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The Body Politics of Decoration and Handicraft: Re-visioning 1970s Feminist Art

By

Fu Chia-Wen Lien

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Art History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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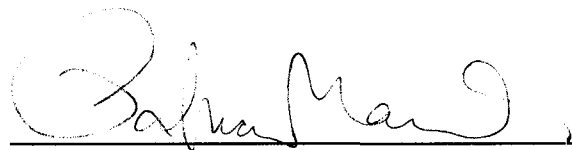
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Abstract**The Body Politics of Decoration and Handicraft: Re-visioning 1970s Feminist Art****By****Fu Chia-Wen Lien****Advisor: Professor Mona Hadler**

In the 1970s, the burgeoning of feminist art presented a challenge to mainstream Modernism that transformed the art world radically. One of the most interesting phenomena of this early generation of feminist art was the exploration of "decoration" and "handicraft," such as quilting, embroidery, crocheting, patterned tile painting, and china painting, which were formerly considered by modernists to be "low" art with derogatory connotations. Through a discussion of this issue, I hope to clarify how the use of decoration and handicraft constituted formal and political strategies. Through these strategies, women artists developed what Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro have characterized as the "female" style. I argue that decoration and handicraft, though varying in form, technique, and material, reflected a particular phase of the body politics of early feminist art. The fantasy, desire, eroticism, and sensual pleasure associated with decoration and the tactile experience of the hands-on process involved in handicraft constitute a corporeal dimension in feminist art.

In my dissertation, I focus on three artists whose works consciously address decoration and handicraft. While stressing female experience and sensibility, Judy Chicago

applied female traditional crafts, such as embroidery and china painting, in her collaborative political project The Dinner Party. Miriam Schapiro turned decoration and handicraft into collage works emphasizing a “female style” that she called “femme.” Joyce Kozloff reinstated decoration into architectural spaces through installations and public murals. These diverse approaches reflect different levels of conceptualization of decoration and handicraft, and serve to describe various aspects of feminist art’s revolt against the modernist establishment.

The study of the artistic development of Chicago, Schapiro, and Kozloff reveals their interest in and concern with body images and female identification, which corresponds to the body politics of decoration and handicraft expressed in their full-fledged feminist works. Chicago uses bodily images to directly express female sexuality with women’s traditional practices of handicraft. Schapiro has a more intimate and personal take on decoration, presented in bodily-related images of eggs, shrines, houses, fans, hearts, and costumes. Imbued by the fantasy and desire evoked by decoration, Kozloff attempts to humanize the pictorial (and later, public) space with a feminized bodily experience and sensibility in her various works.

Acknowledgments

My son, who grew from a child to a teenager while I was writing my dissertation, one day asked me, "Why do you need advisors to do a dissertation?" At that moment, I thought, "Aren't advisors just like parents for the dissertation?" Most people writing dissertations are probably, as I am, doing it for the first time in their lives. A dissertation takes years to grow--from coming up with a proposal to doing the research, finding funding, to writing and editing, and finally to fixing the details and putting everything together. For me, advisors have been like parents who have helped, guided, and at last seen this "baby" grow to maturity. They have given honest advice, full support, and good nourishment (or constructive criticism).

I thank all of my committee members for their expertise and efforts in "parenting" this dissertation and helping it grow into a reality. Without them, I could not have reached the completion of this challenging task. Professor Hadler, my advisor, took on the full responsibility of helping me at the most difficult stage of my work and directed it onto the right track, in terms of writing in a historical context and creating a sound argument. Professor Long provided continuous support of my work throughout my graduate career and gave significant and intelligent advice. Professor Schneider-Adams gave important suggestions to reformulate some unclear concepts, which helped my dissertation achieve clarity. Professor Manthorne contributed her even judgment, criticism, and encouragement to my work. I would also like to thank Professor Patricia Mainardi for her support, encouragement and guidance of this project.

The grants from the Fulbright Foundation in Taiwan and Asian Cultural Council in New York have supported my years of study in the Graduate Center Art History Doctoral Program until candidacy. Afterwards I received dissertation scholarships from the Chiang Ching-Kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange in Washington, D.C., the Lin Pen Yuan Educational and Cultural Foundation in Taiwan, and the John Rewald Scholarship from the Graduate Center. I also appreciated the support of my researches from the Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America at Radcliffe College at Harvard University in Boston, Through the Flower Foundation in New Mexico, the Taipei Fine Arts Museum and Hanart Gallery in Taiwan, Steinbaum Krauss Gallery, DC Moore Gallery and the Holly Solomon Gallery in New York. In addition, I thank all the artists, art historians and art critics who granted their precious time and valuable opinions in our interviews. My editors Jonathan Goodman, Emily Bowles, Allison Moore, and Bruce Murphy, as well as all my readers, have worked hard to smooth my English, which is my second language. I appreciate them greatly.

My family has supported me and provided me with the stability and security to work things out in my graduate study. Most amazingly, my husband, teaching at a college in Taiwan, sacrificed his own time as an artist to take up the financial burden of the

family and to cook and take care of our son. Sustaining our "coastal" marriage for years, he gave me the continuous support and love that saw this dissertation to completion.

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Finally, this dissertation is also dedicated to all the women who have contributed to improve the condition of women in the world.

Preface

My experience as a feminist artist and writer from Taiwan has been shaped, both personally and politically, by the feminist art of the 1970s in the United States. When I started as a Master of Fine Arts student at the University of North Carolina in Greensboro in the early 1980s, I learned to paint in the early modernist tradition. Judy Chicago lectured there once when I still had no clear idea what feminist art was. Nevertheless, she made an impressive mark on the early stage of my learning about Western art and art history. In retrospect, I realize that the seed of my interest in feminist art was planted years ago.

After I went back to Taiwan to teach at a college in the mid- to late-1980s, following several years' hiatus from my studio work, I started to do collages with patterned paper cutouts. I felt a sudden liberation, and realized that my love for decoration and handicraft had been completely suppressed during the course of my academic training in studio art. I remembered that I used to feel that decoration is a crime, a legacy of my modernist training.

In response to my show in Taipei in 1991, one of my male students looked at my work and said, "Miss Fu, I'm sorry that I have to say that these works certainly look feminine." When a male colleague of mine commented on my works, it was often with an undertone of suspicion. Both men presumably related these works either to the arts and crafts projects for children in elementary school, or to women's handicraft work. Women artists and female students seemed to identify with my works much more than men, but seemed to like them without knowing why. However, a couple of female critics mentioned that my works reminded them of 1970s feminist art in the United States.

The criticisms I received following my artwork's change of direction suddenly awakened my feminist sensibility. I decided to pursue these issues further by studying art

history in New York. Returning to the United States in 1992, I was surprised to discover that 1970s feminist art had almost been forgotten, and was underappreciated if not completely neglected in academia. The feminist discourse in vogue at the time was anti-essentialist and post-feminism. Most feminist art historians and critics adopted ideological or theoretical positions that argued for the social and cultural construction of female identity, the collapse of the binary construct of sexual identity, and the embrace of ethnic and queer identities. Unfortunately, the positive inclusion of multiple issues in 1980s feminist art had caused the negative exclusion of 1970s art. The latter was then condemned as essentialism and was understood as the narrow-minded centralism of white feminism. I immediately felt that something was missing, and started to think about the possibilities of bridging the gap between the 1970s and the 1980s in my historical and critical undertaking to study feminist art history.¹

In my dissertation, I will discuss Judy Chicago's The Dinner Party, Miriam Schapiro's "femmage" series, and Joyce Kozloff's decorative paintings, installations, and public art as three case studies of the 1970s feminist art practice of decoration and handicraft. There are three distinctive parallels in these three artists' lives and careers. First, they are all academically trained, well-informed about art history, and aware of trends in the contemporary art world. In each case, the artist's early work was done in a geometric and minimalist-influenced style prevalent in the 1960s. Second, once they made the decision to become feminist artists, all three rejected the style of modernist, purist painting and embraced a female-oriented subject matter in their art. Third,

¹ Fu Chia-Wen Lien, "Decoration and Handicraft: Re-visioning 1970s Feminist Art," from a paper presented at the annual College Art Association Conference, Toronto, Ontario, February 26, 1998. These three paragraphs are quoted from the beginning section of this unpublished paper.

decoration and handicraft became their new aesthetic approach, and also their political strategy in the exploration of a distinctively feminist art.

Focusing my discussion of handicraft on Chicago's project, and my exploration of decoration on Schapiro's and Kozloff's, I also investigate these practices in various artworks, ranging from collage paintings to installations to public art. The distinctions and particularities of their form, media, messages, and conceptions can provide an understanding of different aspects of decoration and handicraft. With my choice of artists, I will also be able to touch upon both West Coast "community-based" and East Coast "institution-based" feminist art. This division, even though it risks generalization, is quite interesting, especially as it applies to the artists I am writing about. Living and working on the West Coast, Judy Chicago organized the female community for her craft workshops involving The Dinner Party and other collaborative projects, while Miriam Schapiro and Joyce Kozloff on the East Coast developed networks with art institutions and galleries, making their way through feminist activist work and continuous exhibitions.²

It is both peculiar and exciting to observe how the history and reception of The Dinner Party has continued to change during the course of my six years' work on this dissertation. The exhibition of The Dinner Party at the Brooklyn Museum of Art from September 2002 to February 2003 and its permanent installation there in 2004 provides

² Harmony Hammond, interview by author, Tape recording, New York, New York, 20 April 1998. In Seeing Through the Seventies: Essays on Feminism and Art (Amsterdam: G+B Arts International, 2000), Laura Cottingham also analyzed bi-coastal feminisms. For her, New York and Los Angeles formed the two central poles of the feminist art movement. Reflecting this polarity, she writes, "Southern California was more focused on pedagogy, more collaborative, less market oriented, and more encouraging of new media like performance, video, and installation works than the sister network in New York. Both coasts documented and protested the active discrimination against women in fine art, such as the protest of the Whitney Museum in New York and the Los Angeles County Museum" (164).

It should also be noted that there was an active interchange between the two coasts. Both Miriam Schapiro and Joyce Kozloff were engaged in West Coast feminism in the early 1970s. Also, Judy Chicago was never cut off from her connection with the East Coast art world, although she based herself mainly in the West.

recognition for this work as a milestone of 1970s American feminist art. When I began this dissertation, the work was still in the storage room of the Through the Flower Foundation, established by Judy Chicago in New Mexico. For this reason, my tone in writing about this work in Chapters I and II is different than in Chapter V, my conclusion. In Chapter V, I take into account recent reviews in order to discuss the changed status of the work, which has certainly become less shocking, though not necessarily less controversial. Art critics and the general press are, perhaps, less antagonistic towards this work nowadays. Yet, while interviewing visitors at the Brooklyn Museum of Art's exhibition of The Dinner Party, as well as during six years of teaching a "1970s Feminist Art" course at Parsons School of Design, I heard divided views about this work. The complexity, conflict, and controversy associated with it remain among the most interesting aspects. The acquisition of The Dinner Party by one of the country's major art institutions also means an opportunity for another awakening and period of growth for feminism and feminist art, which have often seen to be passing phases. There is still much opportunity for scholarship in this field, both nationally and internationally.

Even though I was not a first-hand witness to the feminist art movement when it began in the 1970s, through interviews, symposia, lectures, and first- and second-hand written accounts, I have become aware of the many controversies and contentions that the art from this period produced. Dealing with this particular period of feminist art is a complicated task, particularly because in Taiwan there was no specific moment of a feminist movement except for what grew out of Western feminism.

American feminist art of the 1970s made a significant mark in Taiwan. Beginning in the 1980s, feminist art gradually emerged and developed through many exhibitions and

organizations in the following decades. On 25 December, 1997, I interviewed Judy Chicago in Taiwan as she was exhibiting in Asia for the first time. When I asked, "What has been your reaction to the response to both the exhibition and yourself?" Chicago answered,

The thing that really astonished me was the level of influence I have had on women artists in Asia. I have been so attacked back home. It was a surprise to know how highly regarded I am by women artists all over the world. I actually now see my new mission in life as going around the world and showing young women that you can survive bad criticism. [laughter] Women are going to have to learn to stand up to criticism. They just are.³

Chicago also proposed a broader and more optimistic view about feminist art.

When asked about her impression of the works of Asian women artists there, she replied,

It is interesting how many of them are willing to be so subjective and personal in their art. My definition of feminist art was always a very broad definition, and given the way the British theorists have criticized me, especially of essentialism, I don't know what they would make of Asian women artists.

Historically this is a very new time. Worldwide for the first time there is an emergence of women artists who are looking at what it means to be female, and expressing this in a variety of ways. And that to me is feminist art.⁴

To consider the generational and geographic aspect of feminist art, I will reflect again on my position as a Taiwanese feminist visiting the United States twice for an extended period of time. I have been able to observe the phenomena in both places and perceive a particular moment of cultural encounter. However, to address international

³ Judy Chicago, interview by author, tape recording, Taipei, Taiwan, 25 December 1997. In December 1997, Judy Chicago was honored with a retrospective at Hanart Gallery in Taiwan and a role in a group show with works by Taiwanese female artists at the Hsin Chung City Cultural Center. This turned out to be a momentous occasion for both the artist and for the many Asian women for whom she had become a source of tremendous hope and inspiration. I interviewed Chicago during this time. My Chinese translation of the interview, "Conversation with Judy Chicago," appeared in *Artist Magazine* 273 (February, 1998), 352-357. A shorter English excerpt is transcribed with help from John Angeline. In this excerpt, Chicago discusses *The Dinner Party* and its critical reception by the feminist community.

feminism in this respect is beyond the scope of this dissertation and will be undertaken as a later project.

⁴ Judy Chicago, interview by author, Taipei, Taiwan, 25 December, 1997.

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Chapter I

Introduction

When I use the term *feminine* to describe some 1970s art practices, I refer to work that deliberately invokes the historicized visual codes of female adornment and female decorative labor; such signifiers include ribbon, lace, makeup, needlework, high heels, pantyhose, embroidery, crochet, quilting, and the color pink. This use of *feminine* contrasts with the ahistorical, womb-based concept of "central-core imagery" or "female forms," which interested Chicago, Schapiro, and others in the early days of the feminist art movement. Rather than describing women's biological differences from men, *feminine*, as I use it here, refers to culturally dictated differences. Still I have connected items associated with the decoration of a woman's *body* with items associated with the kinds of decorative *work* that women have traditionally performed in the home because I think the two are related. It is because women's bodies have served as vehicles for decoration (and trade) that are *the* bodies expected to externalize decoration through labor and craft.¹

--Laura Cottingham

In this long passage, Laura Cottingham, writing in 1996, states several important issues involved in 1970s feminist art that directly relate to my study. For her, decoration is linked to the female world; decoration involves handicraft, which utilizes particular materials; the domestic practice of female traditional art has to do with (the decoration of) the female body; the idea that womb-based central core imagery² and female form emphasized by feminist artists such as Judy Chicago (1939-) and Miriam Schapiro (1923-)

¹ Laura Cottingham, "Eating from the Dinner Party Plates and Other Myths, Metaphors, and Moments of Lesbian Enunciation in Feminism and Its Art Movement," in *Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago's Dinner Party in Feminist Art History*, ed. Amelia Jones (Los Angeles: UCLA at the Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Cultural Center, 1996), 218.

² Judy Chicago, *Through the Flower: My Struggle as a Woman Artist*, with an introduction by Anaïs Nin (New York: Doubleday, 1975; reprint, New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 108, 141. Lucy R. Lippard, *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1976), 40, 49, 69.

goes beyond biological differences to cultural ones; and the notion that female bodies serve as vehicles for externalized decoration and handicraft.

I will synthesize this series of issues into two specific problems: how decoration and handicraft become a female art for feminist artists, and how decoration and handicraft relate to the body. Through these two strands of discussion, I hope to argue that decoration and handicraft constitute a phase of body politics of 1970s feminist art. I argue that decoration and handicraft, though varying in form, technique and material, reflected a particular phase of the body politics of early feminist art. The fantasy, desire, eroticism and sensual pleasure associated with decoration and the tactile experience of the hands-on process involved in handicraft present a corporeal dimension.

* * *

The burgeoning of feminist art in the 1970s presented a challenge to mainstream modernism. While the emergence of feminist art has transformed the art world in many respects, one of the most interesting phenomena of this early generation of feminist artists was the exploration of decoration and handicrafts such as quilting, embroidery, crocheting, patterned tile painting and china painting, which were formerly considered by Greenbergian modernists to be "low art" with derogatory connotations. I hope to clarify how the use of decoration and handicraft constituted formal and political strategies. Through these strategies, women artists developed what Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro have characterized as the "female" style.

Experimenting with and exploring various forms and techniques of handicraft and decoration, feminist artists attempted to subvert what they view as patriarchal values in the establishment, which emphasize form rather than content and the autonomy and purity of painting as defined by Greenbergian formalism. Since the 1950s and 1960s, Greenberg established an authoritative tradition of modernist formalism and disparaged "mere decoration."³ He also created a dichotomy between "superficial ornament" and the "pure surface of abstract painting."⁴

In their 1978 article "Art Hysterical Notes on Progress and Culture," feminist artists Valerie Jaudon and Joyce Kozloff attacked the modernist establishment, which included Minimalism, and introduced a kind of "maximalist" thinking. Listing more than fifty anti-decoration quotations from modern artists, architects, critics, theorists and thinkers--from Frank Lloyd Wright, Adolf Loos, Le Corbusier, and Amédée Ozenfant, to Clement Greenberg-- they demonstrated how in their view the canonical language of art history celebrates the pure, the masculine, and the Western and denigrates the eclectic, the female, and the non-Western.⁵ Their argument anticipated postmodernist thought at the same time that it celebrated embellishment.

³ Clement Greenberg, "On the Role of Nature in Modernist Painting," in Art and Culture (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 174. This essay was written in 1949.

⁴ Clement Greenberg, "The Crisis of the Easel Picture," in Art and Culture (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 154-157, also quoted in Donald Kuspit, Clement Greenberg: Art Critic (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1979), 63, and Gill Perry, "Primitivism and the 'Modern'" in Primitivism, Cubism, Abstraction-The Early Twentieth Century by Charles Harrison, Francis Frascina, and Gill Perry (Yale University Press, 1993), 62.

⁵ Valerie Jaudon and Joyce Kozloff, "Art Hysterical Notions of Progress and Culture," in Heresies: A Feminist Publication on Art and Politics 1, no. 4 (Winter 1977-78), 40, 42; also cited in Carrie Rickey, "Writing (and Righting) Wrongs: Feminist Art Publications," in The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact, ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 128.

Many modernist artists and theorists have had negative views of decoration and decorative art. In 1918, Le Corbusier and Amédée Ozenfant stated, "There is a hierarchy in the arts: decorative art at the bottom, and the human form at the top. Because we are men!"⁶ The Mies-ian concept, "form follows function," later became the aesthetic catch phrase of modernist architecture and design and brought forth the constant striving for pure form without superficial decoration. This paralleled the elaboration of a formalist discussion concerning art ranging from Cubism to abstract movements such as De Stijl, Suprematism, and Minimalism. Abstract art's denial of decoration was further consolidated by Greenberg's formalist theory, when he openly declared the differences between "mere decoration" and abstraction and privileged the latter. Greenberg concluded, "...Only when it becomes mere decoration does abstract art proceed in a void and really turn into 'dehumanized' art."⁷ He insists that abstraction potentially has "pictorial" value while decoration has none.⁸

For decades, the established narrative of Greenbergian Modernism had dominated the art world, and was finally challenged by feminist art in the 1970s. In 1994, Arthur C. Danto affirmed the achievement of women artists. According to Danto, women artists at that time were interesting precisely because they were working against the canonical and established idea of art. Instead of entering the mainstream, women artists redefined the mainstream.⁹

⁶ Amédée Ozenfant and Edouard Jeanneret (Le Corbusier), "Après le Cubisme," (Paris: Editions des Commentaires, 1918), n.p.; also quoted in Jaudon and Kozloff, 38-42.

⁷ Greenberg, "On the Role of Nature in Modernist Painting," 171-174.

⁸ Ibid.; also quoted in Donald B. Kuspit, "The Decorative" Clement Greenberg: Art Critic, 57-86.

⁹ Arthur C. Danto, "Women and Mainstream Art," in Embodied Meanings: Critical Essays and Aesthetic Meditations (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), 53-59. As Danto observes, "The 1970s are a difficult period

But how did women redefine the mainstream? Danto touches upon the application of decoration and handicraft in artwork as an alternative to the modernist paintings. He writes,

And certain ways of modifying matter that would not commonly occur to males, like sewing or stitching, might suggest themselves as alternatives. Women became resourceful seekers of traditional forms of female expressiveness, using their bodies or making patterns or cultivating ornamentation, or raising to a higher power practices like cosmetic modification or dressing dolls or fabricating quilts or making dresses or plaiting hair or tying ribbons. Anything but the traditional and hence the male-dominating forms....¹⁰

Anna Chave's essay "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power" also offers a feminist account of Minimalism.¹¹ Through a discussion of Minimalism as a masculine form, with its rhetoric of power built into the ideology of many minimalist artists such as Carl Andre, Frank Stella, and Richard Serra, Chave explains the inherent danger of an art that relentlessly practices the rhetoric of power. For Chave, minimalist art is about the display of power rather than a critique of power relations. She scrutinizes the titles and

to bring into art-historical focus. Art is not materialized as in the '50s and '60s. Roy Lichtenstein said, 'The seventies seem a kind of nonentity. I don't know what to think of the seventies; I don't know what happened.'...Jennifer Barlett said, 'I didn't really have a point of view like that, I like a lot of different work,' but 'not having a point of view' came to be, by the end of the decade, the point of view to have.... Schapiro said, 'Feminism taught me not to worry about what I was "allowed" or "not allowed" to do as a serious artist.'" (54-55) Danto points out that here there is no dogma, no demand to sell art, no market, no star system: "The 1970s were a Golden Age in which artists could pursue individual visions in a permissive cultural atmosphere under livable economic conditions. In a word, there was no *mainstream*." (56)

¹⁰ Ibid., 57.

¹¹ Anna Chave, "Minimalism and the Rhetoric of Power," *Arts Magazine* 64, no. 5 (January 1990), 44-63. In her discussion of Minimalism as a masculine form with the rhetoric of power, Chave notes that the feminist artists of the 1970s refuted this male establishment with the "female" form of decoration and handicraft. I do not think this essay is an attempt to undermine the value of minimalist art and criticize all the male minimalists. However, in its endeavor to illuminate the conundrum of reading minimalist art and the distance and refusal existing between the art and the viewer, it is rather audience-sympathetic. As the author explains, "Why such an object might elicit both a kick and a kiss, and why a museum guard might do nothing about it are at issue in this essay."(44) The object's look of absolute or "plain power" helps explain the perception that it did not need or merit protecting, or even deserve an assault.

the various media of the works and discusses the narration and signification associated with them. She assesses the power and aggression in this art and the element of the art that reflects contemporary culture and technology.¹²

According to Chave, Minimalism can be seen as replicating "those systems of mediation which have overdetermined our history: Money, the Phallus, and the Concept as privileged operators of meaning." She affirms, "The blank face of Minimalism may come into focus as the face of capital, the face of authority, the face of the father."¹³ Chave further discusses the materials used by Minimalists, which "have a value within the political economy."¹⁴ According to Chave, some female critics (such as Lucy Lippard, Barbara Rose, and Annette Michelson) have suggested the "act of negation" and "implicit violence" in minimalist objects, which exhibit "a cruel taciturnity and disinterest in the spectator, a class of object with the impersonal face of technology, industry and commerce; the unyielding face of the father...."¹⁵ The argument proposed by Chave provides a rationale for understanding 1970s feminist artists' anti-minimalist stance.

Through reviewing the historical formation of the division of high art and low art, domestic and institutional practice, male establishment and the marginality of otherness, it turns clear why decoration and handicraft practiced by both males and females for centuries become a female art promoted by 1970s feminist artists as an aesthetic politics.

¹² Ibid. The author gives examples such as Frank Stella's first black painting, Reichstag (1958), Arbeit Macht Frei (1958), and Die Fahne Hoch (1959), whose titles symbolize Nazi power.

¹³ Ibid., 51.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 54-55.

* * *

Although 1970s feminist art has been documented in anthologies such as Lucy Lippard's From the Center (1976), Randy Rosen and Catherine Brawer's Making their Mark: Women Artists Move into the Mainstream, 1970-85 (1989), Whitney Chadwick's Women, Art and Society (1990) and Norma Broude and Mary Garrard's The Power of Feminist Art (1994),¹⁶ their emphasis has mostly been on historical documentation. Decoration and handicraft are frequently mentioned, but mainly affirmed as a female style expressing female sensibility and tradition without in-depth analysis or criticism. Although the foremost formal and political strategies of 1970s feminist art, decoration and handicraft have not been thoroughly discussed in a book-length study.

The most comprehensive contemporary exploration of female traditional art in the 1970s appeared in the winter 1978 issue of Heresies: A Feminist Publication on Art & Politics, a special issue on women's traditional arts and the politics of aesthetics. The journal revealed how feminist artists of that generation, including Miriam Schapiro and Joyce Kozloff, both of whom were on the editorial board of Heresies, were seriously probing into the subject of decoration and female traditional craft of different generations and countries. Books such as Rozsika Parker's The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine (1989)¹⁷ provide a study of how embroidery became a female practice and how its

¹⁶ Lucy R. Lippard, From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1976). Randy Rosen and Catherine C. Brawer, ed., Making Their Mark-Women Artists Move into the Mainstream, 1970-85 (New York: Abbeville Press, 1989). Whitney Chadwick, Women, Art, and Society (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990). Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, eds., The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994).

¹⁷ Rozsika Parker, The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine (New York: Routledge, 1989).

social-political influence should be acknowledged. In her article "Quilts: the Great American Art,"¹⁸ Patricia Mainardi asserted the artistic value and individual creativity presented in quilting. In feminist art journals such as Heresies, Feminist Art Journal, Womanart, Chrysalis and Woman's Art Journal, the feminist use of decoration and handicraft was defended and celebrated, but also contested. I will explore the debates that developed in conjunction with the appearance of this art.

Linda Nochlin and Lucy Lippard wrote in defense of female art. Mainardi, together with Cindy Nemser in The Feminist Art Journal, questioned the notion of female stereotypes and female sensibility. The implicit restriction of this idea of female stereotypes was the focus of women's art on the realm of female biology, evidenced by the prevalence of vaginal imagery and the female body. The idea of "female sensibility" was controversial and discussed by Mainardi in "Women Artists and Women's Studies":

Another trend deflecting our movement to freedom is Lucy Lippard and Judy Chicago's attempt to establish a so-called 'feminist sensibility' in art which, instead of freeing women artists from age-old male imposed stereotypes such as pastel colors, womb shapes, enfolding forms, seeks to reimpose them with the new found authority that these stereotypes are now coming from 'feminist' women....We who have been labeled, stereotyped, and gerrymandered out of the very definition of art must be free to *define* art, not to pick up the crumbs from the Man's table, in this case labeled infolding forms, circles, pastels or whatever. We must begin to define women's art as *what women do*, not try to slip and squeeze ourselves through the loopholes of the male artworld.¹⁹

Mainardi, however, is not criticizing decoration and handicraft as a female art; instead, she defends female traditional crafts such as quilting as a way "to define women's art as

¹⁸ Patricia Mainardi, "Quilts: The Great American Art," The Feminist Art Journal, 2, no. 1 (Winter 1973), 1, 18-23. Also reprinted in Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, eds., Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 331-46.

¹⁹ Patricia Mainardi, "Women Artists and Women's Studies," in Feminist Revolution, ed. Redstockings of the Women's Liberation Movement (New York: Random House, 1978), 117-18.

what women do" and not be seen "through the loopholes of the male artworld." When she acknowledges a great woman quilt maker by name, she takes the same position as Schapiro, who affirms in an interview, "For me, a good quilt could be as great as a Picasso's work."²⁰

In her frequently quoted essay, "What is Female Imagery?" Nochlin answers the question by saying,

My first reaction is anger, because the term is so constricting. I'm human, undefined by preconceptions, an androgynous being that isn't slated to give birth to any particular imagery. But my second reaction is to try and think it through. I do live in a society, and who I am is determined by the structure of experience a woman is supposed to have. My experience is filtered through a complex interaction between me and the expectations that the world has of me.

I've been reading Dorothy Richardson, who I think, invented the stream-of-consciousness style at the beginning of this century. She consciously set out to create a female style and imagery, the quality of female existence in a certain experience and sensibility. That's female imagery, not something Jungian-predetermined and absolute.²¹

Lippard clarifies her thoughts on female imagery and sensibility:

Of course, "female imagery" was first used, and should continue to be used, to mean female sexual imagery. That wasn't understood and it all got confused. I prefer "female sensibility" because it's vaguer, even more impossible to pin down. There is a lot of sexual imagery in women's art-circle, domes, eggs, spheres, boxes, biomorphic shapes, maybe a certain striation or layering. But that's too specific. It's more interesting to think about fragments, which imply a certain antilogical, antilinear approach and also common to many women's work. I like fragments....²²

²⁰ Miriam Schapiro, interview by author, tape recording, East Hampton, New York, March 24 2002.

²¹ Linda Nochlin, "What is Female Imagery?" Written records of group discussion, in Lucy R. Lippard, From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1976), 80. Reprinted from Ms. 3, no. 11 (May 1975). In this group discussion, the women participating are: Susan Hall, figurative painter; Lucy Lippard, art critic; Linda Nochlin, art historian; Joan Snyder, abstract painter; and Susan Torre, architect.

²² Lucy R. Lippard, "What is Female Imagery?" Written records of group discussion, in Lucy R. Lippard, From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art, 81.

In my view, Nochlin criticized female sensibility and style on formal grounds. It is important to take note of the social-political interpretation of certain feminist approaches aside from formal assessment. As Norma Broude and Mary Garrard succinctly put it,

The 1970s debate about women's art was consistently misdirected to the question of "whether" rather than "how" women used certain forms..., yet the question to be posed is not whether the form language is essentially female or male, but, rather, what is *signified* when that form language is used by women or men.²³

This early period of feminist discourse was marked by the confrontation between various feminist art discussions, and the feminist artists' negotiation between the marginal and mainstream arts.

Body Politics

The body politics of feminist art in the 1970s mainly emphasized the female persona, body, and sexuality of performance art, which was often overt and extreme. The radical way feminists used nudity, the self, the body, and body parts produced both shock and artistic debates. In contrast, decoration and handicraft arts of the time seemed to be more retrogressive than progressive, because they hark back to the traditions of the female arts of weaving, crocheting, embroidery and the like. Although the practices of decoration and handicraft traditionally associated with women involve complex social and economic factors, such practices have never been acknowledged as radical and audacious in comparison to performance art involving the body and sexuality. Instead, crafts are often considered naïve, retrogressive, or kitsch. For example, Chicago's The Dinner

²³ Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, "Introduction: Feminism and Art in the Twentieth Century," in Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, eds., The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact, 25.

Party seems to provoke more controversy over the piece's sexual imagery than the application of decoration and handicraft which, in my analysis, actually also relates to the female body and sexuality.

In Lucy Lippard's essay "Pain and Pleasure of Rebirth: European and American Women's Body Art" and Amelia Jones's Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago's Dinner Party in Feminist Art History, the authors, in their discussions of feminist body politics, focus on the physical female body or sexual imagery used by female artists as sites of political struggle, often expressed in performance art. Lippard analyzes the idea of body art:

I have no strict definition of "body art" to offer, since I am less interested in categorizing it than in the issues it raised and in its relationship to feminism. Early on, the term body art was used too loosely, like all art labels, and it has since been applied to all performance art and autobiographical art rather than just to that art focused upon the body or body parts—usually the artist's own body...I am not setting out, therefore, to draw any conclusions, but to provoke thought and discussion about sexual and gender-oriented uses of the body in Conceptual art by women.²⁴

While my analysis of the body politics of decoration and handicraft is also about "sexual and gender-oriented uses of the body," the issues and categories of body art discussed by Lippard above have little to do with my project. My focus is not completely on the application of the physical and material body, such as the body and self in performance art. I propose that the practices of decoration and handicraft are significantly connected to the female body. Investigating how the female body was reflected in the use of decoration and handicraft, I address aspects of intermediation, extension, function,

²⁴ Lucy R. Lippard, From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art, 121-138. Lippard discusses body and performance art, which emerged in the 1960s mainly through conceptual art done by men, including Yves Klein who used female nudes as "living brushes." Only in the 1970s did body art emerge as an art created by both sexes, on both American coasts and on both sides of the Atlantic. Lippard's observations—on the differences between European and American body art, the issue of sexual identity, self as subject, androgyny, the use of body parts, using the body of the opposite sex, maso-sadism, exorcism and its reception—are especially interesting and insightful.

surrogation, reference, and sometimes even the absence of the body in the visual imagery of works. Although decoration and handicraft are not commonly discussed as a type of body art, their processes and products are nonetheless related to a gendered body, and exemplify the pleasure, fantasy, and desire derived from their production.

In her discussion of how "the process of the destruction of derogatory myths surrounding female experience and physiology appears to be one of the major motives for the recent surge in body art by feminist artists," Lippard includes craft in the category of "bodyworks" by women. She writes:

Bodyworks by women, and art dealing with specifically female and feminist issues, materials, images, and experience, no matter what style they were couched in, became publicly visible with more difficulty than mainstream art and have therefore acquired a "radical" image in some circles. Although such "women's work" eventually suffered a brief vogue, it was initially considered clever, or pretty, but not important, and was often relegated to the categories of Naïve art, or craft...It was justifiably perceived as coming from an "other" point of view, and was frequently labeled retrograde for its lack of compliance with the evolutionary mainstream.²⁵

In the same vein, decoration and handicraft, with their relation to the female world and domesticity, were also employed by feminist artists to make a radical statement challenging mainstream art. As Lippard suggests, the negative associations with decoration and handicraft have to do with their connection to the female body and women's physical experience. I argue that decoration and handicraft are as central to the body politics of feminist art as the theme of body and sexuality in performance art.

Laura Cottingham is one of the few scholars who attempts to link the female practice of decoration and handicraft to the body. Cottingham says that the term

²⁵ Ibid., 138.

"feminine" as used by Chicago, Schapiro, and Lippard in some 1970s art practices can refer to both "the historicized visual codes of female adornment and female decorative labor" and "the ahistorical, womb-based concept of central-core imagery or female forms." What is particularly significant is that she attempts to make connections between domestic decorative works and female bodies--which, according to her, "serve as vehicles" for decoration and handicraft practice.²⁶

When Schapiro began her transformation from making abstract expressionist and minimalist art to feminist art, she started to collage fabrics onto the canvas in images of women's costumes from different cultures, going beyond the traditional medium of paint. She experienced a new kind of intimacy with her material through this bodily experience.

I began to read up on quilts and samplers and the history of lace and needlework in general. It was as though I were trying to reconstruct a history for myself. I wanted a history of women who worked with their hands. I wanted to reconstruct what was in their minds. I use paint and canvas: they used other materials.²⁷

With their corporeal dimension, decoration and handicraft were used by feminist artists to embody a "mind speaking through the body" instead of a "body serving the mind." The study of the artistic development of Chicago, Schapiro, and Kozloff reveals their interest in and concern with body images and female identification; furthermore, we can see that the body politics of decoration and handicraft is expressed in their full-fledged

²⁶ Laura Cottingham, "Eating from The Dinner Party Plates," 218.

²⁷ Miriam Schapiro, "Interview with Miriam Schapiro by Moira Roth" (Berkeley, California, 12 November, 1973), in Miriam Schapiro: The Shrine, the Computer and The Dollhouse (San Diego: Mandeville Art Gallery, University of California, 1975), 15. Schapiro recalled, "After the experience at Womanhouse and after any other intense cooperative experiences with women artists...I had a great need after fourteen months away from my studio to go back and be a private person and a private artist again."

feminist works.

* * *

Definition of Decoration

Decoration is a term that resists coherent definition. Used in reference to both fine and applied art throughout human history, decoration has run the gamut of artistic production, from functional to non-functional, figural to abstract, content-bearing to content-free, and sacred to profane. In general, decoration embraces the qualities of embellishment, superficiality, ornament, and pattern-making.²⁸

In my analysis, I will use the definition of decoration discussed by Trisha Laughlin in her essay "Lee Krasner and the Decorative Impulse in Modern Art." She delineates some of the basic characteristics by which the decorative has been defined:

1. A flat, shallow pictorial space (surface) is one of the most significant aspects of decoration. For example, more often than not, the tile mural, carpet, tapestry, wallpaper and fabric designs render no deep sense of receding space.
2. Another important aspect that has traditionally been used to define decoration is a de-emphasized subject matter or content. The surface of a decorative object creates above all else a pleasing appearance of forms and patterns...²⁹

²⁸ E.H. Gombrich, *The Sense of Order: A Study in the Psychology of Decorative Art* (London: Phaidon Press, 1979), x. In his preface, Gombrich explains the terms of ornament, design, decoration, and pattern. "In Germany the term *Ornament* would serve quite well...to most speakers of English, 'ornament' conveys some knick-knack on the mantel-piece, and to the musician a technical term for certain flourishes. The word 'design' tends to relate to technology and the term 'decoration' rather begs the question whether the practice with which I deal is simply one of adornment. There remains that jack-of-all-trades, the term 'pattern', which I shall use quite frequently though not with a very good conscience." Gombrich apologizes for not being able to give clear definitions of the terms he uses: "Luckily it is a mistake to think that what cannot be defined cannot be discussed. If that were so we could talk neither about life nor about art."

²⁹ Trisha Laughlin, "Lee Krasner and the Decorative Impulse in Modern Art," *Art Criticism* 10, no. 2 (1995), 33. Laughlin's definition is applied here for its merit of simplicity and clarity. Chronologically and historically, the objects of her study are also closer to the contemporary period that I will explore.

For Laughlin, the decorative element "appeals more to the eye than the intellect": "Decoration, therefore, is defined by an almost exclusively sensual, perceptual experience of colors and forms, rather than the perception of an illusionistic or symbolic narrative, typical of an artistic composition."³⁰ Laughlin's definition has the merit of simplicity, appropriately narrowing down the discussion of decoration in the context of modern art.

The Association of Decoration with the Feminine

When the decorative was associated with the feminine in the modernist era, the underlying aesthetic judgment of decoration was further degraded. Impressionist brushstrokes were described as feminine.³¹ Female painters such as Marie Laurencin and Berthe Morisot were designated decorative painters by Guillaume Apollinaire.³²

In her discussion of decoration, modernity, and femininity, Gill Perry lays out the hierarchical relationship between fine art and the decorative, which was further complicated by the gender roles of artists. First, male art critics such as Apollinaire designated female artists like Morisot and Laurencin as decorative painters. Second, many female artists who in fact were both painters and decorative artists preferred to be identified as fine artists rather

³⁰ Ibid., 32-54.

³¹ Gill Perry, "Primitivism and the 'Modern'" in Primitivism, Cubism, Abstraction-The Early Twentieth Century by Charles Harrison, Francis Frascina, and Gill Perry (Yale University Press, 1993), 60-61. Pissarro used the term "decoration" pejoratively as meaning superficial ornamentation and applied art, and criticized Monet's painting in an 1888 exhibition as "skillful decoration."

³² Guillaume Apollinaire, "Art News: The Decorative Arts and Female Painting," in Apollinaire on Art, Essays and Reviews, 1902-1918, ed. Leroy C. Breunig, trans. Susan Suleiman (New York: Viking Press, 1972), 208-210. Apollinaire thinks the decorative painter will study female artists such as Morisot and Laurencin. "A decorative style that, issuing from the great French styles, would blend with the harmonies of works like these—frank, simple, free of all social or doctrinaire tendencies, and above all spontaneous." This discussion is also cited in Gill Perry, Women Artists and the Parisian Avant-Garde (Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 1995), 115-116.

than decorative artists. However, in their enterprise of self-portraiture, they masqueraded their femininity with decoration.³³

The concept of masqueraded femininity was initially analyzed by Mary Ann Doane in her theories of female spectatorship in the flourishing of feminist discourse of the 1980s. According to Doane, to return the male gaze and to reconstruct the female gaze, women must transcend the narcissism created by the objectification and sexualization of the female body and by masquerading femininity. Doane says, "The Masquerade, in flaunting femininity, holds it at a distance. Womanliness is a mask which can be worn or removed."³⁴ I propose that decoration, in its application by women to their artworks, often functions in an intermediary role of masquerading femininity to defy sexualized objectification and to reconstruct female spectatorship. Decoration associated with the female body projects fantasy, and a desire to confront the condition of being objectified in the male gaze.³⁵

As we have seen, for many authors, decorative elements incorporated into the fine arts were viewed pejoratively as a feminine practice. Doane, instead, proposes an active role for women in performing masqueraded femininity. Miriam Schapiro's 1970s feminist work incorporating decoration in female body images reflects Doane's idea.

³³ Gill Perry, Women Artists and the Parisian Avant-Garde, 115-116.

³⁴ Mary Ann Doane, "Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator," Screen 23, no. 3-4 (September-October 1982), 81; Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasures and the Narrative Cinema," in Visual and Other Pleasures (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1989), 14-26. Mulvey studies gender roles in film, and "fetishism" and "voyeurism" in the traditional gender structure and the unconscious construction of gender identity. Under these conditions and terms, women become the passive objects of a male gaze and women are more bearers of meaning than makers of meaning. Doane's essay investigates Mulvey's study (originally published in 1975) and takes her conclusions one step further, intending to subvert the male gaze by theorizing female spectatorship.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 74-87.

Abstract Form Incorporated into Decorative Art

There were women artists in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries whose art was both decorative and abstract. Sonia Delaunay and Sophie Tauber-Arp's decorative art and textile designs, and Bauhaus and Russian Constructivist textile designs by women artists are cases in point.³⁶ Taking Sonia Delaunay as an example, Whitney Chadwick writes,

Dissatisfied with the inherently static qualities of painting as a medium, during the summer of 1913, Delaunay began to make simultaneous dresses, in reaction against the drabness of current fashions. Their patterns of abstract forms were arranged both to enhance the natural movement of the body and to establish a shimmering movement of color. The poet Blaise Cendrars's remark of 1913, "On her dress she wears her body," suggests that the female body itself was being perceived as an important signifier for modernity. In the twentieth century, as we shall see, it was fashion which translated the principles of abstraction to, and defined modernity for, a broad public.³⁷

In the 1920s, Delaunay's costume and fashion designs were exhibited, purchased, and well received. It is also worth noting that these women artists did not differentiate or set hierarchies between fine art and functional objects, or abstract form and decorative form. Therefore, they could break down the boundaries and reiterate the role of art in society and art as production.³⁸ This was in direct opposition to the later Greenbergian differentiation of abstraction and decoration. Only after the emergence of feminist art in the 1970s were their

³⁶ Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art, and Society*, 249. As Chadwick notes, in the "Productivist Manifesto," "Stepanova and Rodchenko called for artists to serve the public. Textile and dress design were central in the Productivist desire to fuse completely the artistic and technological aspects of production...."

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 244. In chapter 9, "Modernism, Abstraction, and the New Woman," Chadwick states her thesis. "I want to discuss several less often explored aspects of the development of abstraction in the early twentieth century. First, there is the extent to which its visual language derives from that of the decorative arts, particularly textiles, and why. Second, how did the fashion designs that resulted from geometric abstraction, when worn, come to signify modernity and, at the same time, to obscure very real kinds of social change that would ultimately erode the ideal of individual artistic freedom so prized by modern artists at the beginning of this century? Finally, how are we to view the unusual fact that women functioned both as producers of this new visual culture and as the signifiers of its meaning?" (236).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 246.

achievements reevaluated and justified through increasing attention in publications on women artists.

Body Politics or the Corporeal Dimension of Decoration

The erotic and corporeal associations of decoration often implicitly appear in the writings of artists decades before the feminist era and provide an interesting commentary on this issue. Adolf Loos, for example, is one of the early theorists who discussed the erotic and corporeal aspect of decoration. In his famous essay "Ornament and Crime," Loos bases his argument about decoration's relation to crime on three factors. First, he mentions the "primitive" aspect of such decoration as tattoos, and states that modern man does not need them.³⁹ Second, he relates the erotic side of art to ornament by citing a peculiar example of "the cross." He claims that "the first ornament invented, the cross, was of erotic origin. The first work of art, the first artistic act, is a horizontal line (the woman) and a vertical line (the man) penetrating her."⁴⁰ Third, he explains that the labor involved in decoration is no longer suitable for the modern age. He admits that decoration is for pleasure but argues that we no longer need this kind of pleasure: "Even greater is the damage ornament inflicts on the

³⁹ The attempt to track down where and when "Ornament and Crime" was originally published is somewhat difficult. Some of the sources still express a slight uncertainty as to when the first publication really occurred, but it seems pretty much settled: On 21 January, 1910, Loos gave a talk (about half an hour) under this title. It was then printed in French in June 1913 in both "Cahier d'aujourd'hui," and in "L'esprit nouveau", 15 November, 1920. In German it was published only in 1929, in the "Frankfurter Zeitung" (24 October, 1929) and in the "Prager Tagblatt" on 10 November, 1929. It was then also included in the collection of essays by Loos titled "Trotzdem, 1900-1930" published in Innsbruck (Brenner Verlag) in 1931. Here, I use the English publication by Ludwig Munz and Gustav Kunstler, *Adolf Loos: Pioneer of Modern Architecture* (New York: Praeger, 1966), 226. As Loos notes, Papuan tattoos, kills and eats man but he is not considered criminal. The modern man who tattoos himself is a criminal or a degenerate. For example, prisoners are often tattooed. Loos also mentions that the urge to decorate one's face is the origin of graphic art. He claimed, "All art is erotic."

