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# MONTANA WOMEN'S RESOURCE

VOL.3 NO.4

## WOMEN AND THE ARTS: A FEMINIST REAPPRAISAL

"The art world has traditionally ignored the issues of sex, class, and race, at most acknowledging them as background or context. Moreover, it originally assumes that a single human norm exists, one that is universal, ahistorical, and without sex, class, or race identity, although in fact it is quite clearly male, upperclass, and white." (Fine Arts and Feminism: The Awakening Consciousness by Lise Vogel) Women artists have been victimized by such standards of judgement just as the art world has been denied the historical and present creative achievements of over half the population. It is only through the labors of feminist scholars that we are now rediscovering our artistic identity and history. Women artists did work in the guilds, and often produced fine work. The context remains however: women artists worked under male artists, and much of their work was attributed to their male superiors. For example, through research it has been shown that some works signed by the eighteenth century painter David were in fact done by his student Constance Marie Charpentier. How many other women artists were, and are being stifled in such a manner? In the modern art world women artists are often ignored, or defined by the male artist they copulate with.

Out of these norms, standards by which aesthetic judgements are made have come into existence. High art, the major arts, or the fine arts have been considered the largely male domains of painting, sculpture, and architecture while low art, the minor arts, or crafts, in fact most of the utilitarian arts have

been "women's work." This dichotomy has even extended itself into the choice of media in which one may work. Pastels, watercolors, and fabric have become feminine modes which are of lesser importance, while oil paints, steel and marble are considered better materials for the serious artist.



Like formal criticism in art, content has been largely determined by a white male capitalist value system. Paintings that depict women as individuals are almost nonexistent in western art. Rather, they are three stereotypes of male wish fulfillment; the humble servant of man who bears children, the sinful temptress who lives only to give man pleasure, and the ideal of beauty. These stereotypes, Madonna, Eve and Venus have so invaded the consciousness of most male historians and artists that it is very difficult for them to conceive of any deviation from the norm as serious work. Women artists often portray themselves and other women very differently. For example, when Mary Cassatt painted her rather awkward, adolescent maid, Edgar Degas seemed surprised that he had

learned something from her work.

The effect of discrimination against women artists, devaluation of the so-called minor arts and sex role stereotyping in the visual arts could be termed, at best, devastating. Our self image as artists and as women has been largely determined by patriarchy. But along with the blossoming feminist movement, women artists have begun to re-

evaluate the male art culture thus giving birth to the Women's Art Movement. In 1970 the Los Angeles County Museum of Art mounted the monumental Art and Technology show in which not a single exhibitor was a woman. Protests came quickly and women artists for the first time came together as a group. Out of that spirit the Fresno Feminist Art Program grew and found form along with similar organizations around the country. A great diversity of needs and values have emerged through the gathering of women artists. Some women wish to work as artists within the existing male art structure while others desire an alternative aesthetic and societal framework. Some attention has been given to the "central image theory" which basically states that because women artists experience in our society is dif-



ferent than the male experience, the imagery in women's art reflects that basic difference by being similar to other women's work and very different than male work. But even more importantly, women have begun to express their lives through artistic means more honestly because of the notion that the women's movement developed--the personal is indeed political.

## Women's Music

"What's new in women's music?" one of the editors asked. Dear Goddess, how far we've come. At the start of this decade, there was no women's music, only a few unknown, but determined women who knew there was power in music. They were isolated from one another and performing for small audiences.

While songs were taking shape in their minds, most of us were wandering through the music of Joni Mitchell, Laura Nyro, and other commercial "stars" trying to find lyrics that spoke honestly about women's lives and our relationships with other women. The male-dominated recording industry seldom gave us those songs.

So women started reclaiming what their ancient sisters, the Muses, had created--Music. Companies such as Olivia Records, Wise Women Enterprises, and Women's Wax Works began to produce record albums that are "by, for, and about women"--a phenomenal concept that is now a commonplace phrase in the language of our movement.

The Woman-identified musicians recorded by these companies are giving form to the heritage and aspirations of women's culture. They voice our anger, focus our vision on political issues and give us joy and strength. Even more importantly, their records have made it possible for women's music to reach rural communities like Heron, Mt. as well as metropolitan areas. Music is a unifying force, and we're just beginning to realize the potential power it has to organize women against our oppression.

