

Feminist Art Education: Made in California

by Judy Chicago

I've often stated that it would have been impossible to conceive of, much less implement, the 1970/71 Fresno Feminist Art Program anywhere but California. One reason for this became evident in the 2000 Los Angeles County Museum of Art exhibit on 100 years of art in California, whose title I borrowed for this chapter. *The Made in California* show demonstrated some of the unique qualities of California culture, notably, an openness to new ideas that is less prominently found in the East, where the white, male, Eurocentric tradition has a longer legacy and thus casts a stronger shadow.



Not that California has been exempt from some of the discriminatory aspects of that tradition. For example, to say that the Los Angeles community of the 1960s was macho would be an understatement. Women artists were simply not taken seriously. As a young artist, I was determined to overcome this prejudice. However, doing so took many years and the excision from my art of any form or content that could be labeled feminine. After a decade of struggle, I rebelled, asking myself what was the point of being an artist if I could not represent my experiences as a woman?

As I wrote in my first autobiographical book, *Through the Flower, My Struggle as a Woman Artist*, I started the Feminist Art Program in Fresno because, as a result of my own struggle, I suspected that the reason women had trouble realizing themselves as artists was related to their conditioning as women. I had found that society's definition of me as a woman was in conflict with my own sense of personhood (and, after all, it is a person who makes art).

I thought that if my situation was similar to that of other women, then perhaps my struggle might serve as a model for the struggle out of gendered conditioning that a woman would have to make if she were to realize herself artistically. I was sure that this process would take some time. Therefore, I set up the Fresno program with the idea that I would work intensely with the fifteen women I chose as students.

It's important to take a moment to comment on the climate for women at that time. There were no Women's Studies courses, nor any understanding that women had their own history. In fact, attitudes might be best understood through the story of a class in European Intellectual History I had taken in the early 1960s, while I was an undergraduate at UCLA. At the first class meeting, the professor said he would talk about women's contributions at the end of the semester. I looked forward the whole semester to what he had to say. At the last class session, the professor came in, strode up to the front of the room, and said,

"Women's contributions? They made none."

When I came to Fresno, in part it was with the idea of discovering whether my professor's assessments were true. At that time, while working in my studio and teaching, I began a self-guided research program into women's art, women's literature, and women's history, which I shared with my students. The way in which I structured the class was something I came to intuitively, in order to help my students find their own individual subject matter. I soon discovered that performance could be a valuable tool in this process. Most importantly, informal performance seemed to provide the students with a way of reaching subject matter for art-making. Ultimately, the most powerful work of the first year of the program was performance art.

My important discoveries about the positive effects of feminist performance for female art students led me to the conclusion that one of the reasons so few women succeed(ed) in art schools is that many of the techniques for establishing a focus for art making rise primarily out of the conventional cultural ed-

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education of men. In many sculpture classes, male students “got going” by completing presumably simple problems with materials and techniques assigned by their instructors. Many female students, like those with whom I have worked, often could not relate to these assignments because for them, the materials and techniques with which they were most familiar were often quite different. My students in Fresno were more comfortable with sewing than with hammering, for example. But within a supportive environment that acknowledged the challenges they faced, hammer they did, as I saw it as an essential part of their education to physically construct the off-campus studio we rented.

When it came to art-making, I encouraged my students to approach art with the materials with which they were most comfortable, and to bring their personal issues into the art-making process. This meant that both the form and content of their projects reflected their lives as women. The educational process I initiated in Fresno helped my students to confront those aspects of their socialization as women that prevented them from taking themselves seriously and setting ambitious goals. This was and continues to be a significant problem for women students.

In terms of performance, we started by “playing around.” Our experiments grew out of our ability as women to put out direct feeling. We cried, roared, screamed, and made animal noises, always trying to focus on a feeling and connect with it and with each other. Performances were based upon personal experience and also analysis of the female role, as we called it then; now it is referred to as the “construction of femininity.”

The Cock and Cunt Play, a send-up performance piece I wrote which was first performed in Fresno in 1971, was a way of helping women deal with their more assertive sides. In the play, two performers take turns playing male and female roles. This piece was also performed at *Womanhouse*, one of the first openly female-centered exhibitions. Created in Los Angeles in 1972 by students of the Feminist Art Program at the California Institute of the Arts (guided by me and Miriam Schapiro, with whom I was team-teaching), *Womanhouse* was a group of installations created in each room of an old house about to be torn down. The living room was turned into a performance space, and performances for the space were created in the performance workshop that I ran, which was an outgrowth of what I had done in Fresno..