⁴⁰ Munz and Kunstler, 226.

workers. As ornament is no longer a natural product of our civilization, it accordingly represents backwardness or degeneration, and the labor of the man who makes it is not workers. As ornament is no longer a natural product of our civilization, it accordingly adequately remunerated."⁴¹ In summary, Loos's interpretations of the primitive, the erotic, and the labor-intensive aspects of ornament underscore the connection between ornament and the body, but from a negative perspective. As he states, "the advocate of ornament believes that my urge for simplicity is equivalent to a mortification of the flesh." He concludes that lack of ornament is a sign of spiritual strength.⁴²

In Jaudon and Kozloff's essay "Art Hysterical Notes on Progress and Culture," written in the 1970s, Loos's "Ornament and Crime" was quoted four times:

We have outgrown ornament; we have fought our way through to freedom from ornament. See, the time is nigh, fulfillment awaits us. Soon the streets of the city will glisten like white walls, like Zion, the holy city, the capital of heaven. Then fulfillment will be come.

No ornament can any longer be made today by anyone who lives on our cultural level.... We have art, which has taken the place of ornament....

I have made the following discovery and I pass it on to the world: The evolution of culture is synonymous with the removal of ornament from utilitarian objects....

....The Papuan tattoos his skin, his boat, his paddles, in short everything he can lay hands on. He is not a criminal. The modern man who tattoos himself is either a criminal or a degenerate....⁴³

⁴¹ Ibid., 228-229. While Loos associated decoration with eroticism and decadence, he was also ambivalent. He mentions the pleasure involved in the labor of decoration. When Loos had a shoemaker make a pair of shoes without decoration, he admitted, "He has less work, but I have robbed him of all his pleasure." (230-231).

⁴² Ibid., 228-231.

⁴³ Ibid., quoted in Jaudon and Kozloff, 38-42.

The avid defense of the modernist purist idea and the condemnation of ornament by Loos became an influential part of the discourse, resulting in the long-term suppression of decoration in modern art.

As Kozloff reflected in 1975,

Some years ago, I noticed that the most taboo thing you could say about an abstract painting was that it was decorative. That was the biggest put-down. After some thought, I decided that this taboo was both sexist and racist (since it refers to the so-called "decorative arts"--those done by women and by people of non-Western cultures). Since I'm most interested in the arts of women and the arts of other cultures, I decided to "come out." Now I want to make paintings that do not deny their inherent decorativeness, that in fact, reaffirm their decorativeness, and are as ostentatiously decorative as they want to be.⁴⁴

Art critic John Perreault, advocating for pattern and decoration art, expresses a similar perspective, writing that "the exclusion of decoration from serious consideration as art" in the name of modernism and purity has been motivated by sexism (the idea that decoration is feminine) and racism (the idea that ornament is savage). Perreault believes that "for too long a time, it has been commonly held that decoration is what savages do; they scar and tattoo their bodies. Decoration is what women do; no matter how poor or overworked they are, they are always trying to make themselves and their environment beautiful."⁴⁵

In discussing Loos's "Ornament and Crime," Gombrich mentions how Neoclassicism valued the naked body without adornment in his 1979 book, The Sense of Order. Gombrich wrote, "The aesthetics propounded by Loos certainly harked back to the Neo-classical tradition, which saw in any surfeit of ornament a symptom of vulgarity."

⁴⁴ Joyce Kozloff, "Excerpts from Tapes Made with Judy Seigel About Decoration in Art," in Miriam Schapiro ed., Art: A Women's Sensibility (Valencia, Calif.: California Institute of the Arts, 1975), 38.

⁴⁵ John Perreault, "On Decorative Art," in New Decorative Works from the Collection of Norma

Regarding the alignment of primitivism and ornament, he quotes Loos's statement of 1898: "The less civilized a people is, the more prodigal it will be with ornament and decoration." Furthermore, as Gombrich explains, "When Loos came to develop and expound his identification of ornament with barbarism and with crime he drew even more heavily on the erotic association of decoration. In fact, Loos identifies ornament with primitive eroticism and, at least by implication, the absence of ornament with purity and chastity."⁴⁶

When asked in an interview about the connection between decoration and the female body, Miriam Schapiro cited the example of clothing. She recognized that the differences in choice of pattern and style in clothing between various cultures and peoples can signify different identities.⁴⁷ When Schapiro says that women wear plain, simple, single-colored suits to avoid harassment by men, she implicitly refers to the sexual and erotic association of decoration.⁴⁸ Schapiro, in making her works full of decoration and pattern, nevertheless emphasizes the bodily involvement of eye and hand: "In the thirst for beauty, eyes and hands, servants of the imagination, translated primary forms into complex patterns."⁴⁹ Arguing for a mind speaking through the body, 1970s feminist artists who applied decoration and handicraft in their art works represent a phase

and William Roth (Florida: Loch Haven Art Center, 1983), 6.

⁴⁶ Adolf Loos, *Samtliche Schriften*, ed. F. Gluck, vol.1 (Vienna: Herold, 1962), 167, 65, 276-78; quoted in Gombrich, *Sense of Order*, 59-61.

⁴⁷ Miriam Schapiro, interview by author, tape recording, East Hampton, New York, 24 March 2002.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Miriam Schapiro, "Geometry and Flowers," in *The Artist & The Quilt*, ed. Charlotte Robinson (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983), 31.

of body politics that aspired to subvert the hierarchy between mind and body, art and craft, abstraction and decoration, Western and non-Western.

Definition of Handicraft

In this section, I will deal with several points concerning handicraft; first, a brief definition of handicraft; second, the conflation of decoration and handicraft; and third, the construction and the deconstruction of the hierarchy between art and craft in relation to the bodily aspect of handicraft and its emphasis on tactility. In the context of my study, handicraft is defined as a mode involving a hands-on process carrying out meticulous and repetitive work with a particular kind of material. In the American Heritage Dictionary, handicraft is defined as: "1. Skill and facility with the hands; workmanship. 2. A craft or occupation requiring skilled use of the hands. 3. Work produced by skilled hands."⁵⁰ Notably, all three definitions relate handicraft to the skillful use of the hands, solidifying the connection between the handicraft movement and the use of a specific part of the body, the hands. Second, in each definition, handicraft requires special skill. Nevertheless, these two elements are not enough to specify the handicraft that I examine here, because all kinds of art-making, including painting and sculpture, also involve the use of the hands and some skill. The particular kinds of handicraft, such as embroidery, needlework, ceramics, crocheting and so on, that I will discuss, involve specific kinds of materials, processes, formats, and skills. These handicraft arts are also often associated with the traditional female tasks performed in the past or Third World cultures, and for that reason they are often excluded from the "fine art" domain and considered "low art."

⁵⁰ The American Heritage Dictionary, 2nd College Edition (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1982), 591, s.v. "handicraft."

How Handicraft Became Associated with the Feminine

Using embroidery as her object of study, Rozsika Parker presents an argument about the formation of the female identification with handicraft. In her attempt to clarify the role of embroidery, Parker writes,

The classification of embroidery is a difficult task. To term it "art" raises special problems. To move it up on the ladder of forms of art will be affirming the hierarchical categorization. To describe it as art will fail to differentiate it from painting and sculpture and the differences of medium... Also, embroidery failed to comply with the utilitarian imperative that defines craft. Traditionally, women called it "work" involving patience and perseverance... The term was engendered by an ideology of femininity as service and selflessness and the insistence that women work for others, not for themselves. I have decided to call embroidery art because it is, undoubtedly, a cultural practice involving iconography, style and a social function.⁵¹

Parker studied how embroidery became related to the feminine ideal and identification of female roles. She examined religious tradition, social class, and domestic issues in the history of embroidery in order to clarify how embroidery was associated with the making of the feminine.

Parker also notes that both men and women practiced embroidery in medieval times, but it became a gender-specific practice through the reconstruction of the Victorian ideal of femininity.⁵² She summarizes:

The art of embroidery has been the means of educating women into the feminine ideal, and of proving that they have attained it, but it has also provided a weapon of resistance to the constraints of femininity....By mapping the relationship between the history of embroidery and changing notions of what constituted feminine behavior from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century, we can see how the art became implicated in the creation of femininity across classes, and that the development of ideals of feminine

⁵¹ Parker, 5-6.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 39.

behavior determined the style and iconography of needlework. To know the history of embroidery is to know the history of women.⁵³

In The Second Sex, Simone de Beauvoir wrote, "It is evident that woman's 'character'--her convictions, her values, her wisdom, her morality, her tastes, her behavior--are to be explained by her situation."⁵⁴ In defining femininity, Parker clarifies that "the behavior expected and encouraged in women, though obviously related to the biological sex of the individual, is shaped by society."⁵⁵ Parker claims that the history of embroidery also reflects changing ideas about femininity, which is a social, biological and psychological product.⁵⁶

In both Janis Jefferies's essay "Text and Textiles: Weaving Across the Borderlines" and Nancy Miller's book Subject to Change, weaving and textiles are interpreted as metaphors of female writing. As Jefferies affirms, women's crafts "guarantee a range of protective, comforting and homely value...but also residues of 'Women's Time.'"⁵⁷ Miller takes weaving, textiles and tapestry as metaphors for the feminist poetics of writing and for the analysis of the modes of production of female work. What is at stake is that both femininity and textile are erased and distorted by

⁵³ Ibid., Forward.

⁵⁴ Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex (London: Penguin Books, 1972), 635.

⁵⁵ Parker, 4. Here, I think it is useful to consider Parker's delineation of ways to address femininity. They include the following four categories:

The construction of femininity refers to the psychoanalytic and social account of sexual differentiation.

(Lived) femininity is a lived identity for women either embraced or resisted.

The feminine ideal is a historically changing concept of what women should be.

The feminine stereotype is a collection of attributes which is imputed to women and against which their every concern is measured.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Janis Jefferies, "Text and Textiles: Weaving Across the Borderlines," in New Feminist Art Criticism, ed. Katy Deepwell (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 1995), 65.

history. In affirming female writing and textiles, Miller takes the position that "woman as speaking subject" articulates the female voice in texts and textiles.⁵⁸ In the same vein, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar in The Madwoman in the Attic discuss weaving and women and affirm that weaving is a mind practice: "True it is, spinning with the fingers is more proper to our sex than studying or writing poetry, which is the spinning with the brain."⁵⁹ The metaphor is further stated:

If [Emily] Dickinson's female spider artist suggests her deliberate elaboration of an aesthetic of artifice, that same spider implies also her commitment to another central female metaphor-sewing...both in the subtle subversiveness of her sewing and in the striving toward wholeness of her sewing expressed, Dickinson was enacting and exploiting a traditional metaphor for the female artist. Like Ariadne, Penelope, and Philomela, women have used their looms, thread, and needles both to defend themselves and silently to speak of themselves...⁶⁰

Melissa Meyer and Miriam Schapiro discuss the aesthetic and technical authenticity of women's needlework: "...it is necessary to point out the extraordinary works of art by women which despite their beauty are seen as leftovers of history. Aesthetic and technical contributions have simply been overlooked. Here, for example, we are concerned with the authenticity and energy in needlework."⁶¹ Miriam Schapiro, in formulating her femmage work, reflected back on the value of women's traditional quilts. She says:

⁵⁸ Nancy K. Miller, "Archnologies: The Woman, The Text and the Critic," in Subject to Change: Reading Feminist Writing (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 77-80.

⁵⁹ Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 638.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 641.

⁶¹ Melissa Meyer and Miriam Schapiro, "Waste Not, Want Not: An Inquiry into What Women Saved and Assembled," Heresies: A Feminist Publication on Art and Politics 1, no. 4 (Winter 1977-78), 66-69.

Although quilts have their own special domain in the history of folk art and have constituted a universal form of needlework since before 1750, only now is their significance as an indigenous American art form created exclusively by women beginning to be recognized. The quilting tradition illuminates the darkness of women's history like a torch, showing us the strength and power of women as artist-makers and the consolidation of women as a sharing community.⁶²

How handicraft became a female art is discussed here in both historical and social contexts. Reclaiming the value of traditional female craft, women artists of the 1970s found that by using handicraft techniques, a new feminist aesthetics and politics could be expressed.

Handicraft and Its Bodily Connection

Many modern and contemporary artists have incorporated craft into their artistic production as an attempt to break the boundaries between art and craft. Bruce Metcalf, in "Craft and Art, Culture and Biology," insists that art and craft are different undertakings. He argues that art and craft gained their respective high and low hierarchical classifications in the modern context, and that the biological and bodily connection of craft contributes to this hierarchy. He believes that art and craft have different value systems in their social, cultural, and biological contexts.⁶³

Metcalf qualifies "craft" as suggesting skillful labor and denoting a class of objects including ceramics, weaving, and silversmithing. While the contemporary art world value system prizes the open-ended manipulation of meaning, craft must retain several limitations. Its objecthood and material come as a prior condition. A craft object must be made

⁶² Schapiro, "Geometry and Flowers," 26.

substantially by hand, utilizing the hand itself, although in some cases, power tools may be used.⁶⁴ Still, in Metcalf's terms, the objecthood and material in the domain of craft maintain a specific nature. The objecthood mentioned here is utterly different from the often-manufactured minimalist art devoid of gesture and traces of handicraft. In the late sixties, process art and post-minimalist art were emerging.⁶⁵ Lucy Lippard discusses characteristics of the repetition and association of craft process in the works of Eva Hesse, and also mentions the notion of ritual, "which allows scope to fantasy, compulsive use of the body accompanied by a freeing of the mind."⁶⁶

After clarifying the culture of craft and its definition, Metcalf's second initiative is to account for the nature of craft. His assumption, in keeping with his differentiation of art and craft, is to see craft as connected to the body through its tactility and intimate nature. To address the relationship between craft and biology, Metcalf applies educational psychologist Howard Gardner's study of multiple intelligences, which revised the widely accepted hierarchy of mind over body and thought over physical labor. Among the six kinds of intelligence identified by Gardner, the sixth kind, *bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence*, which

⁶³ Bruce Metcalf, "Craft and Art, Culture and Biology," in The Culture of Craft, ed. Peter Dormer (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 1997), 68. Metcalf's premise is that the differentiation between art and craft derives from the differences between seeing "art-as-language" or "art-as-object."

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 69-71.

⁶⁵ Richard Armstrong and Richard Marshall, The New Sculpture 1965-75: Between Geometry and Gesture (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art), 1990.

⁶⁶ Lucy Lippard, Eva Hesse (New York: New York University Press, 1976), 209. According to Lippard, "The most salient feature of Hesse's art can be related to her fascination with repetition....The wrapping and binding and layering process is also repetitive....Women are always derogatorily associated with crafts, and have been conditioned towards such chores as tying, sewing, knotting, wrapping, binding, knitting, and so on."

refers to fine motor movement of the fingers and hands and gross motor movements of the body, can be seen as a foundation of craft practice.⁶⁷

Metcalf insists on the autonomy of craft, and studies the separate and hierarchical development of art and craft in the modern era; however, feminist artists' and contemporary artists' incorporation of craft defies this simple categorization. The embroidery of the runners and the china painting plates in Judy Chicago's The Dinner Party are not autonomous functional craft objects any more, but rather vehicles of feminist politics. In addition, more often than not, with reduced or substituted labor force in handicraft process, contemporary artists' or feminist artists' application of craft technique mutilates rather than revives or preserves the tradition of craft. Acknowledging the biological and cognitive foundation of craft practice, Metcalf mentions that bodily intelligence appears to be linked to language and is the "mind speaking through the body."⁶⁸

Three Case Studies--Judy Chicago, Miriam Schapiro, Joyce Kozloff

The definitions and studies of decoration and handicraft in the above section provide a background for the rebellion by 1970s feminist artists. They applied these elements in their works to challenge art history, to subvert the established canon of aesthetics, and to incorporate female traditional art into their creativity.

⁶⁷ Howard Gardner, Frame of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 206, quoted in Bruce Metcalf, "Craft and Art, Culture and Biology," 75. Gardner proposes six distinct types of intelligence. While the categories themselves are artificial, they denote real properties of the brain. Linguistic intelligence and logical/mathematical intelligence are the capacities measured by IQ tests and the like, and almost exclusively form the Western conception of mental power. But Gardner also proposes musical intelligence, spatial intelligence, personal intelligence (which governs social and introspective skills), and bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence.

⁶⁸ Metcalf, 76-77.

In my dissertation, I focus on three artists whose works consciously address decoration and handicraft. While stressing female experience and sensibility, Judy Chicago applied female traditional crafts such as embroidery and china painting in her collaborative political project, The Dinner Party (fig. 1) Miriam Schapiro turned decoration and handicraft into collage works emphasizing a "female style" that she called "femmage." Joyce Kozloff reinstated decoration into architectural spaces such as interior decoration and public murals. These diverse approaches reflect different levels of conceptualization of decoration and handicraft and serve to describe various aspects of feminist art's revolt against the modernist establishment. In my discussion, I also incorporate some of each artist's early and later works in order to reveal their concern with body images and female identification, corresponding to the body politics of decoration and handicraft. In addition, I briefly discuss the 1971 project Womanhouse (fig. 2), created by Chicago and Schapiro with 21 female students in the Feminist Art Program at CalArts. It marked the inception of feminist art on the West Coast by exploring female experience with the representation of domestic space in both a symbolic and realistic manner.

It can be claimed that the essay "Art Hysterical Notions of Progress and Culture," written by Valerie Jaudon and Joyce Kozloff in 1977 and published in Heresies: A Feminist Publication on Art & Politics, was the manifesto of feminist decorative art and the "Pattern and Decoration" movement. The movement includes artists, curators, and critics with diverse approaches, the number and scope of which cannot be covered in this dissertation. In other words, I do not attempt to present an overview or a value judgment about the pattern and decoration movement. In this essay, the collective refutation Jaudon and Kozloff made concerning this issue included a list of pejorative reactions to the word

"decorative" by mainly modernist art historians, theorists, and writers--all male. This article functions as a declaration of the feminist critique of the hierarchy between fine and applied art. It also functions as the justification of the "Pattern and Decoration" movement, as stated in the introductory paragraphs of the essay:

As feminists and artists exploring the decorative in our own paintings, we were curious about the pejorative use of the word "decorative" in the contemporary art world. In rereading the basic texts of Modern Art, we came to realize that the prejudice against the decorative has a long history and is based on hierarchies: fine art above decorative art, Western art above non-western art, men's art above women's art. By focusing on these hierarchies we discovered a disturbing belief system based on the moral superiority of the art of Western civilization.

We decided to write a piece about how *language* has been used to communicate this moral superiority. Certain words have been handed down unexamined from one generation to the next. We needed to take these words away from the art context to examine and decode them. They have colored our own history, our art training. We have had to rethink the underlying assumptions of our education.

Within the discipline of art history, the following words are continuously used to characterize what has been called "high art": man, mankind, the individual man, individuality, humans, humanity, the human figure, humanism, civilization, culture, the Greek, the Romans, the English, Christianity, spirituality, transcendence, religion, nature, true form, science, logic, purity, evolution, revolution, progress, truth, freedom, creativity, action, war, virility, violence, brutality, dynamism, power and greatness.

In the same texts other words are used repeatedly in connection with so-called "low art": Africans, Orientals, Persians, Slovaks, peasants, the lower classes, women, children, savages, pagans, sensuality, pleasure, decadence, chaos, anarchy, impotence, eroticism, artifice, tattoos, cosmetics, ornament, decoration, carpets, weaving, patterns, domesticity, wallpaper, fabrics and furniture.

All of these words appear in the quotations found throughout this piece. The quotations are from the writings and statements of artists, art critics and art historians. We do not pretend to [*sic*] neutrality and do not supply the historical context for the quotations. These can be found in the existing histories of Modern Art. Our analysis is based on a personal, contemporary perspective.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Jaudon & Kozloff. "Art Hysterical Notions of Progress and Culture," 38.

As this quote indicates, feminism has ramifications for understanding the reception of non-Western art. In 1970s feminist art, there are many other artists' works equally interesting for their practice of decoration or handicraft, such as the works of black feminist artists Faith Ringgold and Betye Saar. In my dissertation, however, I focus on the controversies surrounding only the white feminist artists Chicago, Kozloff, and Schapiro.

The Dinner Party is often criticized for not being inclusive enough and for ignoring Asian and black women. Judy Chicago responded in an interview:

It is very important for us to see beyond the boundaries of Eurocentric feminist art criticism and see ourselves in a much larger, global context. In art you can see the picture of women beginning to awaken worldwide and for the first time starting to struggle from being object to being subject.... I'm glad that I did not have more of a global perspective back when I did The Dinner Party--if we'd tried to do the history of women of the world we'd still be working on it. [laughter]⁷⁰

Chicago acknowledges that she did not intend The Dinner Party to be inclusive, and that it mainly focused on the representation of white females in Western civilization. For her, the work would have required more time and more work to show women's experience in all its fullness and diversity.

Disputes arise from the traditional association of Third World cultures with decoration/handicraft. When white feminist artists applied these elements to their art, issues of cultural imperialism, exploitation of labor, and historical suppression of the female were often raised. Could the attempt to break the boundaries of art and craft, Western and non-Western art, masculinity and femininity actually strengthen the hierarchy? How can we compare the appropriation of decoration and handicraft in white

⁷⁰ Judy Chicago, interview by author, tape recording, Taipei, Taiwan, 25 December 1997.

feminists' art with past practices in the historical context, or the powerful tradition of craft carried on other world cultures?⁷¹ Is the reiteration of female traditional art and domestic practices in these works a sign of oppression or liberation? These are the questions that I intend to illuminate through this dissertation.

Judy Chicago's Collaborative Installation: The Dinner Party

Chicago conceived The Dinner Party as "a symbolic history of women in western civilization." Constructed over the course of five years (1974-79) and with more than 400 people involved, this project embodied the craft practice in the community of women and transformed the feminine and the handicraft into a social space.

There is a wealth of material written on The Dinner Party, including two documentary books, Embroidering Our Heritage: The Dinner Party Needlework⁷² and The Dinner Party⁷³ commemorating the project; two Judy Chicago autobiographies; and the

⁷¹ While there is a strong tradition of decoration and handicraft essential to the work of African and African Diaspora artists as well as Asian artists and designers, these will not be the scope of my discussion in this dissertation. Speaking from the standpoint of my dissertation, I think the particular political contention raised by white feminist artists' application of decoration and handicraft is unique in its generation and geography. This phenomenon is not reflected in other contexts or cultures where the hierarchy between art and craft does not exist or does not register so clearly.

Nonetheless, multicultural and postcolonial discourses did become important issues in feminist art of the following decades, and the interrelationship between gender, race, and class is undeniable. See for example Amelia Jones, The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader (London: Routledge, 2003), in which the notion of feminism as a unified discourse is challenged. Essays explore how issues of race, class, nationality, and sexuality enter into debates about feminism, such as Bell Hooks' "the Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators" (94-104); Trinh T. Minh-ha, "Difference: 'A Special Third World Women Issue'" (151-173) and Lorraine O'Grady, "Olympia's Maid: Reclaiming Black Female Subjectivity"(174-186). Hooks attempts to challenge the culture of gaze outside of male structure as well as white feminist perspectives and reconstruct the "pleasure of interrogation" in the black female spectator (34). Trinh and O'Grady expand white feminists' identity politics and show the complexity of the notion of difference in lived experiences (116).

⁷² Judy Chicago, Embroidering Our Heritage: The Dinner Party Needlework. (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books), 1980.

⁷³ Judy Chicago, The Dinner Party (New York: Penguin Books), 1996.

recently acquired Judy Chicago archives in the Schlesinger Library at Radcliffe College. The most recent publications on Judy Chicago's oeuvre are Edward Lucie-Smith's Judy Chicago: An American Vision (2000) and Elizabeth A. Sackler's Judy Chicago (2003).⁷⁴ Both include a chapter on The Dinner Party. Even in this sizable literature, the issues of handicraft in Chicago's work have not been fully addressed as such, although these were among the most important elements that identified this monumental work as a major feminist art project of the 1970s. According to Lucy Lippard, the needlework in this project was a particularly important part of the integrating process.

The body identification of Judy Chicago's work began with her early interest in a highly controversial central core imagery of boxes, ovals, spheres and "empty" centers in women's art, through which Chicago, along with Schapiro, explored gender identity and asserted sexuality. Lucy Lippard finds that, in relation to central core imagery, earthiness, organic images, curved lines, and a centralized focus are common factors for women's works.⁷⁵ Lawrence Alloway remarks that central core images are topical and political.⁷⁶ Amelia Jones states that the direct representation of the female genitalia in the centralized "vulviform images" on Chicago's plates was assertive, even combative in its implications. As Jones notes, Chicago realized that female sexuality has historically been repressed, so she looked for female identity through symbolic statement.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Edward Lucie-Smith, Judy Chicago--An American Vision (New York: Watson-Guptill Publications), 2000. Elizabeth A. Sackler, Judy Chicago (New York: Watson-Guptill Publications), 2003.

⁷⁵ Lippard, From the Center, 69.

⁷⁶ Lawrence Alloway, "Women's Art in the '70s," Art in America 64, no. 3 (May-June 1976), 64-72.

⁷⁷ Amelia Jones, ed., Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago's Dinner Party in Feminist Art History (Los Angeles: UCLA at the Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Cultural Center, 1996), 92-93.

Chicago's early works, greatly influenced by Minimalism, are less often discussed but equally as interesting and provocative as her feminist works. The central core imagery played an important role in suggesting female body and sexuality in a series of works, such as Rearrangeable Game Board (1967), Pasadena Lifesaver (1969-70), Great Ladies Series (1973), and Rejection Quintet (1974), among others.

I will evaluate how Chicago's representation of female culture and history through the collaborative political project The Dinner Party comprised a critique of the modernist establishment through the feminist body politics of handicraft. In addition, I will examine how the idea of women working collectively in a community workshop and practicing traditional women's art and handicraft was viewed at the time, as well as its later impact. While the practices of embroidery and china painting are less confrontational than the overt sexual images in The Dinner Party, these elements of the work had a more pronounced long-term impact on future generations of artists attempting to incorporate craft in their art.

Miriam Schapiro's Femme series

In Thalia Gouma-Peterson's retrospective catalogue Miriam Schapiro: Shaping the Fragments of Art and Life, the artistic career of the artist is traced, from her human figure images executed in the Abstract Expressionist style to her Minimalist-inspired period in which images of houses, shrines, and eggs suggest their relationship to the human body and female work.⁷⁸ As an example of the latter, the painting OX (1967) (fig. 3) actually refers to a female body with an opening in the center. These early interests in images of the

⁷⁸ Thalia Gouma-Peterson, Miriam Schapiro: Shaping the Fragments of Art and Life (New York: Harry N. Abrams) 1999.

female body were transformed into the sentimental and expressive decoration of her 1970s "femme" series. "Femme" was a series of collage works by Schapiro intended to use decorative and "feminine" materials such as fabric, handkerchiefs, and ribbons as tokens of women's traditional crafts.

In the catalogue Miriam Schapiro: A Retrospective, 1953-1980, both Linda Nochlin and Norma Broude acknowledge that Schapiro's feminist art was born in reaction to the formalist rhetoric of Greenbergian reductivism.⁷⁹ Schapiro's "femme" series endeavored to challenge what they perceived as Greenbergian modernism's separation of high and low art. Her works represented a sustained feminist attempt to break down the traditional hierarchy of value between craft art and fine art, decoration and abstraction. Schapiro's application of domestic and female traditional arts suggests the ambiguous boundary of decoration as either a site of oppression or of liberation in the female domain.

In her work, images of eggs, houses, fans, hearts, and costumes address content related to the female body in representation, symbol, and metaphor, as well as the absence and presence of the body. Decoration, with its erotic and seductive aspect, plays the intermediary or surrogate role of the beauty and sexuality of the female body, and so contributes to the body politics of decoration in the "femme" series.

⁷⁹ Linda Nochlin, "Feminism and Formal Innovation in the Work of Miriam Schapiro," in Miriam Schapiro: A Retrospective, 1953-1980, ed. Thalia Gouma-Peterson (Wooster, Ohio: The College of Wooster, 1980), 19-24. Norma Broude, "Miriam Schapiro and 'Femme': Reflections on the Conflict Between Decoration and Abstraction in Twentieth-Century Art," in Miriam Schapiro: A Retrospective, 1953-1980, ed. Thalia Gouma-Peterson (Wooster, Ohio: The College of Wooster, 1980), 31-38.

Joyce Kozloff's Decorative Works--Painting, Installation and Public Art

While working on the same artistic terrain as Schapiro--that is, asserting the value of women's collective heritage in decoration and bringing content into abstraction--Kozloff's works were distinct from Schapiro's in that they moved from easel painting to installation and public art--specifically, the mural.

Kozloff expressed concerns about the cultural and historical content of decoration. She would directly quote decorations from different cultures, such as Islamic art, in her own work, and reflected on the function of decoration in history. Kozloff said, "decoration is where painting and sculpture meet architecture. It is the way we humanized and personalized domestic spaces. It is how men and women have always transformed the banal into the extraordinary."⁸⁰ Working in and out of the framing of decoration, Kozloff actually shifts between the banal and the extraordinary, the private and the public.

The later development of her work, seen in the 1990 exhibition "Pattern of Desire," appropriates the erotic images quoted from different cultures as she deliberately relates decoration to eroticism. In my view, the choice of placement for her decorative public art, often installed in the passageways of buildings, and her interest in transient spaces including airports and train stations, may be considered as gendered, involving the association of the passageway as a feminized space evoking the intimacy, fantasy, and desire of passing viewers.

Thalia Gouma-Peterson and Patricia Johnston contributed significant essays to the 1985 catalogue Joyce Kozloff, Visionary Ornament, and have pointed out the development

⁸⁰ Joyce Kozloff, statement, in The Decorative Impulse, Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, exhibition catalogue with an essay by Jane Kardon (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania), 1979, n.p. ; quoted in Thalia Gouma-Peterson, "Decorated Walls for Public Spaces: Joyce

of Kozloff's work and her dialogue with historical and worldly styles of ornament. I would like to examine how Kozloff first decontextualized decoration in her easel painting, and then recontextualized it in architectural and public spaces. This process, I believe, suggests another level of complexity in the modern feminist dialogue between the decorative and the body.

Kozloff's Architectural Installation," in Joyce Kozloff: Visionary Ornament (Boston: Boston University Art Gallery, 1986), 45.

Chapter II

From Pubic to Public: Handicraft in Womanhouse and Judy Chicago's The Dinner Party¹

The fictional ideal of the classic public sphere is that it includes everyone; the fact is that it can be constituted only by the rigorous exclusion of certain groups--slaves, children, foreigners, those without property, and (most conspicuously) women.... The word "public" might more properly be written with the "l" in parentheses to remind us that for much of human history political and social authority has derived from a "pubic" sphere, not a public one. This seems to be the case even when the public sphere is personified as a female figure.²

--W.J.T. Mitchell

In Art and the Public Sphere by W.J.T. Mitchell, the author discusses the relationships between public art, its publicness, and violence; he brings up the notion of the word "public" deriving from a conflation of two quite different Latin words, *populus* (the people) and *pubes* (adult men). He explains the relationship between the pubic and public in the context of gender structure. Females and children were often expelled from public spaces, even though the public spaces often display female statues. So he concludes that "much of human history political and social authority has derived from a 'pubic' sphere, not a public one. This seems to be the case even when the public sphere is personified as a female figure." He further cites the Greek goddess Athena, France's Goddess of Reason, and the American Statue of Liberty as examples of female

¹ When I use the word "pubic" in this case, I am referring to female private parts. Besides playing on the similarity of the words, I also intend to make a connection to the phrase "from the private to the public," which in turn corresponds to the feminist slogan, "The personal is the political."

² W.J.T. Mitchell, "The Violence of Public Art: Do the Right Thing," Art and the Public Sphere, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 35-37.

monuments, and sees the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. as an anti-heroic monument.³

* * *

West Coast feminist art of the 1970s began with the Feminist Art Program in Fresno and at the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) in Valencia, California. The project Womanhouse, on which Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro collaborated with 21 female students, focused on the exploration of female experiences, including the practice of the traditional female art of handicraft.⁴ This project stimulated Chicago's even more ambitious collaborative project with 400 women, The Dinner Party of 1974-1979. Handicraft played a vital role in the feminist politics of both projects.

When feminist artists break down the hierarchy of art and craft in the modernist tradition and reclaim the value of handicraft as practiced in the private domestic space, they are asserting a public political gesture--"the personal is political," as the saying

³ Ibid. The point illustrated here strengthens the social and political aspects of my argument about "the public and the public."

⁴ Arlene Raven, "Womanhouse," in The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact, ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 48; Faith Wilding, By Our Own Hands: The Women Artist's Movement Southern California, 1970-76 (Santa Monica, California: Double X, 1977), 24-29. The site of Womanhouse was an abandoned house (later demolished) at 553 Mariposa Avenue, Hollywood, near downtown Los Angeles. Marked under a contemporary photograph of this lost site is the statement, "Site of Womanhouse. As with so many of women's other endeavors, no trace remains of this ambitious collaborative project." The only trace that does remain of this collaborative project is the Dollhouse, created by Miriam Schapiro and Sherry Brody, in the collection of the Smithsonian Institution.

goes.⁵ In a special issue about feminist art published by ARTnews in 1980, Grace Glueck stated,

Certainly by the mid-1970s, markedly female approaches to the making of art were strongly in evidence...permitting the incorporation into so-called "high" art of the traditional modes and materials of women's crafts--stitchery, quilting, weaving, piecing, applique, china painting, among others--once scorned by the male-dominated art world as "decorative."⁶

The application of female traditional art by feminist artists marked a heightened moment in feminist politics.

Discussing Womanhouse and The Dinner Party, I will explore the issues of form and format, technique and material, socio-cultural history, and the psychological interpretation of handicraft and its relationship to modernist art history and feminist art. I emphasize the corporeal embodiment and bodily connection of handicraft, its hands-on process and its tactility, and argue that handicraft is another phase of body politics in 1970s feminist art.

With regard to the body politics discussed here, I do not mean the material body, employed by performance artists as a site of political struggle in the 1970s, as in Lynda Benglis' Art Forum Ad of November 1974, a self-portrait photograph with a dildo satirizing chauvinism in male sexuality, and Hannah Wilke's S.O.S. Starification Object Series (1974-1982), in which the artist stuck wads of chewed chewing gum shaped like vaginas all over her body. Wilke's performance, along with the photographs documenting

5 Erin Elman, "A Stitch in the Cannon: A Discussion of Five Contemporary Artists Who Have Been Influenced by Feminism" (M.A. thesis, The University of the Arts, Philadelphia College of Art and Design, 1997), 47. This saying upholds the feminist position that there is no true distinction between the personal and public realms of an individual, because they are mutually responsible for the construction of an individual's identity.

6 Grace Glueck, "Redefining the Whole Relationship between Art and Society," Art News 79, no. 9 (October 1980), 59-60.

it, aims to interrogate sexuality and the male gaze in the gender structure. The female body connected to a handicraft practice functions as a critique of the "politics of the body" in terms of how the body is signified in a cultural "text." Here, the idea of cultural text refers to female traditional art, including weaving, embroidery, and other forms of handicraft practiced throughout various generations and geographies. As Janis Jefferies writes in her essay "Text and Textiles: Weaving Across the Borderlines," written in 1995,

Textiles signify certain ideas, values, and traditions within communities identified with domesticity, female creativity, shared endeavor. Textile work is perceived as labor-intensive, slow and painstaking and yet, in a double twist rendered and devalued as invisible women's work, non-work, or nonproductive labor...[textiles] are "always ethnic, class and gender indexed."⁷

The point of view presented here argues against Lawrence Alloway's denial of the gender specificity of handicraft in his writing on 1970s feminist art, published in 1976. Alloway claimed that the aesthetics of art and the operations of craft overlap. He sees art and craft as forming a common base of work, accessible to both men and women. For him, the differences between art and craft are generational rather than sexual.⁸ Alloway's point was only a partial view of a complicated discourse involving handicraft. My essay, focusing on the issue of gender, instead uses Janis Jefferies' discussion as a point of departure to illuminate handicraft as a phase of body politics in the context of 1970s feminist art.

I aim to establish a triangular argument with the body, the female, and handicraft as three connected issues. First, I will ask how the mind/body duality contributed to the

⁷ Jefferies, 164.

⁸ Alloway, 70.

formation of a hierarchy of male vs. female, culture vs. nature. How did this occur philosophically and historically? Second, I will explore how handicraft came to be identified as a female practice. Correlatively, how did handicraft work become a disenfranchised art in light of Greenbergian Modernism, and how did modern and contemporary artists appropriate handicraft to assert its value in the high art context? Third, I will argue that handicraft is connected to the body biologically, psychologically, and culturally and, therefore, it formed a phase of feminist body politics in 1970s feminist art.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the embracing and celebration of handicraft in 1970s feminist art was both a reassertion of craft theorists' emphasis on bodily intelligence and a practice of corporeal representation subverting the prevailing cultural tradition. The production of handicraft was seen to politicize the modernist value system. Women's will and urge to create through craft are part of the expression of fecundity, which in this case joins the biological connection and social-political intention. The value of women-centered art as emphasized by Chicago lies in the "pubic made public." The feminist collaborations and workshops of handicraft practiced in The Dinner Party and Womanhouse reflect the collision between art and craft, high and low, intellect and physical labor, as well as aesthetics and domestic kitsch. These are the issues that have to be addressed in order to clarify the feminist politics of handicraft.

West Coast Feminist Art and the Project Womanhouse

The collaborative Womanhouse project emphasizes a separatist mode and a female-centered art, which was seen as a necessary strategy and process for educating female

students to succeed in the artistic profession. This work demonstrated a significant step in both Chicago's and Schapiro's development from women artists into full-fledged feminist artists.

After months of intensive work, including finding an abandoned house near downtown Hollywood, cleaning and fixing the house, and building the installations in seventeen rooms, the Womanhouse project was opened to the public from January 30 to February 28, 1972. It drew immediate public and media attention and 10,000 visitors.⁹ House and domestic imagery were used throughout the project, and suggested that a private space and private domain--a woman's world--were being made public. Most of the rooms replicated the conventional areas of a house--bathroom, dining room, kitchen, etc. Transformed through a variety of traditional domestic crafts and media including stitchery and crochet, bread-dough sculpture, and makeup and costume art, they also reflected a mixture of reality and fantasy.

The most powerful messages that the Womanhouse project suggested, with its focus on the expression of female experience, were not only to celebrate women's lives and fantasies, but also to illuminate how they live in a sexist society. Before the feminist movement, women's lives were traditionally private and hidden. Women's creativity was

⁹ Laura D. Meyer, "The 'Essential' Judy Chicago: Central Core Imagery and the Language of Fetishism in Womanhouse and The Dinner Party" (M.A. thesis, University of California, Riverside, 1994), 74, note 93. Aside from Chicago and Schapiro, student participants in Womanhouse included Beth Bachenheimer, Susan Frazier, Camille Grey, Vicki Hodgetts, Kathy Huberland, Judy Huddleston, Karen LeCoque, Janice Lester, Paula Longendyke, Ann Mills, Robin Mitchell, Sandra Orgel, Jan Oxenburg, Christine Ruch, Marcia Salisbury, Robin Schiff, Mira Schor, Robin Weltsch, Faith Wilding, Shawnee Wollenman, and Nancy Youdelman. Additionally, three professional Los Angeles area artists, Wanda Westcoast, Sherry Brody, and Carol Edison Mitchell, were invited to participate. See also Faith Wilding, By Our Own Hands: The Women Artist's Movement Southern California, 1970-76 (Santa Monica, California: Double X, 1977), 25-29.

devalued and ignored. My study is particularly concerned with the fact that handicraft was traditionally practiced in domestic and private spaces and consequently was disparaged as a minor art. Feminist artists and students in Womanhouse were able to apply the artistic practice of handicraft and elevate it to the public, political, and aesthetic domain. They made the issue critical. Simultaneously, handicraft practice, with its corporeal connection to intimate tactile experience, was closely linked to the exploration of the body and sexuality in this feminist project.

In her autobiography, Through the Flower, Chicago traces the history of the awareness of her femaleness in what she saw as the male-dominated art world of the time, when Minimalist art was the major trend. She says,

In 1969, I began a series of paintings entitled "Pasadena Lifesavers." They embodied all of the work I had been doing in the past year, reflecting the range of my own sexuality and identity....When I finished the paintings, I felt like icebergs were breaking up inside of me. By making images of my feelings, I was able to liberate myself from the guilt about my needs, my aggressiveness, my power as a person. However, although I was feeling increasingly liberated as a person and a woman within my artistic and personal life, I was still discovering that this liberation did not necessarily extend to the outside world.¹⁰

Chicago states that the distance between male and female was the distance between public and private.¹¹ She expresses the urge to have personal messages and feelings brought into the public realm. The messages included finding her identity, exploring her sexuality, and expressing her feelings in her art.

The initial step for Chicago to announce her feminist, anti-patriarchal position was not only a personal and humorous one, but also a political and serious one. She writes in her

¹⁰ Judy Chicago, Through the Flower, 56-57.

¹¹ Chicago, Through the Flower, 130, quoted in Nancy Reeves, Womankind (Chicago: Aldine-Atherton, 1971), 29.

autobiography, "...I also wanted my being a woman to be visible in the work and had thus decided to change my name from Judy Gerwitz to Judy Chicago as an act of identifying myself as an independent woman."¹² Taking away her father's last name of Jewish identity and adopting the name of her birthplace, Chicago, as her last name, she asserted an anti-patriarchal, feminist stance by making a most visible mark in her personal identity.

Her next step was to make an anti-patriarchal statement in her art. She advocated female experience and sensibility, commenting that "At that time, there was no acknowledgement in the art community that a woman might have a different point of view than a man, or if difference was acknowledged, that difference meant inferiority....In order to be considered a 'serious' artist, I had had to suppress my femaleness."¹³ One of her essential approaches was to use the female voice to battle against and to distinguish herself from Minimalism.¹⁴ She brought a content-oriented approach and a female sensibility to her art. As seen in her series of fifteen Pasadena Life Savers (fig. 4), central core forms began to emerge with an implicit reference to the body. Chicago notes, "This series, though quite formal, actually was about female sexuality. But the abstract structure obscured the content."¹⁵ The minimalist, repetitive forms were colored with sensuous pastel tones using

¹² Chicago, Through the Flower, 62-63.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹⁴ In 1994, the Museum of Modern Art presented the exhibition Sense and Sensibility: Women Artists and Minimalism in the Nineties (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994). Curator Lynn Zelevansky notes, "The work in this exhibition has roots predominantly in the many manifestations of Post-Minimalism, from 'anti-form' sculpture and Process Art, to Conceptualism and Performance and Body Art...which often involved an emphasis on the artist's 'touch,' sometimes evoked the 'primal,' and could be emphatically hand-made--extended the boundaries of what was acceptable to the art world in a manner that paralleled certain goals and strategies of the Women's Movement" (7). The focus on the material quality and sense of touch of these women artists was in direct opposition to most male minimalists' industrially fabricated pieces, which showed no trace of the artist's hands.

¹⁵ Chicago, Through the Flower, 72-73.

sprayed acrylic lacquer, reflecting not only the influence of Georgia O'Keeffe's art, but also the 1960s' Los Angeles "Cool School," often called "Finish Fetish." Chicago's technique resembled that of other artists such as Billy Al Bengston, who was involved in this dominant art scene with an aggressively masculine stance.¹⁶ The movement's embrace of industrial materials and the artisanal techniques used to decorate motorcycles and surfboards resembles Chicago's early paintings on car hoods.¹⁷

Chicago soon found supportive friendship from Miriam Schapiro, who could read and affirm her work and ideas. Schapiro, sixteen years older than Chicago, was teaching at a new art school called the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) in Valencia, north of Los Angeles. Schapiro had been painting and exhibiting for a number of years in the East and had made her way into the art world during the heyday of Abstract Expressionism, which, according to her, was "a hotbed of Macho Attitudes."¹⁸ She described how her interaction with male artists and female artists could reveal sexual discrimination and differences in the art world in a variety of ways.

Along with an artistic and emotional affinity, what particularly drew Schapiro and Chicago together was the struggle of being a woman, as well as their urge to express female content and identity in their works. These common experiences and shared intentions and backgrounds brought together two women who were pioneers in the feminist art movement

¹⁶ Thomas Crow, The Rise of the Sixties: American and European Art in the Era of Dissent (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996) 79-80.

¹⁷ Chicago, Through the Flower, 36-37.

¹⁸ Ibid., 81. Also see Miriam Schapiro, "Notes from a Conversation on Art, Feminism and Work," in Working It Out: 23 Women Writers, Artists, Scientists, and Scholars Talk About Their Lives and Work, ed. Sara Ruddick and Pamela Daniels (New York: Pantheon, 1977), 287.

on the West Coast. Although they went their separate ways later on, this early collaboration was of great significance. Collectively, it initiated the feminist art education program and the project Womanhouse, which created a fertile ground for the development of feminist art. Individually, it provided both artists with the enlightenment of feminist art and with success in their artistic careers, as Chicago wrote in her biography:

I saw two clear patterns in the lives of the women artists that we visited. 1. Some women worked in almost total isolation, unknown to or ignored by the art community...connected to their home lives or their experiences as women, work in the house, no part of the art world. 2. Another group of women artists, work more neutralized, as Mimi and I, more connected to the art world, had stores and lofts for studios...still peripheral to the art world...complained of blatant discrimination. In the years since then, it is these women artists who have tended to become visible as a result of the feminist movement.¹⁹

In the early 1970s, Judy Chicago created a feminist education program at Fresno State College in California with the permission of the Art Department Chair, Heinz Kusell. Chicago wanted to offer an art studio program for women only, entitled "Feminist Art Program." Chicago and Schapiro obtained permission to bring the program to CalArts, and eight participants from Fresno State were accepted as transfer students, joining the program at CalArts in the fall of 1971.

