speak clearly.

I don't want to adopt an annoyingly motherly "you'll see" role, but I stick with what I wrote in 'The *ism* that Dare Not Speak Its Name' that 'embracing the non-

feminist center also carries risk for the woman artist: that the new post-gendered universal of the center turns out to be the (male) universal of the past in which only feminist specificity can spare a woman artist from being subsumed by a male-oriented art history.' It would be a terrible mistake to lose what we have gained through so much struggle. Things are much better than they were in the 1960s, at least in this country, but we still have a long way to go.

Mira Schor is a painter and writer, she teaches in the MFA Program of the Fine Arts Department at Parsons The New School for Design and in the SVA in the MFA in Art Criticism Program. She was a participant in the Womanhouse project of the Feminist Art Program at CalArts in 1972, and she received her MFA from CalArts in 1973. Between 1986 and 1996, she and Susan Bee were co-publishers and co-editors of *M/E/A/N/I/N/G*, a journal of contemporary art, which was an important tribune for a large number of feminist writers and critics. Schor wrote many texts on feminism and art. She is the author of a book of collected essays entitled *Wet: On Painting, Feminism, and Art Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), and co-editor of *M/E/A/N/I/N/G: An Anthology of Artists' Writings, Theory, and Criticism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000). Recently, she also contributed to the exhibition catalogue *Painted Faces: Mary Cassat, Alice Neel, Karen Kilimnik* (Philadephia: Moore College of Art and Design, 2002). She is currently working on a new collection of her writings and is editing *The Extreme of the Middle*, a collection of the writings of the abstract expressionist painter Jack Tworkov. As an artist, Schor exhibited her works in many one-woman and group exhibitions all over the United States. She is the recipient of a 1985 NEA grant in painting, a 1992 Guggenheim Fellowship in painting, and a 1997 Pollock-Krasner Foundation grant. She is also the recipient of the 1999 College Art Association's Frank Jewett Mather Award in Art Criticism.