How does women's music unite us? Several factors work together to put us on common ground so we can work through individual differences and political opin-

ions. Obviously, the lyrics are different from other songs we hear through the mass media. They range from overt political statements to woman-loving-woman songs. They speak about women supporting and working with other women, life experiences unique to us, and freedom and equality in relationships rather than possessiveness and insecurity.

Songwriter and musician Margie Adam contends that the form as well as the lyrics of women's music are different. "There is

a complexity about chordal progressions, the rhythmic variations within a single song. The chord structure deviates more from basic tonal harmonics (triad chords and sevenths) and into fourths and fifths--open chords--chords which give the effect of space--a place for the ear and mind to go." A musician may understand what she is saying. One thing is clear however--women's music does take our minds and emotions to a new and very personal plane. Women who attended Montana's first concert featuring a nationally known woman-identified musician (Meg Christian, Bozeman, 1976) have experienced this high. They developed a bond with the musician and were able to relate her feelings and political messages to their own lives.

Women's music is changing and growing each year. It has expanded from folk-oriented music (Meg Christian, Chris Williamson) and is now redefining other styles--rock (BeBe K'Roche), country and blues (Casse Culiver, Teresa Trull, Willie Tyson) and classical (Kay Gardner). It's also changing its white, middle class character as recording and performing opportunities, along with financial support increase for third world and working class women.

The availability of women's music is growing rapidly. Two years ago, women's recording companies were releasing only one or two albums a year. Today, Olivia Records, for example, has six albums scheduled for production during the next twelve months (Meg Christian, Chris Williamson, Linda Tillery, Mary Watkins, Gwen Avery and "Lesbian Concentrate").

The distribution network for women's music has also expanded greatly during the past two years. There are now record distributors in nearly all states and a few foreign countries. Some of these women have formed production companies to promote concerts and other cultural events. Artemis Productions in Montana is one of these companies.

Presently only a few women involved in record distribution and feminist production companies are able to financially support themselves through this work. But they are gaining skills in business management, production, promotion and sound engineering as they increase the availability of women's music. Hopefully, their energy will eventually create non-oppressive jobs for many women.





# National Women's Studies Association

Women's Studies is currently being taught in over a thousand institutions of higher education, hundreds of community women's centers, and innumerable secondary and elementary schools. In the last seven years Women's Studies has grown from the demands of a few women students and faculty for university courses which spoke to women's experience and changing roles to an educational revolution that reaches out to women at every educational level and in every educational setting.

In January of 1977 over five hundred delegates involved in all aspects of Women's Studies met to form the National Women's Studies Association. Whether we were involved in outreach women's studies in rural Montana, community colleges in Kansas, women's studies media, women in minority studies programs, non-sexist materials development for elementary schools, or a Ph.D. program in women's history at Columbia, we felt the mutual need for a national professional association to advocate our common interests.

The National Women's Studies Association was founded "to actively support and promote feminist education and to support all feminists involved in that effort at every level and in every educational setting." In order to carry out this enormous task the NWSA 1) has developed Task Forces with specific concerns, and 2) is encouraging the growth and development of strong Women's Studies networks on a grassroots regional basis.

The task force areas are as follows: Communications; Curricula, Programs and Institutional Practices; Consultation and Evaluation; Research; Standards; Advocacy; Employment; Recruitment and Affiliation; and Funding. Leadership for these Task Forces is based in different regions and caucuses of the NWSA and we are energetically developing policies, collecting and disseminating materials, and establishing networks for each Task Force. Our Northwest region is partly responsible for Curricula, Programs and Institutional Practices. (If you have interest in working on this Task Force, please contact us.) Regional organizations of Women's Studies are encouraged as the NWSA affirms the strength of grassroots networks. We in

Montana belong to a sub-region composed of North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming, and Montana. Women from all of these states but Wyoming were in Missoula for the "Women and Power" conference in May, and have formed the Northwest Sub-Regional NWSA. The NW/NWSA collected a considerable amount of money at the conference and has the ability to provide an information and resource network. This network will consist of mailings and a regular column in this newsletter with information hopefully from you about your concerns in Women's Studies. We can also put you in touch with curriculum/program materials and other people who are working in your area of interest around the country. Let us know who you are and what we can do for each other, or what resources you can offer others. We need you on our Women's Studies mailing list!