Some of the most influential pieces that came out of the workshop were what came to be known as duration performances. Women performed a series of domestic chores like ironing clothes or washing the floor. The audience simply had to sit there for the duration of the time these activities required. A

number of art critics have noted that these initial duration performances had a considerable influence on later performance artists, notably California artist Mike Kelly.

Another work, both an installation and a performance at *Womanhouse*, was based upon *Cheri*, a novel by the French writer Colette. This performance, which dealt with female narcissism, was created by Nancy Yodelman and Karen Lecocq, both of whom went on to successful careers as artists. The two young women took turns making up while incessantly staring at themselves in the mirror of a room that recreated the ambience of the bedroom described by Colette in her book.

The mirror would figure prominently in the work of many later women artists, probably because, as the art historian Whitney Chadwick noted in the introduction to the catalog, *Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism, and Self-Representation* (1998): “For women artists, the problematics of self-representation have remained inextricably bound up with the woman’s internalization of the images of her ‘otherness.’”

Some people have referred to the education process involved in feminist art education as “consciousness raising.” This term has been overlaid on what I do, probably because CR groups were prevalent during the 1970s women’s movement. But Feminist art education is actually something different, a distinction I hope will be better understood by the end of this chapter. I view Feminist art education as “empowerment education” because it begins with the process of helping students to become *empowered* to do what is important to them in their art. I accomplish this by “going around the circle,” a basic structure and technique of the class. Each person speaks, beginning by telling the class about themselves, then moving on to discuss interests and goals. *Everyone speaks and everyone listens.*

No one dominates the class, including me. My role in class is that of *facilitator*. As I wrote in my second autobiographical book, *Beyond the Flower*, the teaching methods I brought to Fresno evolved out of the part-time teaching I had done in the 1960s in Los Angeles. Even then my definition of a teacher had always been more akin to that of a facilitator, by which I mean one who facilitates the growth and empowerment of her students. This requires making a real connection with students, which I accomplish by encouraging my students to reveal *where they are* intellectually, aesthetically, and personally. Making this type of connection requires the shedding of the traditional teacher role in favor of a more humanized interaction that dissolves the distance conventionally maintained between teacher and student.

It has always been extremely important to me that all of my students actively participate, be it by asking questions or engaging in discussion. In my earlier classes I had noticed a tendency

of some students (usually, but not always, the men) to dominate the classroom while others (often, but not exclusively, the women) remained silent. To counteract this, I developed the technique of going around the room, asking everyone to speak about the subject at hand. (One fascinating result was my discovery that the quietest people are sometimes the most interesting!) This was well before the days of consciousness raising, with which this process has a lot in common, though with one important exception. Because I was the teacher, I could interject comments in order to make appropriate observations and suggestions.

The strategies of “going around the circle” and interpreting the teacher’s role as a facilitator proved to be an effective way of combining education and empowerment, which I see as the most desirable goal for teaching. One without the other seems to lead to only partial growth for students, i.e., either the amassing of information without the ability to apply it in any meaningful way, or self-development at the expense of learning specific skills. One reason for my staunch and abiding commitment to feminism is that its principles provide valuable tools for empowerment, and not only for women. In my view, feminist values are rooted in an alternative to the prevailing view of relations of power, which involves *power over others*. In contrast, feminism promotes *personal empowerment*, something that, when connected with education, becomes a potent tool for individual and social change.

At the end of the first year of the Fresno program, we held an exhibition. Remarkably, several hundred people came, including many who drove up from L.A. to see what I had been up to in Fresno. Among the visitors were artist Miriam Schapiro and her husband, Paul Brach, who was the dean of a new art school, the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts). The campus now in Valencia wasn’t built yet, and classes were being held in a convent in Burbank. I had invited Miriam (Mimi) to Fresno earlier in the year; I was desperate for someone with whom I could discuss what I was doing because the Fresno program had no precedent and therefore was somewhat frightening to me. After all, I was still a young artist myself.