For Judy Chicago, her Feminist Art Program delineated an important separation of men and women for educational purposes. In an interview, she expresses the view that, "Girls respond to information in the class in different ways than men or when men are around. The process and the content are totally different. Even writers such as Carol Gilligan address that. As far as I'm concerned, separatist mode is a stage."²⁰ Chicago also

¹⁹ Chicago, Through the Flower, 99.

²⁰ Judy Chicago, interview by author, tape recording, Taipei, Taiwan, 25 December 1997.

reflected on how most feminist art programs eventually stopped. She said, "These programs all stopped later because feminism is dangerous to an institution because it empowers women. Therefore it destabilizes the institution and education."²¹

Faith Wilding discusses the structural differences between the Feminist Art Program and a traditional art school experience, stating,

The main points of differences were the mentorship traditionally offered to male students by their male teachers; the myths of (male) genius and mastery deemed as necessary to the making of art; the lack of social expectation of achievement and ambition for women; and the traditional hierarchies of materials and methods taught in art schools which devalued many of the skills and experiences women have been trained in.²²

She further asks, "What does a woman need in order to become an artist?...Do women have different needs than men because they have been housekeeping, raising children, quilting, sewing, cooking, weaving, nurturing, pleasing men, and remaining in the background, while men ran the world?"²³ All these issues were reflected in the craft practice of the female art world following the Womanhouse project.

The key concept of this program lay in the separatism in the education of female artists. One of the important techniques was consciousness-raising, which "relies on the idea that theory must grow out of feeling and experience and can affect political change."²⁴

When the students began making art, they were encouraged to explore a wide variety of

²¹ Ibid. When I commented, "It seems feminist discussion is happening in every different discipline and course these days. It is almost not necessary to have a separate feminist art program. Of course, the 1970s feminist movement [made a] great contribution..." Chicago answered, "Even though [feminist] theory is widespread, in the art world it is as if it does not exist. It is incredible."

²² Faith Wilding, "The Feminist Art Programs at Fresno and CalArts, 1970-75," in The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact, ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 32-47.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Laura Meyer, "The 'Essential' Judy Chicago," 73.

media and to address their personal experiences as women. During the development stage of making Womanhouse, Schapiro described the way a typical consciousness-raising session would begin:

We asked ourselves what it would be like to work out one of our closest associative memories--the home. Our home, which we as a culture of women have been identified with for centuries, has always been the area where we nourished and were nourished. It has been the base of operations out of which we fought and struggled with ourselves to please others. What would happen, we asked, if we created a home in which we pleased no one but ourselves? What if each woman were to develop her own dreams and fantasies in one room of that home? The idea seems like a good one.²⁵

At the same time, Paula Harper, who had joined the CalArts Feminist Art Program staff as its art historian, also suggested making a house, a women's traditional "place," as both the site and subject of the work. The idea of making Womanhouse gradually emerged. At that point, several students searched for an appropriate location in the Los Angeles area and found an abandoned house in Hollywood. In the working process, Chicago also recalled how Schapiro had successfully incorporated consciousness-raising subject matter into art-making:

Three of the women were working together in the kitchen and not having too much success. Mimi suggested that we try a consciousness-raising session on kitchen. As we went around the circle, women talked about their memories of the kitchens in their homes. It became clear that the kitchen was often the battlefield of the house. The giving and taking of food, what kind of food was fixed, who made food, and when it could and could not be eaten provided the means for a power struggle between mother and father, mother and children. The association of women with the kitchen and with the giving of food led to the idea of a nurturant kitchen, in which the walls, floors, and objects were covered with a flesh-colored skin, and plastic eggs transmuted into breasts cascaded down from the ceiling onto the walls.²⁶

²⁵ Miriam Schapiro, "The Education of Women as Artists: Project Womanhouse," Art Journal 31, no. 3 (Spring 1972), 268.

²⁶ Chicago, Through the Flower, 113.

Women's experiences, dreams, fantasies and fears emerged while each room was gradually built. Craft works such as quilts, curtains, sewn sculptures, bread-dough pieces, and a crocheted room were both techniques and content, revealing female experiences.

While I have chosen to discuss Faith Wilding's Crocheted Environment (fig. 5) and Miriam Schapiro and Sherry Brody's Dollhouse (fig. 6) as two parts of the project that made obvious use of handicraft practice, it should be pointed out that cleaning and remodeling the house and creating an installation in each room is indicative of Womanhouse's persistent use of women's physical and manual labor. According to Erin Elman, Womanhouse "served many purposes. First, it provided a context for students to work collaboratively; second, it forced them to learn building techniques and to use power tools; and third, it provided a sense of accomplishment and self-confidence."²⁷ Indeed, the physicality involved in making art was actualized in both the project itself and its process. The differentiation and conflation of art and craft were the prevalent issues.

Faith Wilding's Crocheted Environment, 1972

In Womanhouse, Faith Wilding took crochet work to monumental proportions, creating an enormous open-work domed environment. If a house is often related to a body or a womb, then Wilding's claim of her woven tent as being a womb, a space of nurturing and giving birth, implies both interior and exterior, the organic growth and the function of the dwelling and the body. Laura Meyer comments that the imagery of a protective womb

²⁷ Elman, 46-47. For this project, a 5,000 square-foot space was located and rented for a seven-month period. Each student contributed \$25.00 per month for rent, supplies, tools, and materials.

and a maternal body was evoked throughout the project. In this "dome-shaped play-house pieced together from oversized squares of crochet work," Meyer writes, "the patterns woven into these squares alternated between loose, asymmetrical webbing, like veins traversing the uterus, and tubular passageways suggesting the vaginal canal...." She further asserts, "By utilizing the method of crocheting..., Wilding suggested that any comfort to be found in the home is the product of women's active domestic labor, not a mere function of female biology."²⁸

Interestingly, this woven space, presented in the form of an accumulation of growing cells, provoked a particular association--the bodily connection to both the womb and the handicraft process. As Arlene Raven writes, "it represents a mother's woven nest of blood and everyone's 'first' room, the sacred heart of the Virgin Mary, and the hearth of the home...in the metaphorical womb of the home, to develop into fully adult humans. Feminism provided a second look at the all-encompassing needs of people for mothering"²⁹ In Wilding's Crocheted Environment, the desire to weave, to touch, and to make direct contact with the body suggested a connection between handicraft and the female body.

Miriam Schapiro and Sherry Brody, Dollhouse, 1972.

The dollhouse that Sherry Brody and Miriam Schapiro collaborated on for Womanhouse was a "house within a house" containing six rooms, a nursery, a kitchen, a parlor, a seraglio, an artist's studio, and a star's bedroom. In her essay "The Education of Women as Artists: Project Womanhouse," Schapiro described the Dollhouse:

²⁸ Laura Meyer, "'Essential' Judy Chicago," 88-89, 96.

A smaller room on the first floor is less environmental, more museum-like. Here a wall has been built with an aperture cut out to reveal what could be a "Punch and Judy" show, only instead we see six open rooms of a woman artist's doll house. The tiny house with its miniature kitchen, studio, bedroom, etc., is touched by wit and irony...it is the creation of two older women who allowed themselves to regress to the age of magical belief.³⁰

The quality of its miniature size, the detailed rendering of small soft sculptures, and figures made from fabric sewn by hands make the Dollhouse a representative case for studying handicraft.

In the 1980s, art historians such as Linda Nochlin reflected on how this artwork confronted domestic violence within the seeming safety and comfort of the home sphere, challenging what she saw as society's gender biases and the masculinized domain of art. In Nochlin's view, "despite the name and the seemingly benign subject matter, the piece was full of complexities and contradictions."³¹ A woman "was confined not only to her house but to her various roles as mommy, seductress, and happy home-maker."³² Nevertheless, it was "a catharsis for Schapiro and Brody, an angry and yet playful statement about the contradictions and complexities of being a woman and an artist."³³

As Schapiro recalled in 1977:

When the dollhouse was finished, I realized that it was a pivotal expression in my life. I returned to my studio, and the work just poured out of me.

The new work was different from anything I had done before. I worked on canvas, using fabric. I wanted to explore and express a part of

²⁹ Raven, 55.

³⁰ Schapiro, "Education of Women," 268-270.

³¹ Linda Nochlin, "Feminism and Formal Innovation in the Work of Miriam Schapiro," in Miriam Schapiro: A Retrospective, 1953-1980 (Wooster, Ohio: The College of Wooster Art Museum, 1980), 22.

³² Katherine Maxwell Duncan, "Miriam Schapiro: The Reconciliation of Art and Feminism" (M.A. thesis, Florida State University, 1988), 49.

³³ Ibid.

my life, which I had always dismissed--my homemaking, my nesting. I wanted to validate the traditional activities of women, to connect myself to the unknown women artists who made quilts, who had done the invisible "women's work" of civilization. I wanted to acknowledge them, to honor them. The collagists who came before me were men, who lived in cities, and often roamed the streets at night scavenging, collecting material, their junk, from urban spaces. My world, my mother's and grandmother's world, was a different one. The fabrics I used would be beautiful if sewed into clothes or draped against windows, made into pillows, or slipped over chairs. My "junk," my fabric, alludes to a particular universe, which I wish to make real, to represent.³⁴

Here, Schapiro points out how her new exploration of fabric related to the female world of home and domesticity, the private space where women make handicraft work, including quilts, draperies, and pillows.

The Image of a House and the Representation of the Female Body and Sexuality

Controversies surrounding Womanhouse often focused on the critique of the representation of female life and experience, including the body and sexuality. The dichotomous debates involved whether it revealed the stereotyped image of women's confinement and oppression, or created a constructive view of women's lives, their realities, fantasies and desires.

Some of Louise Bourgeois' early work Femme Maison (fig. 7) directly maps the relationship between the home and a woman's body, creating a metaphor of women's confinement. I propose that Womanhouse presented a women's world of creativity, fantasy, and challenge, which contrasts with convention, irony, and stereotypes.

³⁴ Schapiro, "Notes from a Conversation," 296-97.

Kneading, sewing, piecing, and building: techniques of handicraft were celebrated here to recreate homemaking and the female world.

Negative criticism of the project often related it to the situation of "bourgeois housewives, trapped within the safe confines of their suburban homes." These homemakers created an image of idealized femininity, which Betty Friedan had described in The Feminine Mystique. She found this idealization reinforced by the structure of what she saw as the primarily male-dominated manipulative mass media.³⁵

Further critiques were made by Cindy Nemser, who, in 1973-1974, claimed that the work "reinforced stereotypical notions of women's domesticity."³⁶ And Griselda Pollock in 1988 critiqued the early feminist, "female sensibility" art on the grounds that it was "realist in an uncritical way."³⁷ Laura Meyer in 1994 refuted this criticism with the statement,

It would be ludicrous to call a house in which fried eggs metamorphosed into human breasts, a dome-shaped shelter was made entirely from crochet-work, and a woman in nineteenth-century garb applied makeup ceaselessly like a latter-day Miss Havisham caught forever in her defining tragic moment, a simple, uncritically realistic description of contemporary women's lives.³⁸

Centering on female life, experience, and the traditional skill of craft, Womanhouse

³⁵ Betty Friedan, The Feminine Mystique (New York: W.W. Norton, 1963), 35, 44, 63, 67. Also quoted in Kathryn Hannen, "Creating a Feminist Iconography: The Art of Judy Chicago" (M.A. thesis, Vanderbilt University, 1995), 7, 8, 20.

³⁶ Cindy Nemser, "The Women Artists' Movement," Feminist Art Journal 2, no. 4 (Winter 1973-74), 9.

³⁷ Griselda Pollock, "Screening the Seventies: Sexuality and Representation," in Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art (London: Routledge, 1988), 157-163.

³⁸ Laura Meyer, "'Essential' Judy Chicago," 84.

asks us to remember that women's will and urges to create through craft are also part of the expression of fecundity, which not only reflects a biological connection, but also women's social-political existence.

The Dinner Party, 1975-79

Despite the controversies surrounding the piece over the last three decades, The Dinner Party remains a powerful and ambitious work representative of 1970s feminist art, particularly considering its scale and the time, labor, people, documentation, and criticism involved. Investigating the issues surrounding this work--from sexual images, the application of female tradition craft, its combination of mythic and historical figures of women, collaborative/cooperative work, and populism versus art criticism--I see body politics as the central issue illuminating Chicago's feminist idea and ideal. Seeing the work firsthand also provokes a total experience of bodily association, from the eye (an exuberant presentation of a visual feast comprised of china painting and embroidery), to the mouth (the images of dinner plates), to the hand (the detailed and refined work of handicraft), to the sexual organ (the vulvae, butterfly, and flower), and even to the whole body (arguably the collective body in the female community, in which work is united with a notion of sisterhood).

The Dinner Party was conceived by Chicago as a symbolic history of women in Western civilization and constructed over the course of five years, from 1974 to 1979. The complete work is an installation in five parts: 39 table settings representing historic or legendary women, with 13 on each side or "wing" of a triangular table; the tiled "Heritage Floor"; 6 tapestries with visionary texts installed at the entrance of the exhibition; 3

panels for documenting collaborators; and 7 "Heritage Panels" with timelines of historically important women. The main part is an equilateral triangular table, 46 feet in length on each side. The place settings are arranged in chronological order. Wing One spans from prehistory to classical Rome, from a primordial goddess to the fifth-century Hypatia. Wing Two begins with Marcella, a fifth-century Roman, and traces through the Reformation, ending with Anna van Schuman, a seventeenth-century Flemish scholar and advocate of women's rights. Wing Three begins with Anne Hutchinson, a seventeenth-century American preacher and leader of women, and terminates with the table's last place setting, for Georgia O'Keeffe. Individual settings include a painted or sculpted porcelain plate and an ornamental needlework runner. Each plate is 14 inches in diameter and the name of each woman is embroidered on the front face of her table runner. Linen napkins, porcelain flatware, and gold-luster goblets complete the settings. At each corner of the triangular table is what Chicago has labeled a "millennium sampler," with embroidered patterns done with different types of needlework. The entire table rests on the Heritage Floor, comprised of 2,300 hand-cast tiles and inscribed in gold with 999 names of women of achievement.³⁹

The centralized configuration is reinforced through the enclosed triangular structure, the images on the plates, and the symmetrical embroidery design of the runner. Similar to Lucy Lippard's choice for her book's title, From the Center, in The Dinner Party we observe how Judy Chicago worked from the center of female life and the female body, which remain as consistent images.

³⁹ For a complete listing of place settings, refer to Chicago, The Dinner Party; Chicago, Embroidering Our Heritage; and Josephine Withers, "Judy Chicago's 'Dinner Party,'" in The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History, ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 451-52.

Each place setting can be viewed as an individual art piece, with a well-thought-out formal design, color scheme, particular modification of vulvae form, and choice of different complicated techniques of needlework to fit the specific narration presented in the runner. Even the selection of the particular fabrics and materials used for each place setting was well-considered. For example, on the Primordial Goddess place setting, the application of leather and shell enhances the image of this "Earth Mother." For imperial figures, such as the Byzantine empress Theodora and England's Queen Elizabeth, designs in shades of gold are incorporated. Emily Dickinson's place setting has pink lace covering the plate and the runner, representing a talented and intelligent woman's repression in the Victorian age.

With the triangular structures of the settings, the back of the runner, which presents more narrative details of the figure, becomes difficult to read. According to Chicago, it is part of the symbolic meaning of women's hidden history. Despite this explanation, the device interrupts the reading of the whole message presented in the runner. Another symbolic device is the changing of the plate forms from flat to low relief to high relief as the viewer moves forward in time with the place settings, symbolizing the growth of female power.

The Dinner Party debuted at San Francisco's Museum of Modern Art in March 1979. It was installed within a large room that was entered through a hallway hung with large woven banners. A documentary book by Chicago, The Dinner Party: A Symbol of Our Heritage, and a film by Johanna Demetrakas, Right Out of History: The Making of Judy Chicago's Dinner Party, were produced for the exhibition. One hundred thousand people saw the installation and 20,000 books were sold in two weeks. Responses and

reactions were intense; The Dinner Party was both embraced and vilified. As Amelia Jones has pointed out more recently, the populism of the work also created an art world conundrum. The general audience and the art world were divided in their views, as were conservative modernist critics and feminist critics, as well as populist feminists and more recent post-structuralist feminists.⁴⁰ Two decades after The Dinner Party was completed, debate about the work is still unsettled.⁴¹

This cooperative project, which involved 400 women, further transferred the decorative and the feminine from the pictorial space to the public space. It is a monumental and complicated project touching upon wide-ranging issues in feminist art: female sexuality, the myth of the great goddess, matriarchal culture, traditional craft, and collaboration, to name a few. While the china painting and embroidery are often praised

⁴⁰ Jones, 89. Amelia Jones attributes the vehement responses, both for and against this project, to four reasons: 1.) different value systems of modernist criticism; 2.) battles existing within feminist art theory and practice; 3.) politics in the New York-dominated art world; and 4.) problems around perceptions of Chicago's personality, choice of style and theme, and strategies of production.

⁴¹ Laura Meyer, "A Monumental Meal," Gadfly (September, 1997), 7. Meyer notes, "The ongoing controversy over Judy Chicago's landmark 1979 feminist artwork, The Dinner Party, however, shows that art has the power to inspire vehement emotions and attests to the very real politics of culture.... When Judy Chicago offered to donate The Dinner Party to the University of the District of Columbia in 1990, conservative members of Congress labeled her feminist monument a clearly pornographic [piece of] weird sexual art, and introduced a bill to cut the university's federal funding by more than a million dollars if it decided to accept the gift. Although the bill was eventually defeated, negative publicity surrounding the Congressional hearings forced Chicago to withdraw her offer." The Dinner Party remained without a permanent home for a long time.

The recent exhibition of The Dinner Party by the Brooklyn Museum of Art, from September 2002 to February 2003, and its permanent installation there in 2004, have changed the status and fate of this work. In the recent exhibition of The Dinner Party, the majority of reviews were positive. See Roberta Smith, "For a Paean to Heroic Women, a Place at History's Table," New York Times, 20 September 2002, E34. She affirms that "over two decades later, Judy Chicago's 'Dinner Party' still offers insights.... and belongs to 'a part of American culture....' Finally, from today's vantage point, 'The Dinner Party' presents an early hands-on example of international festivalism--feminist in style, much more solid than most. It is self-conscious spectacle, meant to impress a large audience with its scale, labor-intensiveness, visual richness and density of information."

In "Reassessing Judy Chicago and Other Feminist Avatars: Dinner is Served," Leslie Camhi describes the work as "magnum opus to function both as a work of art and a pedagogical tool.... its sensual and intellectual delights are manifold" Village Voice (16-22 October 2002), 55.

for their beautiful and exquisite rendering of handicraft and its labor-intensive process, others have criticized The Dinner Party as being a kitsch entry into the contested field of art and craft, high and low culture.

Carrie Rickey has examined many of the controversies surrounding this work, including the use of sexual imagery to commemorate the history of women, the mix of sociological and artistic approaches, the relationship between religion and art, and the work's ambivalent relationship with the museum.⁴²

While the heated controversies around this project often focus on the imagery of vaginas, I would like to discuss the "hand" involved in the making of the work. In the attempt to break down the hierarchy of art and craft in the modernist tradition, feminist artists such as Judy Chicago reclaimed the value of handicraft traditionally practiced in the private domestic space and made their art a public political gesture. I will investigate whether The Dinner Party's underlying methods and techniques, such as china painting and embroidery, are also susceptible to the same kind of controversies and criticism as the sexual imagery. Is handicraft gender-specific in this work? I believe it is, especially in the context of the studio setting and collaboration with more than 400 women and only a few men. Is mixing artistic and sociological approaches a negative element with respect to the application of handicraft? Because handicraft already possesses a long historical and social significance by itself, any work that involves handicraft cannot deny either aspect. The Dinner Party "is less spiritual paradigm than religious parody," as Rickey

⁴² Carrie Rickey, "Judy Chicago: The Dinner Party," in Visibly Female: Feminism and Art Today, An Anthology, ed. Hilary Robinson (New York: Universe Books, 1988), 94-96.

puts it.⁴³ I would describe it as a parody subverting the patriarchal aspect of religious tradition. With regard to the consciousness-raising process intended to help women's art get into the museum context, The Dinner Party actually brought about a great potential for handicraft to subvert the established high-art language. The practice of handicraft in this project was much acknowledged as both celebratory and educational for feminist purposes.

The Dinner Party is Judy Chicago's attempt to tell "herstory" rather than history. The traditionally female craft of china painting and ceramics, as well as the arts of needlework and embroidery, became appropriate and powerful techniques conveying the symbolic history of women. As Chicago says,

My aim was to imply that history should be seen as belonging just as much to women as to men, while also paying homage to needlework, which, like china-painting, was primarily a female craft. In addition, I very much liked the idea of telling "herstory" through these particular "womanly" techniques. The only real problem was that the plates were going at an agonizing slow pace.⁴⁴

The idea of telling "herstory" and the emphases on female imagery and techniques have provoked the continued discussion of what is called the female style and, in the following decade, what was condemned as the essentialism of The Dinner Party. In an interview, Judy Chicago defended her project:

As women in the goal of liberation, the first step was to move from object to subject, and that is what we did in the 1970s. Then in the 1980s the feminists said that was essentialist and that we should be critiquing the institutions of the patriarchy. The issues we opened up in the 1970s did not go away, despite what they said in the 1980s. Critiquing the patriarchy can only take us so far—it still centers on male authority and

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Judy Chicago, Beyond the Flower: The Autobiography of a Feminist Artist (New York: Penguin Books, 1996), 52-53.

puts female experience on the margin. We need 100 years of art that shows us the woman's experience in all its fullness and diversity. It is interesting that today suddenly the body is back at the forefront of people's concerns and many of the issues and strategies of the 1970s are being revisited or at least appreciated by the new generation of feminist artists.⁴⁵

Chicago insisted on her female position and perspectives. This essentialist female style, though debated and expanded by later feminists, remains an important initial stage for feminist enunciation.

The most frequently reproduced photo documentation of this work is often a view from above, showing the triangular table settings and Heritage Floor, a perspective which does convey the ambiance of the original presentation with its dramatic lighting. That, however, is not the vantage point of the viewer. Nonetheless, without observing the real work, one can hardly appreciate the beauty of the detail rendered by the china painting and embroidery created by skillful hands.

China Painting in The Dinner Party

According to Chicago's design, each plate in china painting represents a celebrated woman, and the table runner in embroidery explains her environment. I will separately discuss the two different kinds of handicraft utilized in this project.

In 1972, her second year at CalArts, Judy Chicago started her apprenticeship, learning a specific form of decorative art called china painting, which she would use for making the plates of The Dinner Party.⁴⁶ Before that point, she was more oriented toward learning, applying, and identifying with industrial techniques such as firework, plastic,

⁴⁵ Judy Chicago, interview by author, tape recording, Taipei, Taiwan, 25 December 1997.

and auto-body painting, the latter related to the prevailing Finish Fetish style in Los Angeles in the 1960s. Recalling the beginning of her interest in china painting, Chicago writes,

I had also seen and become intrigued by a hand-painted porcelain plate that I stumbled upon in an antique store....I would soon learn that this type of painting involves the applying of specific paints onto a glazed ceramic surface, then firing it until the colors meld with the glazed surface. In addition to providing the kind of visual fusion I liked, china painting also seemed to offer exactly the precision of form I thought my sprayed acrylic paintings were lacking.⁴⁷

The first studio of china painting (or porcelain painting) that Chicago attended had a different approach than what she needed for the special visual effect she wanted to achieve. Later, she found a teacher named Mim Silinsky who was sympathetic to her requirements for achieving a specific visual precision. Chicago apprenticed herself to Silinsky between 1972 and 1974.⁴⁸

Before Chicago developed the fourteen-inch Dinner Party plates, she made some test works, combining ceramic painting with sexual imagery in a series of experimental two-inch porcelain knobs. For example, Cunt as Temple, Tomb, Cave, or Flower (1974) (fig. 8) is comprised of china paint on porcelain in a velvet-lined box. Sex from the Inside Out (1975) (fig. 9) is a disarming little diorama composed of six clitoral ceramic knobs, encircled by specific and primly scripted instructions from a woman to her lover.⁴⁹ The

⁴⁶ Chicago, The Dinner Party, 4-5; Chicago, Embroidering Our Heritage, 4-5; Chicago, Beyond the Flower, 37-38. According to ceramic artist Bob Ely, china painting is ceramic. There are different techniques for ceramics and china painting is one kind.

⁴⁷ Chicago, Beyond the Flower, 37.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 37-38.

⁴⁹ Jones, 66. The instructions on the knobs read, "[1] Enter me slowly and gently, she said, [2] Just rub it around in there for a while, [3] Hold still and let me move around on it, [4] There, there, that's the place that feels good, [5] Now, push it all the way up in there, [6] And draw my orgasm right down on you."

sexual iconography used here shows the early phase of her development in feminist body politics.

In 1974, Chicago revised The Dinner Party project, changing the number of plates from 100 to 39. She worked in isolation for more than a year, painting and firing test plates and researching women's history. Only afterward did a large group of women join the project, making it a collaboration. Two men, Leonard Skuro and Ken Gilliam, both ceramicists (Gilliam was also an industrial designer), also joined the ceramic studio to help produce plates that could be crafted in relief.

Chicago was clear about her goal. Her purposes, she writes, were "to commemorate the sundry unacknowledged contributions of women to Western civilization while simultaneously alluding to and protesting their oppression through the metaphor of plates set upon and thus 'contained' by the table." She further remarked, "At some point I decided that I would like the plate images to physically rise up as a symbol of women's struggle for freedom from such containment."⁵⁰ Thus, the handicraft practice used to build these plates became a site of both liberation and oppression highlighting female history and culture.

The fact that Chicago took on the painstaking process of china painting for her project, learning the skills alone, proved her ability to venture into different realms of artistic form and technique. Her predilection and respect for female craft works were also essential to her conceptualization of this project. The significance of taking up this task was spelled out in the physicality of the handiwork and the collaborative nature of this feminist project.

⁵⁰ Chicago, Beyond the Flower, 47.

As recorded in Lucy Lippard's essay, the technical difficulties and challenges were tremendous:

The plates were the last major problem: they had to be done over and over again. They cracked or were simply unsatisfactory by Chicago's perfectionist standards. The deeply carved Hrosvitha plate, for instance, was remade over a dozen times, its form changing with each reincarnation. In December 1977, an all-woman team worked out the problems for the last images on the plates in a series of legendary "ceramics blitzes," working for six days solid, with other members feeding them and running errands.⁵¹

Laura Meyer relates the glossy surface of china painting to Chicago's early interest in the form of Finish Fetish, which revealed some contradictions with the feminist ideal. She points out several particular characteristics in the style of Finish Fetish that are also visible in The Dinner Party: clean lines, surface perfection, sensuous optical effect, and contemporary industrial techniques. According to Meyer,

The Dinner Party synthesizes the cool technical perfection of finish fetish with the heated demands of the early feminist movement. It counters the worship of technology in post-World War II society with a painstaking tribute to traditional women's handicraft.⁵²

However, there were some contradictions between the application of the Finish Fetish techniques and the celebrated ideal of female traditional craft. Meyer discusses the art criticism around the finish style, which emphasized surface perfection achieved through mechanical means, revealing no trace of human labor. The allure of Finish Fetish was derived from its meticulous erasure of labor, which produced the illusion of casual

⁵¹ Lucy Lippard, "Judy Chicago's 'Dinner Party,'" Art in America 68 (April 1980), 122.

⁵² Laura D. Meyer, "From Finish Fetish to Feminism: Judy Chicago's Dinner Party in California Art History," in Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago's Dinner Party in Feminist Art History, ed. Amelia Jones (Los Angeles: UCLA at the Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Cultural Center, 1996), 48-50. According to Meyer, previous discussions of The Dinner Party have neglected the history of Chicago's artistic development within the Los Angeles art world of the 1950s and 1960s and her subsequent involvement in the 1970s with the feminist art movement in California.

mastery, the result of masculine know-how and technical prowess.⁵³ Thus, there was a paradox between handicraft labor and the effortless effect of Finish Fetish.

I observe several other aspects of the contradiction. The sexual icon represented by a vaginal form executed in china painting has a hard, cold, and untouchable form; its surface is shining, glorious and seductive, but its material is fragile and breakable. In addition, the image includes food--the plates, each with a "serving"--that is neither edible nor touchable, and which defies physical consumption. Instead, a more visual and psychological response is provoked. Consequently, we have an object and an image whose material and form are not necessarily compatible. The oral associations with the plate, the body identification of the vaginal form in relief, and the physicality of the handicraft process all conveyed olfactory and tactile experiences and were supposed to evoke a sense of desire. But, at the same time, the associations are suppressed by the presence of the hard, cold, and shining Finish Fetish surface, and even become religious, as if the work presents a displayed Eucharist object, in Withers' term.⁵⁴ According to Meyer, there are significant differences between The Dinner Party and Finish Fetish work. "The Dinner Party displays the signs of its laborious creation like a badge of sainthood" and it is "a profoundly moralizing work of art." She concludes,

The Dinner Party synthesis of finish fetish and feminism is thus fraught with contradictions, embodying the artist's own conflicting objectives and mirroring the dilemmas of a society that is driven by the desire for mastery and achievement yet hungers for the comfort of human communion.⁵⁵

⁵³ Ibid., 51.

⁵⁴ Withers, 452. Josephine Withers emphasizes the symbolic, mythic, and thematic aspects of the work. She looks at it as a temple dedicated to women and a religious Eucharist ceremony. She perceives the aspect of sacrifice and redemption in the images of this feminist project. However, she also makes the criticism that it follows a patriarchal linear history.

⁵⁵ Laura Meyer, "Finish Fetish," 71.

Comparing the plates in The Dinner Party with female Surrealist artist Meret Oppenheim's Object (Fur Lined Tea Cup) (1936), which also evoked eroticism with its representation of female sexuality, it appears that Oppenheim's work is more consistent in choice of image and technique expressing desire and tactility.

The Dinner Party was ridiculed by Susanne Muchnic as "a grotesque embarrassment--the ultimate in 1970's kitsch," and by Kay Larson, who simultaneously found it to be "coy" and "brutal, baroque and banal."⁵⁶ While I disagree with Muchnic's negative remark, I would affirm the subversive intent of the kitsch-like quality of these plates. Larson's description touches upon the contradictory nature of medium and message, process and product, material and surface in the work; Laura Meyer's essay presents a major inquiry about the application of china painting to the plates. The Finish Fetish art strove to conceal "the signs of labor" which, in my opinion, were completely essential to the process of handicraft and the concept of collaboration in this work.

Embroidery in The Dinner Party

The Dinner Party's table runner was designed to represent the environment of the celebrated woman, and embroidery was taken up as the technique to "weave through the story." As Lucy Lippard describes,

The backs of these embroideries (each executed in needlework techniques appropriate to the subject's period) comprise an interior narrative that runs along the inside of the table and offers a counterpart to the front view of runners and plates. Chicago weaves and interweaves varied aspects of the same ideas through different materials and techniques until words and images, objects and perceptions, become the same fabric. The longer I

⁵⁶ Suzanne Muchnic, book review section, Los Angeles Times, 15 April, 1979 and Kay Larson, The Village Voice, 17 December, 1979, quoted in Lippard, "Judy Chicago's 'Dinner Party,'" 118.

spent with the piece, the more I became addicted to its intricate detail and hidden meaning.⁵⁷

Reading into the intricate design of the embroidery provokes both interest and desire to learn the details of history of important but often neglected women, as well as the history of needlework in relation to women's history and art history. The work expands this ambition to a heroic scale with quasi-encyclopedic documentation.

Judy Chicago was aware that men did needlework in the Middle Ages. In fact, although women were and continued to be the creators and makers of needlework art throughout history, they were deemed workers and amateurs rather than professionals.⁵⁸ According to Lippard, the needlework in Chicago's project was a particularly important part of the integrating process of the work. Transforming it from its female, even "hobby art" category, Chicago found that the scope of its historical technique permitted her a similarly new scope in imagery. In The Dinner Party, she used different forms and materials to express "parallel tracks" of content, and found needlework to be the vehicle for her biggest step away from Modernism.⁵⁹ In an interview, she addressed this issue:

When I was going to art school in the early days, women's crafts were looked down upon. I did not have the same kind of attitude as other people did. For me, china painting is potentially beautiful as a medium as spray painting or any other form of aesthetic expression, same thing as needlework. I just don't think like that, those kinds of categories.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Lippard, "Judy Chicago's 'Dinner Party,'" 118.

⁵⁸ Judy Chicago, interview by author, tape recording, Taipei, Taiwan, 25 December 1997.

⁵⁹ Lippard, "Judy Chicago's 'Dinner Party,'" 124. Lippard explains further, "This confirmed her experience over the years of working with such 'fringe techniques' as smoke flares, industrial plastics, automobile painting and china painting. She has found that each medium brings with it 'certain content and image possibilities.'"

⁶⁰ Judy Chicago, interview by author, tape recording, Belen, New Mexico, May 24 2003.

Tracing Chicago's biography, we find more detailed reasons for her choice of incorporating needlework into the runner. Chicago appointed Susan Hill as head of the needlework project. At the time, Chicago recalled that she could "barely sew a button on a shirt."⁶¹ Then Hill invited Chicago to an exhibition at the Episcopalian Embroidery Guild:

I can still remember entering the dim, slightly claustrophobic exhibition hall filled with displays of vestments and church furnishings. Although I had absolutely no idea what most of these ecclesiastical objects were used for, I could see that the embroidery embellishing them was altogether superb. Many of the needlewomen were proudly standing by or demonstrating the techniques by which they had rendered these objects so exquisite, seemingly oblivious to the fact that their talents were being spent upon a religious system that was essentially oppressive to the female sex. Even more unsettling was the fact that the women received absolutely no credit for their work; they were not even allowed to stitch their names on the pieces they had spent months and sometimes years creating. As I commented to Susan, it was almost as if we were seeing women's overall historical and social circumstances being displayed right along with their splendid array of needle skills.⁶²

It dawned on Chicago that if each plate was a woman's symbolic portrait, the runner could be thought of as the context providing a space that could convey something about that woman's life and particular historical circumstances. Having the runners connote altar cloths would lend a sacramental quality to the table, which Chicago found appealing. With the arrangement, she might be able to present the table as a dual metaphor, encompassing both the domestic and the sacred spheres. It reminds one of the German phrase "Kinder, Küche und Kirche"; feminists recognized that women were confined to the world of children, kitchen, and church, and that the church was almost the only public sphere of traditional women's life. Given these circumstances, it makes sense

⁶¹ Chicago, *Beyond the Flower*, 51.

⁶² *Ibid.*

for Chicago to relate these elements in the runners. Embroidery was connected to women's lives in both a domestic and religious context.

In The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine, Rozsika Parker analyzes the historical and social aspects of embroidery and explains how it became a gendered practice. The embroidery runner in The Dinner Party presents the stronger correlation between form, technique, and function with regard to gender issues, while the plates often raise more controversies in their imagery and rendering. The narration on the runner serves to tell the stories of the women represented. As Chicago decided,

...in addition to turning around needle techniques on behalf of women, I would also raid art history--as male artists constantly do--by adapting various art-historical motifs from the period in which each of the women lived, not only for the plate imagery but also for the runner designs. In the case of the runners, I would combine these with needlework styles or techniques that had been employed during, or associated with, the same period.⁶³

The application of handicraft in the form of embroidery on the runners proved a good technique and a historical documentation as well. Its images, form, concept, and even the choice of the style and technique of the needlework for the particular time period celebrate the historically important women figures in this project.

In Embroidering Our Heritage, Chicago explained and documented different kinds of needlework and techniques--quilting, embroidery, and sewing--applied on the runners. Chicago's work showed how much research and skillful labor was involved in the creativity of handicraft and needlework art, and each runner features a different type of needlework.

⁶³ Chicago, Beyond the Flower, 53.

In Chicago's documentary book, Hatshepsut (1503-1482 B.C.) (fig. 10), a female Egyptian pharaoh of the Eighteenth Dynasty is represented by a place setting, the design of which Chicago derived from Egyptian tomb paintings and which includes geometric motifs and hieroglyphic panels in the patterned border of the runner. According to Chicago's document, the roundel embroidery, made by Marilyn Akers, was inspired by the collars traditionally worn by the pharaohs and repeats the blue forms on the plate. Tent stitching was used on the thin borders and divisions of the runner design. The craftswomen-artists also researched the Egyptian method of making colored bands that were embroidered on garments. A 22-mesh canvas was used to fit the scale of the stitching, as finely done as the linen thread count. It is also worth noting that in Egyptian mythology weaving represented the creation of life.⁶⁴

As Chicago notes, Aspasia (470-410 B.C.) (fig. 11), the ancient Greek scholar, philosopher, and leader of women is represented in drapery forms recalling Greek togas. This place setting's runner incorporates Greek costume styles with ornamentation and motifs from vase paintings. The front drape is held in place by the image of palmettes embroidered in Ver au Soie silk using the split stitch. They were stiffened, backed with linen, edged in Japanese gold, and sewn in place. The frieze bands on the side of the runner, embroidered in the stem stitch, split stitch, and satin stitch, are derived from traditional Greek ornamentation.⁶⁵

According to Chicago, Boadicea (Britain, d. A.D. 62) (fig. 12), a figure standing for warrior queens extending back to legendary times, has a table runner with helmet

⁶⁴ Chicago, *Embroidering Our Heritage*, 57-63.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 72.

forms and Stonehenge images. The design emerged from reviewing the artifacts, armaments, incised objects, and enameled jewelry typical of early Celtic art. The runner, executed by Terry Blecher, incorporates curved forms cut from thick handmade felt with rhythmic lines of cording and complex patterns that are stitched to imitate decorative motifs of the time. The needlework techniques include couching, stem stitching, running stitch, and cording. Small enameled copper pieces simulating Celtic jewelry are set into the felt to enrich the runner and repeat the curvilinear motifs.⁶⁶

As Chicago recorded, the runner for Hrosvitha (German, 935-1002) (fig. 13) was done on an unbleached, loosely woven linen cloth. The embroidery technique was based on the needlework style *opus teutonicum*, which involves complex geometric patterning and counted thread work, styles closely tied to traditional German needlework motifs. This runner is especially intricate, with a three-scene narration of Hrosvitha's remarkable life as a German playwright, historian, and religious woman.⁶⁷

Another runner is dedicated to , Christine de Pisan (France, 1363-1431) (fig. 14), a writer, humanist, and early feminist. Bargello, which is also called "flame stitch" or "Florentine stitch," is an old form of counted-thread embroidery similar to needlepoint, generally used for upholstery of chairs or for rugs, curtains and bed valances. The pointed and undulating patterns of the flame stitches made possible the creation of a series of jagged forms.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Ibid., 80-83. The felt was made by Susan Leverton using the traditional method. Felt is the oldest form of fiber, predating weaving. It is a thick, compact fabric made by matting wool fleece, and the name has its root in a word meaning "to grow or join together." It was used extensively by many ancient people, including nomadic tribes of Central Asia and civilizations of the Mediterranean.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 124.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 158.

In the runner for Mary Wollstonecraft (England, 1759-1797) (fig. 15) stump work was the technique chosen. This needlework was traditionally thought ugly because of the size differences of the stitches. However, it was considered beautiful and suited to this piece by Chicago.⁶⁹ As Lucy Lippard noted, "Mary Wollstonecraft's death in childbirth, for instance, would have been gross in painting, but the forthright 'stump work' technique made it credible."⁷⁰

In the runners, Chicago explored female traditional arts with great dedication and effort, and the embroidery techniques were executed with great degrees of success. The mapping of image, technique, form, format, and concept was complex, and Chicago took consideration of each detail. All in all, the plates contain some contradictions between the aggressive sexual images and the smooth, supple surfaces of the finishes, as well as between the desire for "craft" and the cool, sophisticated look of the pieces. The uniformity of the sexual images (an arbitrary and personal choice made by Chicago) and the china painting technique also risk universalizing and essentializing image and form. In contrast, the execution of the runners connects the history of embroidery with the history of represented women in a more judicious and objective way. The connection of the image and the form was well thought out, with different kinds of needlework techniques appropriately applied to each historical figure, thereby forming a more consistent style of expression.

Besides the provocative sexual images in the work, decoration and handicraft create a critical site for the interrogation of modernist values and feminist inquiry. In the

⁶⁹ Ibid., 124.

following section, I explain how handicraft has been viewed in modernist art history and how it was associated with the female world and its connection with the corporeal. I wish to consider the argument that the application of handicraft forms another phase of body politics in 1970s feminist art. These analyses will be conducted through the lenses of art history, sociocultural history, and psycholinguistic interpretations.

Art, Craft and Gender Politics in an Art Historical Context

Taking an anti-modernist and anti-minimalist stance, feminist artists of the 1970s brought content into form and broke down the boundary between high art and low art with the introduction of traditional female craft into art-making. After reviewing the contemporary critics' discussion of this issue, I will discuss and compare 1970s feminist art to Bauhaus textile design, Russian Constructivist textile design, and the Arts and Crafts movement--modernist movements in which the unity of art and craft reached a heightened state.

In 1976, Lawrence Alloway stated that craft is a culturally rooted, generational aesthetic common to both men and women, rather than a gender-specific practice. Craft, according to Alloway, became understood as a female style because of its feminist politics, its association with domestic applications, and its strong pastoral, primitivist, and anti-consumer undercurrent. He concluded that the search for sexual specifics in women's art led to the neglect of sexual comparisons.⁷¹ I propose a different view.

⁷⁰ Lippard, "Judy Chicago's 'Dinner Party,'" 124.

⁷¹ Alloway, 70. He explains, "Craft techniques...comprise another important sub-category within the broad effort to isolate female form-characteristics. Such techniques are in broad use among men and women at

The enabling myth of women's traditional craft forms involves discourse in sexuality and gender politics. In 1996, two decades after The Dinner Party was first shown, Amelia Jones discussed the critical responses to The Dinner Party concerning the issue of craft practice. In the context of modernist art history, she emphasizes that,

Through its overt celebration of craft and its explicit politicization of the history of Western culture, the piece blatantly subverts modernist value systems, which privilege the "pure" aesthetic object over the debased sentimentality of the domestic and popular arts.... Chicago's integration of media associated with women's labor in the domestic sphere (needlework, ceramics, and china painting) into this monumental artwork produces an explosive collision between aesthetics (the public domain of the high-art museum) and domestic kitsch (the private domain of women's space, the home).⁷²

Craft is often practiced in the domestic and female world, but when it is incorporated into art-making it can be seen as a feminist strategy working against Greenbergian formalism. Greenberg holds the dichotomous view of culture that opposed a pure Modernism to degraded "kitsch."⁷³ In the 1960s, Pop artists incorporated kitsch from commercial culture in their works. Later, Jeff Koons's kitsch images challenged consumerism on a different level by reproducing kitsch objects and compressing high and low art into one and the same. While Koons and these male Pop artists' works have been embraced by the critics and art world, The Dinner Party was ridiculed by critic Robert Hughes as kitsch, which "is all that formalist, modernist art is not: it is popular, loved by the masses: it is

present but can be programmatically associated with women because of their traditional domestic application." He does not think that "there is an instinctual female urge to craft." As of today, crafts "signify primitivism more than utility. There is a strong pastoral, anti-consumer undercurrent to craft in those forms in which it interpenetrates with sculpture or painting...As the esthetics of art and the operations of craft have overlapped, so a common base of work, accessible to men or women, is apparent." It is generationally rather than sexually attributable.

⁷² Jones, 87-88.

⁷³ Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," in Art and Culture (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 10, also in Jones, 87.

literary; it is associated with women's tastes and with domestic crafts." Hughes stated that this work is "mainly cliché...with colors worthy of a Taiwanese souvenir factory. In terms of taste, The Dinner Party is no better than mass devotional art."⁷⁴ His comments are maliciously negative regarding the application of handicraft as a female style. The disparagement of Taiwanese factory products also harshly marginalizes the socioeconomic and cultural experience of Taiwan. The evidence of the aesthetic form and refined technique presented in Chicago's china painting plates and embroidery runners should counter Hughes' "kitsch" criticism.

Craft may not necessarily be a gender-specific issue in some generations, but it can provoke gender politics in its collision of oppositions: art vs. craft, patriarchy vs. matriarchy, and Modernism vs. multivalent anti-modern or postmodern art. When gender politics are put into context, greater dynamism between art and craft practice is created.

Although Alloway held an ambivalent view of feminist politics in relation to craft, he sympathized with feminist artists in the 1970s and affirmed their collaborative effort and avant-garde position as an attempt to reform the art world. He wrote,

My impression is that newly appearing male artists were not the equals either in number or intensity of women...propaganda and reassurance have been prominent, and texts are scattered in catalogues, parochial newsletters and magazines.⁷⁵

Later in the essay, he continued:

The women's movement in art can be considered as an Avant Garde because its members are united by a desire to change the existing social forms of the art world--the innovative factor is precisely the

⁷⁴ Robert Hughes, "An Obsessive Feminist Pantheon: Judy Chicago's Dinner Party Turns History into Agitprop," Time 15 (December 1980), 85, quoted in Jones, 87-88.