Finally, while those interested in Women's Studies in our region are automatically NW/NWSA members, if you wish to join the National Women's Studies Association, please do so. We are a young group which needs your support and input. Membership fees are on a sliding scale so everyone can belong, and membership includes a subscription to the Women's Studies Newsletter, an excellent source of information on all aspects of Women's Studies and NWSA.

To join or contact NWSA:  
National Women's Studies Assoc.  
University of Maryland College  
Baltimore, Maryland 21201

To join or contact NW/NWSA:  
Women's Resource Center  
University Center  
University of Montana  
Missoula, Montana 59812

This is an exciting time for Women's Studies both nationally and in the Northwest. What we are committed to is enormous and challenging. As is stated in the constitution of the National Women's Studies Association:

"Women's studies is the educational strategy of a breakthrough in consciousness and knowledge. The uniqueness of women's studies has been its refusal to accept sterile divisions between academy and community, between the growth of the mind and the health of the body, between intellect and passion, between the individual and society.

Women's studies, then, is equipping women not only to enter society as whole and productive beings, but to transform it."

--Diane Sands, Coordinating Council Member for NW/NWSA

The Montana Divorce Handbook, sponsored by the Missoula Women's Resource Center and the UM Dept. of Social Work, is available for \$1.35 at the WRC or \$1.60 by mail. Place orders at the WRC. The handbook is for women and men who counsel about divorce or who have gone through divorce, and covers legal, community, and financial and personal resources and children. The handbook has received many favorable comments.





# Goings On:

\* Women's Studies Classes  
University of Montana

## Missoula:

\* The Women's Resource Center will be sponsoring the organization of women's Consciousness Raising groups. An organizational meeting will be scheduled during the first part of fall quarter. For further information contact the WRC.

\* The Missoula Women Artists Association will be showing recent work in a juried display November 21 through December 3 in the University Center Gallery, University of Montana.

\* Women's Place of Missoula is sponsoring a Violence Against Women Conference the weekend of October 14-16. It will be held in the University Center Montana Rooms. The conference will feature national speakers and will deal specifically with the rape and battering of women.

\* Holly Near will appear in concert October 15 at 9:00 p.m. in the Gold Oak Room which is in the University Center. The concert is being made possible by Artemis Productions.

\* Assertiveness Training is designed to assist people to respond assertively in situations as opposed to behaving passively or aggressively. Assertiveness is defined as the "honest expression of feelings and attitudes without undue anxiety or deprecation of others." The Montana Assertiveness Training Collective for Women will be offering several classes in Assertiveness Training. Pre-sessions will be announced fall quarter.

\* The WRC has a non-traditional job counselor/program planner for women, funded by CETA. The counselor is available for individual counseling for women considering entering jobs traditionally held by men, and can also provide information on training programs and financial aid available. Support groups and Assertiveness Training groups are available to help women already working in such jobs overcome problems related to working in a male-dominated job situation. The counselor also acts as a resource person for employers needing assistance in complying with affirmative action goals or in improving relations between male and female employees. To see the counselor or for more information stop by or call the WRC.

\* The Women's Resource Center plans to sponsor several self-help classes during fall quarter. Some of the ideas for workshops are: a bike repair workshop, a workshop for women who would like to learn more about handling financial matters, and a drawing workshop for non-artists. For more information on organization and/or participation in one of these workshops, please contact the Women's Resource Center.

\* The Women's Resource Center will also have an informal discussion about feminist theory, and open house for new volunteers Wednesday, October 5 at 7p.m. in the WRC.

## \*Eng. 243

A class will be held on poetry through the Center for Continuing Education on Tuesdays, 7-10 p.m. fall quarter. The course will be a discussion of the works of Adrienne Rich, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, and Denise Levertov. Related themes of feminism, sexuality, and identity will be involved.

\*Instructor: Nancy Schoenberger

The Psychology Department at the University of Montana will offer a three unit course, Psych. 195, The Psychology of Women, winter quarter on MNF at 10. The course will be taught by Prof. Fran Hill of the Psychology Dept., with the assistance of Marti Adrian and Betsy Hess. Psychology 110 (Introductory Psychology) or consent of the instructor is a prerequisite. This course will cover much of the same material used for the previous newsletter, and will include two lectures and one discussion per week.

## Great Falls:

The Great Falls Women's Resource Center is sponsoring a Women's Workshop September 23 through 25 which deals with such areas as Women and Politics, Employment, and Battered Women. For more information contact: Women's Resource Center  
926 Third Avenue South  
Great Falls, Montana 59405

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