Paul and Mimi invited me to bring my program and some of the more accomplished students to CalArts with the idea that Mimi and I would team teach and expand the program. Sometime during the summer, a number of the “Fresno Girls,” as I called them, formed a caravan down California’s Highway 5. Students, significant others, a variety of pets, motley furnishings, and an array of vehicles all made their way down to Los Angeles.

When school began in the fall of 1971, the new CalArts buildings were not yet complete, so we began to meet informally in vari-

ous living rooms. In addition to a promised space and funding, CalArts provided the program with a feminist art historian, Paula Harper, who had recently earned her Ph.D. at Stanford. In Fresno, we had begun assembling slides of work by women artists. This was critical because there were no such collections anywhere. My students and I would search through books, finding small black and white reproductions, which we photographed. I also brought slides back from my trips around the country or elsewhere. For example, I discovered Canadian artist Emily Carr on a visit to Vancouver and excitedly brought back slides for our developing archive.

It was Paula Harper who suggested the idea of doing some kind of project about a house. We rented an old house on Mariposa Street in Hollywood, a fitting location as “mariposa” means “butterfly” in Spanish. For a while we were all in the larval state, and then there was this incredible immersion in the first sort of openly female work. We started the *Womanhouse* project as we had in Fresno, by actually constructing the space.

People sometimes ask me if the “process” isn’t as important as the “product” in Feminist art education. I always answer “NO” because the purpose of Feminist art education as I conceived it is to prepare students for a life of art-making. In other words, the goal of the methods involved in Feminist art education is *art practice*.

In terms of *Womanhouse*, this process resulted in many performances as well as many compelling installations, including the “Bridal Staircase,” for which a bride’s veil flowed down the staircase from the landing at the top of the stairs, where viewers could see the back of the bride disappearing into oblivion. And like many of the other works in *Womanhouse*, “Lipstick Bathroom” was a precursor of a considerable amount of later Feminist art. The “Nurturant Kitchen” featured a series of fried eggs on the ceiling, which cascaded down the walls, the eggs slowly transforming into breast forms. The whole kitchen was just pink, pink, pink because in the days before we had more racial consciousness, we just assumed that flesh color meant pink, just like the Crayola Crayons used to be. (Similarly, when I was a young art I student, almost all the models were Caucasian. And one of the things that happens when you’re being formed as an artist is that in such art classes, everyone comes to assume that the norm is Caucasian, which is of course very destructive).

My own contribution to *Womanhouse*, “Menstruation Bathroom,” was one of the first images of menstruation in Western art. I want to emphasize the fact that such openly female-centered art was only possible to create because of the context of support the Feminist Art Programs provided, not only for the students, but also for me. As I mentioned, I was still a young

artist in my early thirties when I went to Fresno. It was certainly my intention to help younger women who desired to become artists and I wanted to do this in a way that did not require them to move away from their own experiences and content, as I had been forced to do in my own initial quest to be taken seriously. However, in addition to wanting to be of service, I also wanted to develop a context in which I could create a Feminist art practice, something that did not yet exist. Nor was there any precedent for the term Feminist art.

One of the students at CalArts, Mira Schor, went on to become a prominent painter and feminist theorist. Among her writings is the influential essay, "Patrilineage," in which she argues for the importance of a "matrilineage" in terms of our understanding of art history. What I believe she meant is that generally artists, including women artists, are placed into an art historical narrative that is male-centered. Consequently, in terms of our understanding of women's art, we are deprived of seeing it in the context of women's long, historic struggle for creative freedom and artistic equity. With the development of Feminist art history and feminist theory, there has been some change – but not enough, particularly in the mainstream art world.

Although there are numerous women artists who had successful careers before *Womanhouse*, this revolutionary project definitely opened the way for a more explicit female imagery. One might say that both the Fresno Feminist Art Program and *Womanhouse* marked the moment when the construction of a true aesthetic matrilineage became possible, if only because of our conscious attention to issues of female identity and the expression of those issues in identifiable visual form.

Unfortunately, this perspective has not been incorporated into the mainstream art world, which insists upon viewing the Feminist art movement as an isolated phenomenon of the 1970s. In actuality, that period instigated a worldwide movement that is still going on, as attested to by the fact that women artists all over the world are working in ways that would have been impossible before the advent of the Feminist Art Program.