⁷⁵ Alloway, 66.

attribute of non-stylistic homogeneity--the members are compatible for social and political purposes, and they take priority.⁷⁶

Both Alloway and Danto emphasize the political aspect of feminist art. While Alloway acknowledges the avant-garde position of 1970s feminist art, Danto claims to take up the deconstructionist and poststructuralist philosophy to analyze feminist art. On the social level, there was a demand for justice and equality; on the conceptual level, the emphasis was on a deconstructionist approach. Feminists examined every component in the institutionalized conceptual scheme of art, asking whether it was an insidious form of male oppression. As Danto says, "From the deconstructionist viewpoint, nothing in art is sexually innocent or, in consequence, politically innocent."⁷⁷ Handicrafts applied in feminist projects are the product and process of the representation of the female identity and female body as a surrogate of handicraft work.

Bauhaus Weaving and Russian Constructivist Textile Design

The autonomy of art and the classification and collectivization of craft contribute to the hierarchy of high art and low craft. To breaking down boundaries, we have only to observe the exchanges between art and craft in particular historical periods of modern art. These exchanges both correlate and contrast with the experimental and political strategies of 1970s feminist art.

Art and craft interact and contest with each other on manifold ideological levels. As a result, craft becomes a constantly shifting signifier. For feminist art, it is a sign of

⁷⁶ Ibid., 72.

⁷⁷ Danto, "Women and Mainstream Art," 56.

femininity; for Russian Constructivist textile design, a political ideology; and for Bauhaus textile workshops, an evolutionary step toward the industrial production of works with a higher quality of both aesthetics and function.

With regard to the gender issues surrounding Bauhaus weaving, Sigrid Weltge discusses the practice of handicraft in relation to industrialization. For the Bauhaus weaver, the subjectivity of the artist and the aesthetics involved in the practice of traditional art and craft can still influence the process of industrialization. Under the system of mass production in industry, human touch and aesthetic judgment can become even more important. Gunta Stolz, as the major innovator of textile design in the Bauhaus weaving workshop, stressed the importance of making the understanding of handicraft influence the process of industry, not vice versa. According to Weltge, Stolz "championed the hand loom as a tool for industry" and also aimed "to educate young people through the discipline of handwork, to the development of a flexible artistic and technical expression."⁷⁸ It is important to acknowledge that in this special period, technology had the potential to merge with art and craft so as to create both aesthetic and industrial success. The supremacy of handicraft's value was affirmed at the same time, much in the same way that 1970s feminist projects were discussed. But while the two issues were similar in aesthetics, they aimed for different purposes and social-political agendas. The Bauhaus was interested in industry and mass production; feminists, in aesthetic and sexual politics.

⁷⁸ Sigrid Wortmann Weltge, Women's Work: Textile Art from the Bauhaus (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1993), 97.

The entrenched gender issues involved in the social and institutional aspects of weaving were also crucial for both Bauhaus and feminist art. As pointed out by Weltge, "While their origin is shrouded in obscurity, archeological evidence suggests that spinning and weaving were gender specific in many parts of the world, with one or the other performed by either men or women." According to Weltge, in Europe highly respected masters of medieval guilds, skilled silk weavers in textile centers, and the members of weavers' and tailors' guilds in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were all male. Nonetheless, with the rise of capitalism and the introduction of power looms in the nineteenth century, women joined the labor force and replaced skilled male weavers not as professionals but as workers.⁷⁹

It was not craft itself but the designation of professional versus amateur weaver that was at stake. Despite the success of Bauhaus weavers, it could not be denied that women were designated to work in textile workshops because of their gender. The underlying hierarchies of art and craft, painting and functional object, male and female--even though not overt in the artistic products--were in the structure of the organization and institution. As Judy Chicago responded in an interview,

I do think there is a distinction between art and craft and I think it's a distinction that needs to be maintained. However, I do not think it's the historical distinction. I think the historical distinction is--if men do it, it's art and if women do it, it's craft. I think there's a tremendous amount of sexism and racism and classicism in the traditional distinction between art and craft, and what I use myself as a working distinction is that in art, the technique or the material is in the service of meaning, and in craft, the technique or the material or the process is an end in itself.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Ibid., 41.

⁸⁰ Judy Chicago, "Judy Chicago," interview by Dinah Dossor (Liverpool, England, October 1982), in Visibly Female: Feminism and Art Today, An Anthology ed. Hilary Robinson (New York: Universe Books, 1988), 44.

Russian Constructivist fabric design, practiced by women artists and designers, and female crafts practiced by 1970s feminists share a certain political agenda. The figurative image created by younger Russian avant-garde textile and fabric designers represented collective agricultural industry and a proletarian social ideal, but they failed to satisfy the mass consumer market, which finally led to their demise.⁸¹ In contrast, Judy Chicago's collaborative studio work on The Dinner Party celebrated female traditional art and communion along with feminist utopias and politics, risking many levels of contradiction and controversy. Yet, The Dinner Party faced the dilemma of art-institutional acceptance. The comparison of these two cases of female artistic practices is illuminating and worth investigating further. In chapter III, I address the feminist intention with Miriam Schapiro's fabric collages.

The Arts and Crafts Movement and Communal Workshops

To discuss handicraft in The Dinner Party, it is essential to analyze one of the most controversial issues around this project, namely, the workshop involving the handicraft labor of hundreds of women and a few men. I would like to analyze the Arts and Crafts Movement for comparison, to see how Chicago's craft studio shared common ideological, ethical, and political ideas. The utopianism involved in merging art and craft is significant. However, in the latter half of the nineteenth century the Arts and Crafts Movement was predominantly conceived by men, with William Morris (1834-1896) as a central figure and John Ruskin (1819-1900) as a theorist. Chicago's craft studio in the

⁸¹ Charlotte Douglas, "Russian Fabric Design, 1928-1932" in The Great Utopia: The Russian and Soviet Avant-Garde, 1915-1932 (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1992), 635-46.

1970s was a feminist practice that created a quite different structure, organization, and reception. To investigate the positive and negative reviews of the collaboration in The Dinner Party will illuminate the particular predicament and unsettling situation of this feminist collaboration.

Aesthetic and ideological aspects

While the Arts and Crafts Movement, Art Nouveau, Bauhaus, Russian Constructivism and other art and design movements synthesized both fine art and decorative art, important trends of modern art focusing on formalism and abstraction were gradually moving away from the trace of handiwork and gesture of the artist and toward conceptualism. With the factory-manufactured production of minimalist art or Andy Warhol's Factory, modern art eliminated handiwork completely.

In "The History of Craft," Greenhalgh discusses the dynamics of art and craft in different art historical periods. He concludes that the Arts and Crafts Movement successfully synthesized these two domains of creative practice. He explores craft in light of three attributes: politics, the vernacular, and the association with women. Greenhalgh defines vernacular as existing within a craft constituency. Craft, he writes, is "the cultural produce of a community, the things collectively made, spoken and performed." It carried the mystique of being an authentic voice of society. There had been a tendency to associate this authenticity with pre-industrial, rural communities. So it happened that the vernacular tradition was construed as something static and timeless, in contrast to the dynamic and progressive modern world. The rural and handmade aspects of craft production were emphasized in reaction to industrialization at least partly as a result of

the desire to return to the vernacular world.⁸² Indeed, the way Judy Chicago organized the female community for her china painting and embroidery workshop corresponds to the vernacular tradition of craft as it is explained here.

Greenhalgh traces the emergence of vernacular into modern art and craft. He writes, "There is a powerful irony in the fact that it was the modernization of European culture which gave the vernacular a presence on the cultural scene because of its status of being 'authentic' culture."⁸³ Its attractiveness lay in the fact that it stood outside such notions as professionalism, specialization, authorship, or academicism. In the feminist approach of the workshop, Chicago held an anti-academic stance, hoping to stimulate alternative ways of organizing a communal group. Yet the collaborative method of making art suggested an anti-heroic position, which in some ways contradicted Chicago's demand for professionalism and authorship.

Educational, ethic and moral aspects

The social morality and politics of William Morris' Arts and Crafts movement and the gender politics of Chicago's art-incorporating-craft project share some characteristics. According to Greenhalgh, William Morris was centrally responsible for generating a political understanding of craft. His socialist-based theories purported that creative work could improve society. Craft was about the empowering of individual workers, about the political control of the work situation. It was a kind of rebellion against the constraint of machinery and the division of labor. Makers and thinkers associated with the Arts and Crafts

⁸² Paul Greenhalgh, "The History of Craft," in The Culture of Craft, ed. Peter Dormer (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 31.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 31-32.

movement brought three elements--decorative art, the vernacular, and the politics of work--together. Their motivations were social, moral, and aesthetic. Greenhalgh puts it eloquently:

The Arts and Crafts movement, in retrospect, can be seen to be the most successful construction of a theory and practice of ethical art. The crafts were to be a politicized form of work which produced art objects to decorate society. The vernacular was the model, unalienated work was the means and art was the goal. The larger ideal pulled the three elements into proximity. It was a brilliant formulation: humankind would be liberated through communal creativity. Ultimately, for craft pioneers, the movement was centered on physical and mental freedom. By uniting the work process directly to the demand for a higher quality of life, they had generated the idea that craft was synonymous with power.⁸⁴

Anthea Callen's study of sexual division of labor in the Arts and Crafts movement, published in 1984, provides a feminist perspective. In her view, the Arts and Crafts movement contributed more opportunities for women to work and to engage in craft, yet it also further strengthened the division of labor and hierarchy between male and female. The issues involved include economic payment, domestic versus public domain, as well as sexual and professional entanglement. As Callen puts it,

Although the Arts and Crafts Movement was in many ways socially and artistically radical, it in fact reproduced and perpetuated--and thus reinforced--the dominant Victorian patriarchal ideology. These traditional male-female roles are especially apparent in the fields of design, production, craft skills, income, and management.⁸⁵

Women faced a predicament in both private and public spheres. At home, domestic activity was not recognized as real work; it was a labor of love. In public, "for middle class women, work and especially paid work, meant a serious loss in social status

⁸⁴ Greenhalgh, 34-35.

⁸⁵ Anthea Callen, "Sexual Division of Labor in the Arts and Crafts Movement, Woman's Art Journal (Fall 1984/Winter 1985), 1-6.

in a society in which 'lady' and 'work' were a contradiction in terms."⁸⁶ Plus, in the Arts and Crafts movement, the split between designer and maker was often also a division between male and female.

The Arts and Crafts guilds were mostly male-dominated organizations. As Callen remarks, "Male bonding was the logical product of a social structure which discouraged intellectual equality for women and restricted social intercourse between the sexes to a narrow and rigid formula."⁸⁷ Callen concludes, "...despite its positive aspects, the Arts and Crafts Movement further alienated women trying to reconcile the opposing ideals of 'lady' and 'work,' 'woman' and 'artist,' private and public."⁸⁸

In contrast, Judy Chicago's feminist ideals led to educating women artists, and her handicraft workshop provided communal support for women's creativity and empowerment. As art critic Lawrence Alloway additionally points out, the purpose of feminist coalitions is to acquire a shared experiential base. Therefore, skills and insights are not personal and untransmittable.⁸⁹

Collaborative or Cooperative

The claiming of authorship with The Dinner Party was problematic. The collaborative nature of the piece, or "cooperation" to use Judy Chicago's word, made authorship difficult. She said, "A collaborative relationship is different from a cooperative relationship." For Chicago, a cooperative relationship involved leadership, a

⁸⁶ Ibid., 4.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 5.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 6.

⁸⁹ Alloway, 64.

quality that was important in her view.⁹⁰ For more than a decade after the creation of The Dinner Party, Judy Chicago's authorship of the piece was often questioned. In an interview, Judy Chicago makes a clear defense for her role in leading the project and its cooperative, rather than collaborative, nature.

In Womanhouse, I was the teacher; it is not my work. I was facilitating my students. The only part that is my work is Menstruation Bathroom. Whereas The Dinner Party is my work and my vision and my images and we all work in service of a larger purpose of teaching women through art. But people work within the framework of my images. And I think that was always misunderstood. And one of the reasons that people got the wrong idea was through Johanna Demetrakas' film "Right Out of the History," which I liked. It looked like we all sat around and talked and somehow The Dinner Party got made. Even though there was an egalitarian structure where you went around the table and everybody talked. Somehow that was not what happened in the studio. In the studio I designed the images and people worked on my images. So I think that is one of the things that is washed out is people see The Dinner Party in relation to my work. I have continued to work on my art. A lot of the people who have done The Dinner Party have not continued to work, because they were not artists. I think there is a huge misunderstanding around the subject, around the way I worked. Part of it is because people can not imagine there can be a hierarchical situation where it is not authoritarian and oppressive. You know. There was a hierarchy in the studio. It was based on all kinds of things, how much time you put in, how much talent you have, how much work you did. It was not necessarily based on the usual [sic]--if you are a white man you are on the top. If you are not, you are at the bottom.⁹¹

Lippard acknowledged Chicago as an individual artist and The Dinner Party as a major achievement in her course of artistic development. Lippard made it clear that in her opinion the project was not just a collective political feminist project for which Judy Chicago took credit, in the process neglecting the effort of some 400 women.⁹² Yet many

⁹⁰ Judy Chicago, "Judy Chicago," interview by Dinah Dosso, in Hilary Robinson ed., Visibly Female, 43-49.

⁹¹ Judy Chicago, interview by author, tape recording, Belen, New Mexico, 24 May 2003.

⁹² Lippard, "Judy Chicago's 'Dinner Party,'" 115-126.

complaints and controversies remained around the authorship issue. Audrey Farrell, one of the collaborators of The Birth Project, used the word "exploitation" to describe the whole dynamics of the workshop in her essay.⁹³ According to Farrell,

The best part of the whole experience was the companionship and camaraderie we all felt as we worked. What we both feel for Judy Chicago is an entirely different matter...Chicago writes repeatedly about her obvious professionalism as opposed to all of us rank amateurs...To begin with, I found it intriguing that only one needle worker came to The Birth Project from The Dinner Party--only one came out from the nearly 250 whose hard work had made all the difference. Why: I find this very odd and telling indeed....⁹⁴

After Farrell received the catalogue of The Birth Project, she discovered how the effort of the collaborators was minimized. She writes, "The more I read and researched for this paper the more I began to feel the full impact of how nearly all of us on the project 'labor force' were only that and nothing more."⁹⁵

In an interview of Judy Chicago, I posed a question about this issue. When asked, "Can you comment on some of the criticisms of The Dinner Party? For example, the accusation that you were continuing the artistic tradition of the male artist exploiting his assistants, especially women." Chicago remarked,

The Dinner Party didn't break the myth of greatness. It was modeled on it. That was part of what upset so many feminists. The Dinner Party was based upon the old atelier system with a master and his assistants. This was not a collaboration in its true sense: it was my concept, these were my images, my ideas, and the people worked to

⁹³ Audrey Farrell, "Exploitation or Art," Art Criticism 10, no. 2 (1995), 96. Farrell represents a kind of volunteer who joined the project initially out of enthusiasm but later became disappointed by the whole project. "In 1981 when I learned of The Birth Project, I became very excited. A group of women in my hometown had started work on one piece of this massive undertaking. I sought them out and joined the Mom group. I had worked extensively in needlepoint and crewel embroidery so my skills and enthusiasm fit in well..."

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 104.

execute my ideas just like in the atelier system. The problem is that people cannot imagine that system as being anything but oppressive, whereas in my case it was not oppressive in the least.

I have developed a way of working that I think is unique. And I call it cooperative, rather than collaborative. I compare it to the traditional method of quilting. But there are many feminists who are not willing to accept this.⁹⁶

Chicago cites an example:

Amelia Jones was telling me about her trip to lecture in London and was confronted by Griselda Pollock about this issue. These English feminists are insisting on repeating this thing about how I exploited women. Jones replied that she had interviewed over 30 women who had worked on The Dinner Party and none of them have ever said that they felt they were in any way exploited. She asked if anyone there had any evidence or sources to the contrary, and of course no one did, but still the myth of exploitation continues.

The reason people keep saying it is that the taboo against women aspiring to greatness, having real power, having authority, is still very, very deep. And it is deepest among women. The worst criticism of me has come from women. The most hostile criticism of me has come from women. And that is what I mean when I say we are still obedient to men in this society.⁹⁷

Chicago was distressed at being described as being "on a power trip" and the collaborators on the project as "labor force." She remarked, "It is a hurtful issue for me tremendously. Because I did not benefit financially..., everybody volunteers. ... It was very painful to me. It was painful in the old days... It is just part of the processes I have endorsed in my life."⁹⁸

The myth of exploitation that has been imposed on this project for years is still provocative and debatable. I attribute these negative criticisms to several factors. First, there existed the conflict between Chicago's ideal of educating women and women artists

⁹⁶ Judy Chicago, interview by author, tape recording, Taipei, Taiwan, 25 December, 1997.

⁹⁷ Judy Chicago, interview by the author, tape recording, Taipei, Taiwan, 25 December, 1997. This issue was addressed again by Chicago in our second interview on 24 May 2003.

and simultaneously organizing them as a volunteer group labor force to complete the project. It worked with Womanhouse through the Feminist Art Program at CalArts because the project took place in the protective womb of an educational institution, where the hierarchy of power was more established and where the capitalist terms of exploitation were not taken up by teachers and students. In The Dinner Party, Chicago expected the group workshop to function as a supporting system so that education through teamwork could be realized. When asked, "How do you reconcile the artistic and educational purposes--can one use one's art as tool of education? Is feminist art largely about education?" Chicago replied, "The process is educational and can be educational. Should art always be educational? Not necessarily. It can be inherently educational or education can be the by-product. In The Dinner Party, it has a specific educational purpose because so little is known about women's experience and history." Chicago continued, "In The Birth Project, I definitely set out to break the silence of the subject in the culture about not only the birth experience, but also about women. In Holocaust Project, I set out to educate the art audience about the Jewish experience."⁹⁹ Amelia Jones has stated that Judy Chicago's desire to raise her students' consciousness and enable them to become artists was awkwardly merged with the studio setup of The Dinner Party. Chicago finally became an isolated authority figure more than an educator.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Judy Chicago, interview by author, tape recording, Belen, New Mexico, 24 May 2003.

⁹⁹ Judy Chicago, interview by author, tape recording, Belen, New Mexico, 24 May 2003. When asked, "Did you practice or were you aware of your Jewish identity in your art?" Chicago replied, "Actually, in retrospect, I can see the whole thing of teaching through art and I think that is a very strong Jewish impulse.... Also I think the fact that I organize in order to survive. I organize all kinds of art events. I organized the community support of my work. That comes out of Jewish identification. That is what Jews have been doing historically to organize the community in order to survive."

¹⁰⁰ Jones, 106.

To address the controversies around the voluntary work in relation to the power structure and the economic distribution in the community workshop, Chicago reiterates,

What I did wrong in The Dinner Party is not being explicit about how art making requires more than the creative act. For example, the people who worked on The Dinner Party were not responsible for getting it done. I did it. They were not responsible for the funding, Diana Gelon did it. They were not responsible for taking care of it, Through the Flower did it. They were not responsible for housing the work, Elizabeth Sackler did it. So what they got is five years' great satisfaction of art making. They got educated about what making art at a high level is. I should have been explicit about the fact of that. They have the joy of making art without taking the other responsibilities. Exactly how did I exploit them? So, the question is there is the persistent desire to make me feel that I did something wrong. The Dinner Party was wrong.... There has to be something wrong with the power of women. She cannot really be a kind, generous, and sincere person. [shedding tears]¹⁰¹

As Chicago remarks, in the volunteer group there are all kinds of "positive and negative dynamics." Chicago concludes that it is important to "keep on the track in the process to serve the larger vision. If it is not in the service of larger vision, it can really be ugly."¹⁰²

Second, there is also a larger problem to address--what is feminism and how should a feminist art history be represented? In my view, the striking remark about Chicago's exploitation of other women is only partially due to her personality and the combative nature she brought to her directorship. The controversies had more to do with the ideal of creating a project of feminist art. Several questions need to be asked: Is this project an individual enterprise of the artist alone, or a group effort improving the lot of women? Does it represent a reality or a symbol? Is feminism a movement or an ideology? How does one balance theoretically oriented or practically oriented approaches, as well

¹⁰¹ Judy Chicago, interview by author, tape recording, Belen, New Mexico, 24 May 2003.

¹⁰² Ibid.

as political or aesthetic aspects? Another issue in the 1970s was Conceptual art, which emphasizes the concept of the work more than the execution. In some sense Chicago's "helpers" were like Sol LeWitt's assistants for his wall drawings. The artists have the concept and the assistants carry it out. Nevertheless, Chicago's project is not wholly conceptual; it is also material and object-oriented and it emphasizes both process and products. The directorship in this case is also different in nature from one in a film or architecture project because of its largely volunteer system, which does not involve economic payment issues. Therefore, the complexity of the ideological, psychological, and conceptual issues becomes the key points in this cooperative system. A project such as The Dinner Party could provoke questions rather than solve problems, even with Chicago's all-encompassing ambition. The third factor, as far as the relationship between power and labor is concerned, is a rule of capitalist society that the person with power will make those without power work. The troubled, mostly hidden history of craft as labor involves both gender and class issues. Therefore, using traditional craft as a symbol of feminist art points to a contradictory site of liberation and oppression, a celebration of female traditions and a critique of their history. Chicago's idealistic and utopian views in her celebration of feminist art and history and her revival of the group workshop lies at the heart of The Dinner Party's contentious reception and ensuing fate.

Fourth, an additional factor concerns how women exerting power were viewed in a much more disparate way than men were. As Chicago records in her autobiography, it is more difficult for females to establish authority than males. However, the criticism was also often made that Chicago's feminist ideal turned into a male paradigm of power struggle and a stereotypical hierarchy.

There is a continuing fear of female power. If a woman is powerful, there's got to be something bad about it. Doing something, she's got to take advantage of somebody. The idea my power could be benevolent and could be inspirational and educational to the people who worked--that never crossed anybody's mind.¹⁰³

The essay by Audrey Farrell, whether fair or biased, reveals that this collaboration in feminist craft practice confronted the issue of *labor*, whereby a woman's collective does the work, vs. *creativity*, whereby Chicago alone is responsible for the design. Other themes include low vs. high art evaluation, and manual work vs. intellectual exercise.¹⁰⁴

Craft and the Female World

In the beginning of this chapter, I discussed the female body as a cultural text in my argument that handicraft was another phase of body politics in 1970s feminist art. Janis Jefferies, in "Text and Textiles: Weaving Across the Borderlines," discusses textile as a text, and whether there is gender in the textile. Here we can reconsider corporeality involved in handicraft as expressing bodily intelligence, to use Howard Gardner's terminology.¹⁰⁵ My argument will address the triangular relationship of body (text), textile (text), and femaleness. How handicraft forms a phase of the body politics of 1970s feminist art will also be analyzed.

Tracing how craft is associated with the female world, Rozsika Parker's The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine discusses the formation of a female identification with traditional craft. She takes a historical and social

¹⁰³ Judy Chicago, interview by author, tape recording, Belen, New Mexico, 24 May 2003.

¹⁰⁴ Audrey Farrell, "Exploitation or Art," 94-106.

¹⁰⁵ Gardner, Frame of Mind, 206, quoted in Metcalf, "Craft and Art, Culture and Biology," 75.

perspective rather than a psychological or biological one. Parker recognized that embroidery was practiced by both men and women in medieval times. But later it became a gendered practice, especially in Victorian times, when the ideal of femininity was reconstructed.¹⁰⁶

Judy Chicago attempted to revive this association between the feminine and the creativity of handicraft, which has often been discredited in the modernist context. Despite the controversies, the innovations and merits of Chicago's reaffirmation of female traditional craft in her project are manifold.

First of all, she gave credit to all craft artists by documenting them and their work in her books Embroidering Our Heritage and The Dinner Party. Chicago acknowledged the effort of the women involved by naming them; they have become artists rather than merely workers. In her well-known essay "Quilts: The Great American Art," Patricia Mainardi attempts to rewrite art history in regard to the woman's art of quilting. She found that "quilts were signed and dated by the maker, not just collective art in anonymity." She further overturned women's collective culture by acknowledging that quilts "have more in common with art-making than collective work interpreted in the myth of women's culture of production."¹⁰⁷

Second, through the process of working collaboratively in handicraft, Chicago helped women to find the female identification of creativity and sensibility. Women became speaking subjects rather than objects appreciated for their passiveness. Women's culture was duly recognized.

¹⁰⁶ Parker, 1-16.

¹⁰⁷ Mainardi, "Quilts: The Great American Art," The Feminist Art Journal, 1, 18-23. Also reprinted in Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, eds., Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany, 332, 341.

Jefferies discusses "the problematic genre of 'textile art' which can be made almost infinitely elastic. It is in a constant slippage of identity, the 'boundaried boundarilessness.'" These hybrid forms "eclectically appropriate or replace, quote and parody, contaminate and are contaminated by 'other' traditions, languages and gender inscriptions." Jeffries also critiques the idea that Judy Chicago and Lucy Lippard treated the textile as part of "nature" for a feminine subculture, which is outside culture, language and meaning. While I do not think Chicago and Lippard have neglected the context of culture in their proposal for a woman-centered art, Jefferies's argument does expand the possibility of "woman as speaking subject" and create the condition of "women reading" rather than "reading women."¹⁰⁸

Third, the embroidery, china plates, and craft workshop in The Dinner Party work as part of an educational process rather than as functional objects, therefore expanding the confined role of craft. Mainardi also asserts that quilts have been used for "controlling the education of daughters" and as "a secret language" for women. Quilts offer emotional content, besides being functional. Moreover, they may be used for political purposes. For example, Susan B. Anthony's first public demand for equal rights was raised at a "quilting bee," a function with social and utilitarian purposes. This event was appropriately commemorated by a runner for Anthony's setting in The Dinner Party.¹⁰⁹

Fourth, Judy Chicago intends to empower the female with creativity in the craft tradition. She states, "In Womanhouse, they [men] were spectators to our lives, to our art, to our point of view, just as we had been the spectators to male activities for centuries.

¹⁰⁸ Jefferies, 166-70.

This made them the 'other' instead of us."¹¹⁰ Chicago's emphasis on female-centered art has the power to overturn conventional spectatorship. The sense of a reversed spectatorship, in which a woman moves from sexual object to sexual subject, has a powerful effect of making a feminist statement.

Fifth, the practice of traditional female craft in this context has challenged the boundary between art and craft as well as high and low art. The shifting role of craft between function and non-function was addressed as the key issue in this feminist project. In her 1995 essay, "Kinda Art, Sorta Tapestry: Tapestry as Shorthand Access to the Definitions, Languages, Institutions, Attitudes, Hierarchies, Ideologies, Constructions, Classifications, Histories, Prejudices and Other Bad Habits of the West," Ann Newdigate, a tapestry artist herself, discusses its materiality and its capacity to shift within traditions and how it is a signifier of power.¹¹¹

The winter 1978 issue of Heresies: A Feminist Publication on Art & Politics was a special issue on women's traditional arts, the politics of aesthetics, and craft in different cultures. Artists, historians and theorists researched craft in traditional, contemporary, and feminist contexts. This extensive and diverse study asserted female creativity in craft, which is transformed by labor from a traditional form of oppression to a sign of power from the feminist perspective.

¹⁰⁹ Lippard, "Up, Down, and Across," 33. Mainardi, "Quilts: The Great American Art," The Feminist Art Journal, 1, 18-23. Also reprinted in Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, eds., Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany, 331-46.

¹¹⁰ Chicago, Through the Flower, 115.

¹¹¹ Ann Newdigate, "Kinda Art, Sorta Tapestry: Tapestry as Shorthand Access to the Definitions, Languages, Institutions, Attitudes, Hierarchies, Ideologies, Constructions, Classifications, Histories,

Female Body and Handicraft

The identification of the female body and sexuality represented in The Dinner Party is all-pervasive, informing its image, form, format and technique, and materials. Handicraft should be seen as another phase of body politics, and the overt sexual and body images associated with craft should also be discussed with the awareness that female traditional craft is applied as a method.

I will explore the issue of the body politics of feminist art practiced in handicraft from several perspectives. First, I will address the division between mind and body. In Susan Bordo's writing, she examines how the tradition of Western philosophical discourse, the split and duality between the body and the mind, contributed to the formation of the hierarchy between male and female.¹¹² This historical formation is also discussed by Josephine Withers and Dorothy Dinnerstein, and it is important to investigate in terms of the rationale for making a feminist project. Second, I look at the development of body identification and central core imagery in Chicago's work, reinforced by the relationship between image, form and technique, including the choice of handicraft. Third, I maintain that the construction of a female spectatorship of images and handicraft are important experiential and psychological bases for feminist art. Fourth, I study the association of tactility, female sexuality, and the carnally constructed vision involved in handicraft.

To begin with, the reason that Judy Chicago greatly emphasizes the representation of the body and sexuality in her work is historical. Not only do Chicago's personal experiences,

Prejudices and Other Bad Habits of the West," in New Feminist Art Criticism: Critical Strategies, ed. Katy Deepwell (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1995), 174-81.

¹¹² Susan Bordo, Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 5. "For if, whatever the specific historical content of the duality, *The Body* is the negative term, and if woman *is* the body, then women *are* that negativity, whatever it may be: distraction from knowledge, seduction away from God, capitulation to sexual desire....."

as written in her autobiography, attest to women's oppression, but also to the suppression of the female body and sexuality. The female was associated with the body and nature and therefore became disparaged in the philosophical discourse, which emphasized the superiority of mind and thinking. Reflecting on the mythical division that men create history and culture, whereas women are associated with nature and the collective history, Josephine Withers succinctly wrote in the 1970s that The Dinner Party presented the paradox of the patriarchal order and matriarchal myth. It refers to how Judy Chicago, while acknowledging the achievement of the female in history, still uses a traditional patriarchal paradigm and historical order, whereby women figures are made heroic. In this view, Chicago ended by creating a matriarchal myth instead of reality.¹¹³

Withers praises the work's exquisite richness of materials and perfection of craft. She also points out that most of the plate designs have powerful central core images with great expansive force; however, they are also contained and even compressed within the edges of the plates. The plate, according to Withers, is a "metaphor for the containment of women throughout history."¹¹⁴ Typical of the writings of the 1970s, men were seen as affirming the human impulse toward eternity and immortality, and yearn toward a truth beyond the flesh. The male is civilization, history. Such is the formation of the stereotyped hierarchy of man/woman, culture/nature, mind/body, historical presence/ahistorical collective existence.¹¹⁵ To compare the contemporary food images in

¹¹³ Withers, "Judy Chicago's Dinner Party," 454-61.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 454-458.

¹¹⁵ Dorothy Dinnerstein, The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 210; also quoted in Withers, 454. Dinnerstein succinctly defines that historical content as a "pool of memorable event, communicable insight, teachable technique, durable

Pop art and the association of food in The Dinner Party and its plates, the former are made through manufactured process and of manufactured food, instead of the handicraft with human touch in the latter. While Pop art intends to glorify commercialism, food images are actually a sign of consumer societies alienated from any oral or bodily association. The conflation of oral-sexual images presented in The Dinner Party plates confronts the female culture and history with bodily experiences and references, which finally convey the message of erasing the hierarchies of nature/culture and body/mind.¹¹⁶

The body identification of Judy Chicago's work began with her early interest in a highly controversial central core imagery. In The Dinner Party, it was represented in the form of china painting's "Finish Fetish," accentuating the bodily representation. Early in Chicago's career, she had already decided to explore the female body and sexuality in art. She said,

In my work, I felt a body identification with both the images I made and the surface on which they were painted. I felt myself to be both the image/surface and the artist working on that painting simultaneously. The canvas was like my own skin; I was the painting and the painting was me.¹¹⁷

Chicago further compared herself to other women artists: Barbara Hepworth, who emphasized that bodily experience is in the center of creation; Georgia O'Keeffe, whose flowers are a sign of femininity and the mysteries of life; and Lee Bontecou, whose

achievement." In our secular society, history has become a principal vehicle of self-transcendence, an attempt to identify and contribute to that "pool of memorable event."

¹¹⁶ Sherry B. Ortner, "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?" in The Woman Question, ed. M. Evans (London: Fontana), 1982, n.p., reprinted in Maggie Humm, ed., Modern Feminisms: Political Literary Cultural (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 252-255. In the commentary, R. Tong remarks, "Ortner's focus is on the universal and symbolic significance for women of this invariable association between women and nature which has generated a particular female personality. Ortner suggests that the deployment of 'nature' by society to devalue women would end only with massive changes in reproduction and child rearing practices combined with dual participation in the work force and politics."

¹¹⁷ Chicago, Through the Flower, 142.

stretched canvas forms make use of a body metaphor.¹¹⁸ For Chicago, Miriam Schapiro's OX painting, with the association of a central cavity and a spread leg-image, expressed the duality of strength and vulnerability, power and receptivity.¹¹⁹ In the early 1970s in the CalArts Feminist Program, Chicago and Schapiro were gradually developing the idea of central core imagery, through which the two artists explored gender identity and asserted sexuality. As Kathryn M. Hannen notes, their works at this time "focus on female biological processes and a central cavity or opening, a visual metaphor for the vagina." This attention to "an interior opening, a characteristic of womanhood," moved beyond "female anatomy" to "provocative visual polemics" to challenge society's conception of female experience and creativity.¹²⁰

In her field research, which consisted of visiting numerous women artists' studios, Lucy Lippard found that, in relation to central core imagery, earthiness, organic images, curved lines, and a centralized focus are common factors for women's works. At the beginning of her research in the 1970s, she felt somewhat reluctant to accept the idea of central core imagery. She writes, "When I first heard Judy Chicago's and Miriam Schapiro's theories about the high incidence of central-core imagery, of boxes, ovals, spheres, and 'empty' centers in women's art, I vehemently resisted them." However, she also found some recurring elements among the works by women artists, namely,

a uniform density, or overall texture, often sensuously tactile and repetitive or detailed to the point of obsession; the preponderance of circular form, central focus, inner space...; a ubiquitous linear "bag" or

¹¹⁸ Mona Hadler, "Lee Bontecou's 'Warning,'" in Art Journal 53, no.4 (Winter 1994), 56-61. In this essay, Hadler further studies Bontecou's "employment of the body as the site of social protest." (56).

¹¹⁹ Chicago, Through the Flower, 142. .

¹²⁰ Hannen, 1.

parabolic form that turns in on itself; layers, or strata, or veils; an indefinable looseness or flexibility of handling; windows; autobiographical content; animals; flowers; a certain kind of fragmentation; a new fondness for the pinks and pastels and ephemeral cloud colors that used to be taboo unless a woman wanted to be accused of making "feminine" art.¹²¹

Lippard concluded that theories and refutations will continue to help women artists and critics develop a new direction in aesthetics.

In the discussion of Chicago's exploration of the female body and sexuality, Lippard wrote:

By 1969, she [Chicago] was becoming aware of the psychological source of these formal elements and was connecting them to her own sexuality--the discovery and development of multiorgasmic capacities. She has long identified the surfaces of her work with her own skin, and has compared her Los Angeles "Fetish Finish" precision, her need to "dance on the edge" of technical disaster, to orgasm. (It is rare that we hear about this aspect of an artist's development, though it is often taken for granted that art-making is directly related to sexuality--as a form of expression, repression, obsession or compensation.)¹²²

Writing on 1970s feminist art, Lawrence Alloway also remarked that Schapiro and Chicago are articulate and dogmatic artists and that their central images are topical and political.¹²³ Discussing the female imagery and the politics of "Cunt Art," Amelia Jones, writing in 1996, states that the centralized "vulviform images" on the plates "threatened Western aesthetic conventions privileging images of the female body as fetishistic objects for male spectatorial pleasure." The direct representation of the female genitalia was assertive, even combative in its implications. Judy Chicago realized that

¹²¹ Lippard, *From the Center*, 38, 40, 49.

¹²² Lippard, "Judy Chicago's 'Dinner Party,'" 117.

¹²³ Alloway, 70.

sexuality has been repressed, so she looked to express female identity through symbolic statement.¹²⁴

In focusing on the female identity, it is also important to construct female spectatorship. Chicago's "cunt art" intended to present woman as a desiring subject rather than as a sexual object under male spectatorship. The shining and hard surface of the plate presents a bodily image suspended between touchable and untouchable ambiguity, between inviting the gaze and rejecting it. It refuses to be objectified through the self-gazing and self-identification of the female images created by female artists. The amputated and the partial organs on the plates represent a state of female fetishism born of self-love, as well as the desire to defy the male erotic fantasy. Furthermore, the ambiguity between the butterfly, flower, and vulva forms, the play between abstraction and figuration, all suggest the mediation of overt sexual reference.

It is particularly thought-provoking to imagine the process whereby each plate was molded under the touch of the hands and the gaze of the eyes of female artists. One is reminded that this corporeal experience extends from the eye to the hand to the symbolic sexual organ; from the visual, to the tactile, to the imaginary. One can observe this process by viewing the photo of Chicago painting a Natalie Barney's plate herself. (fig. 16) This self-gazing, self-identification of the feminist artist reminds one of Luce Irigaray's argument that women are alienated from the detachment, focus, and fixity of vision and closer to touch. According to Lisa Tickner, Irigaray considered that the transition from matriarchal to patriarchal society had been accompanied by the decline of

¹²⁴ Jones., 92-95.

an olfactory sexuality and the development of a more sublimated, visual sexuality.¹²⁵ The shining and lustrous surface of the china painting accentuates the erotic association of the imagery. However, the eroticism of this work was not exploited by the visual experience of the male gaze, but instead enjoyed as tactile experience by the female artist. Gaston Bachelard once likened the kneading and molding of clay and dough to erotic experience.¹²⁶ Handicraft artists experience more directly the encounter with materials, which unites and differentiates people from the world of objects. By wrestling with materials and engaging physically with them, artists find a way of working whereby material becomes a metaphor for the bodily involvement of the artist.

All these interpretations argue that handicraft involves a body speaking through the mind. As a cultural text representing femininity and the female body, handicraft in these works arguably forms another phase of the body politics of feminist art.

Women's pleasure in experiencing touch through handicraft was examined by Lippard in her writing about quilts in 1983. Lippard has never completely dismissed the study of the biological aspect of female experience; however, she also acknowledges a cultural and social intersection with the biology. Her engagement in feminist art led her to various kinds of feminist projects, including "The Artist & The Quilt," the collaborative quilt exhibition curated by Charlotte Robinson. She writes with great sentiment and judgment for women's art and traditional craft. For her, "The quilt is a

¹²⁵ Lisa Tickner, "Feminism, Art History, and Sexual Difference," *Gender* 3 (Fall 1988), 115.

¹²⁶ Gaston Bachelard, *L'Eau et les rêves* (Paris: Librairie Jose Corti, 1942), 146, quoted in Sarah Wilson, *Paris Post-War: Art and Existentialism 1945-55*, ed. Frances Morris (London: Tate Gallery, 1993), 33-35. Bachelard's philosophy focuses on imagination, reverie (daydreaming), and primal matter. The primal matter--fire, water, air and earth--are natural phenomena and also the source of imagination for primitive people. He posits a "mesomorphic imagination" in between the formal and the "material" imagination. His erotic description of the reverie is born from the work of kneading.

diary of touch....The homemaker's touch is as often determined by economics as by biology.....A woman made utility quilts as fast as she could so her family wouldn't freeze. And she made them as beautiful as she could so her heart wouldn't break."¹²⁷ She suggests the role of the quilt is both functional and aesthetic. The story of the quilt contains a history of women that is both sentimental and practical, biological and social.

Judy Chicago considered the canvas as skin and was often engaged in a bodily identification with paintings. Her experience and concepts were further explored in her understanding of needlework as a fine art. While Chicago claimed that "thread could be thought of almost as a brushstroke,"¹²⁸ I would describe the needle as the brush and the thread as paint. When needleworkers use their hands to stitch, the "brushstroke" formed by the thread stitches in and out, up and down on the "skin" of cloth. The piercing of needle through the cloth (the skin) suggests an association of bodily experience related to the needlework. The "pain" (the piercing, the labor, the oppression) instead of the "paint" is retained in the rendering of the needlework. The whole process is quite different from applying paint to the surface of the canvas. Not only is different tactility involved in needlework; the closeness between the hands and the medium, as well as the proximity between the subject and the object, shows a particular phenomenon different from those associated with traditional ways of painting. The corporeal embodiment of needlework may be analogous to the experiences of some Color Field or Abstract Expressionist painters' direct pouring of paint on the unprimed canvas. The intimacy between the

¹²⁷ Lippard, "Up, Down, and Across," 32.

¹²⁸ Chicago, Beyond the Flower, 52.

bodily gesture, the paint medium, and the canvas has been more often discussed in the context of the body of the canvas and the paint.¹²⁹ The tactile experience superseding the visual, and the corporeal superceding the cerebral experience, are both more strongly registered in handicraft work, and the concomitant identification of the body with women's creativity.

Chicago acknowledged that both painting and sculpture need as much handiwork as craft. When I mentioned that traditional handicrafts involved more tactility and proximity to the surface of the work, Chicago was interested in making connections between her paintings and handicraft. Further, she made a clear distinction between her painting and abstract expressionist paintings, as well as the differences between the approaches of handicraft and the approach of the abstract expressionist brushstroke.

Actually, my relationship to the surface in painting and drawing is very similar to the surface of handiwork. In other words, I think you would not get very far within traditional women's handicraft with [the] Abstract Expressionist thrust. Abstract Expressionism emphasized the whole notion of thrusting into the canvas, dominating the canvas. You [Abstract Expressionists] would not really get very far with the impulse in crochet, embroidery or any traditional women's handicraft. That is not the approach that would succeed. All you do is that you rip the fabric and destroy the thread.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Griselda Pollock, "Killing Men and Dying Women: A Woman's Touch, in the Cold Zone of American Painting in the 1950s," in *Avant-Gardes and Partisans Reviewed*, ed. Fred Orton and Griselda Pollock (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 1996), 223. Pollock's discussion of Helen Frankenthaler and Lee Krasner as female artists negotiating their sexual differences in the gesture paintings is enlightening. Gestures by Action Painters were often considered as masculine practice; Pollock points out that the female abstract expressionists' practice of corporeal experiences reveal their particular gender identity. She writes, "It is my contention that the artists who are women work across a doubled field. As ambitious painters shaped by the formation we call the avant-garde, they must negotiate the conditions of their own intervention just like any other. They must evolve their own gambits in the complex play of 'reference, deference, and difference.' The resources from which they will inevitably draw to do so will include dimensions of social, cultural, psychic and even corporeal experience that is unacknowledged by a phallogocentric culture."

¹³⁰ Judy Chicago, interview by author, tape recording, Belen, New Mexico, 24 May 2003.

Then she describes the way she paints in relation to the experience of tactility and the picture surface,

So my approach to surface, with pencil or color is that I stroke the surface. Or in spray paint, you gently acquire paint in layers on the surface. That is much more like how the thread is laid on the surface or the way that something is stitched or a thread is woven in and out of the warp and the weft. My whole approach as an artist is something which does not lend itself to the dominant discourse, i.e. [the] Abstract Expressionist kind of approach of art making. It implies an art which is different from Abstract Expressionism and an art finding a whole different approach to tactile experience. That is why I can do design for needlework. I cannot imagine Jackson Pollock designing for needlework....¹³¹

In embroidery, the needles work up and down and in and out the surface of the canvas. Chicago affirms that there is a different kind of bodily involvement and tactile proximity in handicraft.

In "The Story of the Eye," written in 1989, Rosalind Krauss proposed that there is a carnally constructed vision representing the body through a particular vision, which is not only metaphysical or conceptual, but also erotic and sensual. Janis Jefferies affirms that handicraft and weaving are constructed in such a vision. Krauss claimed the "body as the site of libidinal pressure on the visual organ, such that the pulse of desire is simultaneously felt as the beat of repression." This sexual "lust of the eye" can be replaced by the sexual "lust of the hand" in the feminist handicraft projects discussed here.¹³²

Krauss discusses the story of vision using examples ranging from the traditional sculptural trompe-l'oeil illusion, to what she feels is the self-sufficient modernist abstract art developed from the autonomy of the retinal optical illusion of Impressionism, then to the

¹³¹ Judy Chicago, interview by author, tape recording, Belen, New Mexico, 24 May 2003.

anti-modernist projects of Duchamp. In fact, Duchamp was cited as an example of the invisible resistance to the optical--specifically, the "retinal art" developed since Impressionism. His optics are more about the order of the encoding and decoding of optical experience than about the sensory impact at the level of the eye. Duchamp's vision is seen as both perceptual and physical.¹³³ Thus the eye, just like the hand, also represents the body for a mind to speak through.

Krauss writes, "Duchamp thought about vision as arising from multiple sources, both perceptual stimuli external to the body and from excitations deep within the body....and arrived at the threshold of desire-in-vision, which is to say to construct vision itself within the opacity of the organs and the invisibility of the unconscious."¹³⁴ Addressing the unconscious and the carnality of vision, Duchamp's desire-in-vision and feminist artists' "desire" to weave, while vastly different, are both anti-modernist projects deconstructing the autonomy and detachment of vision from art works. They represent the carnally constructed experience, which embarks on the body as the site of libido, desire, and unconsciousness.

Conclusion

In my attempt to illuminate the complex issues surrounding handicraft practiced in these two feminist projects--The Womanhouse and The Dinner Party--the phrase "from public to public" implies several perspectives. On the social-political level, it refers to the feminist slogan "the personal is political." The private and hidden world of women

¹³² Rosalind Krauss. "The Story of the Eye," New Literary History I, no. 2 (Winter 1989), 283-297.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 287.

becomes public, and domestic handicraft turns out to be a social and political statement of female identity. On the biological and psychological level, the association of "the pubic" argues for the biological and bodily connection of handicraft to female experience. When the pubic (the private) is transformed into the public, the boundaries between biology and social exchange, body and mind, physicality and intellectuality, and craft and art are dismantled.

