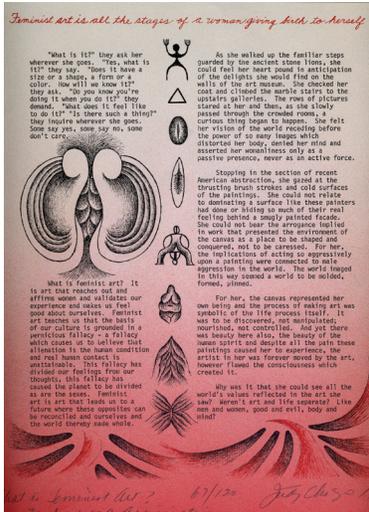


What is Feminist Art?

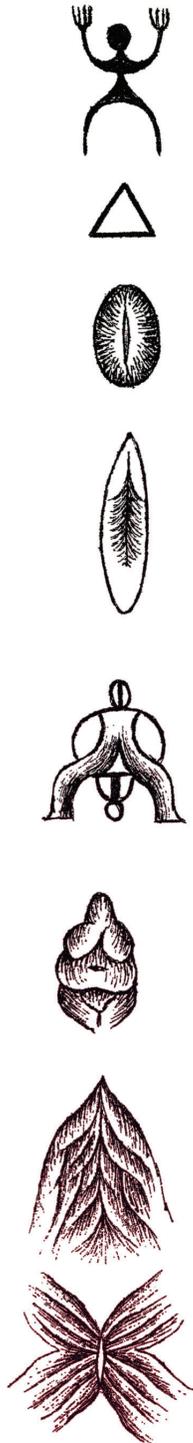
by Judy Chicago

Feminist Art is all the stages of a woman giving birth to herself.



"What is it?" they ask her wherever she goes. "Yes, what is it?" they say. "Does it have a size or a shape, a form or a color. How will we know it?" they ask. "Do you know you're doing it when you do it?" they demand. "What does it feel like to do it?" "Is there such a thing?" Some say yes, some say no, some don't care.

What is feminist art? It is art that reaches out and affirms women and validates our experience and makes us feel good about ourselves. Feminist art teaches us that the basis of our culture is grounded in a pernicious fallacy - a fallacy which causes us to believe that alienation is the human condition and real human contact is unattainable. This fallacy has divided our feelings from our thoughts, this fallacy has caused the planet to be divided as are the sexes. Feminist art is art that leads us to a future where these opposites can be reconciled and ourselves and the world thereby made whole.



As she walked up the familiar steps guarded by the ancient stone lions, she could feel her heart pound in anticipation of the delights she would find on the walls of the art museum. She checked her coat and climbed the marble stairs to the upstairs galleries. The rows of pictures stared at her and then, as she slowly passed through the crowded rooms, a curious thing began to happen. She felt her vision of the world receding before the power of so many images which distorted her body, denied her mind and asserted her womanliness only as a passive presence, never as an active force.

Stopping in the section of recent American abstraction, she gazed at the thrusting brush strokes and cold surfaces of the paintings. She could not relate to dominating a surface like these painters had done or hiding so much of their real feeling behind a smugly painted facade. She could not bear the arrogance implied in work that presented the environment of the canvas as a place to be shaped and conquered, not to be caressed. For her, the implications of acting so aggressively upon a painting were connected to male aggression in the world. The world imaged in this way seemed a world to be molded, formed, pinned.

For her, the canvas represented her own being and the process of making art was symbolic of the life process itself. It was to be discovered, not manipulated; nourished, not controlled. And yet there was beauty here also, the beauty of the human spirit and despite all the pain these paintings caused her to experience, the artist in her was forever moved by the art, however flawed the consciousness which created it.

Why was it that she could see all the world's values reflected in the art she saw? Weren't art and life separate? Like men and women, good and evil, body and mind?

Judy Chicago