The *Womanhouse* exhibition was enormously successful. It was on display for a month during which thousands of people visited it. There was also an immense amount of media coverage, including an article in Time magazine. And a marvelous documentary film about the project (of the same name) was made by Johanna Demetrakas, which subsequently brought images from *Womanhouse* to thousands of people all over the world.

By the time the exhibition closed, the new buildings at CalArts had opened and we had moved in. Within a very short time, even though I had a two-year contract and was only half way

through my first year, I became unhappy. At that time, I thought my dissatisfactions arose because we were operating within a male-dominated institution and I didn't like how that felt. Also, I didn't like the fact that, in the new buildings, there were all these unattractive corridors where different classrooms were identified by doors with different colors. To me, it was too much like a factory and I hated it.

On top of this, there began to be considerable friction between Mimi and me in terms of our respective teaching styles and philosophy. By the end of the first year, I tendered my resignation, working out the rest of my contract in a basement room far from the spacious quarters of the Feminist Art Program, where Mimi continued to work with many of my students. And when I left, I left everything – my program, my students, and all the art history slides we had compiled, even the slides of *Womanhouse*.

But even before my tenure at CalArts ended, I had begun making plans to establish an independent feminist art program with Sheila De Bretteville, a designer who also taught at CalArts (and who is now at Yale), and the late Arlene Raven, an art historian who had come to Los Angeles to work with me and who also worked at CalArts. (She later moved to New York where she had a successful career as an art critic.) In the fall of 1973, the Feminist Studio Workshop began, filled with students from around the country who had moved to Los Angeles to be part of this new school. At first, we had no space of our own, so we again met in an assortment of living rooms.

Although Arlene, Sheila and I specialized in different professional disciplines, we seemed to approach teaching in similar ways. This compatibility reinforced an equitable educational process for the students that was quite different from the traditional authoritarian model, which seemed to be the norm. One of the things I didn't like at CalArts was that this traditional model prevailed. Consequently, there was a lot of back-biting and undermining of the Feminist Art Program when it was at CalArts and after it was over, the institution basically banished even its memory.

At CalArts, inside the Feminist Art Program, we tried to promote cooperative, egalitarian values. But when our students left our space to take other classes, they had to navigate in an art school with quite different values. CalArts was geared towards preparing students to "make it" in the art world, but without acknowledging that the art world was (and is) racist, sexist, homophobic and class-ist.

I found this contradiction entirely untenable, which is one reason I had to leave. I cannot even imagine how difficult it must have been for the students I brought there. At the time I left,

there were feminist programs across the disciplines at CalArts, an outgrowth of the impact of the Feminist Art Program. But as I said, within several years Cal Arts had erased the entire history of this period. In the 1990s, a group of women students who were struggling with the school's lack of support for female voices, unearthed the history of the Feminist Art Program. As a result, they held a symposium and mounted an exhibition. But whether they accomplished any real change, I have not heard.

CalArts had evolved from Chouinard, an art school that Walt Disney had attended. Because he had become so successful, he decided to repay Chouinard, which had supported him when he had no money. Therefore, he created a new, presumably better school of the arts, CalArts. As a result, the old Chouinard building in downtown Los Angeles came up for rent and Sheila, Arlene and I decided it was the perfect place for the Feminist Studio Workshop. We made affiliations with a number of other feminist organizations and brought a coalition of groups into the building, which we named the Woman's Building, modeled after an exhibition hall at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair.

The opening of the Woman's Building in 1973 was a delirious affair with thousands of people thronging the halls to visit the various exhibitions, performances and activities that were going on. I held an exhibition of the *Great Ladies*, a series of paintings that reflected my growing interest in women's history. Most of the images were abstract portraits of women whose lives and work I had found inspiring.

One day, about a year into the Feminist Studio Workshop, one of the women from the "Board of Lady Managers" that ran the Woman's Building (another structure we borrowed from the 1893 Woman's Building) chastised me for not going along with some rule or other. Well, I had never easily abided rules throughout my life. I replied, "What do you mean? This is my institution. I created it. Why do I have to go along with the rules?"