Whether we call The Dinner Party a feminist project, a social-political work of art, a sculptural event, a collaborative work, or an example of public art, the work's transgressive power to subvert the modernist establishment is effected through its great publicity and publicness. The point made by Mitchell reminds us of the gender issues in public art. Although his points are somewhat implicit, I think what Mitchell suggested can relate to feminist body politics. While the "pubic" (the female) was excluded by the "public" sphere, "the public" is actually often derived from the "pubic" sphere.¹³⁵ This notion reaffirms the validity of female-centered art, the fecundity of women's creativity, and the bodily connection of women's art.

The Dinner Party, with its multiple controversies manifested in the practice of female traditional arts including china painting and embroidery, is an attempt to combat the biased and partial view of women's history. In the course of merging body and mind in handicraft practice and the body politics of feminist art, it relentlessly embodies the contradiction and duality of the feminist predicament in its initial phase. The dualities of the sacred vs. the secular, aggression vs. suppression, utopianism vs. fetishism, spirituality

¹³⁴ Ibid., 292.

¹³⁵ W.J.T. Mitchell, "The Violence of Public Art: Do the Right Thing," Art and the Public Sphere, 35-37.

vs. materiality, and communitarianism vs. individualism form the basis of The Dinner Party's controversies. Reflecting on the dark and hidden continent of female history, life, and body, one realizes that representations of these long suppressed realities are bound to reveal these dubious dualities. The significance of The Dinner Party lies in these conflicting elements and its unsettling fame and fate.

Chapter III

Miriam Schapiro's "Femmage": Collage the Female, Decorate the Body

Women's culture is the framework for femmage, and makes it possible for us to understand "combining" as the simultaneous reading of moosehair and beads, cut paper and paint or open-work and stitches. Our female culture also makes it possible to see these traditional aesthetic elements for what they are—the natural materials needed for spiritual, and often physical, survival.¹

--Miriam Schapiro

Despite their modest scale and experimental nature, the works produced by Schapiro and Chicago with female students in the Feminist Art Program in the early 1970s had an extensive and profound impact on feminist art. Miriam Schapiro made a personal transformation in her artistic career after her intensive involvement in the program. While Chicago went on to make her large-scale and community-oriented project The Dinner Party on the West Coast, Schapiro worked in her studio, making "the personal political" in ways that were different from Chicago's. She chose to pursue recognition in the institutional network of galleries and museums, while also advocating for her feminist ideas by lecturing around the country or occasionally working on collaborative projects. She was also involved in feminist activities in New York, including the Feminist Art Institute in the New York City and the Pattern and Decoration Movement.

From 1974 on, Schapiro developed highly sophisticated ideas and works that she called "femmage." The term, signifying female collage, was meant to subvert the

¹ Melissa Meyer and Miriam Schapiro. "Waste Not, Want Not," 68.

modernist collage by bringing female content and method into the art process. With its combination of traditional methods of collage, nontraditional materials such as fabrics and ribbons, sentimental images such as hearts, fans and houses, and a controversial, richly decorative style (deemed taboo in formalist abstraction), femmage became the banner of 1970s feminist art.

The female body represented in Miriam Schapiro's femmage is not a real or physical body, but rather the body as a cultural text represented in decoration in the context of domesticity, traditional female craft, and female sensibility and experience. Eroticism, desire, and fantasy in relation to decoration were the ways Schapiro celebrated femaleness. In femmage, the recurring images of a heart, hand-held fan, and costume, as well as the domestic images of house, home, and nest, are all arguably connected to the body and act as signs of femininity and the female world. The subtitle of this chapter, "Collage the Female, Decorate the Body," attempts to evoke issues that link decoration, the female, and the body. I will first discuss how decoration is associated with the female, and then argue that decoration is related to the body. I will conclude by arguing that Miriam Schapiro's decoration represents another phase of the feminist body politics of the 1970s.

To take an anti-modernist and anti-minimalist stance and express decoration in the female way, Schapiro invented femmage, which is different in its content and material from the collage practiced by male artists such as Picasso and Braque.²

² While femmage and collage both attempt to connect art and life, in femmage, material and content linked to traditionally female and domestic arenas are chosen. Of course, there are more complex debates about form and content in collage. Rosalind Krauss and Robert Rosenblum have debated the issue of content, specifically the fragments from life represented in collage, which will be addressed later in this chapter. See Rosalind E. Krauss, "In the Name of Picasso," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1985), 23-40; Robert Rosenblum, "Picasso and the

Femmege appropriated the elements of traditional female arts such as quilting and needlework; used the materials of traditional female arts including fabrics, handkerchiefs, and ribbon; and both challenged and illuminated the suppression of domesticity in modern art. Femmege addresses the omission and obliteration of female creativity by collaborating with historical male and female artists, merging the forms of traditional crafts with images appropriated from modern paintings.

In its second part, this study attempts to trace the mapping of the image of the body and decoration, as developed and reflected in the artist's works--how decoration functions as an intermediary to the female body, represented in the form of the heart, fan, house, and costumes, etc. Decoration is a visual sign inviting the pleasure of the gaze without asking for something in return. In feminist art, decoration, understood as a cultural text representing domesticity, femininity, and the female body, works as a mediation of feminist politics.

How Miriam Schapiro Transformed Herself into a Feminist Artist

In both the private and public spheres, Schapiro's initial involvement with the prevailing artistic environment and art style in the 1950s and 1960s forms one of the most interesting and conflicting phases of her life. In Schapiro's private life, her artist husband, Paul Brach, played a contradictory role in her growth as a feminist artist. Though a supportive lifetime companion and artistic comrade, Brach expressed doubts about his wife's feminist art at the beginning. In her public life, Schapiro's academic training and

Typography of Cubism," in *Collage: Critical Views*, ed. Katherine Hoffman (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1989), 91-120.

experiences in modern art and the New York art world were undeniably male-oriented, often hindering her development. Eventually she was able to outgrow all these powerful male influences and empower herself to make the transformation to being a feminist artist.

Case studies of the three women artists I discuss in my dissertation reveal a parallel phenomenon in their personal lives. Chicago, Schapiro, and Kozloff all had artist husbands: in Chicago's case, a sculptor, Lloyd Hamrol, and, later, a photographer, Donald Woodman; in Kozloff's case, photographer and art critic Max Kozloff. Whitney Chadwick's wonderful book Significant Others: Creativity and Intimate Partnership provides a good model for studying intimate relationships between and creativity within artistic couples.³ How Chicago, Schapiro, and Kozloff thrived in their marriages and art would be very interesting phenomena for further study in this context.

As a child, Schapiro was well educated artistically, frequently going to museums with her father. In college, Schapiro studied together with Brach in the State University of Iowa from 1943 to 1949. After moving back to New York from 1952 to 1955, Schapiro basically painted in the Abstract Expressionist style, along with Brach and other (mostly male) artists. The couple exhibited together in the 1950s.

Schapiro frequented New York's Cedar Bar, a hangout for Jackson Pollock and other Abstract Expressionist artists. The experience was extremely painful because of the sexist atmosphere there. She felt a sense of isolation, realizing that women artists were still deemed "peripheral appendages." Schapiro made bold statements about how women artists became sexual targets and how the group atmosphere was sexist. As Thalia

³ See Whitney Chadwick, ed., Significant Others-Creativity and Intimate Partnership (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1993).

Gouma-Peterson later remarks, "The absence and muting of women artists as professionals both in the history of art and in the contemporary New York art scene, profoundly affected Schapiro....She felt diminished by her social and cultural identification as mother, wife and daughter."⁴ Schapiro remarked,

Joan Mitchell, Grace Hartigan, Jane Freilicher, Jane Wilson and Helen Frankenthaler were all friends and still are. We never discussed problems of ambition and ruthlessness. The spirit of the times did not permit such frankness—woman artist to woman artist. We identified and had camaraderie more on the basis of being women than on the basis of being artists. Art was somewhat of a secret life when we were together. When Helen and I were together, we would talk about problems with men; getting fat; whether to have a baby or not; the difficulty of moving; gossip of the art world; we would plan joint parties or remind each other when we were going to be on the beach. We never discussed our paintings. We were in the same gallery and didn't discuss our work.⁵

While Schapiro suffered from the conflict between the responsibilities of family life and the desire to be a full-time and fully committed artist, she constantly questioned how to negotiate her position as an artist and as a woman. She went to psychotherapy and tried to understand the conflict of being both a "woman" and an "artist."

Schapiro also started to experiment with the female style, exploring decoration and handicraft in female traditional art. At first Brach expressed some doubt about her approach. In her writing, she recalled how he was very puzzled about her art at the beginning. She describes her working processes in the 1950s:

⁴ Thalia Gouma-Peterson, "Miriam Schapiro: An Art of Becoming," *American Art* 11, no. 1 (Spring 1997), 13-14.

⁵ Miriam Schapiro, "Interview with Miriam Schapiro by Moira Roth," (Berkeley, California, 12 November, 1973), in *Miriam Schapiro: The Shrine, the Computer and The Dollhouse* ed. Moira Roth (San Diego: Mandeville Art Gallery, University of California, 1975), 11.

...I have lived with a man, an artist, for twenty-nine years. He works in an entirely different way from mine, and from his discrete vantage point has described to me what I do. Frankly, if I hadn't lived with him, I might not be aware of my own way of working.

...yet I cannot just walk into my studio and "do something significant." I have had to develop a way of getting down to work that is probably best thought of as a way of playing.

When I make up my mind to start work on a new painting, I go through what I call a "blood bath." I get out all my papers, all my paints. I play with them in every way I can imagine; I smear around on paper to get the feeling of paint on my hands. I leave my ordinary world and literally go into another house, a house of painting.

Then I may wash my hands at the sink and start making images on paper, freely, mindlessly, without a thought in my head. At the end of the day, I may have twenty-five "works" all over the floor. My husband stands at the door aghast. He always asks the same question: How can you so deprofessionalize yourself?⁶

Schapiro's early practice in the 1950s, with its great spontaneity and freedom, fits well into the Abstract Expressionist vein.⁷ The vivid description of her hands-on process of "blood bath" in "the house of paint" also signified her engagement with the bodily experience practiced throughout her artistic career. Later, her working process became more distinctive, combining a painterly style with fabrics. In an interview, Schapiro describes how she mixed and rendered these materials:

Usually everything in my picture is painted. I like to have transparent fabric so that it goes over the paint then some qualities of the paint shows through....There are some collage material [sic] but there is also a lot of painting. It all depends. You paint and put fabric and you paint again.⁸

⁶ Miriam Schapiro, "Notes from a Conversation on Art, Feminism and Work," 304.

⁷ In addition to Lee Krasner and Helen Frankenthaler, there were quite a few women Abstract Expressionist painters such as Dorothy Dehner, Ethel Schwabacher, and Janet Sobel, who need to be studied more. See Mona Hadler, "Ethel Schwabacher and the Paradise of the Real," in *Ethel Schwabacher: A Retrospective Exhibition* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Zimmerli Art Museum, 1987), 1-10; Ann Gibson, *Abstraction Expressionism: Other Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 1997; *Art Journal: Sculpture in Postwar Europe and America* 53, no.4 (Winter), 1994.

⁸ Schapiro, interview by author, tape recording, East Hampton, New York, 24 March 2002.

Not only did her engagement with materials and tactile experience reveal her art's female sensibility and bodily connection, but her feelings of fear and anxiety gave way to strength and freedom. Her artwork represented her awakening as a creative being, and particularly as a female creative being. She states,

After several days of playing around, I am disgusted. It is as if I have been coughing and am now able to breathe again. Then I lay out my palette, get my brushes together, and get my equipment, my tapes, and my fabrics. I make my canvas ready and begin to paint. There is inside me always, a fragile, unarmored creature, timid and self-doubting. As my painting grows, I watch this creature, this child-woman change. She becomes stronger, more assertive, alive, happier, and freer in her movement.⁹

Viewing Schapiro's transformation from a non-feminist artist to a feminist artist is enlightening. Abstract expressionist painting and minimalist geometry only worked as a frame for her female bodily presence. The images hidden in this frame are all about her female inner world, the world of her experience, thought, mind, and body.

After a series of hard-edged, geometrically structured works, devoid of symbolic and referential content, and a series of computer drawings and paintings, such as Painting City (1966)(fig. 17) and Byzantium (1967) (fig. 18), Schapiro created OX (1967) (fig. 3), which was frequently described as having a minimalist geometric structure with hidden female content. According to Schapiro, the "X" structure refers to a female body with spread limbs. In Gouma-Peterson's view, it "serves as formal proclamation that a woman could have strong, male-assertive, logical, measured and reasonable thought in a female body."¹⁰ Works such as Shrine: Homage to Cézanne (1963) and Shrine for Two Paint

⁹ Miriam Schapiro, "Notes from a Conversation on Art, Feminism and Work," 305.

¹⁰ Gouma-Peterson, "Miriam Schapiro: An Art of Becoming," 18-20. Schapiro and Brach moved to La Jolla, California in 1967. To respond to the ambience of the scientific community at UCSD in La Jolla, Schapiro created, in collaboration with the physicists David Nalibof and Jack Nance, a series of computer drawings and paintings.

Tubes (1962) (fig. 19) made even clearer reference to female bodily images. The egg form worked as a symbol of birth, signifying possibilities and inspirations. However, these female images were primly set in a minimalistic niche, the geometric frame serving as a shrine.

As has happened to many women artists in history, Schapiro struggled alone. Only when she met her female literary and artistic comrades was she able to change. In 1965, she read Simone de Beauvoir's The Second Sex and Doris Lessing's The Golden Notebook. The experience of reading Beauvoir was "explosive"; Schapiro started to realize the social circumstances of her female condition and was able to release her hidden rage.¹¹

In the early 1970s, she co-founded the Feminist Art Program at CalArts. Her experience there helped her to break out of her self-made boundaries. It enabled her to be brave enough to give up the influence of artistic styles such as Abstract Expressionism and Minimalism and to make art out of her own private and public self as a woman. She was sparked by the idea of creating art in a female way and made a drastic transformation. At CalArts, along with Judy Chicago, she found inspiration from other female artists. Together, Schapiro and artist Nancy Youdelman investigated the art and crafts made and exhibited by women in the Woman's Building at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago.¹² Sherry Brody, Schapiro's collaborator in making the

¹¹ Miriam Schapiro, "Conversations with Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro," interview by Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (September 1993), in Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, eds., The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact, 74.

¹² Christopher Knight, "'Women's Work' Is Never Done at MOCA," Los Angeles Times, Calendar section, 1 October, 1995, 59-62. John Baldessari and Allan Kaprow were also at CalArts at that time, but the Feminist Art Program enabled women artists to form a close bond and develop feminist awareness.

Dollhouse in Womanhouse, loved to work with decoration and clothing. Schapiro reflected,

This echoed in me and gave me permission to develop my idea....The Dollhouse was my idea--I wanted many things from it. I wanted the paradox of being adult and playing house within Womanhouse--a box within a box, a child within the woman. Yet the decisions were sophisticated. I made a Duchampian parlor, where I had his Fresh Window-- satirized it, I feminized it. I had a snake in the parlor, and in the nursery the baby was in an alabaster egg and a monster was in the crib, while a large bear menaced at the window.¹³

Schapiro thought this a deconstructionist work, in the sense that sexuality is deromanticized. She cited Mimi Smith's Steel Wool Peignoir (1966), which used Brillo pads to compose the garment, and Harmony Hammond's Floor Piece VI (Sculpture) (1973), made as an exact simulation of a hooked rug.¹⁴ These works celebrate domestic images and materials even as they are meant to deconstruct the stereotypes of domesticity.

Her experiences in the Feminist Art Program at CalArts and in making the Dollhouse marked pivotal moments of Schapiro's transformation from a non-feminist to a feminist artist. The series of works called femmage, which she developed later, represent her statement as a full-fledged feminist artist. The process of creating her femmage, of cutting, gluing, and pasting, along with painting, was new to the modernist tradition, to the audience, and even to the artist herself. As Schapiro remarked in an interview,

....I am a Victorian lady in the sense of how I was trained up by my mother, my aunt, and my grandmother. I was learning things that I ultimately had to leave behind. I have changed the way people saw art

¹³ Schapiro, "Conversations," interview by Broude and Garrard, in The Power of Feminist Art, 79. In his review of the feminist art show "Division of Labor: 'Women's Work' in Contemporary Art," which originated at the Bronx Art Museum, Christopher Knight harkens back to Womanhouse and comments that Dollhouse is one of the most interesting parts of the show.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 82.

because I added fabric to my painting, to a painted surface and then the surface had embellishment. At that point, I was really involved in an idea about women in crafts. I had the power to bring to mainstream paintings the kinds of ornament that women used, when they do needlework, sewing and making dolls and all the things that belong to women of decoration and ornamentation.¹⁵

Schapiro shows her awareness of the historical background of female collage in religious, domestic, social, and historical contexts. She attempts to demonstrate that her voluntary act of creating femmage not only responds to female traditional culture but is also her way of becoming an advocate of contemporary feminist art. This was a completely daring and experimental attitude, which was later recognized by the critic Lawrence Alloway as avant-garde art.¹⁶ In the following sections, analyzing how decoration forms a phase of body politics in feminist art, I will discuss two aspects of decoration in Schapiro's work: first, how decoration is a pronounced female style in Schapiro's femmage, and second, how decoration is related to the body.

Collage the Female: Decoration and the Female

To discuss how decoration is an expression of female style, I will analyze four aspects: form, material (method), image (content), and feminist politics. Decoration in femmage as a female form presents an anti-modernist and anti-minimalist stance. Decoration as material and method often relates to handicraft, with its focus on the process of making and involvement in tactility, as well as its application of non-hierarchical material associated with female traditional arts such as quilting and

¹⁵ Schapiro, interview by author, tape recording, East Hampton, New York, 24 March 2002.

¹⁶ Alloway, 64-72.

embroidery. Decoration expressed in relation to female image and content emphasizes domesticity and female sentimentality and gives the work a diaristic quality. Decoration as feminist politics addresses issues of public and private, the omission of women in history, the assertion of female collaboration, and broader themes of criticism challenging the art historical canon.

As an eloquent advocate of her own feminist work, Schapiro's writings and statements cannot be ignored. She has outlined 14 characteristics of femmage and acknowledged "the presence of at least half of them should allow the work to be appreciated as femmage."

1. It is a work by a woman.
2. The activities of saving and collecting are important ingredients.
3. Scraps are essential to the process and are recycled in the work.
4. The theme has a woman-life context.
5. The work has elements of covert imagery.
6. The theme of the work addresses itself to an audience of intimates.
7. It celebrates a private or public event.
8. A diarist's point of view is reflected in the work.
9. There is drawing and/or handwriting sewn in the work.
10. It contains silhouetted images, which are fixed on other material.
11. Recognizable images appear in narrative sequence.
12. Abstract forms create a pattern.
13. The work contains photographs or other printed matter.
14. The work has a functional as well as an aesthetic life.

Categorizing these 14 points into four different aspects including form (point 12), material (points 2, 3, 9, 13), image (points 1, 4, 5, 8, 10, 11), and feminist politics (points 6, 7, 14) helps to analyze her concept of femmage.¹⁷

¹⁷ Meyer and Schapiro, 66-69. Schapiro described the list in different ways at different times. She also points out that the criteria for femmage will be the presence of at least half of the listed characteristics. In Miriam Schapiro, "Femme," in *Collage: Critical Views*, ed. Katherine Hoffman (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1989), Schapiro's list is similar but slightly different, as follows:

"The original femmagists:
 saved, collected and recycled materials
 made work with a woman-life context"

Anatomy of a Kimono, 1976.

In celebration of her returning to New York in 1975 and the new age of women, Schapiro made one of the most monumental pieces in her artistic career, Anatomy of a Kimono (1976) (fig. 20, 21), which is composed of ten panels and is 80 by 52 ½ inches. Schapiro states the reason that she chose to work on such a large scale: "I went to the gallery and stayed there a while remembering my last show there and how unhappy I was in the space with all the 60"x 50" paintings looking like postage stamps in the huge gallery." Working large, she attempted to say something and "to announce the comfort that woman has with 'territory.'"¹⁸

Schapiro recalled that in 1976 she received a book from Sherry Brody, a colleague who had been her assistant at CalArts. The book was on the art of the Japanese kimono, which had interested her for years. She selected one kimono in particular for inspiration; it reminded her of Cubist art, and she also found the separate images of the obi sash and "kick" interesting--both formally, as curving and angular forms, and as parts of a kimono.

often made subversive art
 worked for an audience of intimates
 celebrated private or public events in their work
 combined image and text
 used silhouetted form
 used narrative with recognizable images
 created patterns with abstract geometric and floral forms
 used photographs and printed matter
 made functional and aesthetic combinations. (311)

¹⁸ Miriam Schapiro, "How Did I Happen to Make the Painting Anatomy of a Kimono?" in Miriam Schapiro: A Retrospective, 1953-1980, ed. Thalia Gouma-Peterson (Wooster, Ohio: The College of Wooster Art Museum, 1980), 27, 30. In this essay, Schapiro documents the inception, working process, and concept of this work.

For Schapiro, Anatomy of a Kimono is a symphonic piece with complex rhythms of color and form. Her ideas were to move "the color (as music) through the form to create a color/time sequence." She notes, "Each panel was to carry one of the color messages and each group of four would constitute a section of the whole. The first section was to be pale, the second was the original neutral painting, the third was to be dark and sonorous, and finally the red crescendo-finale, bango."¹⁹ The panels of curving forms with the obi and the panels of stately costumes repeat three times with a sharp, double triangular geometric "kick" following. The costume and curve reappear and move through the final two panels with expanding and even more fragmented kimono femmage elements, ending up with a more colorful kick. The four symphonic movements in this parade of femmage panels are a chorus and orchestration of patterned and colorful fabrics. Aside from the opulent visual effects, the intimacy of tactility evoked from the fabric and collage method should be taken into account for its female aesthetics. As Schapiro stresses, "Fabrics are what convey all the sensuous data in the painting." For example, the "anatomy" section, which exists without the contour of the kimono around it, is meant to emphasize "the explosion of the fabrics themselves." They demand "to be seen in another context so that their reality as old bits of lace or as contemporary Indian cottons or as embroidered tea towels or as Japanese contemporary rayon fabric will be evident."²⁰

Her engagement in both the art of quilting and the Pattern and Decoration movement is clearly registered in this ambitious composition of femmaged scraps of

¹⁹ Ibid., 27.

²⁰ Ibid., 28, 30.

patterned fabrics and paint. The signification of the kimono further evokes layers of meaning in regard to her interest in costume, female experience, decoration, and the activities of sewing/piecing in making clothes. The written line in one of the fragmented kimono panels in the work, "Sew a while and be in style," announces that the work is clearly made by women and for women. Schapiro remarks, "I made those costumes to raise the consciousness of women and women artists."²¹ She claims,

I thought about who I would address with my work. First, as always since my conversion to feminism in 1970, I wanted to speak directly to women-- I chose the kimono as a ceremonial robe for the new woman. I wanted her to be dressed with the pose of her own office, her inner strength. I wanted the robes to be rich, dignified; it meant that I imagined I would use a lot of gold and silver.²²

Here is Schapiro's version of feminist politics. She deliberately presents female culture and feminist politics in relation to the dichotomies between monumentality and detail, abstraction and figuration, public and private, and masculinity and femininity. While a kimono suggests traditions of female oppression that made women sacrifice freedom and comfort for the image of femininity and sexuality, Schapiro later realized that kimonos are also worn by men. She acknowledged that "the piece eventually had an androgynous quality."²³ Nevertheless, the imagery of the kick-up form of the obi was noted by Schapiro as symbolizing the freedom of women with a high kick. It reminds one of Schapiro's earlier OX, with its gigantic minimalist geometric form covertly suggesting a sensuous and powerful female body and sexuality.

²¹ Schapiro, interview by author, tape recording, East Hampton, New York, 24 March 2002.

²² Miriam Schapiro, "How Did I Happen?," 28.

²³ *Ibid.*, 30.

Decoration as Female Form: Anti-modernist, Anti-minimalist

In the above categories of femmage, Schapiro mentions only one characteristic related to form, which nevertheless constitutes one of the major points of contention in feminist work. For her, in femmage, "Abstract forms create a pattern." She challenged Greenbergian formalist abstraction with the tabooed elements of decoration and pattern.

The concept of decoration as an anti-modernist formal language aligned with Schapiro's feminist account of decoration. However, the step from modernism to feminism did not happen all of a sudden. For example, art historians such as Linda Nochlin took a qualified tone toward feminist art, and this contrasts with Schapiro's work, which incorporates Abstract Expressionism (and/or Minimalism) and female content. The characteristics of detail and fragmentation should also be discussed; detail, according to Naomi Schor, also presents an anti-modernist orientation to counter the classical and neoclassical ideal.²⁴ Schapiro actually transformed the reduction of a minimalist grid into a maximalist decorative pattern with the orchestration of detail and fragmentation, which are closely related to female life. While decoration has often fallen into a paradoxical slippage between image and non-image, the representational and the non-representational, and content or lack of content, Schapiro's art plays with these two boundaries.

Early on, Nochlin sounds rather tentative when talking about feminism. For her, feminist consciousness is a partial phenomenon among women artists. Modernist collage, Abstract Expressionism, and Minimalism were the historical background for her

²⁴ Naomi Schor, Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine (New York: Methuen, 1987), 4.

evaluation of feminist works. The assertion of femaleness and feminism were expressed with reservations. Nochlin writes,

Not all women artists are feminists: not all feminist artists wish to incorporate their feminist identity into their art works....Miriam Schapiro's collages are unique and deeply personal statements: they are by no means programmatic or didactic in their intentions or their effects....The woman artist's consciousness of her identity can function with the same force and validity as did the Abstract Expressionists' awareness of their identity as Americans....²⁵

In the 1970s, she had not yet developed the perspective that feminism is not only about female consciousness and the identity of the female, but also about the methodology of doing art history and the intention of changing the art historical canon. Schapiro's art is not just personal, it is also about making the personal political and translating private domestic experience into the public institutional sphere. It is both more intentional and effective than Nochlin describes.

Nochlin emphasizes the mapping of abstraction and female collage:

In the collages, the artist's private delight at Bloomingdale's remnants counter, her sympathy with the patient adhocism of patchwork quilts, her responsiveness to the delicate patterns of Persian miniatures are set in fruitful tension with the bold brushwork of gestural painting and the rigorous formal articulation of illusionistic abstraction.²⁶

Apparently, when Nochlin wrote this essay, Schapiro had not yet coined the term *femmage*, and so the term collage was used. Nochlin's discussion of Schapiro's work was often set against the background of male collagists such as Picasso, Braque, Kurt Schwitters, or Robert Rauschenberg. They were the pioneers of collage, "confronting the supreme aesthetic value of the canvas with the aesthetic non-value of newspaper or oil-

²⁵ Linda Nochlin, "The Recent Work of Miriam Schapiro," in Miriam Schapiro: The Shrine, the Computer and the Dollhouse (San Diego: Mandeville Art Gallery, University of California, 1975), 3-7.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

cloth, ticket stubs and waste paper, rubber tires." Only afterwards, did Schapiro use fabric scraps.²⁷

Nochlin acknowledges that, "...the implications of the introduction of patterned fabric--patchwork--into works of imposing scale and major ambition are central to Schapiro's intention and achievement." However, it seems problematic when she writes the following:

While these may be characterized as feminist works, there is nothing pastel or passive--i.e. stereotypically "feminine"--in the collages, in which Schapiro has placed the raw material of everyday domesticity--chintzes, checks, cretonnes--in the novel ambience of bold, often disturbing, abstract structure frameworks at times stringently geometric, at others, explosive, in which the innocently displaced dry goods spring to unsettling new life.²⁸

Here she employs a hierarchy of form and content, with the words "bold and explosive" used to describe form and "innocent, unsettling" for content. While most of the description here conveys the appearance of the work, it seems that she still has reservations about feminist art and female experience. She is clearly ambivalent about the stereotyped feminine, and praises the bold, geometric, and explosive style.

²⁷ Ibid.; Meyer and Schapiro, 66-69. In the latter essay, the authors emphasize the influence of traditional female arts, such as quilting in femmage. They criticize how canonical art history has ignored the "other" and made the misleading attribution of the invention of collage only to Picasso and Braque. Historically, women in different cultures and traditions have made collage with different materials and techniques. While reflecting on the historical context, they comment, "An Iroquois woman in 1775 sews five elliptical quilt work designs at the base of a black buckskin bag, quilt work borders at the top and additional moosehair embroidery at the bottom and sides. Hannah Stockton, a New Jersey woman, in 1830 dips into her scrap bag in the tradition of waste not want not and finds just the right pieces with which to appliqué her quilt."

²⁸ Nochlin, "The Recent Work of Miriam Schapiro," 3.

My analysis is not intended to discredit Nochlin's role as a pioneering feminist art historian, nor does it question the quality and validity of her essay; rather, it intends to show how ambivalent the early feminists could be. If Schapiro's entire body of work is considered, it is clear that she was never totally disengaged from the influence of Abstract Expressionism and Minimalism. To negotiate with the male establishment and institutions was part of her project. In my view, the "ghost image" of the male presence in art and writing is interesting and enlightening. Schapiro's mapping of abstraction with decorative female collage is radically subversive in bringing forth female form and content and finally overturning the insistence on a pure abstraction in Greenbergian terms. Works such as Lady Gengi's Maze (1972) (fig. 22), combining geometric structure with decorative fabric patches, represented a typical moment of transition. The poetic representation of changes of seasons in Cabinet for All Seasons (1974) (fig. 23, 24) contains frames in shrine shapes, geometric window structures in the center, and floral patterns on the top of a grid background.

These earlier works and essays represented a transitional stage from formalist art to feminist art. Schapiro had struggled to identify with the male art world and gradually tried to insert her female sensibility. Her interests also shifted from a minimalist orientation to feminist collage, which she loaded with decoration and handicraft.

Decoration as a female form conveys the visual experience of fragmentation and detail as well as a grid structure--issues that have not been fully addressed in discussions of Schapiro's feminist work. Her choice of femmage instead of painting highlights a crucial aspect of the experience of fragmentation in time that belongs particularly to female life. Schapiro comments,

Time is a conscious factor in the way women structure their art, particularly if they are [at] the same time responsible for the domestic engineering of a home and the nurturing of children. The family, as it is seen on the level of survival (life or death), can never take second place to aesthetic involvement...Guilt is the overriding demon of creative women who must steal time and space from others in order to work.²⁹

Detail is an even more pressing issue in reevaluating women's art. In her influential book, Naomi Schor discusses how detail was devalued and suppressed in classical mainstream thought; detail was held to be related to ornament and femininity and therefore was depreciated in value. Feminist decorative work definitely brought out a new vision, full of details. Schor writes,

The story of the rise of the detail is, of course, inseparable from the all too familiar story of the demise of classicism and the birth of realism, but it should not, indeed cannot be reduced to that story, for to tell the story from the perspective of the detail is inevitably to tell another story. To focus on the detail and more particularly on the detail as negativity is to become aware, as I discovered, of its participation in a larger semantic network, bounded on the one side by the ornamental, with its traditional connotations of effeminacy and decadence, and on the other, by the everyday, whose "proseiness" is rooted in the domestic sphere of social life presided over by women....The detail does not occupy a conceptual space beyond the laws of sexual difference: the detail is gendered and doubly gendered as feminine.³⁰

Svetlana Alpers in writing about the exclusion of seventeenth century Dutch art in contrast to the privileging of Italian Renaissance art finds parallel situations. She writes, "To say an art is for women is to reiterate that it displays not measure or order but rather, to Italian eyes at least, a flood of observed, unmediated details drawn from nature."³¹

²⁹ Schapiro, "Femme," 311.

³⁰ Naomi Schor, Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine, 4.

³¹ Svetlana Alpers, "Art History and Its Exclusions: The Example of Dutch Art," in Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany, ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 183-199. A more extensive study on this subject is in Alpers's book, The Art Of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 1983. As Alpers notes in the chapter "With a

These passages are particularly significant here in the sense that ornament, femininity, sexual difference, and domesticity are mentioned along with the aesthetics of detail. They argue for what I emphasize as the opulence of the female decorative form in Schapiro's works, which are full of details.

Fragmentation and detail can be further seen with the feminists' appropriation of the quilt and the grid structure contained in it. In Schapiro's art, the grid as a minimalist geometric structure often played an underlying role in framing the composition, and she tried to fill in the frame with abundant female content. According to Schapiro, "The gridding is familiar in quilting and appeared as newly energized after 1970s...old patterns and old techniques to be used as a basis for freshly vitalized statement about art and life."³² The emphasis of this grid was quite different from that of the formalist or minimalist grid. In minimalist art, the repetition and reduction of the grid suggests the technological and industrial side of modern life, while the grid of feminist art, inspired by quilt-making, refers to the experience of fragmentation, repetition, and the detail derived from domestic experience and decoration.

In her discussion of quilts, Lucy Lippard acknowledges that the quilt has become "the prime visual metaphor for women's life, for women's culture." She writes, "In proper prim grids or in rebelliously 'crazy' fields, it incorporates the Spider Woman's web, political networking, and the collage aesthetic." To expand the idea of minimalist grid to a crazy field of women's creativity, Lippard attempts to "suggest a broad social

Sincere Hand and a Faithful Eye," Dutch art is characterized by the craft of representation, the emphasis on visuality rather than textuality, and therefore also on detail (72).

³² Schapiro, "Femme," 306.

framework for the perception of that metaphor, to stretch the frame within which 'high' and 'low' arts are perceived."³³ She further notes,

The quilt is a diary of touch...The mixing and matching of fragments is the product of the interrupted life. Quilts also incorporate the grid, symbolizing, perhaps, the desire to salvage order from domestic and other distractions...What is popularly seen as "repetitive," "obsessive," and "compulsive" in women's art is in fact a necessity for those whose time comes in small squares...Passive housekeeping differs from active homemaking...Overdecoration of the home and "inherent female fussiness" can also be attributed to creative restlessness. Women are raised with an exaggerated sense of detail, which extends from body to house to the objects it contains.³⁴

In her terms, the quilt as a visual metaphor for women's lives suggests that ideology builds upon detail and fragmentation, either in women's experience of time, perception of life structure, or in the way they create.

When James Leggio discusses Robert Rauschenberg's combined painting Bed (1955) (fig. 25) and its applications of quilt and paint, he raises the issues of grid/geometry, gender/the feminine, and bodily reference. Leggio's interpretation of quilts is particularly thought-provoking:

The quilt brings with it a ready-made frame of bodily reference, one which Rauschenberg could hardly ignore. Its design raises questions of gender. Quilt-making has for centuries been considered almost exclusively a women's art, and thus carries inevitable associations of the feminine; at the same time, the role of the quilt as bedding asserts a link between gender and geometry.³⁵

³³ Lippard, "Up, Down, and Across," 32.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ James Leggio, "Robert Rauschenberg's Bed and the Symbolism of the Body," in Essays on Assemblage (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1992), 97. The particular quilt in Bed was given to Rauschenberg by Dorothea Rockburne, who had used it herself for several years. According to Leggio, "In these vestigial senses, Bed remained a woman's bed as much as it was Rauschenberg's own." The androgynous references in this piece are noteworthy.

In the following sections, quilts will be further addressed in respect to handicraft and materials.

Decoration as Material and Method

Because quilt making is so indisputably women's art, many of the issues women artists are attempting to clarify now--questions of feminine sensibility, of originality and tradition, of individuality versus collectivity, of content and values in art--can be illuminated by a study of this art form.³⁶

Quilts, with their rich decorative patterns, also became another hallmark of 1970s feminist artists, who derived their inspiration from new materials and new methods of making art while reflecting on cultural traditions. For the first time in history, women's traditional arts were acknowledged for their creativity and aesthetics rather than just being functional objects for utilitarian purposes. Not only did the artist and quilt-maker join to develop new explorations of quilting; art historians also reflected deeply on the issues involving the quilt. In the essay mentioned earlier, Patricia Mainardi also emphasizes the creativity of the individual quilter rather than collective achievement, even though she recognizes that quilting had its religious and sociopolitical function.³⁷ Michelle Cliff brought attention to black women's creativity with the quilt to counter the idea that quilting was a sign of slavery and oppression. It is acknowledged that the strength of black women did not result from the oppression of slavery but rather from their creativity.³⁸ Lippard saw the quilt as "a symbol of the feminist resurrection of our

³⁶ Mainardi, "Quilts: The Great American Art," *The Feminist Art Journal*, 1, 18-23. Also reprinted in Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, eds., *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany*, 331.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 332.

³⁸ Michelle Cliff, "Object into Subject: Some Thoughts on the Work of Black Women Artists," in *Imagining Women: Cultural Representations and Gender*, ed. Frances Bonner, Lizbeth Goodman, Richard Allen, Linda Janes, and Catherine King (London: Open University, 1992), 140-153.

foremother's lives, an innovative way for feminist art to explore geometry beyond minimalism and also question the boundary of high and low, aesthetics and function."³⁹ In *femme*, the material and method evolve a great deal from Schapiro's interest in quilting, which inspired her to use fabric and exposed her to female handicraft, with its emphasis on process and tactility. She comments,

In the late 1960s I knew very little about the nature of fabrics, and nothing about their special history in women's culture. I never realized they could help me solve my painting problems, until I closed the gap between the "pure" studio and the everyday reality of my home. Once the doors to my outside studio were literally shut and I moved my painting materials back home, I learned from the quiltmakers how to do everything under one roof. I learned to add a new dimension to what I already knew: that even though painting indisputably raises a vivid image in the mind, quilts have a charismatic glow--so why not have the best of both worlds? I attached fabrics to my painted surfaces. After painting a simple geometric structure, which served as a container for a burst of fabrics, I often glued sheer materials like printed chiffon over my acrylic scaffold. They appeared to flutter against the structure like a bird seeking freedom from the cage.⁴⁰

Schapiro's liberation is not only about breaking the grid "cage" of geometric structure with flying pattern, but also about using fabric more than conventional paint in her art. In an interview with Moira Roth in 1973, Schapiro described her transformation from painting to making collage with fabric. She stated that, after her collaboration with women artists and students in Womanhouse,

I still made structured paintings but the collage elements had a way of exploding the structures. The fabrics were so intimately tied up with my years of homemaking and nesting which I, as so many women artists, had sought to keep separate from the art. Formerly, I had gone into the studio with my "serious" self. Now I was going into the studio with all selves. I began to read up on quilts and samplers and the history of lace and needlework in general. It was as though I were trying to reconstruct a

³⁹ Lippard, "Up, Down, and Across," 32-43.

⁴⁰ Schapiro, "Geometry and Flowers," 29.

history for myself. I wanted a history of women who worked with their hands. I wanted to reconstruct what was in their minds. I use paint and canvas: they used other materials.⁴¹

Leggio defines a quilt as "a kind of folk collage, assembled from leftover scraps, often of dress material, stitched together to make geometric patterns." Schapiro's *femme* is a collage utilizing fabric and quilt technique. Schapiro stresses working with the hands in these types of traditional women's art, while Leggio finds that the cutting up and attaching of collage elements--generally thin membranes of paper or cloth--suggests "a kind of bodily assemblage." In Leggio's analysis, cutting patches and sewing them together remind one of the "epidermal procedure" or the surgical sewing of stitches. Therefore, in order to "assess the bodily associations of the quilt, we need to examine...the geometric collage of pieced fabric...."⁴²

The material (fabric) and method (handicraft) of quilt-making were further studied and employed by feminist artists. An experimental collaborative project organized by Charlotte Robinson starting in 1975 marked the feminist apex of bringing quilts into art and raised the contested issues of high and low, aesthetic and functional. Schapiro joined this project and created a piece with a collaborator, Marilyn Price.

Talking about the conception of this project, Robinson stressed that she and her collaborators were considering a return to a truly indigenous art form in order to celebrate a contemporary phenomenon: the Women's Movement. At the same time, they were "anxious to eliminate the hierarchical division between fine arts and crafts that has

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁴² Leggio, 97.

evolved over the last three hundred years, that separation between visually distinguished articles created for aesthetic pleasure and those created for practical use."⁴³

The project was conceived with the idea of celebrating the year 1975, designated by the United Nations as the "International Year of the Woman." By asking prominent women artists to design quilts for quilters who would make them, the project was intended to meld fine art and folk art. The plan would include an exhibition of twenty quilts, sewn by the finest needleworkers and shown with the original artwork of mature, established women artists, all of which would be circulated to art museums around the country.⁴⁴

It took seven years to complete this project. Eighteen graphic artists gave designs to sixteen needle artists. Thirty-five women volunteered to sew the two signature quilts

⁴³ Charlotte Robinson, ed. *The Artist & The Quilt* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983), 10-11. Robinson gives both historical and contemporary sources of inspiration related to her idea. She writes, "...quilt, as art form, as a statement about identity as artists, as female...explores a rich history that runs from the padded clothing of ancient Persia to the highly developed quilts of eighteenth-century England, and to American Colonial patchworks born of the absence of fabrics and made one square at a time under the harshest pioneer conditions." Robinson also notes, "In 1971 Jonathan Holstein broke through the barrier when he organized the exhibition 'Abstract Designs in American Quilts' at the Whitney Museum in New York. In 2001, the stunning 'Baltimore Album Quilts' opened at the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, traveled to the Metropolitan Museum in New York, and closed at the Baltimore Museum." Before her project, Robinson also made, with Bonnie Persinger, a finished, prototype quilt that looked like "an ear of corn, a soft sculpture, a puffy yellow quilt tucked into a stitched green fabric husk." It was used as a bedcover. Most recently, the Whitney Museum of American Art launched an exhibition of quilts by African American women from Gee's Bend, Alabama, entitled "The Quilts of Gee's Bend: Masterpieces from a Lost Place" (21 November, 2002-9 March, 2003). The exhibition included 70 of these quilts, made from the 1920s to the 1990s. For four generations, the women of the rural community of Gee's Bend, in southwest Alabama, have been creating quilts of exceptional artistry.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 10-12. In her introduction, Robinson notes that "in the heady atmosphere of the 1970s, amidst the excitement of the Women's Movement, three artists from New York and Washington, D.C., Dorothy Gillespie, Alice Baber, and I, were discussing the ways in which women were bringing their own experiences—their personal female vision—into mainstream art through such unusual media as performance, body art, diaries, weaving, and even china painting and needlework." There was a meeting in 1975 at Dorothy Gillespie's New York studio with a volunteer fundraiser (who later withdrew), six artists including Mary Beth Edelson, Joyce Kozloff, Alice Neel, and Miriam Schapiro, and two quilters (Bonnie Persinger and Amy Chamberlin). In 1977, this project was encouraged by Jim Melchert, the Director of Visual Arts for the NEA, to apply for grants. He liked the idea of a "marriage of fine art and folk art." Three thousand dollars was granted—just enough to pay 12 quilters \$250 each.

appearing on the front and back covers of the book about the project. The collaborators commented that the experience was about "a community of spirit in the gentle rhythm of their needlework, the trading of stories, the heightening of consciousness, touching at the very roots of their being; for sewing is a quieting, steadying enterprise, like stroking an animal."⁴⁵

In the original proposal, Robinson and the artists raised questions such as: Why is this project important? Who will benefit? It is obvious that this project strengthened the feminist viewpoint on creating art, and made a statement for celebrating female traditional art and practicing the idea of collaboration in the feminist movement, just like Judy Chicago's The Dinner Party. Ironically, in this type of situation it is the fine artists who benefit, while the actual quilters remain anonymous and underpaid.

In the essay "Waste Not, Want Not: An Inquiry into What Women Saved and Assembled," Melissa Meyer and Miriam Schapiro reflect on how materials such as ribbon, fabrics, aprons and handkerchiefs used in the domestic female sphere were brought into a high art context, as happened with Schapiro's *femme*. They believe that

Women have always collected things and saved and recycled them because leftovers yielded nourishment in new forms. The decorative functional objects women made often spoke in a secret language, bore a covert imagery.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Ibid., 14. Robinson ran into the familiar problems that have arisen in other collaborative projects such as The Dinner Party. She comments, "I developed a love-hate relationship with quilts. Despite my determination to do the exhibition, it took time from my own work (what is more precious to an artist?), and it took money. It became all-consuming. Our 1970s ideal of a participatory democracy, a fluid structure of command, gave way to the practical exigencies of a single administrator, one person determined to see the project through."

⁴⁶ Meyer and Schapiro, 68. On 16 June, 1999, I met Miriam Schapiro for an unrecorded interview in the Steinbaum Krauss Gallery. She lived in East Hampton, Long Island at that time and did not travel to New York City very often. At 76 years old, she was still full of energy and curiosity; she was excited to get back to the city and wanted to take a chance to stroll around. First, we went into a store for kitchen, bed, and bath goods. She picked up napkins with elaborate patterns but remarked that they were too expensive. Next, we went into a store for knickknacks and she got several yards of ribbons for her work. For this initial

They discuss the simultaneous application and non-hierarchical choice of various materials in femmage. In a parallel vein of thought, they recall that "Virginia Woolf talks about the loose, drifting material of life, describing how she would like to see it sorted and coalesced into a mold transparent enough to reflect the light of our life and yet aloof as a work of art."⁴⁷ Schapiro remarks, "For me the fabric of my art and the fabric of my life equate each other."⁴⁸ The essence of unique materials and the process of handicraft never fully explored or acknowledged in the male modernist art establishment lie at the heart of femmage.