During the ensuing argument, it dawned on me that bureaucracy was not just a male chauvinist invention (how I was able to be so naïve for so long is a mystery, even to me), but something that seemed to accompany institutionalization. The Woman's Building was becoming an institution, and that was not good news for me because I realized that I didn't feel comfortable with institutions of any kind, even those run by women.

Moreover, by 1974, I was becoming restless. I had found my way back to my own voice as an artist, something that I had lost as a consequence of professionalizing in the LA art scene, where I had been repeatedly told that I couldn't "be a woman and an artist, too." I went to Fresno to figure out how to be myself as a woman artist, which required *creating a context for myself and*

other women, something the Woman's Building provided and continued to provide for nearly twenty years.

As important as the Woman's Building was, however, I couldn't be there anymore. I am sure this disappointed and upset Sheila and Arlene, not to mention the students who had moved cross-country to work with me. But I was extremely driven; I needed to stop teaching and devote myself entirely to my studio work. I was ready to begin working on a project that five years later would be known as *The Dinner Party*.

At first, I worked alone on what I had decided would become a symbolic history of women in Western civilization. But slowly I began to realize that this undertaking would require help. Eventually, 400 people contributed to the execution of my vision, a vision that allowed equitable collaboration within the larger structure of my imagery, something which later, many people would have trouble understanding. In *The Dinner Party* studio, I combined the methods of the Feminist art education I had developed at Fresno State, CalArts and in the Feminist Studio Workshop with my own art-making, bringing my level of professionalism to bear, thereby modeling the methods of art practice I had taught in the Feminist Art Programs.

In March 1979, *The Dinner Party* premiered at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, where it was an instant success. Five thousand people attended the opening and the show attracted record crowds. The museum bookstore made so much money that they bought a computerized cash register they named Judy. I was ecstatic, believing that the success of the exhibition would bring me opportunities, commissions, and sufficient support to begin research into a porcelain room in which *The Dinner Party* could be permanently housed. I even moved my studio and one of the studio ceramicists to northern California to begin setting up a ceramics facility.

Inexplicably (to me), the museums scheduled to exhibit *The Dinner Party* cancelled and when the show closed, the work went into storage and I went into shock. All my plans for the future came to a screeching halt as I tried to make sense of what had happened and figure out how to continue making art. All of my assistants had scattered, as devastated as I was about what had occurred. I was deeply in debt as a result of having to borrow money in order to finish the piece. At that point, I had to start all over again.

Amazingly, there was so much interest in *The Dinner Party* -- fueled by widespread media coverage and *Right Out of History*, Johanna Demetrakas' film about the making of the piece -- that slowly, a grassroots movement developed, first in the United States and then all around the world, to get *The Dinner Party*

shown. Incredibly, people actually organized to bring *The Dinner Party* to their cities for an exhibition.

The first place this happened was in Houston in early 1980, less than a year after the San Francisco Museum of Art exhibition closed. By that time, I'd been getting considerable criticism from people who asked, "Why didn't you include this woman?" And, "Why didn't you include that woman?" I responded each time, "Why don't you make a triangular quilt for somebody you think should be honored?" So, people started doing that. Every time *The Dinner Party* was exhibited, more and more of these quilts arrived, and now there are over 700 of them in the possession of Through the Flower, the small, non-profit arts organization that I started in order to finish the piece. (It went on to become the touring agency for what would be an international tour.)

In 1987, as a result of intense grass roots organizing in Germany, there was an exhibition of *The Dinner Party* at the contemporary museum in Frankfurt. A year before, to celebrate the success of their effort, the organizers of this grass roots campaign held "The Festival of a Thousand Women" at the refurbished Frankfurt Opera House. Hundreds of women from all over Europe gathered together, all dressed as the women on the table and the floor. Many of the participants became so inspired that they began doing their own research into women's history, some even making made pilgrimages to ancient Amazon sites.

At one point during the festival, there was an evening performance of a little-known work by Fannie Mendelssohn. Publicly performed for the first time by an all-female orchestra, the conductor was dressed as the composer, which was very touching. Another poignant moment came when thirty-nine women dressed as the various women on *The Dinner Party* table assembled as a triangle in the room. One of the figures, Petronilla De Meath, was missing, so I stepped in for her. It was really amazing how the spirit of *The Dinner Party* came alive as we enacted *The Dinner Party* table.

Sadly, Dagmar van Garnier, the organizer of the festival, and I almost came to blows because she was using an authoritarian model of organization rather than a model of equality and cooperation, which I believe to be a fundamental principle of feminism. I was very upset about her understanding the form, but not the content of my work and vision.

I continued to make art using these same principles, developed first in my educational programs, then applied in *The Dinner Party* studio. Between 1980 and 1985, I created the *Birth Project*, which was initiated at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art after a book signing for my second book on *The Dinner Party* (*Embroidering Our Heritage: The Dinner Party Needlework*). In conjunction with its publication, I gave a lecture at the museum.

Afterwards, I passed out flyers announcing that I was going to do another project on the subject of birth that involved needlework. About thirty stitchers responded.

Eventually, almost 150 needleworkers from around the country worked on the *Birth Project*, which resulted in eighty-five exhibition units (a needlework and its documentation) that were exhibited in over 100 venues. I used the same methods I had employed in my teaching and in *The Dinner Party* studio, an inclusive process which generates both a group bond and considerable energy. And it's out of this base that my projects get done, whether it's a student's own work developing his or her own ideas, or working on one of my major collaborative projects.

However, the *Birth Project* was not executed in my studio as *The Dinner Party* was. Instead, it was done in a decentralized network, with people working in their own homes all over the country. One woman was even as far away as New Zealand. The glue of the project was something I called "the review process," where we would get together, either one-on-one, in small groups, or in larger groups to look at the work. At the reviews, I used the same principles I've been describing which produce a group dynamic as the group gets to know each other, and people begin to make connections. Out of this particular group dynamic, future projects of mine evolved, notably, the touring exhibition *Resolution: A Stitch in Time*. Many of the needleworkers who worked with me on *Resolutions* go back to the *Birth Project*. After that project was over, a number of them maintained a network among themselves throughout the years, as some of the "Fresno Girls" also did.

In all of my educational programs and collaborative projects, I try to create equitable relationships and equitable collaborations. One might say that my feminism – that is, my commitment to egalitarian relationships (be they between husband and wife, teacher and student, or artist and artisan) -- has been central to my entire life. It has certainly informed my relationship with a woman named Audrey Cowan, with whom I've worked since *The Dinner Party*. One could say that we have a Feminist art partnership, although she works on my images. She says she can't paint and I can't weave, but together we do both and we jointly own all the work that we have created together.

This is also true of *Resolutions*, in that the stitchers and I own the work jointly. It's important to understand that such an arrangement is a very different scenario from conventional artist/artisan relationships. For example, in traditional Aubusson Tapestry weaving, which is the type of weaving that Audrey practices (though in a modified version), the weavers work from a design usually supplied by an artist. In fact, they weave with

numbers around their necks which correspond to the colors chosen by the artist. Also, they weave from the back of the tapestry, which means that they cannot see the image except by running around and looking at small sections with a mirror.

This type of relationship is very different from Audrey's and mine. We redesigned the loom so that Audrey weaves from the front. This allows her to have input as she brings my image to life in thread. We discuss the color choices and the image, and she translates my painted design into thread, a significant departure from traditional Aubusson weaving. It's the reason that Audrey would only work with me; she did not want to go back to the kind of robotic relationship between artist and artisan that is traditional.

I would now like to discuss Through the Flower, which began its formal life in the Santa Monica studio in the late 1970s, and then took up residence in a large building in Benicia, California that was the headquarters for the *Birth Project*. As I mentioned, Through the Flower is a small non-profit organization that came into existence quite by accident in order to provide a fiscal structure to fund the exhibition and storage of *The Dinner Party*, allowing people to make tax-deductible contributions. At the time, I never dreamt how important the organization was to become in terms of my ongoing art-making and now, the preservation of my art.

By the early 1990s, I was living in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and had moved Through the Flower there as well. We started an intern program, probably after I gave a lecture somewhere and some young woman asked if she could come and work with me, and I said, "Sure." Young women, and some young men as well, began to work in the offices of Through the Flower. They reported that they were not learning about women artists in their art history classes and that they knew very little about the Feminist art movement. This really upset me. So, we started holding public programs that began with the showing of the film by Johanna Demetrakas, *Right Out of History: The Making of Judy Chicago's Dinner Party*.