Decoration Represented in Female Image and Content

Among all the fourteen characteristics outlined by Miriam Schapiro, seven of them belong to content, which suggests that content and image play major roles in femmage. Schapiro made two major points, namely, that femmage contains women's life contexts and that femmage is narrative and diaristic. While the purpose of collage, on one level, is to bridge art and life, femmage attempts to bridge art with *women's* lives. Domestic life traditionally constitutes the center of female experience for most women. Patricia Mainardi's article "The Politics of Housework" addressed this in a most factual way, expressing the poignancy of women's life, oppressed by the division of labor in the

private encounter, we had a nice conversation about feminist art and her artistic career in general while at a café. We agreed to have a formal interview in her studio later.

⁴⁷Ibid., 66.

⁴⁸ Thalia Gouma-Peterson, Miriam Schapiro: Shaping the Fragments of Art and Life (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1999), 69.

household even after the women's liberation movement.⁴⁹ While addressing female experience and life, the domestic imagery in Schapiro's femmage ranges from house to handkerchief, fabric to fan. These images are subversive in intent, and are meant to challenge the art establishment.

Both collage and femmage have challenged the formalist tradition in modern art. Debates between Robert Rosenblum and Rosalind Krauss elaborate different positions regarding collage, in which the fragments of daily life are incorporated into the pictorial surface. Rosenblum interprets these collage elements as referring to the real world, which Krauss therefore defines as a form of realism. Krauss challenges Rosenblum by proposing that collage elements form a system of signifiers instead of labels for objects.⁵⁰

According to Katherine Hoffman, "Rosenblum's careful delineation of possible puns, plays on words, fusions of words and visual imagery, the use of wit and irony, etc. enriches conceptually and intellectually the formal language of cubism."⁵¹ Rosenblum points to the great impact of this "typography": "In this light the cubist sensibility to the commonplace urban situations represents the first full-scale absorption into high art of the typographical environment of our century...."⁵²

⁴⁹ Patricia Mainardi, "The Politics of Housework," in Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement, ed. Robin Morgan (New York: Random House, 1970), 447-54.

⁵⁰ Rosalind E. Krauss, "In the Name of Picasso," 31. According to Krauss, "Robert Rosenblum proposes to read the names printed on the labels introduced into cubist collage, and thus to identify the objects so labeled....the word-fragments perform these jokes while serving to label the object-the newspaper-with its name, is very much Rosenblum's point. For he concludes his argument by declaring the realism of Picasso's cubist collages, a realism that secures, through printed labels, the presence of the actual objects that constitute 'the new imagery of the modern world.'"

⁵¹ Katherine Hoffman makes a note at the beginning of the essay by Robert Rosenblum, "Picasso and the Typography of Cubism," in Collage: Critical Views, ed. Katherine Hoffman (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1989), 91.

⁵² Robert Rosenblum, "Picasso and the Typography of Cubism," 91.

Krauss asks, "Is the structure of cubist collage itself supportive of the semantic positivism that will allow it to be thus assimilated to the art history of the proper name?" as Rosenblum suggests; or "...are the word-fragments that gather on the surfaces of Picasso's collages instead a function of a rather more exacting notion of reference, representation, and signification?"⁵³ For Krauss, "...cubist collage exchanges the natural visual world of things for the artificial, codified language of signs." She further explains, "...The sign, as a function of absence rather presence, is a coupling of signifier and immaterial conception...there may be no referent at all." According to Krauss, "In analyzing the collage elements as a system of signs, we find not only the operations of absence but also the systematic play of difference."⁵⁴

In my view, the debate between Rosenblum and Krauss reflects different positions, and both have made contributions to the interpretation of cubist collage. Feminist femmage, based largely on the real-life experiences of women, is closer to Rosenblum's perspective of typographical environment, in this case domesticity and the female world.

The suppression of the domestic subject is well explained in Christopher Reed's book Not at Home: the Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture. Reed attributes this condition to several perspectives and traces the history of domesticity.⁵⁵ Griselda Pollock noted in her 1988 essay "Modernity and the Space of Femininity" that female painters such as Mary Cassatt and Berthe Morisot address

⁵³ Krauss, "In the Name of Picasso," 32-33.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 35.

⁵⁵ Christopher Reed, ed., Not at Home: The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996), 7.

subjects that focus more on the domestic space.⁵⁶ This kind of gender division created a hierarchy between male and female, public space and private domestic space, high art and low art, modernist art and its "others." For Greenberg, the domestic was the antithesis of art. One of Greenberg's best-known essays defined the avant-garde through its opposition to "kitsch," a term identified with the knick-knacks of the middle class home.⁵⁷

In Schapiro's femmage, the issue of domesticity, along with the art of decoration and handicraft, constitutes a gendered issue. As Reed emphasizes, "It is primarily in the home that we are constructed as sexual and gendered beings." The domestic sphere is "the main arena for the enforcement of conventional divisions of masculinity and femininity."⁵⁸

Upon further investigating the relationship between domesticity and feminist art, we find in the private domestic space, where women practice the art of decoration and handicraft, categories of expression once neglected and disparaged by modernist artists practicing pure and abstract form. As a matter of course, the suppression of domesticity, whether experienced as content, image, or medium of making art, was closely related to the suppression of decoration and handicraft in art. Sharon Haar and Christopher Reed praised the powerful transformation of female private and domestic experience into public and political statements in the projects Womanhouse and The Dinner Party. They also discussed postmodernism and pop art in regard to feminism. For them, "In contrast

⁵⁶ Ibid., 8; Griselda Pollock, "Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity," in Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art (London: Routledge, 1988), 50-90.

⁵⁷ Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," 3-21.

⁵⁸ Reed, 16.

to the ambivalent--even antagonistic--relationship between domesticity and modernism, the postmodern era has witnessed a kind of homecoming in high culture, as artists and designers have (re)turned their attention to domesticity." As they notes, "Pop and feminism made domesticity a central element in their defiance of modernism, though with very different motives and effects...."⁵⁹ Pop artists use domestic images as a sign of commodity, which reflects the modern technologies of mass production and reproduction. Therefore, the symbol of domestic life is alienated and estranged from real life. This simulation of household imagery suggests some kind of emptiness, a lack of human content. Domestic images in feminist art, however, are intimately connected to real female life experience, which belongs to the private interior world. For the first time, feminist artists tried to make such experience public.

Lucy Lippard began by writing about minimalist and Pop art, and then turned to feminism. She makes a feminist remark about the different reception of household imageries created by male and female artists:

If the first major Pop artists had been women, the movement might never have gotten out of the kitchen. Then it would have struck those same critics who welcomed and eulogized Pop art as just women making more genre art. But since it was primarily men who were painting and sculpting the ironing boards, dishwasher, appliances, food and soap ads, or soup cans, the choice of imagery was considered a breakthrough.⁶⁰

When men create images of domestic subjects, it is considered avant-garde. When women incorporate images from the household into their art, it is considered trivial, regressive, and restrictive. The underlying gender hierarchy cannot be ignored.

⁵⁹ Sharon Haar and Christopher Reed, "Coming Home: A Postscript on Postmodernism," in Not at Home: the Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture, ed. Christopher Reed, 253.

⁶⁰ Lippard, From the Center, 56.

In addition to the domestic associations, Schapiro deliberately used sentimental images such as the heart, fan, and handkerchief. She states,

Men think that sentiment is not valid, women think that sentiment is important because men deal with feeling in different ways. Men suppress feelings, women explore feelings. Sentimentality, for me, is a very powerful measure. I don't use sentimentality for its sake alone. I use sentimentality as a basis for feelings; out of those feelings, I want the spectator to think about what I am saying.⁶¹

In another text, Schapiro is determined to be a sentimentalist in her own right, both in her works and in her feminist ideas:

Because of our respect for history from a woman's point of view, because of our desire to conserve such a past, women's work often shows us to be avowed "sentimentalists." For some of us this word has lost its negative stigma.... It comes from a desire to reconstruct the masculinist point of view in art (mainstream) and to produce an art of sentience, which relies on female signifier....⁶²

In works such as The First Fan (1978), Barcelona Fan (1979), and Fan: Mother Russia (1994) (fig. 26), Schapiro blew up a small, sentimental image of a fan to a monumental scale. As Gouma-Peterson remarks, Schapiro created a powerful personal icon out of an object typically labeled feminine and trivial.⁶³

In Schapiro's focus on female content, femmage was also endowed with the narrative and diaristic quality of feminist art. Each collaged element contained a piece of the story:

Collected, saved and combined materials represented for such women acts of pride, desperation and necessity. Spiritual survival depended on the harboring of memories. Each cherished scrap of percale, muslin or chintz,

⁶¹ Miriam Schapiro, interview by Paula W. Bradley, New York, New York, 27 February, 1980, quoted in Paula W. Bradley, "Miriam Schapiro: The Feminist Transformation of an Avant-Garde Artist," (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1983), 92.

⁶² Schapiro, "Femmeage," 315.

⁶³ Gouma-Peterson, "Miriam Schapiro: An Art of Becoming," 40.

each bead, each letter, each photograph, was a reminder of its place in a woman's life, similar to an entry in a journal or a diary.⁶⁴

Schapiro sees her art as narrative. She comments, "Although I use text sparingly ...I see these works as short stories that salute women's experiences and women's lives."⁶⁵ Schapiro notes earlier examples of such works:

Femmagists interchange text and image frequently. I have made a simple etching by dipping a work already crocheted into a soft ground solution and printing the result on Arches paper. The work is called "bread" because that is what the original work says. It is part of a series of ten such works called "Anonymous Was a Woman," a phrase originated for us by Virginia Woolf.⁶⁶

The narration of women's life expressed in femmage, no matter whether it focuses on domesticity or female sentimentality, or whether it has a diaristic quality, speaks for the most essential aspect of decoration in Schapiro's feminist art.

Feminist Politics of Decoration

In the past, the role of decoration was often discussed within formal, historical, and social parameters. With the emergence of feminism in the 1970s, decoration became a political strategy. Feminists traced the history of the quilt and found the political aspect of it in different cases. Patricia Mainardi notes,

Women not only made beautiful and functional objects, but expressed their own convictions on a wide variety of subjects in a language for the most part comprehensible only to other women. In a sense, this was a "secret language"...there was more than one man of Tory persuasion who slept unknowingly under his wife's Whig Rose Quilt.... Women named

⁶⁴ Meyer and Schapiro, 68.

⁶⁵ "Miriam Schapiro: Collaged, Femmaged, Printed, and Painted," exhibition flyer, Steinbaum Krauss Gallery, 22 March, 1997-26 April, 1997, n.p.

⁶⁶ Schapiro, "Femmage," 306.

quilts for their religious beliefs...or their politics—and at a time when women were not allowed to vote.⁶⁷

To address the feminist politics of decoration in femmage, one has to question the boundary between high art and low art, between aesthetics and function. The intention to un-privatize the domestic sphere and project it into public arena resulted in dynamic feminist art and changed the art historical canon. To challenge the establishment, Schapiro also addressed the omission and obliteration of female representation in art history by collaborating with woman artists. In her Collaboration Series, she had paid homage to historical male and female artists. In works such as Anonymous Was a Woman (fig. 27) and The Architectural Basis (fig. 28), she collaborated with contemporary women in various ways, either working with them or collecting materials from them. Decorative patterning was often a quintessential element to frame her ideas.

In the hegemony of Greenbergian modernist art, decoration and handicraft were deemed low art because of their relationship to folk art, domesticity, the female world, and functional objects. In making femmage, Schapiro intended to celebrate what was neglected and once put down as minor art. She claimed, "It is in fact the 'school girl' and the 'housewife' we must look at more carefully to understand the aesthetics of our ancestors and their processes."⁶⁸ Asked whether she was using a stereotyped female image in her feminist art, Schapiro completely denied this interpretation, saying, "I don't think it is a stereotype at all. It is about women's culture. It is about how women live. Something ornamental is something that gives them pleasure. I want to raise the

⁶⁷ Mainardi, "Quilts," 331, quoted in Schapiro, "Femme," 303.

⁶⁸ Schapiro, "Femme," 297.

consciousness of women's work as something noble. I am interested in nobility. I won't take the notion of stereotypes."⁶⁹

In Jean Taylor Federico's essay "American Quilts: 1770-1880," the author comments on how the study of quilting "has been colored by a large measure of folk tradition provided by the late-nineteenth-century romancers of the idyllic past."⁷⁰ Mainardi also explains the formulation of hierarchy and the ability of the women's movement to change stereotypes:

The Women's Liberation Movement in art has the potential to revolutionize all concepts about art as well as about women artists, to rewrite art history to include the accomplishments of all races and classes of women, past and present, and to break down the barrier between "high" art, which white men define as what white men do, and "folk," "decorative," and "primitive" art, so called because they are primarily the work of women.⁷¹

From the above discussion, it is understandable that the quilt, with its origins in folk art and female art, was deemed minor art. What created an obstacle for dissolving the hierarchy of high and low was the boundary between the aesthetic and the functional. Whether decoration or decorative examples such as the quilt are appreciated aesthetically or functionally depends on their time period, the location, and the consumer, as well as many other factors.

Lippard explains how utilitarian decorative works or folk art became aesthetic or even fashionable because of the change of value involving the location or the user:

Today in affluent Western societies, even outside the counterculture, expensive new clothes are made to look rehabilitated, and the quilt itself is

⁶⁹ Schapiro, interview by author, tape recording, East Hampton, New York, 24 March 2002.

⁷⁰ Jean Taylor Federico, "American Quilts: 1770-1880," in *The Artist & The Quilt*, ed. Charlotte Robinson (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983), 16.

⁷¹ Mainardi, "Women Artists," 117.

as often found on the wall as on the bed--a victim of gentrification.... What was once women's work has been transformed into a pastime for the well-off and has become a "minor art" or "high craft."⁷²

The transition of placement of quilt from "bed" to "wall" is an intriguing phenomenon inviting further reflection. One is reminded how the vertical image (on the wall) can often be associated with the aesthetic, visual, rational, conceptual--that is, with men and culture--and the horizontal image (on the bed) with the functional, tactile, intuitive--that is, with women and nature. When I had a chance to interview Joyce Kozloff in her home, I was impressed by the sight of the quilt she had made for Charlotte Robinson's The Artist & The Quilt project. This quilt, which once hung on a museum wall, now covers her son's bed.⁷³ Feminist art's appropriation of the quilt form and quilters' collaborations with artists propose a politics questioning all these boundaries.

Schapiro acknowledges the aesthetics involved in the making of traditional quilts:

...not all quilts were good, nor all made with affection, but those that survive and come down to us as esthetic surprises have a sense of self-validation that in itself is a splendid heritage....Such a heritage led to high graphic consciousness, as among the Chilkit and Navajo women, whose ability to render ideas (religious, political, or simply visions of the physical world) in both concrete and abstract forms brought extraordinary beauty to familiar objects.⁷⁴

Discussing Robert Rauschenberg's combine painting Bed (1955), which involves both quilt and paint, Leggio acknowledges the categories of fine art and applied art that

⁷² Lippard, "Up, Down, and Across," 32-33.

⁷³ Joyce Kozloff, interview by author, tape recording, New York, New York, 24 June 1999. Charlotte Robinson curated the exhibition of collaborative project The Artist & The Quilt, which traveled to the San Antonio Museum of Art from 10 September to 22 October, 1983 and was documented in the catalogue The Artist & The Quilt, ed. Charlotte Robinson (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983).

⁷⁴ Schapiro, "Geometry and Flowers," 26.

the artist redefines; Rauschenberg thus bridges the gap between art and life.⁷⁵ If the quilt has a moment when it changes from a functional object to an aesthetic display because of changes in public taste and institutional treatment, the term "decoration" is still applied ambivalently, placing the work somewhere in between. According to Federico, "Some quilts were made for purely utilitarian purposes, while others were especially made in a more decorative manner. It is quilts of the latter type that are generally found today in museums and private collections."⁷⁶ Here, decoration is considered as an aesthetic element, the antithesis of a utilitarian element.

To emphasize or even reverse the division or hierarchy of art/craft, aesthetics/utility, decoration/function, male/female, high/low, or to elevate the latter in each pairing to the level of the former, further strengthens the centrality of established values and frustrates the validation of female work in traditional or contemporary feminist work. Schapiro called for a total erasure of these boundaries and asserts that Picasso's work can be as great as a quilt.⁷⁷ Lucy Lippard proposed the acknowledgment of function as being as valid as aesthetics in art, truly intending to break down the hierarchy and the boundaries. She writes,

Distinctions between "high" and "low" culture, amateur and professional, are usually used to exclude minorities, the lower classes, and women from full creative participation...Why is the high/low or fine arts/crafts dichotomy there at all, and what social needs do such divisions fulfill?...Looking at the extraordinary manifestations of women's traditional arts in all cultures, one wonders what illogic led to the non-utilitarian object's becoming more valuable than the utilitarian.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Leggio, 108.

⁷⁶ Federico, 16.

⁷⁷ Schapiro, interview by author, tape recording, East Hampton, New York, 24 March 2002.

⁷⁸ Lippard, "Up, Down, and Across," 36.

Lippard proposes that we should "encourage a truly innovative art of making that would transcend these barriers and acknowledge function as one function of art."⁷⁹

Approaching the 1990s, Schapiro was able to sum up the feminist politics of femmage, which attempted

...to reshape artifacts from women's culture and give them a new voice. As we move into the nineties, Femmage is also coming to mean any deep concern with women's issues, values, and any ideas relating to gender, language, and media as they illuminate who women are and how they can redefine themselves in the light of deconstructing old mores, customs, style, and patriarchal meaning.⁸⁰

Therefore, the domestic and institutional spheres are finally connected and the boundaries between gender and hierarchical values are eventually revealed.

Collaboration series

The project Womanhouse gave both Chicago and Schapiro their first experience of female collaboration in making art, and they continued to experiment with the idea of collaboration in their feminist art. There were two different ways in which Schapiro worked on her collaboration projects. Like Chicago, Schapiro collaborated with other women. The Collaboration Series appropriates both male and female artists' works in a historical mode. In this series, Schapiro attempted to celebrate the decorative while detailing the obliteration of female representation in art history.

From 1976 to 1980, Schapiro traveled around the country and spoke about her art, feminism, feminist art, and the art of women past and present. Collaborative art projects

⁷⁹ Ibid., 43.

⁸⁰ Schapiro, "Femme," 296.

emerged at this stage, such as her suite of etchings Anonymous Was a Woman (1977), which she produced with a group of nine women who were studio-art graduates of the University of Oregon. Each print is an impression made from an untransformed doily that was placed in soft ground on a zinc plate, then etched and printed. Schapiro washed out the original doilies and preserved them for her collection of women's needlework. These prints are thus a double collaboration, with both the contemporary women artists and the anonymous women who made the doilies.⁸¹

When Schapiro began collaborating with anonymous women, she introduced actual handkerchiefs, aprons, doilies, napkins, and tablecloths into her femmages. These decorative objects were collected while she had been traveling and lecturing and meeting women in her audiences. She asked them for souvenirs, such as a handkerchief, a bit of lace, an apron, or a tea towel--objects from their past. She also asked whether they would be willing to have them "recycled" in her paintings. These pieces, composed of handkerchiefs hand-embroidered by women, were given expressive, moving, and poetic titles.⁸² They include works such as She Sweeps with Many Colored Brooms (1976), Patience (1977), Connection (1976) and Architectural Basis (1978).⁸³ Schapiro recalled how she started this form of collaboration:

Once when I was on the road in the early stages of lecturing—it was all so new to me, this business of being a public person—I couldn't think where I was, so I upfronted this to my audience and asked them to help me. I said, "If you send me a handkerchief and tell me what town it's from and add your name, I'll save it, I'll do something with it."

⁸¹ Gouma-Peterson, Miriam Schapiro: Shaping the Fragments, 29.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 78-80.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

When I returned to my studio, all the handkerchiefs they had given me went into a quiltlike grid painting called Connection. I used the handkerchiefs from the nun, the teacher, and the high school student—from all of them. It's one of my favorite paintings.⁸⁴

Connection was composed of handkerchiefs formally placed around a small, elegant tablecloth that once belonged to art collector Ima Hogg of Texas.⁸⁵ Schapiro specifically addressed the significance of using handkerchiefs:

When you look at this painting I want you to think about the ordinariness of handkerchiefs, how women used them to soak up their tears. Some of them are flattened out on the surface on the canvas and some are crunched up. They appear to fly and move and rush like Alice, down the rabbit's hole. The grid is there in my painting so you can think about form, the handkerchief so you can cry.⁸⁶

The work conveys sharing, sentimentality, and intimacy, evoking women's longings, daily experiences, and desires. The exploration of these feelings was apparently influenced by Schapiro's study of quilts.

Another work in the femmage series was titled Collaboration Series, which resulted from a different process and presented a more visual and conceptual approach. She pictorially appropriated iconic works from history by both male and female artists and framed them with richly decorative patterns. In doing so, Schapiro "collaborated" with male artists such as Eugène Delacroix, Théodore Géricault, Gustave Courbet, and Paul Gauguin, as well as women artists such as Cassatt, Morisot, Elisabeth Vigee-LeBrun, Frida Kahlo and Russian constructivist women artists.

⁸⁴ Miriam Schapiro, "Conversations," interview by Broude and Garrard, in The Power of Feminist Art, 83.

⁸⁵ Gouma-Peterson, Miriam Schapiro: Shaping the Fragments, 80.

⁸⁶ Miriam Schapiro, Miriam Schapiro: Femmages, 1971-1985, exhibition catalogue, Brentwood Gallery, St. Louis, Missouri, May-June, 1985, n.p., as cited in Miriam Schapiro: Shaping the Fragments, 80.

Whether Schapiro was in collaboration with male or female artists, she deliberately emphasized the rise or predominance of female power by portraying women, representing floral costumes, or defining the pervasive allure of decoration. In Delacroix and Me (1975) (fig. 29), a floral dress is superimposed on Delacroix's painting of a reclining soldier and a woman in harem attire. In Gauguin and Me (1975) (fig. 30), decorative kimonos enclose an early self-portrait of the artist and an image of a Polynesian woman like the ones Gauguin often painted. The woman's lower limbs form a mermaid tail, creating a womb-like space enclosing the portrait of Gauguin.

In Schapiro's collaborations with female painters, the artists are portrayed as female icons for their artistic achievement. The images of women in the works appropriated by Schapiro are often independent, assertive, and actively engaged in their work. Her homage to women artists continued into the 1990s in works such as Fan: Mother Russia (1994), the most monumental painting in this series.⁸⁷ According to Gouma-Peterson, Schapiro identifies with modernist Russian women artists of the 1920s because of her interest in these women's creativity, and also because of her own Russian ancestry. This work is "a true homage and a celebration of a short period when Russian women artists...actively participated in laying the foundations of Soviet culture and conceived a new role for themselves."⁸⁸ In a fan-shaped composition, she creates her

⁸⁷ Gouma-Peterson, Miriam Schapiro: Shaping the Fragments, 78.

⁸⁸ Gouma-Peterson, "Miriam Schapiro: An Art of Becoming," 39-40. As noted by Gouma-Peterson, the outermost band of Schapiro's fan-shaped work has silkscreen portraiture, including figures such as Sonia Delaunay, Antonia Sofronova, Nadezda Udaltsova, Liubov Popova, Anna Golubkina, Alexandra Exter, Varvara Stepanova, Popova, Olga Rozanova, Nina Simonovich Efimova, Stepanova, Natalia Goncharova, and Vera Mukhina. In the second zone of this semicircle are works created by the women, between two registers. A line of black fabric embroidered in gold repeats the worked *poejdka* (journey) written in Cyrillic characters. Segments of a black, white, and red fabric create an abstract pattern between the spokes of the third register, and beneath it, in large Cyrillic letters, is the inscription *kooperaunia* (cooperation).

pantheon of modern Russian women artists with silkscreen portraits, including her own face for the first time. As noted by Gouma-Peterson, "After years of living in a culture that lacked female artist prototypes, she [Schapiro] rejoices in the creative energy and the power of survival of her genealogy of women."⁸⁹

Decoration nevertheless always provided the framing for these works. For Schapiro, decoration has a genealogy derived historically from female tradition and culturally from the utility of daily life and its objects, ranging from clothing to quilts. Male artists such as Delacroix, Matisse, and Gauguin considered decoration an important element in their painting, but more from the perspectives of formalism, primitivism, and exoticism.

Feminist art historian Norma Broude has compared Schapiro's decorative work with Wassily Kandinsky's and Gauguin's decoration. In Broude's view, feminist artists' decoration had a greater tendency to break down the high and low; while male artists used decoration as a formal innovation instead of appreciating decoration by itself.⁹⁰ In Matisse's Pianist and Checker Player (1924), figures are dissolved in a maze of decoration that functions as a pictorial form full of color, vibration, and rhythm. Decoration is part of the abstract element formulating the autonomy of the picture surface explored continuously by modernist painters. In Schapiro's Cassatt and Me (1976) (fig. 31), decoration, instead, functions as a frame for an image or icon loaded with meaning. Here the statement is a historical and a feminist one. As the forerunner of the feminist art

Finally, in the innermost semicircle, a hammer and sickle and a star are superimposed over a sheaf of wheat that resembles tumbling buildings.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Norma Broude, "Miriam Schapiro and 'Femmage': Reflections on the Conflict Between Decoration and Abstraction in Twentieth-Century Art," 320-325.

movement, Schapiro felt the need to develop an affinity with accomplished women artists of the past. She took the responsibility of being a contemporary spokeswoman for those artists who were undervalued during their time. The decorative frame and shrine in these collaboration series worked to deify and venerate these women artists, who were often disparaged as decorative painters. At the same time, Schapiro is arguing in favor of decorative language.

I conclude that decoration by male modernist artists such as Matisse and Gauguin is different from that by feminist artists such as Schapiro. The former focus on the autonomy of art and the abstractness of decorative language, while the latter view art in context and use decoration to introduce potent ideologies. Thus, through collaboration, Schapiro found that decoration has both a maternal genealogy, which is more culturally, socially, and politically oriented, and a paternal association, which she found more formally and also competitively oriented.

Decorate the Body: Absence of Body and Presence of Decoration

When I look back on the years of excessive self-doubt I wonder how I was able to make my paintings. In part I managed to paint because I had a desire, as strong as the desire for food and sex, to push through, to make an image that signified.

—Miriam Schapiro, 1977.⁹¹

With this statement Schapiro describes how her creative energy in art is deeply connected to the bodily experience. There are various aspects of the female body to discuss in regard to feminism. In the version of feminist art here, we observe the

⁹¹ Miriam Schapiro, as cited in Gouma-Peterson, *Miriam Schapiro: Shaping the Fragments*, 35.

suppression, liberation, and rediscovered interest in reflecting on gender and sexuality, as well as concerns about female practices of certain traditional art related to the bodily experience, and about the sisterhood bond in the community of women. These aspects variously represent the physical body, the psychological body, and the social body.

Analyzing the body images in Schapiro's works, I will investigate how these body-related images are framed or presented with decorative forms, which suggest eroticism, fantasy, and desire. In the case of Schapiro's femmage series, decoration functions as an intermediary for the viewer to enter the bodyscape of the female in the disguise of eggs, a shrine, a house, a heart, a fan, a handkerchief, an apron, costumes, and other images.

I will study the body identification in Schapiro's work chronologically. In Schapiro's abstract expressionist period, the symbol of the body represented by the egg or house/shrine image and the metaphor of the body suggested in the OX series exemplify the transitional period of struggle between the male establishment and hidden female images. Later, decorative forms emerge to celebrate the female style; these include applied images of a fan, handkerchief, and heart as extensions of the body, and the decorative costume serving to represent the female in the absence of the female body. Eventually, decoration replaced the absence of the real body, functioning as the performative, masquerade, or veiling of the female body.

Presence of Body

Viewing Schapiro's oeuvre, including her early abstract expressionist works of the 1950s and her later 1980s and 1990s collages of dancing figures, we find she has a

persistent interest in the subject of the figure. In her Imaginary Museum (1957) (fig. 32), the early drawings for which were made between 1953 and 1957, dancing figures are depicted in an abstract expressionist style. In a photo showing the artist and this imaginary museum, she holds a board stacked with female figures done by Picasso, Marcel Duchamp, and Constantin Brancusi, among others. Her works also pay homage to Peter-Paul Rubens and Giorgione, suggesting a voluptuous body hidden in gestural painterly brushstrokes.⁹² Thalia Gouma-Peterson interpreted this period of Schapiro's work:

...the only formal language available to her at that time was the masculine construct of the "old master," which she endeavored to make her own, thus inserting herself into the male-dominated art historical canon.⁹³

Here is Schapiro's reflection on the puzzle of being a woman artist and the struggle of seeing herself in a female body but with a "male" ambition:

I never read about a woman artist of the stature of Velazquez or Vermeer. That proved to be the basis of another confusing message to me. Who was I supposed to be? I was obviously in a woman's body with a man's concerns. Perhaps something was wrong? These, of course, were messy thoughts. It wasn't until years later, when I was in treatment with Karen Horney, an analyst, that I began to deal with the problems of being a woman and a man at the same time.⁹⁴

⁹² Gouma-Peterson, Miriam Schapiro: Shaping the Fragments, 40-41. In 1957, Andre Emmerich became Schapiro's dealer. As Gouma-Peterson notes, "That same year Schapiro posed with her "Imaginary Museum," photographs of works she would have liked to own, for an article on artists as collectors. On a poster board she arranged portraits by Pollaiuolo, Corot, Degas, and Picasso; portraits of Toulouse-Lautrec and Charlie Chaplin; Picasso's and Duchamp's modernist masterpieces (the former's Les Demoiselles d'Avignon and Gertrude Stein, the latter's Nude Descending a Staircase); Brancusi's Little French Girl; a Mexican Jalisco sculpture; and a Henri Cartier-Bresson photograph of a fisher-woman. In the midst of this august assembly she placed a circa 1900 paperboard doll of a ballet dancer. This figure is flanked by a photograph of a nineteenth-century dollhouse with a standing Victorian doll in it. The most contemporary piece in Schapiro's wish collection was a painting by Gorky (bottom left)."

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁹⁴ Miriam Schapiro, interview by Moira Roth, 9.

This statement explains her masculine gestural style and the hidden female body appropriated from the male artists' works in her early paintings. Schapiro's dilemma about gender identity and her ensuing androgynous thoughts derived from the confusion she felt concerning her role as both an artist and a woman.⁹⁵ Her interaction with male abstract expressionist artists was documented in the following statement:

At the end of the Abstract Expressionist period (so-called), I made some really bizarre portraits of movie stars that contained a lot of female identification—much more explicit work. Jackson Pollock came into my studio one day while I was working on an abstract painting of Judy Garland (now owned by Lily Dache) where her clown's costume was transformed into flowers. Pollock said, "The trouble with you painters of the younger generation is that you don't know who you are—you don't know what sex you are painting." Soon after this, although not connected in any way, I began to come out of what I thought of as the morass of expressionism toward a clearer, more firmly stated idea. One of these transitional paintings was titled for me by Jasper Johns and Bob Rauschenberg. They sat in front of my painting for a long time in East Hampton and they came up with the title, The Game. I liked it; I used it. Too bad I wasn't able to learn more from these men who were my friends in the art world. Their ambition was naked and carefully nurtured. I think I was victimized by the notion that that wasn't appropriate for a woman. A woman would run into too much "unlove" if she set herself against the grain in terms of naked ambition.⁹⁶

I would conclude that the presence of the female body in Schapiro's work of this period is quite ambiguous and covert because of her dilemma of gender identification. At that time, she hadn't realized the possibility of being both a woman and an artist in the same body.

Symbols of Body

⁹⁵ Lippard, From the Center, 121-138. Lippard observed and discussed the androgynous tendencies by feminist artists in early performance art.

⁹⁶ Miriam Schapiro, interview by Moira Roth, 11. During this period when The Game (1960) was made, Schapiro and Paul Brach wintered in New York City and spent summers in East Hampton, where they bought and remodeled a barn in 1954 (25).

Schapiro's negotiation between the male and female world continued. Her works became even more suggestive, with symbolic images of houses, shrines, eggs, and fragments of the body becoming more visible. As I will discuss, house and shrine images can symbolize both phallic forms and the female sphere, and they also imply the loss of and longing for maternal protection.

As Gouma-Peterson notes,

Schapiro created in 1960-61, a series of very original compositions in which emerge a number of recurring symbolic shapes: The vertically shaped tower/house and the recessed rectangular aperture, which she has referred to at various times as window, box, and house. On a symbolic level these containers also appear to be allusions to the female/maternal body. Within their apertures they usually contain abstracted, biomorphic figures.⁹⁷

Shrine for Two Tubes (1962) contains some autobiographical elements. The compartmentalized shrine structure is centered on a minimalist, monochromatic red background. A grid with two paint tubes symbolizes the male art world Schapiro dealt with, while a grid with an egg form embodied her creative self. Similar arrangements also appear in Shrine: Homage to Cézanne (1963). Gouma-Peterson explains that a shrine exists as "a metaphor of body and soul." The grids represent windows and mirrors, which "became a means to visualize fragments and contradictions of desires and lived experiences." These compositions, as Schapiro later came to understand, are about the "compartmentalization of women," or how "women see themselves in fragments, in parts...not only mind-body, but also parts of the body."⁹⁸ Gouma-Peterson concludes:

⁹⁷ Gouma-Peterson, Miriam Schapiro: Shaping the Fragments, 51-52.

⁹⁸ Gouma-Peterson, "Miriam Schapiro: An Art of Becoming," 14. Also noted in Gouma-Peterson, Miriam Schapiro: Shaping the Fragments: "The Shrines enable Schapiro to discover the multiple and fragmented aspect of herself...or the 'matrixial' aspect of the self. The 'matrix,' defined in the dictionary as 'that which gives origin of form... or serves to enclose... the womb,' has been proposed by Bracha Lichtenberg

The shrine/house/body, both phallic and matrixial in shape, and representative of a new self-image that is subdivided into multiple units, shows Schapiro in contact with both her masculine and feminine selves. Compartmentalized and additive, the geometrically structured and brilliantly colored "Shrines" transform the Lacanian "One" through female "multiplicity and plurality."⁹⁹

Gouma-Peterson's interpretations of the house as representing maternal, and the egg symbolizing primal existence, encompassing life and maternal origin, are supported by the later experience of Schapiro in the Feminist Art Program. The attention to the symbolic image of the female body started with the project Womanhouse, particularly the egg-breast form in the "Kitchen," which expresses the nostalgia for maternal nourishment. Here, women artists created a space in reference to the female body.

Vicki Hodgetts, a participant in the project, succinctly cited a particular experience in formulating the idea of a kitchen in Womanhouse:

We had a consciousness-raising session on kitchens...I had a fleeting image of fried eggs stenciled over everything--walls, ceiling, floor--and some people saw breasts. Breasts were nurturing--kitchens were the extension of mothers' milk. I felt a little railroaded. I still wanted eggs. And then Robin Weltsch said, "Why not have a transformation from eggs to breasts." And we were all delighted. And that's very important. Because although I was the one who finally carried through the aspects of the kitchen (in the main), the idea was really a collective one. It simply would never have existed if women had not tried to work together.¹⁰⁰

Thus, we see the collaboration realized with the sisterhood bond of female artists working physically together. Meanwhile, the breast and eggs in Womanhouse's kitchen present multiple fragmentation of the female body and recall both oral and sexual desire. The lost

Ettinger as the experience of the prenatal and pre-Oedipal that corresponds to a plural or fragmented subjectivity" (54-57).

⁹⁹ Gouma-Peterson, Miriam Schapiro: Shaping the Fragments of Art and Life, 57.

¹⁰⁰ Vicki Hodgetts, as cited in Miriam Schapiro, "Recalling Womanhouse," Women's Studies Quarterly XV, no. 1 & 2 (Spring/Summer 1987), 30. Also printed in Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro, eds., Womanhouse (Los Angeles: California Institute of the Arts, 1972), 810.

human form, represented reductively and repetitively by the stereotypical nurturing breasts, speaks for the body politics of feminist art in a powerful way.

If Schapiro was still creating a house in the shrine and egg series, in her subsequent works she had transformed the house into a home with a window, which looks more transparent than opaque. Exuberant, colorful patches of decorative fabric flying around the shrine-form celebrate the women's world. In Schapiro's home-like studio, she collected fabrics, stored them in a cabinet, and applied them in large-scale femmage works such as A Cabinet for All Seasons (1974). As Gouma-Peterson remarks, this is "her poetic version of the cyclical changes and repetitions in women's bodies and lives." Schapiro describes how decoration plays an essential role in relation to iconography:

My work is symbolic and I dovetail my feminism with decoration. Decoration pulls us all together and is nonelitist, nonsexist, nonracist....The quality of self-analysis, probing deeply into one's historical resources--bringing to light repressed experience; learning the language of one's own unconscious--this is what leads an artist to a possible personal iconography.¹⁰¹

Mira Schor's interesting differentiation of house and home in the gender structure provides an insightful reading of how feminist art of this generation chose to use the domestic image, at the risk of being criticized as self-restrictive, trivial, and suppressive:

Hewing for a moment to traditional dichotomies, house has represented culture, the father, the building, the body public and political, the future, and modernity; home has stood for nature, the mother, the cave/womb, the body private and psychological, the past, and atavism. Home doesn't depend on a house...Home is also homeland, homeboy, home girl; it is a mother tongue, the basis of an individual's identity in a sense of origin and place; home is where you come from, where your emotional nature is

¹⁰¹ Miriam Schapiro, "Life In and Out of the Studio: A Dialogue with Miriam Schapiro," from Schapiro's unpublished journal, 1975, as cited in Gouma-Peterson, Miriam Schapiro: Shaping the Fragments, 29.

structured and protected, where you are best known and most anonymous...."A house is not a home,"...The word home may itself conjure up a sentimental Victorian image of coziness and comfort, slippers by the fire, teakettles humming on the stove....¹⁰²

Feminists deliberately used images related to home, house, and household to call attention to the stereotypes, the oppression and the suppression in women's home-bound lives. Schapiro has ensured that the house becomes home in her works, with their lushness of decoration and maternal/domestic images.

Metaphor of the Female Body

If central core imagery is shocking to its audience, it is also compelling to the artist, the creator of it as a spectator of her own body given to a particular self-representation. Schapiro's OX (1967) is "a covert representation of woman, her body, and her aspirations." As Schapiro has stated, "in fact, cunt imagery was...a real cry in the darkness... for something besides the symbol of the phallus."¹⁰³ The OX paintings present a metaphor for the female body and for female desires. It was also a breakthrough painting for Schapiro herself. Schapiro refers to OX as her favorite of the 1960s:

It is the most explicit "cunt" painting I painted....When I finished the painting, I turned it to the wall for six months. The interior of the painting is painted in tender shades of pink and the invitational and seductive nature of the paint is sexual and transcends sex at the same time. It was the final resolution of the early monster problem. How could you have strong, male-assertive, logical, measured and reasonable thoughts in a female body?¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Mira Schor, "You Can't Leave Home Without It," in Wet: On Painting, Feminism and Art Culture (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 191-92.

¹⁰³ Miriam Schapiro, journal entry, as cited in Gouma-Peterson, Miriam Schapiro: Shaping the Fragments of Art and Life, 61-64.

¹⁰⁴ Miriam Schapiro, interview by Moira Roth, 13.

The bodily metaphor and central core imagery in this painting are further described in the following texts. In Miriam Schapiro: Shaping the Fragments of Art and Life, Gouma-Peterson notes that OX

is a metaphor for the female body and for female desires. As a shape, it refers back to the "Shrine" with their open passages and ovoid shapes. The "O," the nucleus of the composition, is the egg transformed into an octagonal aperture, a window or passage into the maternal body....The maternal body exposes its passageway and dynamically extends outward in the outstretched limbs of the "X." Neither fragmented nor compartmentalized, the painting was a new stage in Schapiro's continuing quest for a unified identity...a statement by a woman about her desires, aspirations, and conflicted feelings....Schapiro invented an iconic emblem of gender construction.¹⁰⁵

Paula Bradley notes how Schapiro reflected on central core imagery in relation to

OX. Schapiro states,

I want Anita Steckel's nude woman putting her legs around the Empire State Building to have its place. I want Joan Semmel's image looking down her own body from a specific vantage point to have its place....I don't want to take vaginal iconography and elevate it above anything else, but I want it to be considered seriously. And that's because in the male tradition they are not used to fecundity in art. They are used to the promotion of a single dominant thought.¹⁰⁶

Without Schapiro's statement, it is probably difficult to determine the relationship between this gigantic minimalist structure and the female body, except for the seductive orange and pink color. However, the central core imagery is discernible. The dialogue about this image was further developed among Schapiro, Chicago, and other women

¹⁰⁵ Gouma-Peterson, Miriam Schapiro: Shaping the Fragments, 65.

¹⁰⁶ Miriam Schapiro, interview by Paula Bradley, New York, New York, 6 November, 1977, as cited in Bradley, "Miriam Schapiro: The Feminist Transformation of an Avant-Garde Artist," 106.

artists. Gouma-Peterson considers Schapiro's central core imageries in the different series of works she later developed:

Schapiro asked in 1970: "What does it feel like to be a woman; to be formed around a central core and to have a secret place which can be entered and a passageway from which life emerges?"—Schapiro held on to the central aperture as a reference to the womb. She placed it under aprons and handkerchiefs, and in the center of vestures, houses, and hearts. It became an expression for the necessary condition of her own identity and an essential part of her retrieval of women's history.¹⁰⁷

In Lady Gengi's Maze (1972), the female body was transformed into patches of fabric, "one of which has a central aperture or cavity, Schapiro's familiar reference to the body of the procreative woman." Gouma-Peterson describes this painting as "in a roomlike enclosure" in which a staircase leads to a door and the lower architectural portion is like an empty walled garden. There are three square carpet-quilts floating out of the confinement of a house or a palace.¹⁰⁸ The patchwork square and the abstract expressionist-style square are obstructed somewhat by the wall or the third quilt-square. Abstract geometric structures play a role in this painting in the monochromatic foreground and background. The symbolic arrangement here suggests that abstract expressionist style is a past phase and the female self is liberated, flying out of the confinement of the empty geometric structure.

Even if we put aside the controversies of central core imagery for moment, we need to recognize that it is important to enable women to look at their own bodies and develop a self-awareness of their own existence both as sexual beings and as creative

¹⁰⁷ Gouma-Peterson, Miriam Schapiro: Shaping the Fragments, 74.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 72.

beings.¹⁰⁹ The central core imagery invites the gaze into the self, instead of the objectification of being gazed at. The image, despite its controversies, is revealing, surprising, and celebratory at the same time, guarded by the hard geometric form in the house or window or frame, and at the same time disguised by the desire, fantasy, and allure of the decorative.

Extension of Body, Fragmentation

In Schapiro's mature career, this celebratory decorative language has developed to its full extent. The image became even more focused on the female and on sentimental images such as the handkerchief, heart, and fan, which were composed of decorative patterning. These objects replaced the symbolic representation of house/shrine and egg as the metaphorical representation of the female body. All these images are an extension of the female body.

When asked about how she would view the relationship between decoration and the female body, Schapiro immediately made reference to her handkerchief work. The handkerchief, according to Schapiro, symbolizes an ocean of tears and is a sign of sentiments and femininity. She says,

When I think of handkerchiefs, I always think of tears. Those paintings of mine were not noticed or identified with because people are so much into genitals and sex. It's got to be blood or semen or something more appropriate to the time and the media. I saw handkerchiefs as something that implies tears, furtive and hidden. It implies tears you are not supposed to have. You are not supposed to cry in the Mediterranean. You can cry if

¹⁰⁹ Lippard, *From the Center*, 121-38. Lippard visited many women's studios and found that central core images appeared in many women's works. In discussing the central core imagery as a result of female experience, Lippard mentions its body identification, biologically derived form, and the rejection of it by the strong hold of Minimal/Conceptual art on the East Coast. Lippard affirms that dealing "publicly with intimate and specifically female experience" opened up many possibilities. "If the results on the East and West Coast were somewhat different, the motivations were the same."

you are in Italy. The point is that things are complex for me. I told you that I think of all the artists I know who are women [who] would not like to say they came from a Victorian background but I don't mind saying it because it is the truth. Now that's the morass. You bring yourself out where you come from to endorse your own image for women. It was a very difficult process.¹¹⁰

Regarding Schapiro's use of handkerchiefs, Gouma-Peterson remarks:

The flattened and floating handkerchiefs, with their rich embroidery and lace, suffuse the severe geometry of the work's underlying formal structure. They embody the physical realities of women, their bodily liquids, their tears, and sweat. These are bittersweet works that deal with unresolved conflicts....Schapiro's art had become the bond for a reading of the story of the Other, and the gratitude she felt toward these women for the "symbols of connection."¹¹¹

The heart, too, as the central organ or as the symbol of romantic love, is a sign of emotion. With its deliberate sentimentality, the enlarged heart images in Schapiro's work provide a new metaphor for the female body.

Since 1978, the fan, as "one of the most popular objects and images in the Orient and a frequent motif in Western painting from the eighteenth century onward," became Schapiro's new motif for decoration and pattern expressing the female world.¹¹² The fan as the symbol of coyness and flirtation refers to Victorian femininity. Early on, in a performance piece first given as part of the Feminist Art Program, Schapiro was holding a fan and posed as a Victorian lady. As Schapiro comments, "Contemporary women do not like to be associated with the Victorian lady. I do not deny my identification with the Victorian lady because that was how I was trained."¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Schapiro, interview by author, tape recording, East Hampton, New York, 24 March 2002.