I was just astonished by the response and the hunger for knowledge about both women's art history and Feminist art practices. Even twenty years later, it seemed as intense as it had been in the 1970s. By that time, I had been deeply absorbed in my studio work for many years and had just assumed that things had changed. But in 1991, when we organized a summer art-making workshop in Santa Fe, I discovered that the needs and issues of young women artists seemed very much like those of my students in the 1970s. The art produced in the ten-day workshop indicated that even though post-modern theory posits the notion that gender is a changing construct, for many women it has

not changed much in recent decades. Consequently, the issues and images of numerous women I've worked with since then are remarkably similar to that of 1970s Feminist art.

As to my art-making life, I continue to work both alone and collaboratively. In the *Holocaust Project: From Darkness into Light*, I collaborated with my husband, photographer Donald Woodman. In the mid-1990s, after eight years of difficult work on *Holocaust Project*, I began my fourth (and last) major collaborative project, *Resolutions: A Stitch in Time*, which, like many of my major projects, was a traveling exhibition. As I mentioned earlier, most of the women who worked on this project had worked with me previously and hence, as they said, they were already empowered. This made our collaboration the most successful in terms of the ease of working together.

This poem that I wrote when I was working on *The Dinner Party* -- which has been incorporated into various liturgies -- might be said to describe the philosophical underpinnings of my vision, a vision which, when I was young, scared me. Even though some people might find it overly idealistic, I believe in "choosing hope." It was with a newfound comfort with my own vision that in 1999, I began teaching again, one semester a year at different institutions. The "Merger Poem" expresses the fundamental beliefs that underlie both my teaching and my art-making.

And then all that has divided us will merge.
And then compassion will be whetted to power
And then softness will come to a world that is harsh and unkind.
And then both men and women will be gentle.
And then both women and men will be strong.
And then no person will be subject to another's will.
And then all will be rich and free and varied.
And then the greed of some will give way to the needs of many.
And then all will share equally in the earth's abundance.
And then all will care for the sick and the weak and the old.
And then all will nourish the young.
And then all will cherish life's creatures.
And then all will live in harmony with each other and the earth.
And then everywhere will be called Eden once again.

Mellowed as I am by maturity, I no longer believe that we'll ever attain Eden. However, I do believe that we could do a far better job of living in harmony with each other and the earth. The principles of cooperation that are embodied in both feminism and Feminist art education could be a great contribution to improving our world.

As mentioned, in the fall of 1999, I went back to formally teach-

ing again, in part because I saw that there had been this tremendous backsliding. I also received many letters from people around the country wishing for more access to my teaching methods. I decided to start teaching one semester a year again at various institutions around the country. The first year, I taught at Indiana University in Bloomington. I was invited there to do a project class. The participants had their own studio, as they had at Fresno and Cal-Arts. My thought was to do a project aimed at the gap between school and art practice, a gap that's particularly troublesome for women. Too many of them come out of art school and, after a short time, stop making art.

I worked with a number of students from around the state of Indiana. Unlike the original class in Fresno, it was open to men, but no men applied. The class was made up of women between twenty-six and sixty. At the end of semester, they held an exhibition which they decided to call *Sin/Sation*, a humorous play on the title of the show *Sensation*, which was being held at the same time at the Brooklyn Museum in New York.

The project attracted a little hubbub of media attention, even though I myself was staying out of the public limelight, just teaching, working in my studio and keeping to myself, much as I had done in Fresno. The show was held at the IU museum, an I.M. Pei Building that was an excellent venue. Doing a museum level installation presented a really good professional challenge for the students.

The exhibition demonstrated that when women are encouraged to work on their own subject matter, they tend to make art that is quite different from the mainstream. One large installation involved a series of digital photographs of the artist's vagina, which were overlaid with various crude words for that organ, printed on transparent vellum. Another piece involved a parody of De Kooning's misogynist *Woman* images. The artist, a feminist philosopher named Peg Brand who had been driven out of art school by the misogynist environment, took the head out, and then took pictures of people sticking their heads through the head hole—very funny!

At IU, I also team taught an art history seminar with Peg and Jean Roberts, an art historian. The topic was Feminist Art and Philosophy: History and Context. There were a number of men in that class. One of them was a graduate student in theater, who wanted to do a performance section in the exhibition. He got a number of theater students together to restage the *Cock and Cunt* play and other early pieces, plus perform some original pieces dealing with the students' own issues.