¹¹¹ Gouma-Peterson, *Miriam Schapiro: Shaping the Fragments*, 80.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 92.

¹¹³ Schapiro, tape recorded interview with author, East Hampton, New York, 24 March, 2002.

Fans, as small utilitarian objects, certainly remind one of the female presence. When they were expanded to monumental icons, the object was suddenly transformed to the scale of a human body or beyond. On the one hand, it gave Schapiro the opportunity to combine fabric patterns with her concerns with the formal structure. On the other hand, the fan as the traditional veiling of the female is now transformed into a "body" itself, unveiled and reconfigured by decorative elements.

Absence of Body and Presence of Decoration

The corporeality of decoration, based on its revealing of eroticism and the subconsciousness of female fantasy and desire, was ingeniously mapped in Schapiro's images connected to the female body in femmage. The correlation between the female body and decoration was even more conspicuously represented by the image of clothing, costumes, and aprons. Ironically, it is through the absence of the body that Schapiro even more strongly suggests the presence of the female.

Before discussing the imagery of costume, I would like to look back to Schapiro's first use of fabrics in Curtains and See Through Painting (1972) (fig. 33). In these paintings, the lace veils and unveils the body on the canvas and the decorative images underneath. The transparent lace enhances the sensuality of the paint and the canvas as the metaphor of the body. Later on, Schapiro was using patterned fabrics as collage materials. Fabrics, often rich in decorative pattern (especially those used in femmage), have been used for the concealment of the body. Having developed its particular significance for the female body for the sake of fashion and beauty, clothing plays a role for women as masquerade and performativity of femininity.

Schapiro describes the tension of applying fabrics on canvas for the first time in the work Curtain (1972):

No sooner had I finished this painting...[when] the moment of crisis arrived and I was panicked. I was in a real panic and I sort of knew what the panic was about, it was about having put the fabric on the canvas, having glued it on. I had never done that before, and I was frightened....¹¹⁴

Schapiro read this as a confrontation with "her own masculinist artistic training," because she felt there was an invisible man living within her, judging and criticizing.¹¹⁵ Accordingly, decoration, embodied in the fabric and costume in Schapiro's works, acts as a sign of femininity, which returns the gaze to confront the viewer, rejects the objectifying of the female body, performs and celebrates the female body, and, ultimately, declares the body politics of feminist art.

I will first discuss the representation of fragments of costume in Anatomy of a Kimono (1976), then the nearly life-size construction of entire costumes in the Vesture Series (1976-1979), and finally the embodiment of the female with an apron along with domestic images in The Poet, Wonderland, and Welcome to Our Home (all 1983).

Anatomy of a Kimono (1976) is an installation composed of ten large panels of collaged fabric on canvas. With the reconstruction and deconstruction of a kimono, the image evokes the exotic, absent body. Originally, Schapiro conceived "the kimono as a ceremonial robe for the new woman" and a surrogate for her.¹¹⁶ She notes, "I wanted the robes to be clear but also I wanted them to be a surrogate for me--for others. Later, I

¹¹⁴ Miriam Schapiro, unpublished notes, 1974, as cited in Gouma-Peterson, Miriam Schapiro: Shaping the Fragments, 71.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹¹⁶ Gouma-Peterson, ed., Miriam Schapiro: A Retrospective, 17.

remembered that men also wore kimonos and so the piece eventually had an androgynous quality. Nice. The painting gave me a gift."¹¹⁷

Anatomy of a Kimono "was taken as evidence of, as a sign for, an absent human body,"¹¹⁸ just like Robert Rauschenberg's combine painting Bed. For James Leggio,

Rauschenberg's art seeks to symbolize the body: surfaces showing its impress; empty clothes or bedclothes impregnated with its stained residue; canvas aspiring to the texture of skin; a pillow as an abstraction of the head it supported; and geometric pieces of cloth indicative of the gender of the person who sewed them or of the person they covered. In all these, the painting becomes a surrogate, a sign for a corporeal presence that is elsewhere.¹¹⁹

In Schapiro's work, some detailed parts of the kimono such as the kick and the obi are enlarged to create different formal devices and make reference to body parts. Schapiro described the dress as the "architectonic model of a tent" and "a shelter for the naked body." It is a statement of both "intimacy and monumentality."¹²⁰

Between 1976 and 1979, Schapiro created variants of the ceremonial costume in her "Vesture" and "Robe" series. Becoming involved with the Pattern and Decoration movement in 1974 gave her the opportunity to explore decoration and pattern more fully in the context of her feminist consciousness. Her interest in the imagery of clothing also provoked questions about aesthetics and functionality. Between the absence and the presence of the body is the intermediation of relentless decoration.

¹¹⁷ Miriam Schapiro, "How Did I Happen?," 28-29.

¹¹⁸ Leggio, 79-117.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 102.

¹²⁰ Miriam Schapiro, unpublished journals, 1976, as cited in Gouma-Peterson, Miriam Schapiro: Shaping the Fragments, 31.

The concept of the dress as an architectonic model, as a shelter, led Schapiro to reintroduce into her work the theme of the house/shrine. In The Poet (fig. 34), done on a house/shrine-shaped canvas, Schapiro placed an elaborate apron in the center and surrounded it with flying domestic objects including teapots, houses, hearts, and flowers. The image of a female bodily presence at the center of the domestic space and the apron as the stand-in for the female body reappear in Welcome to Our Home (1983) (fig. 35). Here, the reference to the female body is even more greatly enhanced, with the image of a fetus in the area of the belly. Even though domesticity can suggest the confinement and oppression of women, here Schapiro creates a celebratory tone with exuberant decoration. The metaphorical female figure is empowered by being in the center, in connection with and in control of the environment around her. In Wonderland (1983) (fig. 36), Schapiro's tone is more ironic, with a small image of a headless, apologetic wife, saying "Welcome to Our Home" while surrounded by several femmaged embroidery aprons and framed by a decorative background. The jumble of familiar household motifs proclaims, in Schapiro's words, that "domesticity is also chaos." Schapiro also says, "The painting is me, torn in two." By "two," Schapiro means two roles--that of the artist and that of the traditional woman.¹²¹

Looking at all of these paintings, Gouma-Peterson emphasizes the absence of the body and the figure's decapitation. Of Welcome to Our Home, Gouma-Peterson writes,

Although the woman exudes tremendous energy to keep this chaos at bay, her outstretched arms seem to suggest that she intends to take charge of

¹²¹ Miriam Schapiro, "Conversations," interview by Broude and Garrard, in The Power of Feminist Art, 82. Schapiro notes, "Yes, Wonderland is a painting I made after returning from Australia in 1983. While I was there I found needlework to incorporate into my femmage works: crocheted aprons, table linens detailing maps of Australia, a potholder with the words Elizabeth Rex. When I returned to New York I made a painting, assembling my fabrics around the central image of an apologetic housewife....She makes a slight curtsy in our direction as if to say, 'I'm sorry, excuse me for living.'"

her space and transform it. But she still is headless and without a voice. The large inscription "Welcome to Our Home" fills the space above her absent head. This very complex painting summarizes many of the concerns about the lack of female identity that had preoccupied Schapiro for years, but it is also hopeful.¹²²

Regarding The Poet (1983), Gouma-Peterson remarks:

The poet stands in her house among floating teapots, flowers, and small images of houses. The monumental figure of the creative woman--the poet--occupies her assigned domain, the house, and remains silent, unable to enter the linguistic and symbolic structures of patriarchy--empty dress--decapitated image, a "silenced" creative woman...the peasant dress conjures both absence and presence--the absence of the corporeal body and the presence of the memory of those who have yet to be officially recorded.¹²³

But how is this lack "hopeful?" How can a "silenced," creative woman give her utterance? How is the absence of the corporeal body replaced by the "presence of memory"? How is the presence "masked and camouflaged"? How can we justify the subjectivity and the empowerment of the women represented and the artist as a feminist creator if this woman is faceless and voiceless? Gouma-Peterson quotes Hélène Cixous for her interpretation:

...for women in patriarchal society "decapitation rather than castration is at stake." Both decapitation and facelessness and their implicit muting express women's lack of voice. The woman appears but does not speak; her presence is masked and camouflaged.¹²⁴

As Cixous herself proposes,

I shall speak about women's writing: about *what it will do*. Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies--for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must

¹²² Gouma-Peterson, "Miriam Schapiro: An Art of Becoming," 38.

¹²³ Gouma-Peterson, Miriam Schapiro: Shaping the Fragments, 92-93.

¹²⁴ Hélène Cixous, "Castration and Decapitation," Signs 7 (1981), 41-55, as cited in Gouma-Peterson, Miriam Schapiro: Shaping the Fragments, 44.

put herself into the text--as into the world and into history--by her own movement.¹²⁵

I want to emphasize that in Schapiro's work the absence of the body is manifested by the presence of decoration, whose forms masquerade and present a performativity of the female body.¹²⁶ The presence of the female is not only indicated by the form of the clothing, but also by the richness of decoration. One is easily reminded how in Islamic art, such as the mosaic tile *mirab* from Madrasa Imami in Isfahan (1354), the worship of an icon is avoided by applying richly decorated patterns. The power of decorative form, which once spoke for religiosity and spirituality, is also articulated by feminist artists to state their aesthetics and politics. If decoration was used as a replacement for an icon in Islam and was a crime associated with eroticism for Adolf Loos, it is clear that the association of the body with decoration is not unprecedented.

For Schapiro, clothing is "the quintessential combination of structure and fantasy," which is expressed in decoration.¹²⁷ As Schapiro notes about her work Wonderland, "I felt that by making a large canvas magnificent in color, design, and proportion, filling it with fabrics and quilt blocks, I could raise a housewife's lowered consciousness."¹²⁸ Thus, Schapiro's works are meant to celebrate women's presence with decorative fabric and visual design, so that women, even without their face, hands, legs and real bodies, still have their voices. The association of decoration with eroticism,

¹²⁵ Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," in The Signs Reader: Women, Gender and Scholarship, ed. E. Abel and E.K. Abel (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975) n.p.; reprinted in Maggie Humm, ed., Modern Feminisms: Political Literary Cultural (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 195-202.

¹²⁶ Doane, 74-87.

¹²⁷ Gouma-Peterson, Miriam Schapiro: Shaping the Fragments, 31, 85.

¹²⁸ Miriam Schapiro, "Conversations," interview by Broude and Garrard, in The Power of Feminist Art, 82.

desire, fantasy, and fetishism, as related to the female body, constructs the body politics of decoration in feminist art. By leaving absent the real body and suggesting the female with decoration, feminist artists such as Schapiro also provide a strategy and politics to negate the sexualized and objectified female body. Interviewed recently, Schapiro responded with great interest and approval of this interpretation of her work, remarking, "I think it is very important that we celebrate the female body because the body has been hidden so long and only displayed for the gaze of men."¹²⁹

In relating all these decorative images to the female body, Schapiro's femmages recreate a constructed femininity from personal, social, and psychological accounts of female identification. Decoration provides the possibility for female fantasy and desire, for the female performative body, and for the masquerade of femininity.

Conclusion

Schapiro insists that art should be connected to life. Her art challenges the Greenbergian version of autonomy and purity of modern art and brings female content into art. It is a feminist strategy in art to bring the female world of creativity from the personal to the political, from the private to the public, from the domestic to the institutional, and from an anti-modernist to a feminist stance. In Schapiro's femmage, decoration, as an intermediary framing bodily images, presents female culture and psychology and advocates feminist politics and aesthetics.

Throughout Schapiro's artistic development--from joining the abstract expressionist artists at the Cedar Bar, to establishing an early feminist art program at CalArts, to being

¹²⁹ Miriam Schapiro, interview by author, tape recording, East Hampton, New York, 24 March 2002.

based in New York as a feminist artist working on femmage and joining the Pattern and Decoration movement--her persistent experimentation with decoration as a female language has broken down the hierarchy of male and female, mind and body, high and low, as well as aesthetics and function. Thus, decoration built on images of corporeality constitutes a significant phase of feminist body politics.

Chapter IV

Joyce Kozloff's Passage and Pattern of Desire: Her Painting, Installation and Public Art

Patterns are part of our lives and we are all aware of them in some form or another. The rhythms of our bodies, of sleeping and waking, of sex, of life cycles from birth to death, are all within our experience, as are the patterns of night and day and the seasons—the utter simplicity of the basis of patterning is akin to the utter simplicity of the DNA code that programs biological form in all its diversity.¹

--John Perreault

Joyce Kozloff began her feminist art practice by exploring pattern and decoration in the 1970s. Since then, she has experimented in different media, moving from painting to installation to public art, a progression illustrated by the works Three Façades, 1973 (fig. 37), An Interior Decorated, 1979-1981 (fig. 38), and Vestibule View of Amtrak Station, Wilmington, Delaware, 1984 (fig. 39). The title of this chapter suggests her passage through different periods of experimentation in decoration. Passage also refers to her public art murals, often installed in passageways within and between buildings. The gender association with and bodily references to architecture are widely discussed in different texts on modern and contemporary architecture. As I will argue, Kozloff's public art murals also suggest a particular bodily experience in the relationship between her viewers and the space she has created, based on her feminist perspective.

The title of this chapter comes from Kozloff's catalogue Pattern of Desire, a series of erotic drawings derived from diverse cultures using decorative patterns, such as Celtic

¹ John Perreault, "Patterning," Patterning Painting, exhibition catalogue (Brussels: Palais des Beaux Arts, 1979), n.p.

Coupling (1990) (fig. 40).² The erotic connection and body politics of decoration are explored visually and literally in this series, almost as a response to Loos's famous and infamous statement that ornament is a crime. Embracing female culture and world culture simultaneously through her study of pattern and decoration, Kozloff devised a series of decorative works to refute minimalist aesthetics and what she saw as barren urban spaces. In contrast to the viewing of modernist work, the audience encounters a sensuous bodily experience of decorative physical spaces in Kozloff's paintings, installations, and public art, works that have been imbued with fantasy, pleasure, and desire.

Joyce Kozloff's Development as a Feminist Pattern and Decoration Artist

Three years younger than Judy Chicago (b.1939) and almost two decades younger than Miriam Schapiro (b.1923), Joyce Kozloff has had a less difficult career as a woman artist than her colleagues. Feminism was in the air when she embarked on her artistic profession. Not only was she embraced by feminist groups; her shows were often reviewed by the mainstream art press.³ Even so, by taking an anti-modernist and anti-minimalist position, Kozloff has had to negotiate her role as a woman artist. She has done so by being active in the feminist art movement, radical and consistent in her experimentation in pattern and decoration, and widely experienced in the feminisms of both the West and East Coasts.

² Joyce Kozloff, Pattern of Desire (New York: Hudson Hills, 1990).

³ Andrea Moody, "Islamic Art in the Service of Feminism: Joyce Kozloff in the 1970s" (M.A. thesis, Hunter College CUNY, 1997), 2. Moody notes, "The numerous reviews of both her solo exhibitions at Tibor de Nagy Gallery and the many group exhibitions in which she participated have been useful in gaining an understanding of the critical reception of her work at the time, and in reconstructing the successive phases of her development."

Kozloff was born in 1942 in Somerville, New Jersey. Her father was an attorney, and her mother a homemaker. Kozloff received her BFA degree from the Carnegie Institute of Technology in 1964 and her MFA from Columbia University in 1976. At Columbia, she studied with the well-known abstract painter Theodore Stamos. She started out by painting in a hard-edge style influenced by minimalist art. In 1967, she married Max Kozloff, himself a hard-edged minimalist painter and art critic.

Kozloff's interest in decoration and world culture began as early as 1968-1969, when she saw Greek temples in Sicily. Her early works made reference to the exuberant color, light, and pattern she experienced while visiting the temples. Kozloff's urge to insert texture into these abstract forms, for example in Agrigento (1970) (fig. 41), was seen by John Canady as at first making embroidery-like, decorative, and lyrical forms. Canady wrote,

These abstract patterns suggest ancient wall paintings without borrowing directly from them; the mood is contemplative, even reverent, behind what appears at first glance to be nothing more than a pleasantly decorated surface.⁴

These implicitly disparaging remarks about a "decorated surface" became, in retrospect, a positive and significant incentive for Kozloff's feminist development in art. In an interview, when asked whether her early works were minimalist, she remarked, "[They are] formal abstract works... my first couple of shows had those abstract paintings, and then

⁴ John Canady, "Joyce Kozloff," New York Times, 7 November, 1970, 23, quoted in Patricia Johnston, "Joyce Kozloff: Visionary Ornament. An Overview," in Joyce Kozloff: Visionary Ornament (Boston: Boston University Press, 1986), 2. Kozloff's first show at Tibor de Nagy Gallery in New York was mocked by John Canady as being "embroidery." Andrea Moody, "Islamic Art in the Service of Feminism: Joyce Kozloff in the 1970s" (M.A. thesis, Hunter College CUNY, 1997), 15. According to Moody, this exhibition was reviewed by ARTnews, Artforum, Arts Magazine, Art International and the New York Times, not a small feat for the first show of a young artist, particularly a woman in the 1970s.

they become more detailed and intriguing. Then [my work] started to have textures and patterns. Eventually they became patterns."⁵

The year 1971 was crucial for Kozloff's transformation as a feminist artist. She moved to Los Angeles, where she initiated activities in the women's art movement. She met Miriam Schapiro and later organized the first meeting of the Los Angeles Council of Women Artists (LACWA). In one instance,

her [Kozloff's] embarrassment was acute when Schapiro turned to her, or in Kozloff's memory, turned on her, and demanded to know what she was doing to advance the position of women in the arts. Kozloff felt compelled to announce that she would organize the women artists of Los Angeles.⁶

Later, eight women artists were invited to a meeting at her Santa Monica apartment. With artists such as June Wayne and Moira Roth present, the gathering would be remembered as the first meeting of LACWA.⁷

In the fall of 1971, Kozloff returned to New York and chose to attend a meeting of the Ad Hoc Committee of Women Artists (AHCWA), a group that emerged from the Art Workers Coalition. She teamed up with Nancy Spero to publish the Rip-Off File, a publication of anecdotes and testimonials of prejudice against women in the art world.⁸

⁵ Joyce Kozloff, interview by author, tape recording, New York, New York, 24 June 1999.

⁶ Moody, 12-13. As experienced by Chicago and Schapiro, the beginnings of the feminist movement were in the air. Moody notes that the feminist movement had emerged in the mid-1960s, with the publication of Betty Friedan's The Feminine Mystique in 1963, the addition of the category of sex to Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the founding of the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1966 (8).

⁷ Ibid, 9, 11-14. In the spring of 1970, Max Kozloff accepted a temporary teaching position at CalArts in Valencia, California. At first, Joyce Kozloff joined a consciousness-raising group of 6 to 12 women who met weekly. Later, Kozloff organized the LACWA, a group that would later be described as "an amalgam of women painters, sculptors, art historians, critics, teachers, filmmakers, craftswomen, graphic designers" (12). "The best remembered outcome of LACWA's protest against the LA County Museum was the museum's sponsorship of Linda Nochlin and Ann Sutherland Harris' Women Artists 1550-1950." (13)

⁸ Ibid., 29.

Between the years 1971 and 1973, Kozloff had three individual shows and several group shows, including "Women Choose Women" at New York's Cultural Center, an exhibition that included more than 100 women artists.

The year 1973 was a special year for Kozloff. After a trip to Mexico, she abandoned the hard-edge style and turned to the decorative arts for inspiration. In 1975, she joined an artists' group devoted to pattern and decoration. The artists gathered to debate the historical development and meaning of ornament. They questioned modernist ideology and minimalist aesthetics. Their works challenged the notion that decoration is to be considered within the context of low art. As a traveler, an intellectual, an academically trained artist, and a socially conscious feminist, Kozloff was very aware of the agenda behind her work. She was constantly assimilating material from art history but also continuously challenging the established art historical canon. Kozloff's art and life also present three distinctive features that are quite different from those in Chicago's and Shapiro's lives.

First, Kozloff is more engaged in the study and research of decoration as its own visual language and has insisted on quoting ornamental patterns in her art. Second, in experimenting with different forms of decoration, including painting, installations, and public art, Kozloff presents her dialectical and analytical thinking by representing decoration in various pictorial and spatial contexts. Third, as a traveler embracing world cultures and as an artist making public art, Kozloff chose an eclectic rather than radical approach to express her feminist aesthetic in decoration. Although a feminist position is not as conspicuous in her work as it is in Chicago's and Schapiro's art, upon closer study

of her statements and work, her employment of decoration with a gendered perspective of space is clear.

Her travels to different countries to observe cultural monuments heightened Kozloff's sensitivity to the beauty of decoration. In 1967, Kozloff went to Spain with her husband and experienced Islamic art in southern cities such as Seville, Granada, and Cordoba, which had been ruled by Muslims. She was also very much impressed by the fourteenth century Alhambra (1354-1391) in Granada. She realized that Islamic patterning, based on a system of two superimposed grids, allows for a tremendous complexity of form. Kozloff's visit to Sicily the following year left her with memories of Greek temple sites such as Agrigento, a remarkable example of Sicilian Greek architecture constructed in the fifth century B.C. During the years 1969-1970, Kozloff's works were inspired by Greek architecture in the landscape.

In 1972, Kozloff attended an artist-in-residence program at the Tamarind Institute, a lithography workshop at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque. The same year, a summer trip to Italy evoked her admiration of the crafts associated with fifteenth-century Italian painting. In the summer of 1973, Kozloff stayed three months in Tepetzlan, a small town 60 miles south of Mexico City, and sketched patterns and decorative motifs from sources ranging from pre-Columbian stonework to contemporary domestic textiles. As a result, Kozloff's paintings of this period are evocative of Indian textiles and basketry. Since then, she has been making direct appropriation of patterns.⁹

Having seen many decorative patterns from different cultures, Kozloff decided to copy these motifs rather than make up her own patterns. She realized that the existing

⁹ Ibid., 20, 30, 45.

patterns were rich and complex enough, and that it did not make sense to create her own patterns in competition with the great inventions of an ancient culture. Her decision suggests both awe and respect for the originals. In the 1979 exhibition catalogue Joyce Kozloff, An Interior Decorated, Kozloff documented the myriad sources behind her work:

I've painted motifs from many traditions onto these tiles: Native American pottery, Moroccan ceramics, Viennese Art Nouveau book ornaments, American quilts, Berber carpets, Caucasian kilims, Egyptian wall paintings, Iznik and Catalan tiles, Islamic calligraphy, Art Deco design, Sumerian and Romanesque carvings, Pennsylvania Dutch signs, Chinese painted porcelains, French lace patterns, Celtic illuminations, Turkish woven and brocaded silks, Seljuk brickwork, Persian miniatures and Coptic textiles.¹⁰

In An Interior Decorated (fig. 38, 42, 43), an installation Kozloff exhibited at four different locations in various combinations between 1979-81, she synthesized her studies of patterns quoted from multiple sites, her interest in architecture, and techniques acquired from the lithography workshop. This work is a walk-in painting-installation suggestive of a pavilion. Ceramic-tiled pilasters act as columns supporting this imaginary pavilion and lithographs act as decorative wainscoting. Between the columns, silken banners, screen-printed with patterns, reveal stars and heavenly bodies. The contrast between the soft, silky material of the banners and the hard material of the pilasters creates an allusion to solid walls and illusory windows. The tile floor, simulating a pool, reveals a particularly ambitious collection of patterns, including numerous Islamic six-pointed stars and detailed images. Kozloff utilizes multiple resources of decorative

¹⁰ Joyce Kozloff, untitled essay by Joyce Kozloff, as cited in Tibor de Nagy Gallery, Joyce Kozloff, An Interior Decorated, exhibition brochure with writings by Peg Weiss, Carrie Rickey and Joyce Kozloff (New York: Tibor de Nagy Gallery, 1979), 8. This exhibition also traveled to the Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, New York, 5 October-2 December, 1979; the Mint Museum, Charlotte, North Carolina, 1 June-6 July, 1980, and the National Museum of American Art, Renwick Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, August, 1980.

patterning to create a lavishly textured and colorful environment, evoking the ambiance of an exotic pavilion. The mood is both contemplative and fantastic. As Kozloff notes, "The entire piece is my personal anthology of the decorative arts."¹¹ Her consistency in exploring the decorative in her body of work is compelling. She has taken her decorative patterns from different cultural, generational, and geographical sources, and used them to create a new statement with her decorative art.

Cultural Imperialism with a Grain of Salt

Kozloff's non-hierarchical, direct quotations of pattern and decoration became controversial in the 1970s and 1980s. The decorative motifs of exotic cultures, derived from her interest in the art of other civilizations, such as the buildings at the Alhambra, and the Celtic, Navajo, Islamic, and pre-Columbian cultures, are considered by some to be "cultural imperialism."¹² Being accused of "cultural imperialism," Kozloff decided not to appropriate decorative patterns into a "high art" context or concept such as paintings. Her creation of an interior, in which there is the illusion of windows, columns, and a pool, blurred the boundaries of functional and non-functional art. Such an erasure of the division of art and craft, of high and low, counters the accusation of cultural imperialism. An Interior Decorated is not only "an extension of her painting concerns [applied] to room scale;"¹³ the title word "Interior" points to the issue of function going beyond the idea of pure painting.

¹¹ Ibid., 7-8.

¹² Carrie Rickey, untitled essay, as cited in Tibor de Nagy Gallery, Joyce Kozloff, An Interior Decorated, 6.

¹³ Ibid.

Art historian Patricia Johnston has acknowledged that "this literalism has been one of the most persistent criticisms leveled at Kozloff's work....Yet Kozloff's fidelity to her sources may be the most radical aspect of her art." For Johnston, Kozloff's use of pattern "is not secondary" but "functions as both the form and the subject matter of her painting." By quoting the original patterns, Kozloff "echoed her collective and anonymous sources and remained in harmony with their creative processes."¹⁴ Criticism on this issue ranges from doubtful to eclectic, and from neutral to affirmative.

Robin White, in her interview with Kozloff, expresses doubt about the artist's literalism. She tells Kozloff, "But yours are direct translations, and that bothered me in a way."¹⁵ Kozloff explains why she directly quotes patterns of Islamic art in her work:

...I'm interested in the geometry. I'm interested in the mathematics of it...I am drawn to Islamic patterning because it's the most complicated...because of its complexity I can do a lot of different things with it. It's not easily accessible or static. It's built on a system of overlapping grids, so that the patterns have different levels, they can be read different ways. You can push them around. There's a kind of depth to them, a kind of possibility for maneuvering your way in and out of them. You asked me if I have tried to invent my own. The Islamic system of patterning is based upon very complex mathematics that I'm not capable of inventing....¹⁶

For Kozloff, learning from the original patterns is almost like decoding a new language, which is then to be encoded into her composition. The result, a hodge-podge of patterns, makes it difficult for spectators to trace the original without specific knowledge of the

¹⁴ Patricia A. Johnston, "Joyce Kozloff: Visionary Ornament. An Overview." In Joyce Kozloff: Visionary Ornament: Boston University Art Gallery, February 20-April 6, 1986 (Boston: The Gallery, 1986), 4-5.

¹⁵ Joyce Kozloff, "Joyce Kozloff," interview by Robin White, in View (Oakland: Crown Point Press, 1981), 2.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

history of decoration. In this sense, the accusation of cultural imperialism does not seem to be valid.

There are more eclectic and neutral viewpoints, such as Kay Larson's. Larson disagrees with the charge of cultural imperialism, but she doubts the limitations of mimicry in Kozloff's pattern-making. Reviewing "An Interior Decorated," she writes,

Joyce Kozloff and the other pattern painters...patched a way to undermine the imperialism, sexism, and snobbism at the root of the question. Kozloff based her paintings on non-European design..."An Interior Decorated" is ambitious and clever; it takes its imperialism with a grain of salt, as any serious criticism of it should. An American artist in an American gallery poses little threat to a thousand-year tradition of non-American art. Kozloff has taken mimicry about as far as it can go—but as much as I like the show, it's clear that mimicry has its limitations. Kozloff, not the Alhambra, is the one bound to suffer by a comparison. If the opulence of "An Interior" sometimes seems thin, it's due not to arrogance, but to a cultural metaphor too closely tied to the thing it resembles.¹⁷

Asked about the aspect of "impersonality" in her work, Kozloff agrees that her intention is to find her own pattern; however, she recognizes that it will not be as good quality as the original sources. Putting the original pattern into a different context is a way of questioning the "boundaries between high art and craft." She was afraid that she was merely taking her patterns from craft sources and making high art out of them, and she does not feel right about this.¹⁸ In a 1999 interview, she said,

We were also criticized . . . [for] being . . . imperialist and colonialist. Now you hear this again in the '90s, but I was attacked back in the '70s, which is very painful to me. Because people have said I am a white American woman, I have no rights to appropriate the art of these other traditions. That was a political objection that I have been looking [at] with careful judgement for more than twenty years. It's not a new thing.¹⁹

¹⁷ Kay Larson, "Imperialism with a Grain of Salt," *Village Voice*, 17 September 1979, 79. This essay is a review of Kozloff's exhibition "An Interior Decorated" at Tibor de Nagy Gallery, 29 West 57th Street, New York.

¹⁸ Joyce Kozloff, "Joyce Kozloff," interviewed by Robin White, in *View*, 3.

¹⁹ Kozloff, interview by author, tape recording, New York, New York, 24 June 1999.

When asked whether she felt that negative criticism influenced her work, she replied, "No, I can't let it influence my work. I did make [my] defense at a certain moment and I tried to acknowledge the sources, tried to be clear about it, tried to understand the objection....I couldn't stop creating...."²⁰

In my view, the process of direct quotation of patterns is enlightening for the artist and eye-opening for the audience. It presents the artist as a collector and collagist of different visual and cultural resources of decoration rather than an agent of cultural imperialism. As Johnston remarks, "The specificity of her motifs forces the viewer to confront its content; the aesthetic strength and cultural value of the decorative arts."²¹ There is a true sense of cultural politics in her choice.

In an interview, Vicki Goldberg asked whether Kozloff's multicultural perspective gave us a picture of the world today. Kozloff answered:

I would not enjoy a world in which cultures became homogeneous and lost their singularity. All my work is appropriated from outside sources; I create a hybrid, a fusion of diverse materials, but I don't disguise their uniqueness or stylize them beyond recognition. We are flooded with imagery from everywhere; in our museums, our libraries, our media. For years, I've been trying to put it together for myself.²²

What Kozloff offers is not even the reproduction of the original artifact but rather a potpourri of imagery from various and, relatively speaking, distant cultures, put in front of a viewer who is saturated with the mainstream culture of America. As mentioned above, in An Interior Decorated, she quotes almost 20 different sources of patterns

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Johnston, 4-5.

²² Joyce and Max Kozloff, "An Interview with Joyce and Max Kozloff," interview by Vicki Goldberg, Art Journal 59, no. 3 (Fall 2000), 97.

ranging from Native American pottery to Islamic calligraphy. These different patterns are lost in the labyrinth of decorative panels. Kozloff acknowledges the cultural sources, which, nevertheless, cannot be easily identified by the general viewer. She meticulously copies the original patterns in order to escape from the sense of melancholic nostalgia for the culture responsible for the imagery. In this way, Kozloff's art is about romantic longing. The direct quotations of patterns become both an intellectual as well as an emotional choice.

Art critic Amy Goldin's explanation of the synthetic, rather than pure, quality of Islamic art also justifies Kozloff's amalgam of decoration:

Islamic art is anything but pure...Islamic art, highly synthetic from its inception, has often demonstrated how easily it can be adapted to the requirements of foreign cultures. Its history also suggests a complex relationship between the art of the rulers and the ruled, the rich and the poor, the "elite" and the "folk."²³

In this repetition of pattern and synthesis of various motifs, the virtuosity of the artist creates an art different from that done by ordinary craftspeople. As Goldin notes, "Only bad Islamic decoration looks merely dense. Good examples play virtuoso games with scale shifts and contrapuntal sets of linear rhythms...."²⁴

Perrone defends Kozloff's direct quoting of sources, as well as her literalism with regard to decorative motifs. He observes that Kozloff's "generous cross-cultural and multi-material conception takes precedence over any general organizing principle derived from another single architecture interior. Further, this 'decoration' is not specific to its

²³ Amy Goldin, "Islamic Art: The Met's Generous Embrace," *Artforum* 14, no. 7 (March 1976), 48.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

site."²⁵ Kozloff's decorative works can be rearranged in different spaces--anywhere there is enough room for them.

Kozloff's use of foreign cultural material and craft traditions is exemplarily nonexploitative of its sources. This may have had its practical side: Kozloff must be aware that she cannot compete in technical facility or expertise with the artisans she borrows from—but she can dream about it, admire it, make her own fiction with its possibility (Part of the room is titled "Tut's Wallpaper.") Such competition, where the Western Artist "outdoes" the source material, exploiting it, is anathema to Kozloff's implicit political position.²⁶

Wade Saunders commented on Kozloff's installation work Longing and Mad Russian Blanket (1977) (fig. 44) in his review of the Whitney's 1979 Biennial: "I like the making of the Joyce Kozloff piece a lot: the care with the tiles, the willingness to open up her work and the need to put things back into the forms in which she found them, working into rather than from her sources."²⁷ Kozloff's success with an installation piece at the Biennial mitigated the suspicion of cultural imperialism.

In fact, what was seen in the 1970s as literal, today might be viewed as topical, in terms of the issue of appropriation. While Kozloff's technique of mimicking patterns received earlier objections, it might be deemed positive today, and seen as a reflection of multicultural discourse rather than cultural imperialism. As Kozloff comments,

I think it's a little bit open now because the art we see now is so international, everybody . . . everywhere around the world is doing everything. All the world's artists are available to everyone, to modern communication, and everybody is appropriating everything....In the '90s, our aesthetic is more acceptable. People are looking at newer art and I don't think there is a shutout dialog the way we were in the '80s.²⁸

²⁵ Jeff Perrone, "Joyce Kozloff at Tibor de Nagy Gallery," Artforum 18, no. 3 (November 1979), 78-79.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Wade Saunders, "Art, Inc.: the Whitney's 1979 Biennial," Art in America 67, no. 3 (May/June, 1979), 96-99.

²⁸ Kozloff, interview by author, tape recording, New York, New York, 24 June 1999.

In Marianna Torgovnik's book Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives, the author demonstrates how Westerners yearn to "go primitive," to escape from the complexity of modern civilization. This phenomenon has become a cultural cliché, which permeates high and low culture. Obsession, fear, and longing have produced primitivism among Westerners, with psychological and political costs. Western ideas of the primitive have served as a vehicle to control societies outside the West and to suppress women and minorities within it.²⁹

Being a New Yorker living in SoHo, a multicultural bohemian community, Kozloff's desire for other cultures is a natural part of her life. Her traveling experiences further strengthened her urge to express the world's culture in her art. Her yearning, nostalgia, and the urge to "go primitive" is clear. Yet, by acknowledging and quoting the primary resources of her patterns, she pays respect to the original. By engaging herself in the laborious craft process, she dives into the world of painstaking craftsmanship. By presenting and installing her pieces in a modest, non-imposing, non-assertive context, she breaks the barrier between high and low culture.

Neither a noble savage nor a cultural imperialist, Kozloff is a feminist devotee to pattern and decoration in world culture. There is no sign of sexual control or exploitation in her work. Instead, she chooses to be eclectic in her amalgam of patterns from different cultures and gives them a gender-free appearance. The bodily engagement of the artist herself with meticulous hand labor counters the charge of exploitation. If Torgovnick's perspective provides grounds for the critique of the sexual politics of male artists, such as

²⁹ See Marianna Torgovnick, Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 1990.

Picasso and Gauguin, who "went primitive," her point can actually form a defense for Kozloff's direct appropriation of patterns from other cultures.

From Painting to Installation to Public Art

While Chicago focuses on collaborative projects and Schapiro on paintings and collages, Kozloff experiments with decoration and transforms it into an art that can be viewed in the form of easel paintings, museum installations, and public works. As a somewhat scholarly artist, well balanced in her use of thought and experience, Kozloff declares, "Within my intellectual construct, a thought-out structure, I can be free and spontaneous and obsessive and repetitious and sensuous."³⁰ Her works are rich both in their intellectuality and sensuality. As the artist has said, "If a painting can be said to have a 'function,' I would say its function was to provide intellectual and sensual pleasure for its viewers."³¹

Kozloff constantly challenges herself conceptually with regard to the manipulation of the decorative in various forms. The dialectical and analytical thinking in her experiments with different forms of decoration are one of the most interesting aspects of her work. According to her definition, "Decoration is where architecture and painting come together."³² This statement reveals her interest in architecture and also suggests her eventual transition from painting to public art. Believing that painting confines decoration because of its status as a high art form, Kozloff turned to the use of decoration in public

³⁰ Joyce Kozloff, "Thoughts on My Art," Name Book I (Chicago: Name Gallery, 1977), n.p.

³¹ Joyce Kozloff, "Interview with Joyce Kozloff," interview by Jean Heibrunn, Detroit Artists Monthly (May 1978), 18.

³² *Ibid.*

space. As she saw it, the flat plane of the painting could not support an involved exploration of decoration; in response, she created installational environments.

An Interior Decorated was Kozloff's first work installed as a fully integrated environment. The title suggests a functional space, one that challenges the modernist concept of fine art. As Kozloff emphasizes, "For me, the idea is there, and the image follows. So the title is quite important and often comes first."³³ To put this work in a museum with a title suggesting a utilitarian space is a political act that challenges the concept of fine art and decorative motifs. In its attempt to destroy the boundary between functional and non-functional art, feminist decorative imagery blurs the division between art and craft, the high and the low, and the private and the public, as well as the domestic and the institutional space.

Chicago focused on community-based craftwork in The Dinner Party, an artwork eventually collected by a museum. Schapiro's feminist collages, derived from a domestic context, were also collected by a museum. The female culture and domestic imagery explored by Chicago and Schapiro are not Kozloff's focus. Instead, Kozloff takes her images from the public realm. Images such as cathedrals, train stations, maps, and globes are found in her work. Although Kozloff did move toward the exhibition of her art in a public space, she did not refrain from exhibiting in the museum. In fact, her public tile murals were occasionally shown in museums and galleries. Kozloff's museum works are nonetheless in opposition to the restrictions of framing. Her ambivalence in dealing with space can be seen as a struggle to define decoration in a different context.

³³ Kozloff, "Thoughts on My Art," n.p.

In an interview, Kozloff traced the reason for her transition from installation to public art. She explains,

In fact, I didn't do installation for very long because working for two years to make the pieces adapt to a room to show in an exhibition didn't seem to make sense. It became more logical for me to do permanent public artwork... So... after the pattern and decoration painting, I had this need to move onto the walls and decorate the whole room. And then these various installations were how I adapted these elements. I think these installations are flexible and adaptable. These materials were really permanent, heavy, time consuming and breakable, and it became a crazy thing to do temporary installations with them. This leads me to public art... just the practicality of it.³⁴

Reflecting on the change in her situation in the art world over the decades, she says,

The '80s was [sic] a different time because there was a kind of pendulum swing away from our state. I think a lot of the pattern and decoration artists were struggling to survive in the '80s. I wouldn't have to struggle because I went to public art. I was very active and busy in the '80s doing public art and there was a whole different discourse there.³⁵

Kozloff and Feminist Perspectives

Sometimes Kozloff's feminist position is more conceptually defined than visually presented. Her feminism originated from her awareness of the power struggle in the art world between high and low, mainstream and marginal, Western and non-Western, as well as between art and craft. These oppositions further extend to the hierarchy between male and female. As Kozloff reiterates in an interview, "I think if we identify with the decorative tradition, we will find modern art to be a very parochial, narrow--and chauvinistically

³⁴ Kozloff, interview by author, tape recording, New York, New York, 24 June 1999.

³⁵ Ibid.

Western--part of the world's art."³⁶ Carrie Rickey makes a similar point when she compares Kozloff's An Interior Decorated to Chicago's The Dinner Party. She writes, "Chicago sees history's shortcoming as its failure to include the achievements of women. Kozloff sees this exclusion as part of a larger process; the devaluation of the accomplishments of dependent culture by dominant culture...."³⁷

Rickey continues,

Chicago and Kozloff represent two possible approaches to merging the personal with the political. Chicago's is socially based, Kozloff's aesthetically based. For Kozloff, understanding the hierarchies within art history leads her to understand the similar imbalances of power without. She's for decoration, not desecration; for an art that works for a living, that's utilitarian, not one that takes life at leisure; for the reexamination of cultural biases, not the continuation of the status quo.³⁸

In Andrea Moody's thesis, "Islamic Art in the Service of Feminism: Joyce Kozloff in the 1970s," the author attempts to demonstrate that "it was largely through the influence of Islamic art that Kozloff was able to reconcile her art with her feminist consciousness."³⁹ But I question what the correlation between Islamic art and feminist art really is, when in the Islamic world women have been very much suppressed. What does it really mean for a feminist artist to appropriate the visual codes of Islam in the representation of feminism? While it is true that Islamic art constitutes a large component of and influence on Kozloff's decorative art, it would be problematic to correlate Islamic

³⁶ Joyce Kozloff, interviewed by Jean Heibrunn in "Interview with Joyce Kozloff," Detroit Artists Monthly (May 1978), 18.

³⁷ Carrie Rickey, untitled essay, as cited in Tibor de Nagy Gallery, Joyce Kozloff, An Interior Decorated, 7. According to Rickey, "On a trivial level, the two installations share a great deal: they are made by feminists, have fabric and ceramic components, they are room-scaled..." Rickey also feels that the interesting parts are "their divergence, not their convergences."

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Moody, 2.

art with a feminist approach directly. For me, the correlation and the reconciliation between Islamic art and feminist art should be further clarified.

When Kozloff was questioned whether pattern and decoration in art constitutes a collective female heritage, she replied, "...When you look at Islamic art, you are not looking at a female tradition."⁴⁰ The awareness that women weren't represented in Western art history took Kozloff in the direction of the decorative arts and caused her to research many cultures. But it is not merely the quotation of Islamic patterns that makes Kozloff's art feminist. Her art is not about Islam's religious or spiritual aspect. In fact, there is no demonstrable iconographic association between Islamic patterns and feminism.

The amalgam of decorative visual languages in Kozloff's work, derived from world cultures, is not solely Islamic. It is Kozloff's intention to embrace universal values, and the world culture of decoration--ignored and disparaged in the academic tradition and in Greenbergian modern art--makes her subvert the art establishment and identify pattern and decoration with feminist perspectives.

When Kozloff showed Mexican-influenced work at Tibor de Nagy gallery in 1974, New York critic Hilton Kramer commented on the appropriation and the mixture of various patterns from different sources. He recognized that patterned imagery is not female per se.

Not only was she aware of the futility of sorting patterns, often ancient and universal, by sex, but also she recognized immediately the correspondence between the marginalization of "women's work" and the marginalization of non-Western art by European and American culture.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Joyce Kozloff, as cited in Anthony Bannon, "Buffalo Bits in a Mammoth Mosaic," Buffalo News, 10 March, 1985, "Gusto" section, n.p.

⁴¹ Hilton Kramer, "Joyce Kozloff," New York Times, 14 December 1974, 32.

In the process of her initial study of decoration, Kozloff developed her feminist awareness. She recalled, "It clicked with me that the decorative arts were done by women and anonymous people, anonymous artists; I was very enthralled with all this work."⁴² Apparently, it is the ideology of the art world that makes pattern and decoration marginal and, often, related to female handiwork.

It is important to point out that Kozloff herself totally denies the religious associations of her decoration. Her choice of imagery is more political, aesthetic, and cultural than religious or spiritual. She chooses to deal with the art historical issues in a political way and relates her decorative work to pleasure and desire. For Kozloff, Islamic patterns present more of a sensual experience than they do the function and practice of spirituality in Islam. It should be further clarified that "Islamic" refers to an artistic and cultural tradition rather than just a specific faith known as Islam. Characteristics such as "reluctance towards the representation of living beings" and the avoidance of figural imagery in religious art demonstrate how "the Muslim embrace of aniconicism resulted in the development of a tradition of ornament unrivaled in world history."⁴³

In her thesis, Moody writes a long passage describing Kozloff's earlier engagement in politics and feminism. Moody elaborates on the political milieu of America in the late 1960s to the 1970s. In her argument, there is a strong implication that Kozloff and her

⁴² Joyce Kozloff, "Joyce Kozloff," interviewed by Robin White, in *View*, 14-15.

⁴³ Moody, 41-44. Kozloff's dedication and obsession with pattern have been persistent throughout her career. In February 1975, she traveled to Morocco to pursue her newfound interests in Islamic art. She was drawn to visual idioms of the Islamic world, ranging from sixteenth-century Turkish mosques to contemporary Berber carpets. Those works reflect the immense historical and geographical diversity that is encompassed in the term "Islamic Art." According to Moody, many of the American and feminist artists associated with the pattern and decoration movement had spent time in the Muslim world. Valerie Jaudon, for example, had traveled in southern Spain and Morocco in the summer of 1969.

colleagues in pattern and decoration turned to world cultures or Third-World art due to the impact of a politicized atmosphere and a disappointment with American politics and culture.