Several of these involved the pernicious myth about women being able to "have it all." The most effective work involved two

performers. A young woman dressed in a black leotard sat on the stage to the sound of circus music. Then, a performer with a clown hat came on stage and dropped two balloons in the seated woman's lap. The first woman blew them up. One was marked "education" and the other "family." She playfully juggled the two balloons as the circus music kept playing. The clown came back out and dropped a third balloon marked "friends," with which the other performer still had no trouble, happily juggling the three balloons. The clown then returned and dropped a fourth balloon, designated "career." The young woman was just beginning to have trouble juggling all the balloons when the clown came out again and dropped a fifth balloon labeled "relationship." At this point, the young woman really began struggling with the five balloons, whereupon the clown came back out and dropped yet another balloon, marked "baby." The poor woman just couldn't juggle them all, a metaphor for the situation that many young women seem to be confronting.

In the fall of 2000, I taught at Duke under very different circumstances. At that time, Duke -- though an incredibly good university -- had a very poor undergraduate art department and no graduate studio program at all. I taught a class there called "From Theory to Practice," which met twice a week for an hour and a quarter each time. The students were given a choice to do either text-based projects or art-making projects and surprisingly (given the lousy studio situation), a lot of them wanted to make art.

I structured the course so that the first three weeks were devoted to the type of personal empowerment work I have described earlier, along with very intensive readings. Then, the class was broken up into three segments and the students worked on different subjects that I had worked on: women's history, birth, and the Holocaust. At the end of the semester, the students wanted to hold an exhibition in order to share what they had done with the campus community. The show was such a success and the administration so impressed, that -- even though the show was only supposed to be up for a weekend -- the university reopened it after the semester break for a month so that numerous classes could view it together.

One of the pieces in the Duke exhibit involved a series of photos in which a young woman reenacted suicides committed by various important women of the past. Another work was a "history house," which had small inserts about different women in history. In the section on birth, there was a series of sculptures that were very funny, little mother-goddess sculptures that the young women jokingly called "The Spice Girls." There was also a modern take on the conception of Jesus. A series of cartoons depicted God calling Mary on the telephone to tell her that she was chosen to have an immaculate conception. Mary replies,

“What do you mean; I’m not gonna have an orgasm?” Now, that is definitely a 1990s point of view. It was hilarious, especially in the South.

The section on the Holocaust included a poignant double-image done collaboratively by a man and a woman. Another work involved a closed cabinet which – when opened – told the story of a child victim. In a performance piece, a young woman took the part of three different women; one a survivor, the other a child of a survivor, and then herself. From three different viewpoints, she recounted her own reactions to the Holocaust education she had received when she was young.

Then, in 2002, I team-taught with my husband, photographer Donald Woodman, at Western Kentucky University in Bowling Green. We did a project with twenty-five participants, about one-third men, of various ages, who were students, local artists, or faculty. Donald and I helped the students explore the subject of the house thirty years after *Womanhouse*. It was interesting to see what differences in perspective existed and where nothing had changed, particularly in relation to the younger women. Many of them evidenced considerable confusion about their identities as women and the social expectations that still seem to be placed upon them. As to the men, my pedagogy seemed as effective for them as it had proven to be for women.

Although I continued to teach for a few more years, I was disheartened by what I observed, as I had hoped for more significant changes, both culturally and in terms of education, and was singularly disappointed that feminist education was still being marginalized. To my mind, Feminist art education offers profound possibilities for a new type of empowerment for both women and men. But in order for our art institutions to take advantage of such an educational approach, there will have to be a real commitment to altering the male-centered pedagogy that now exists.

It is not enough for Women’s Studies or Women in Art courses to exist as an adjunct—or antidote, as it were—to male-centered art and art history curricula. There must be a recognition that in terms of art education, we need to rethink what is being taught, what is most important to learn in order to become an effective artist, and the purposes for which our present art curriculum is geared. Feminist art education begins with each person’s individual voice and builds both individual and collaborative art-making out of those issues expressed by many different voices. Such an education can lead to a truly diverse art community and a more equitable world, which (hopeless idealist that I remain) is what I still hope to see happen, and in my lifetime.