Kozloff herself comments,

I didn't find the values of this nation and this time [to be] the values I wanted to embrace. I didn't want to make an art that was nationalistic, chauvinistic, or jingoistic. That feeling came out of feminism. It was much more lively and interesting (aesthetically) to be inclusive rather than reductive. But it also seemed more positive as a world view.⁴⁴

While Moody's biographical notes on Kozloff are informative, they reveal little about her transformation as a feminist decorative artist. Decoration, as it was emphasized in 1970s feminist art, has to be traced back to female traditional practice in the social context. Islamic decoration, as applied in feminist art, should not be viewed solely iconographically but rather seen in the context of female traditional art embraced by 1970s feminist art, itself a reaction against modernist and minimalist dominance in the patriarchal mainstream art world. This stance was clearly manifested in Kozloff's unpublished statement "Negating the Negative: An Answer to Ad Reinhardt's 'On Negation,'" on the occasion of the show "Ten Approaches to the Decorative," which

⁴⁴ Joyce Kozloff, "A Conversation with the Artist," interview by Hayden Herrera (P.S.1 Gallery, New York, December 1984), in *Joyce Kozloff: Visionary Ornament* (Boston: Boston University Art Gallery, 1986), 29, also cited in Moody, 4-8. In the late 1960s, Joyce Blumberg joined her fellow students at Columbia University in protesting the war in Vietnam. In 1967, Joyce married Max Kozloff, a contributing editor at *Artforum* and a former editor at *Art International*, who had been extremely vocal in his opposition to the Vietnam war and was an early leader in the peace movement in the art world. Kozloff participated in two art world anti-war protests, including one at MoMA organized by the Art Workers Coalition (AWC) in early 1970 and the other at the Metropolitan Museum of Art on 22 May, 1970, as part of a one-day partial shut-down of New York galleries and museums. The protest was organized by a group called Art Strike in response to the bombing of Cambodia in April 1970 and the subsequent violence at both Kent State University in Ohio and Jackson State College in Mississippi. The Whitney Museum and the Jewish Museum closed, while MoMA stayed open and the Met stayed open longer. Official American involvement in Vietnam ended in March 1973. Other events that affected Kozloff and contributed to her worldview during this period were the Watergate affair, begun in October 1973, Nixon's resignation in August 1974, and the battle for civil rights by African Americans that had been waged since the 1960s.

opened at the Alexandra Gallery on 25 September, 1976. In her statement, Kozloff explained that pattern painting, unlike Minimalism, is,

anti-pure, anti-purist, anti-puritanical, anti-minimalist, anti-post minimalist, anti-reductivist, anti-formalist, anti-pristine, anti-austere, anti-bare, anti-blank, anti-bland, anti-boring, anti-empty, anti-dull, anti-monotonous, anti-flat, anti-picture plane, anti-sterile, anti-clean, anti-sanitized, and anti-machine made...it is... additive, subjective, romantic, imaginative, autobiographical, whimsical, narrative, decorative, lyrical, architectural, sculptural, primitive, eccentric, local, specific, spontaneous, irrational, private, impulsive, gestural, handwritten, handmade, colorful, joyful, obsessive, and fussy.⁴⁵

This statement, along with "Art Hysterical Notions of Progress and Culture," published in the winter of 1978 in Heresies, clearly manifests her anti-modernist and anti-minimalist stance. Kozloff had already acknowledged that decoration is a taboo for male modernists and that the feminist belief in applied decoration is important for her art works.

The Pattern and Decoration Movement

It should be clarified that the Pattern and Decoration Movement is not solely a feminist undertaking. It attempts to deal with a larger picture: the historical bearings of decoration and the issue of multiculturalism, in addition to feminist concerns and influence. Also, the movement includes artists, curators, and critics with diverse approaches, the number and scope of which cannot be covered in this dissertation. In other words, I do not attempt to present an overview or a value judgment about the Pattern and Decoration Movement. My intention here is to find a connection between feminism and the Pattern and

⁴⁵ Joyce Kozloff, statement, in Ten Approaches to the Decorative, exhibition catalogue (Alexandra Gallery in September 25, 1976), n.p. This show was curated by Jane Kaufman. It was the first group exhibition of work by pattern and decoration artists. The exhibition was reviewed in Artforum by Jeff Perrone in the

Decoration Movement, as well as to determine, in relation to their disparities and mutual reliance, the meaning of Kozloff's art.⁴⁶

The Pattern and Decoration Movement started when Schapiro and painter Robert Zakanitch called a meeting at the latter's studio in New York in January 1975, with artists Kozloff, Robert Kushner, Tony Robbin, and critic Amy Goldin attending. In February, a second meeting, as well as a public panel, was organized in SoHo by painter Mario Yrisarry and called "The Pattern in Painting." In the years between 1976 and 1979, pattern and decoration drew much attention and sparked debate in the New York art world. Critics and writers involved in defending and defining the movement included Goldin, John Perreault, Jeff Perrone, and Carrie Rickey.⁴⁷

essay "Approaching the Decorative." Kozloff submitted a statement to the gallery, "Negating the Negative: An Answer to Ad Reinhardt's 'On Negation,'" quoted in Moody (38-39).

⁴⁶ I choose to study the Pattern and Decoration Movement in this chapter because Kozloff's work is more closely connected to this movement in respect to her concern for world culture aside from feminist issues. She is also an artist who quite consistently and thoroughly studied pattern and decoration.

⁴⁷ Norma Broude, "Pattern and Decoration Movement," in The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact, ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 208-25. The following list of the major activities and shows of the Pattern and Decoration movement, many of which included Kozloff's works, were compiled through my research at the Holly Solomon Gallery in 1997-98.

Pattern and Decoration shows:

- 1975, Holly Solomon Gallery in SoHo shows Robert Kushner and Kim MacConnel as pioneers of the decorative
- 1975, Whitney Biennial includes many pattern paintings
- 1976, September 25, "Ten Approaches to the Decorative" opens at the Alexandra Gallery
- 1977, October, Holly Solomon Gallery presents a show called "Pattern and Decoration" accompanied by a catalogue essay by Amy Goldin. The show included 23 artists at the American Foundation for the Arts in Miami, Florida, and then traveled to the Galerie Alkexandra Monett in Brussels.
- 1977, November, "Pattern Painting," a show of 25 artists organized by John Perreault, opens at P.S. 1.
- 1979, Whitney Biennial includes a piece by Joyce Kozloff, an installation with four ceramic pilasters (tiles and brut on plywood) flanking Mad Russian Blanket (left) and Longing (right).
- 1979, a traveling show called "the Decorative Impulse" is organized by Janet Kardon for the Institute of Contemporary Art at the University of Pennsylvania. The show features eleven artists, including seven male artists such as Frank Stella and Lucas Samaras, and is reviewed by Jeff Perrone.
- 1979, "Material Pleasure" opens at the Philadelphia ICA
- 1979, John Perreault curates "Patterning Painting," exhibited at the Palais des Beaux Arts, Brussels, Belgium. It includes eight artists. Schapiro shows "Anatomy of a Kimono."

In 1975, Goldin, in her essay "The 'New' Whitney Biennial: Pattern Emerging?", affirms the "promising position of applying decoration in art." She writes, "If artists feel the production of art and anti-art have both become over-mythologized, they can be expected to turn to decoration. As a discredited form, decoration has a lot going for it."⁴⁸ Goldin was the avid advocate for the Pattern and Decoration Movement until her sudden death in 1978, to the sorrow of many artists in this movement.

Kozloff recalled the interaction between pattern and decoration artists and Goldin;

I have talked to Amy Goldin and I am saving her articles from a period of three or four years before she died. She was trying to find a critical discourse, which didn't exist--the language of decorative art, minor art, folk art, Islamic art. It is a kind of struggle, but it was very challenging and engaging for her. She had written a series of articles and tried to express different points of view. She was very involved in terms of the dialogue in the pattern and decoration movement. She would show us her works and we would give her some feedback. She came to our studio and talked to us. She died in 1978 and it was a really big loss for all of us.⁴⁹

The similarities between the Pattern and Decoration Movement and feminist art discussed here are that both focus on decoration and look into traditions behind them, both contain a nonhomogeneous style, and both take an anti-modernist and anti-minimalist stance. The Pattern and Decoration Movement differs from feminist art in that the former is often considered an art movement in an organized sense, while the latter is not necessarily considered that way; the former was short-lived, while the latter continues

--1981, April Kinsley and 18 other artists are involved in the show "Islamic Allusions" at the Alternative Museum, New York. A review by John Perreault in Soho News, 14 January, 1981 touches upon the discussion of foreign relations between Islam and US.

--1983, Debra Bricker Balken curates "New Decorative Art," at the Berkshire Museum in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, a show of 19 artists including Kozloff and Lucas Samaras, Frank Stella, and George Sugarman.

⁴⁸ Amy Goldin "The 'New' Whitney Biennial: Pattern Emerging?" Art in America 63, no. 3 (May/June 1975), 73.

⁴⁹ Joyce Kozloff, interview by author, tape recording, New York, New York, 24 June 1999.

today; and the former includes both male and female artists, while the latter is generally created by women exclusively.

In 1979, at the zenith of the Pattern and Decoration Movement, John Perreault remarked, "It still amazes me that at last we have an art movement in which women artists are right at the forefront."⁵⁰ While the Pattern and Decoration Movement is probably the first art movement in history led by women, most of the artists, including Schapiro and Kozloff, had already worked in decoration before they joined the group.

I find Goldin's analysis of pattern more focused and her engagement in studying Islamic art important for that moment in the art world. Goldin analyzes the nature, effect, and meaning evoked by the visual language of decoration:

Pattern carries the aura of craft and contrivance (design, device)...There is no beginning, middle or end to pattern. Its boundaries are vague...the crucial determinant of pattern is the constancy of the "interval" between motifs (not the repetition of a motif)...pattern only comes into phenomenal existence when there are enough repetitions of the space/interval to establish it clearly as a unit.⁵¹

Goldin believes that "pattern is basically antithetical to the iconic image, for the nature of pattern implicitly denies the importance of singularity, purity, and absolute precision." She thinks it is impossible to respond "simultaneously" to a picture and a pattern.⁵² Perreault provides another interesting thought about the biological and bodily connection to pattern when he discusses the patterns of our life and being.⁵³

⁵⁰ John Perreault, "A Room with a Coup: Joyce Kozloff, An Interior Decorated," *Soho Weekly News* (13 September, 1979), 47.

⁵¹ Amy Goldin, "Pattern, Grids and Painting." *Artforum* 14 (September 1975), 50.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ John Perreault, *Patterning Painting* (Brussels: Palais des Beaux Arts, 1979), n.p.; refer to the quote at the beginning of this chapter.

Critics differ about whether decoration concerns content/meaning or merely addresses abstraction/structure. I think it is significant that Kozloff considers decoration a third language, outside of figuration and abstraction: "...the reason I became a decorative artist is because I didn't want to be abstract or representational. Decoration was the third category. It could incorporate elements from the other two categories, but wasn't bound by their rules, and it had its own history."⁵⁴

To study the linkage between feminist art and the Pattern and Decoration Movement is a complicated issue. Both movements involved artists who worked in diverse styles. The study of these styles is often incomplete, and the evaluations are also unsettling. On their connections, Kozloff remarked:

The pattern and decoration movement connected directly to the feminist movement, which didn't make things any easier. It grew out of a re-examination of the whole role of women in art, and it also was a reaction to the whole minimalist aesthetic. Suddenly, the feeling was that the formal modernist tradition was very restrictive....Whether pattern and decoration in art constitutes a collective female heritage is "a tricky question"...

⁵⁵

Norma Broude proposes insightful questions concerning the criticism of the contradiction between pattern and decoration and feminism; first, did the Pattern and Decoration Movement create "a deep and lasting revision of values in the art world?" Second, did the success of the Pattern and Decoration Movement in New York and Europe in the late 1970s create a way of "diffusing emerging feminist and multicultural values by co-opting them into the mainstream?"⁵⁶ Because the feminist art of the 1970s

⁵⁴ Joyce Kozloff, "Two Ethnicities Sitting Around Talking About Wasp Culture," interview by Jeff Perrone, *Arts* 59 (March 1985), 79.

⁵⁵ Joyce Kozloff, cited in Bannon, n.p.

⁵⁶ Broude, "Pattern and Decoration Movement," 210.

has its utopian and idealistic aspect, intent upon subverting the mainstream, the way that it merged with the Pattern and Decoration Movement demonstrates a practical goal: exhibiting together with a collective force to make a statement in the art world and the market.⁵⁷

Kozloff has reflected on the market and the press's attention to the Pattern and Decoration Movement:

There was a moment, around 1977-79, when there was much writing, pro and con, about decoration in the art press. The writing not surprisingly coincided with an art market boomlet for "pattern paintings"... but for me, the new pressures were confusing and disquieting...The visibility we had achieved brought us opportunities to do more ambitious projects. For me, that has been the great benefit of "success."⁵⁸

For Kozloff, the questions that remain are "What is valid and humane decoration for the last quarter of the twentieth century? How can we apply the lessons of the past or a problematical present?" She realized that "decoration at its most glorious can create and articulate centers of sociality for whole communities. Modern decoration is in its infancy."⁵⁹ This explains why Kozloff went on to make public art in the community, an action brought about by her dedication in the revival of decoration. Her ideas and actions in art play an important role in linking the practicality of the Pattern and Decoration Movement with a feminist ideal.

The Pattern and Decoration Movement and the Body Politics of Feminist Art

⁵⁷ Valerie Jaudon, interview by author, no tape recording, New York, New York, 3 May 2000. In this untaped interview, Jaudon expressed similar thoughts.

⁵⁸ Joyce Kozloff, "Joyce Kozloff," in New Decorative Works from the Collection of Norma and William Roth (Florida: Loch Haven Art Center, 1983), 18.

To emphasize the body politics involved in pattern and decoration, I intend to shed light on the nature of decoration's evocation of eroticism, fantasy, pleasure, and desire. The bodily connection of tactility in handicraft is found in Judy Chicago's The Dinner Party, in the representation of the bodily images of Schapiro's femmage, and in Kozloff's case, in the creation of a visual experience related to the body and the space. For pattern and decoration artists, the bodily connection derives from the connections between fabric/fashion, decoration/patterning, and female/body.

Since clothing has traditionally been focussed on the feminine sphere, it is appropriate that many women artists turned to garments for inspiration or as their medium.⁶⁰ Kim MacConnell did performance art with self-designed clothes, and Schapiro's femmage in costume form was discussed in relation to the female body in the previous chapter. Judith Stein and Carrie Rickey discuss decoration in feminist art in relation to the art of clothing. Stein notes:

Yet out of the plethora of art possibilities of recent years has emerged a small but interesting group of artists who are producing inventive work inspired by the subject, form, and associative content of clothing. With sources in performance and body art of the 1970s and in feminism, they achieve a subtle variation on figuration by concentrating on the versatile body metaphor of dress.⁶¹

Rickey further defends this type of art:

Curtains and capes, vests and veils--these are some of the forms adopted by the new fabric artists. Whether they use textiles to allude to class taste or for their decorative value, these fabricators once again obscure distinctions between "high" and "applied" art.⁶²

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Judith Stein, "The Artists' New Clothes," Portfolio: The Magazine of the Fine Arts 5, no. 1 (January/February 1983), 63.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Carrie Rickey, "Art of Whole Cloth," Art in America 67, no. 7 (November 1979), 73.

Rickey also astutely differentiates textile-as-art (as represented by the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Costume Institute) from art-as-textile (as seen in the work of pattern and decoration artists such as Kozloff).⁶³ For Rickey, these works are motivated by the fact that fabric is personal: "Fabrics are to be touched and seen, art is to be seen but not touched." Fabric's use can also be considered as architecture for the body. It can be two dimensional or sculptural. Finally, fabric is a symbol of class, occupation, and taste; use of fabric is the use of a social sign language. The social-cultural aspect of fabric that Rickey argues for strengthens the significance of this art. One is reminded of Chadwick's statement about clothing changing from class to identity and the oppression of consumerism.⁶⁴

During the heyday of the Pattern and Decoration Movement, decoration as an experimental art was addressed in group exhibitions. In John Ashbery's review of two exhibitions, including "Material Pleasure" held at the University of Pennsylvania's Institute of Contemporary Art, he considers the display of textiles created by various artists-in-residence at Philadelphia's Fabric Workshop. He notes, "Painting, sculpture, crafts, one's environment, one's body and the way it moves, are all being marshaled under the adjective 'decorative.'" The issue of bodily experience is addressed in the decorative works, including Kozloff's Untitled Silks (1979)--panels of iridescent silk in a peacock-feather pattern, separated by thin panels of mosaic, which, according to Ashbery, "are

⁶³ Ibid., 74. Rickey notes, "All of these works and events coincide with the publication of Anne Hollander's Seeing through Clothes [see A.i.A., July-August, '79], as well as Philadelphia's Fabric Workshop Program, which gives artists the space and technical assistance to experiment with 'Material Pleasure'--as a recent exhibition of the results [at Philadelphia ICA thru July, 1979] was charmingly titled." Also at the ICA during the same period was "The Decorative Impulse," a more general survey of decorative art.

⁶⁴ Chadwick, Women, Art and Society, 238, 261-64.

high points and possibly among the first classics of this still fledgling genre." ⁶⁵

Reviewing Kozloff's achievement at the 1979 Biennial and the numerous pattern and decoration group exhibitions she participated in, it is evident that Kozloff is an artist nurtured by the Pattern and Decoration Movement--aside from feminist art. She strengthened the movement once interest had died down by continuing to work on the same issues addressed in pattern and decoration art. Her public art created a new phase for feminist art, as well for the Pattern and Decoration Movement. These works, installed in public spaces and architecture, also enliven decoration in its original function and context in history, particularly in regard to stations. Kozloff's attempts to humanize the space bring decoration to a new bodily experience of space, one quite different from its modernist perception.

Passage and Pattern of Desire

Passageway

Kozloff, in the exhibition catalogue for "Decorative Impulse," writes,

Decoration is where painting and sculpture meet architecture. It is the way we humanize and personalize domestic spaces. It is how men and women have always transformed the banal into the extraordinary. ⁶⁶

⁶⁵ John Ashbery, "Decoration Days," *New York* (July 1979), 51. Ashbery also reviewed "The Decorative Impulse," which included works closer to traditional painting and sculpture. Addressing the variety of works, he said, "I'll take the current state of chaos: It may be uneven, but it isn't dull...There is a prevailing note of frivolity, but it's serious, coming as a corrective to the puritanical excesses of Minimalism."

⁶⁶ Joyce Kozloff, statement, in *The Decorative Impulse*, 1979, n.p. ; quoted in Thalia Gouma-Peterson, "Decorated Walls for Public Spaces: Joyce Kozloff's Architectural Installation," 45.

When Kozloff defines decoration as the meeting point of painting, sculpture, and architecture, her intention is to experiment with omnipresent patterns and decoration in different forms of art and create varieties of humanized space in the modern urban space. The body politics involved in Kozloff's idea are evoked by her decorative works, available for intimate and sensual experience by the viewer in passageways, which also create a gendered bodily relationship between the spectators and the space they pass through.

In Kozloff's insistence on the detailed rendering of variations in decorative motifs and cultural images, Hayden Herrera finds "a leisurely tempo," a value about which she queried Kozloff in an interview. Kozloff answered,

It's analogous to the minor arts that all these works refer to, which are the sources for my art. Crafts rely on labor-intensive processes, and I've made that kind of process part of my work and imposed it on the viewer as well...My reaction to minimal art was that you got it too fast, and you missed what I like about art, which is the slow take. So I try to hold people's attention by giving them a lot of things to look at. I give them scale jumps, and in some pieces changes of materials, surfaces, textures, and imagery. The work is meant for meandering....⁶⁷

Through a slow interaction between the work and the viewer, a gendered bodily experience emerges in Kozloff's public art. The notion of a moving train is a good metaphor for the way she invites her audience to experience her works while meandering in a passageway.

Kozloff's feminist perspectives in conceiving such a passageway in public art are revealed in the way she identifies with Maya Lin's public work, particularly her Vietnam Veterans Memorial, and admires its non-assertive attitude. Kozloff states, "Yes. I think

⁶⁷ Joyce Kozloff, "A Conversation with the Artist," interview by Hayden Herrera (P.S.1 Gallery, New York, December 1984), in *Joyce Kozloff: Visionary Ornament* (Boston: Boston University Art Gallery, 1986), 28.

her piece is open to each individual experiencing it separately. It's not a monument that tells you what you are supposed to feel."⁶⁸ She further clarifies, "This is a female aesthetic: I think the women involved with public art are more open-ended, making pieces that encourage viewer participation and require time to experience."⁶⁹ Such a female aesthetic also was very much a part of Kozloff's attitude and sensibility while she was making public art. She goes on to describe her special interests in creating these passageways:

I gravitate towards art like Persian-miniatures, early Renaissance painting, art that has a concentration of refinement and detail. I get locked into the work of art. I can't move away from it. Some people stand back and look at the whole. I always go right up to the surface and get stuck in some intricate passage for a long time. Then I move on to another passage. And that's the way I work: in sections, and the allover comes second.⁷⁰

Kozloff's concentration on detail and fragmentation rather than the gestalt and the whole also reflects a distinctive feminist orientation in making and perceiving visual images.

I will take the large-scale decorative painting entitled Striped Cathedral (fig. 45) as an early example of how Kozloff quoted different decorative motifs to create a series of "passageways" that later developed into installations and public art. There is a logical development in Kozloff's transitions from painting using large-scale, horizontal formats suggesting passages, to the installation in an environment such as An Interior Decorated, and then to public art in the passageway of an urban transportation system. At a critical point, Kozloff felt it was not useful for her to stay within the format of easel painting. With the extended passageway, the bodily experience provoked by the visual effect of

⁶⁸ Ibid., 29.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 28.

decoration is effectively presented in the environment. Kozloff's awareness of minimal art and its environmental aspect also inspired her to create an art emphasizing the perceptual and bodily experiences of the spectators.

In the long, horizontal, frieze-like panel called Striped Cathedral (1976-77), Kozloff arranged a vertical sequence of rectangular patterns, taken from a Romanesque-Gothic cathedral in Orvieto in central Italy, along with some ornamented Islamic details. Thus, the melange repeats motifs from the East and the West.⁷¹ As Kozloff notes beautifully in her 1979 show at Tibor de Nagy Gallery, New York:

The horizontal paintings had become very long and were broken into sections, which I meant the viewer to "read" sequentially. This was my private metaphor for travel, paralleling the experience of walking through a bazaar or the streets of an unfamiliar city, taking in complex and variegated visual stimuli at unexpected intervals and rhythms.⁷²

Kozloff's exotic and romanticized sentiments of travel were presented in this seemingly endless parade of decoration, like a visual feast full of fantasy and pleasure. More than once Kozloff has emphasized her need for the experience of travel. She states, "I think of my paintings as memory picture. When I've traveled I've fed off the visual experiences for a very long time...so it becomes filtered through my mind, and eventually it comes out in a different form."⁷³ As a long-time New Yorker, Kozloff correlates her art, the result of her traveling experiences, to an escapist and romantic mentality:

I think--what does my art have to do with the world we live in today? Is it some kind of escapist romantic art? I walk through the streets of New York, and I don't look very much. I keep my head down and walk fast. Oh, I look at store windows and people, but not in terms of what I can get.

⁷¹ Johnston, "Joyce Kozloff," in Joyce Kozloff: Visionary Ornament, 1.

⁷² Joyce Kozloff, as cited in Tibor de Nagy Gallery, 8.

⁷³ Joyce Kozloff, "Excerpts from Tapes Made with Judy Seigel About Decoration in Art," 38.

(and I'd voraciously lap up stuff if I thought I could use it!) I think a lot of recent New York art is about visual deprivation--it looks like New York often looks.⁷⁴

Kozloff aims to create an art of beauty and embellishment from exotic resources to counter the visual impoverishment of the environment she lives in. In an interview with Robin White, Kozloff describes how she dislikes the impoverished visual culture derived from television and advertisements and how she needs to travel. In a trip to Mexico in 1973, she made a conscious decision to look at and copy patterns because they were appearing in her works already. The sketches in her sketchbook later became the source of her painting.⁷⁵

Both Goldin and Perreault explain how pattern in Islamic art can create an extended sense of passage without a sense of beginning and end. For Perreault, "Patterning is predicated upon endlessness. This is most likely why patterning has been so important in religious art: Islamic, Buddhist, Hindu, Tibetan and Christian." Perreault suggests that pattern has "no beginning and no end, aniconic and boundless, endless. The prospect is vertiginous."⁷⁶ Rickey further elaborates on the bodily response of vertigo and dizziness in viewing these extended passages:

What Islamic pattern does that Kozloff dramatically accomplishes in her work is the dissolution of plane, and therefore space. Contemplation of the interlacings of these floriated or geometric shapes produces intellectual vertigo. The complexity of this obsessional overlaying and juxtaposing is overwhelming: the mind and the body are integrated in their dizzied response; plane is suspended, time is extended.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Joyce Kozloff, "Joyce Kozloff," interview by Robin White, in View (Oakland: Crown Point Press, 1981), 14.

⁷⁶ Perreault, Patterning Painting, n.p.

⁷⁷ Carrie Rickey, "Joyce Kozloff," Arts 52, no. 5 (January 1978), 2. This was a review of the exhibition at Tibor de Nagy Gallery held 30 October to 17 November, 1977.

If Kozloff's works of extended passages of decoration appear banal, repetitive, or even boring to some viewers, these traits are also well described in Goldin's writing on Islamic art, which Kozloff often refers to.

The beauty and power of Islamic art cannot be seen in wholes or individual details or in part-whole relationships, but in extended passages....

The repetition of clearly articulated parts virtually guarantees the craftsman a reasonable well designed product, but it also means that Islamic forms fall into types and get boring very fast. Usually only the treatment of the surface offers interest and vitality..., artistic interest lies in seeing how the usual thing is done *this* time....

...,but its immediate justification lies in the ephemeral delights of spectacle, dance and song. The dramatic action and the text are secondary,
⁷⁸

The decorative passages created by Kozloff concerning the architecturally related space can construct an enjoyable bodily experience, one that challenges the convention of viewing an autonomous work of art and the Greenbergian modernist idea of space and architecture. The female sensibility of making public art cannot be underestimated.

Decorative Public Art in Station Passageways

The logical development of Kozloff's intention to create the decorative passageway led her from painting to installation to public art. Finally, she put her decorative work in a real passageway located in a communal space. When Kozloff began to question herself about whether she had resolved the issues of high and low, abstraction and decoration, craft process as well as the function of art, in her decorative painting, she found a discrepancy between her actual paintings and the discussions around them. As

⁷⁸ Amy Goldin, "Islamic Art," 45-6. Goldin gives examples: "The artistic attention demanded by Islamic art is therefore the sort that we give to highly conventionalized Western forms, for we have such forms too.

she recalls, "I had begun to think of my painting as walls, but they weren't walls. One day, I looked at them in my studio and couldn't figure out what they were for. It was not that the paintings were invalid as art; they simply no longer reflected my thinking."⁷⁹ At that point, she decided to move onto the actual walls and to decorate a room, a direction that would lead to her involvement in public art.

Kozloff emphasizes and advocates a female artist's engaged aesthetics in making public art. She realized how many public art works still dwell in the form and concept of sculpture and ignore the context. In her public art, she addresses much more the viewer's pace, the process of experience, and intimacy with the audience, in addition to embracing the environment and community. In many ways, public art enables Kozloff to synthesize her ideas about making a patterned art with more social and political potency. She has been successful in achieving a feminist stance by creating multimedia environments with large-scale art, social and cultural content based on pattern and decoration, the beautification of architectural surfaces, the political act of anti-elitism, and communication with her audience.⁸⁰

In a December 1984 interview with Hayden Herrera, which took place at P.S. 1 in New York on the occasion of the exhibition of tiles designed for the Harvard Square subway station in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Kozloff was asked why she puts "slow art in fast places." She indicated that she believes that the passengers may get to the station earlier one day and have a little time to pause, meander and observe her work, which,

With structurally rigid and standardized products like opera, an Albers painting or television commercials...."

⁷⁹ Joyce Kozloff, untitled essay by Joyce Kozloff, as cited in Tibor de Nagy Gallery, 8.

⁸⁰ Johnston, 9.

without imposing a certain idea, requires audience participation to generate meaning. In the density of the details and images in her public tile works, she expects the audience to "see as much incident and variation as possible" during different encounters with the work.⁸¹

Her non-assertive attitude results in her art staying quiet and neutral, emitting a silent beauty. She advocates the notion of reticence as power. "Silence is golden" as the ancient proverb goes, and the gold luster in her tile works radiates with light and color. Kozloff describes how her pattern can be broken down by color and light, which, while deriving from Islamic art, also is suggestive of Pointillism:

In the mosque, there are tesserae of small interlocking pieces of glazed tile that make an overall pattern. When you get close, the actual number of colors is limited, but when you get back, they blend. As the sunlight bounces off the wall surfaces, the color shimmers. The optical illusion of a great variety of colors is similar to Neo-Impressionism.⁸²

The power of the work does not derive from any overt images or dominant formal scheme; it is an art speaking through the viewers, in the same way that Maya Lin's public work commemorating America's Vietnam dead asserts its "untraditional notion of monuments" and "non-assertive" attitudes.⁸³ The approach allows each individual experience to speak for itself. This is the feminist perspective that Kozloff has insisted on: "In the public pieces I hoped that people would recognize things from their own city, from their childhood. I hoped that would open a wedge to the rest of the piece."⁸⁴

⁸¹ Joyce Kozloff, "A Conversation," interview by Herrera, 28.

⁸² Joyce Kozloff, "Two Ethnics," interview by Perrone, 29.

⁸³ Joyce Kozloff, "A Conversation," interview by Herrera, 29.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

Asked whether her public pieces are political, Kozloff admits that she feels uncomfortable making political claims. However, she points to the following factors that make her work political. First, her works are political in the sense that she considers the public response to her art extremely important. Second, she believes that cultural history is found in the minor arts more than anywhere else, and she sees her work as belonging to anonymous craft. She also embraces non-hierarchical structure by synthesizing Western and non-Western ideas. In addition, she takes motifs from local cultural history and from decorative art. She makes her works more conversational and humorous than intimidating. Finally, she works more for a general audience than for the highly educated. In summary, egalitarian and non-elitist attitudes heavily influence her politics when she makes public art.⁸⁵

From 1979 to the present, Kozloff has been actively engaged in making public art in train and subway stations, including Cambridge's Harvard Square Station (1979) already mentioned; the Amtrak Station in Wilmington, Delaware (1980); San Francisco Airport International Terminal (1982); Humboldt Hospital Subway Station in Buffalo, New York (1983); a suburban Philadelphia Train Station (1985); and the People-mover Station in Detroit (1986).⁸⁶ I will discuss three of these stations to chart Kozloff's development in public art.

In retrospect, Kozloff recalls that the opportunity to create public art became available almost accidentally, when she submitted slides of paintings to the Cambridge "Art on the Line" program. Six months later, on the basis of her design, she was invited

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Helen Cullinan, "The Long, Hard Road to Public Art," Cleveland Plain Dealer, 30 October, 1986, n.p.

to submit a proposal for the Harvard Square subway station. The commission was followed by a ceramic design incorporating a tombstone, seaport motifs, and other familiar images from New England.

Kozloff describes how in creating the Harvard Square Subway Station, New England Decorative Arts (1979) (fig. 46), she has had to "seek the [proper] subject matter." To study the local history and determine proper cultural images, Kozloff made several trips to Boston, where she sketched sites in the city. From her observations, she remarks, "When you are in the Boston area, you don't feel the city: you have a lot of green areas and parks throughout...When you go to a mill town, there's a sense of industrial history and when you go to Lexington or Concord, there's a sense of our national history."⁸⁷

The work attempts to tell stories about Boston's history and culture, incorporate New England craft, and express the relationship of the city to the country. Kozloff is very particular about her sources. Jeff Perrone sees Kozloff's work as "having an educational or instructional component," which shows her "learning about Boston's local history and cultural past, and then sharing that visual information with the public."⁸⁸ In order to keep a local audience in mind, Kozloff chose "New England Decorative Arts" as the unifying theme of her mural. She drew her motifs from gravestones, wall stencils, traditional quilts, weather vanes, bowsprits, silhouettes, native paintings, and eighteenth-century engravings of sailing vessels.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Joyce Kozloff, as cited in Perrone, "Two Ethnics," 79.

⁸⁸ Perrone, "Two Ethnics," 83.

⁸⁹ Joyce Kozloff, as cited in Gouma-Peterson, "Decorated Walls for Public Spaces," 49.

In addition, Kozloff adds a personal touch in her choice of playful episodes--for example, the row of George Washingtons across the top and the patriotic eagles scattered throughout the work are amusing. An Indian is about to shoot a pompous soldier, and an eagle is about to take a bite out of a businessman's ankle.⁹⁰ It is the artist's personal choice to mix fantasy and reality in her detailed narration. Kozloff's attention to detail expresses Boston's cultural context and presents the public with historical and humorous imagery.

Kozloff's insertion of decoration in a public environment coincided with a new policy, approved by Congress, of incorporating art works into its railroad revitalization program. In 1976, Congress passed the Railroad Revitalization and Regulatory Reform Act (4R Act) to improve railroad passenger service between Washington, New York, and Boston. Meanwhile, the Northeast Corridor Improvement Project (NECIP) was also established within the Federal Railroad Administration to carry out an extensive program of interrelated improvements. Wilmington, Delaware's Amtrak station was one of thirteen stations selected for renovation and improvement, and Kozloff received the artistic commission.⁹¹

With each project, Kozloff has made a choice to be faithful to the earlier culture and history of a particular site. In the Wilmington Amtrak station, Kozloff studied the architecture of Frank Furness, who designed the building in 1902. "His work had a lot of

⁹⁰ Herrera, 30.

⁹¹ M. Christine Boyer, "Stately Stations," *American Craft* 45 (June/July 1985), 18-24. The improvements included "upgrading track structures, repairing stations and constructing new buildings. Under the aegis of the U. S. Department of Transportation, NECIP selected thirteen stations, eight of which are now registered historic landmarks, for renovation and improvement. An integral part of NECIP is the Station Arts Program, developed in 1977 to incorporate works of art in the station improvement programs, with a budget based on 3/4 of 1% of construction costs. Artist selection panels were formed with the cooperation of the National Endowment for the Arts" (20).

character," Kozloff said. "I looked at tile-work and ornamental brickwork that he designed, and in archives and libraries I studied other buildings that had been destroyed. Practically everything in my piece is a modification of something I saw."⁹² Kozloff admitted that she loved the Furness building and her motifs just fell into place. She attempted to catch the energy and "spikiness" of Furness' Victorian Gothic Style.⁹³

In her review of the work done on the Wilmington Amtrak Station, M. Christine Boyer concludes, "With its façade cleaned and repaired, its tile roof replaced, its interior redecorated, the Wilmington Station invokes the glamour of railroads past."⁹⁴ Kozloff's piece, Vestibule View of Amtrak Station (1980-84), encourages hurried passengers "to pause and contemplate the relationship between architecture, ornamentation and art and how it once celebrated the romance of travel...."⁹⁵

Kozloff compares the Harvard Square and Wilmington Amtrak stations:

Yes, the Harvard Square Subway Station is very modern, almost futuristic. It's a renovation of an existing station, but the way it will look when it's done will be very sci-fi, judging by the models. The Wilmington Train Station, on the other hand, is a restoration of a 1908 Frank Furness building, and it will bring back the wrought iron and the glass and the brass and the character that the building had originally.⁹⁶

⁹² Douglas C. McGill, "Artworks Enhance the Elegance of Region's Restored Train Stations," New York Times, 14 July, 1985, sec. 1, part 2, p. 43.; Boyer, 20. As noted by Boyer, "Wilmington Station was designed by Frank Furness in 1902 and completed in 1905. Furness, a boldly eclectic Philadelphia architect, is famous for having been the teacher of Louis Sullivan but he was also a popular designer of railroad depots."

⁹³ Gouma-Peterson, "Decorated Walls for Public Spaces," 51.

⁹⁴ Boyer, 20.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁹⁶ Joyce Kozloff, "Joyce Kozloff," interviewed by Robin White, in View, 10.

The choices of location and space for her two pieces also had distinctive differences. Kozloff reflects, "At Harvard Square my piece is really one wall. It goes along a pedestrian ramp; it's very long--eighty feet long. It goes back to my painting ideas, really. I'm making the units larger, in proportion to the scale of the wall itself." Referring to the Wilmington piece, she says, "The other project, the train station, is an intimate-sized room, a vestibule, and the tiles will be smaller scale; they'll surround you."⁹⁷ Kozloff felt that the scale of the Wilmington project was more comfortable for her to work with.

To understand the conceptual development of decoration in Kozloff's work, one has to think about decoration more as a kind of "context." Her early decorative paintings indicate a decision to "decontextualize" decoration from surrounding architecture. Kozloff's later public art intends to recontextualize her decorative panels into an architectural context. The decorative interior or the installation represents an intermediary stage. By taking on the format of a mural, the Harvard Square piece demonstrated a paradox, whereby the wall of the building received direct embellishment but also remained contained within the format of a panel with edges. As Gouma-Peterson also notes, this piece is more "a mural than an architectural decoration." It has "the effect of a large painting set into a wall."⁹⁸ It is interesting to see Kozloff's intention expand from painting to architecture when she paints, while her public art still contains the format and

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Gouma-Peterson, "Decorated Walls for Public Spaces," 50.

limitation of painting at an early stage. This unresolved paradoxical situation was later developed one step further, in the gallery-like space in Wilmington's Amtrak station.

In my observation, the Wilmington work, located within the vestibule of the station, was installed in a well-defined passageway. However, the empty ceiling, which does not seem to be taken into consideration, can be viewed as somewhat incomplete in the overall visual statement. While the inspiration for Kozloff's patterns and imagery came from the Frank Furness building, the installation does not in any way correspond with the other parts of the merely functional interior design in the station. It looks more like a separate artwork, as it does not blend with the embellishment of the rest of the building. Consequently, the work does not present a complete recontextualization of the original function of decoration in the building, something Kozloff had aimed for. It looks instead like a museum installation piece located in a functional building. In spite of that, the passageway embellished with opulent decoration creates an intimate space for passersby. Whether they choose to pause or look at it while walking by, the engagement of the bodily and visual sensation is there.

Kozloff's transition from painting to installation also is present in the development of her public works. If the Harvard Square piece resembles mural painting, then the Wilmington Amtrak piece is closer to an installation. The conceptual differences in spatial rendering represent a dialectic process, whereby she experiments with decoration in the building. To adapt to a new space and create a new format, she does not come to an easy resolution or reach full maturity within one or two works. Her later Humboldt Hospital piece is more successfully merged with its environment.

Kozloff's mural (1983-84) at the Humboldt Hospital Subway Station in Buffalo, New York (fig. 47) is located along the wall beside an escalator rising from underground to street level. It is composed of a combination of decorative forms taken from Seneca jewelry, Art Deco buildings, and local Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright landmarks. The choice of location again creates the experience of taking a passage from inside to outside, down the stairs and then up the stairs, from city to suburb--and, perhaps, from the past to the present to the future. Compared with the works at Harvard Square and Wilmington Station, the Buffalo subway station wall is more sophisticated in its rendering of space. Kozloff turned away from the traditional and restrictive rectangular mural format, and instead created variously shaped and sized panels in circular or other geometric forms. Her intention is to create jumps in scale.

In comparison with Kozloff's other projects, the Buffalo mural was set closer to the eye level of the passenger travelling along the passageway. Altogether, Kozloff has created an even more liberated, intimate and lively work. The natural light shining through the window of the station makes the tiles and Venetian glass of the mural colorful and luminous. The detail and beauty of the patterning evoke the fantasy of an ancient or distant culture and an art rich in decoration. One wishes to see more of the passage decorated, to have it extend wider and further into the entire station. Kozloff's dedication to enlivening the environment through the application of pattern and decoration is clearly manifest in this piece.

Bodily Experience of Walking Through a Passageway

Distance and closeness

There is a special effect created by Kozloff's decoration in passageways. It provokes both a close scrutiny and a distanced observation, physically and psychologically. Upon close examination, the viewer sees each tile; at a distanced view, one observes the whole installation. In the studio, Kozloff works on the detail with closeness and intimacy. But when the piece is presented in public, she feels distanced from the work, which is open to the audience to appreciate.

As an artist, Kozloff engages in a labor-intensive craft, yet at the final stage of her installations, she also has to deal with the overall effect of the composition, which she considers to be "art." Kozloff emphasizes her intention to involve people in the intimate details of her large-scale public works: "I want to make paintings that people will see from a distance and that will have a forceful impact, but I also want to bring the viewer up very close to the surface to look at the textures and the detail. And so I want to do an art that is also intimate."⁹⁹ To humanize a public space and make it intimate is part of Kozloff's feminist aesthetic.¹⁰⁰

Nancy Foote describes the experience of Kozloff's art, whereby the work is read up close and at a distance, in alternating turns:

From a distance, a large overall pattern is dominant. Closer up, one notices that individual elements are themselves minutely articulated with differently colored dots stripes and squiggles, which constitute an intricate self-effacing substructure. Since it is not possible to take in both aspects of the work at once, one or the other remains hidden. The viewer is forced to alternate between detail and grand scheme, allowing the memory of each type of perception to qualify the other.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Joyce Kozloff, "Excerpts from Tapes Made with Judy Seigel About Decoration in Art," in Miriam Schapiro ed., Art: A Women's Sensibility, 38.

¹⁰⁰ Joyce Kozloff, interviewed by Robin White, in View, 22-23.

¹⁰¹ Nancy Foote, "Joyce Kozloff at de Nagy," Art in America 63, no. 3 (May/June 1975), 88-89.

As Kozloff's decorative panels engage both pattern/grid and composition, it is helpful to remember Goldin's view of the grid as a way of clarifying the simultaneous intimacy and distance provoked by Kozloff's work. Goldin's study is based on a differentiation between grids and composition. For Goldin, grids are centrifugal, non-hierarchical and non-relational. She holds that while

compositions breed involvement, intimacy and references to self...grids generate a greater emotional distance....[In fact,] the characteristic response to patterns and grids is rapid scanning...Scanning is a much more specialized, anxious kind of looking...a restless refusal to focus and an attempt to grasp the nature of the whole.¹⁰²

As Goldin claims, "The enjoyment of patterns and grids, so often linked to religion, magic, and states of being not-quite-here, requires an indifference to self-assertion uncongenial to most Westerners."¹⁰³ Goldin claims that "artists who begin with the grid usually proceed to destroy it."¹⁰⁴ The destruction of the grid leads to composition, which has "focal areas" with "hierarchic, relational aspects of pictorial composition."¹⁰⁵ This theory would explain the alteration between closeness and distance that is aroused by the manipulation and arrangement of pattern/grid and composition in Kozloff's decorative panels.¹⁰⁶

In her essay "Grids," Krauss discusses the signification of the prevalence of grids in modern art and provides in-depth analysis from a broader view. Extending Goldin's

¹⁰² Goldin, "Pattern, Grids and Painting," 50-54.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 50-54.

argument, Krauss argues that centrifugal and centripetal readings also apply to the viewing and signification of grids. "By its very abstraction, the grid conveyed one of the basic laws of knowledge--the separation of the perceptual screen from that of the 'real' world."¹⁰⁷ In her analysis, the centrifugal reading of the grid acknowledges "a world beyond the frame....The centripetal branch of practice tends not to dematerialize that surface, but to make itself the object of vision."¹⁰⁸

If the grid implies abstraction (centripetal) and the destruction of the grid suggests the reference to the real world (centrifugal), extremes of modernist abstraction such as minimalist art can be viewed centripedally, as they still focus on the object of vision. Pattern and decorative art, in its demonstration of anti-minimalism, presents itself as centrifugal while referring to the visual system of a different culture. The process of composing minimalist art moves from composition to grid, therefore, and from centripetal to centrifugal. Decorative pattern often emerged out of the opposite process, starting from grid and then filling in the content. The comparison made here is meant to help with an understanding of the antithesis of abstraction and decoration. Nevertheless, the phenomenon of minimalist art, or pattern and decoration art, can be far more complicated.

Handicraft

¹⁰⁷ Rosalind E. Krauss, "Grid," *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1985), 15. Krauss notes, "There are two ways in which the grid functions to declare the modernity of modern art. One is spatial; the other is temporal. In the spatial sense, the grid states the autonomy of the realm of art....In the temporal dimension, the grid is an emblem of modernity" (9-10).

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 18, 21.

With the allure of visual intensity and beauty in decoration, particularly when paired with the intimate context of the passageway, Kozloff's successful enticement of her viewers may be attributed to the power of craft associated with decoration. Kozloff acknowledges the validity of the slow take that occurs in the craft process, indicating the slow process of both the maker and the viewer. Kozloff thinks of herself as a "very romantic and old-fashioned" artist, pursuing "a kind of nostalgia for the past."¹⁰⁹ Describing her work, she immediately likens it to craft: "It's like patchwork, or inlaywork, or a lot of craft processes. I guess the idea of it being experienced slowly has something to do with the time that goes into a craft process..."¹¹⁰ This association with craft is evident to others as well. Douglas McGill remarks on the Wilmington Station's all-over decoration with hand-colored tiles, which create a vibrant crazy quilt of color.¹¹¹ Probably because the decorative wall is mostly modulated in squares, it particularly evokes the pattern of a quilt. Different shades of neutral tones--browns, oranges, pinks and blues--mimic the sense of joy and intimacy often found in quilts. The reference to quilting and the creation of the tiles themselves, which are hand colored instead of fabricated, are noteworthy. Kozloff also emphasizes the qualities of obsession, repetition, boredom, fussiness, and slow process of craft in traditional female art. She comments: "... women are very often involved in repetitive chores, and craft processes are like that, too. A lot of it is very boring, and I think that's true for a lot of work. And yet I don't mind that. I get a certain satisfaction out of doing repetitive work."¹¹² Herrera observes

¹⁰⁹ Joyce Kozloff, "Joyce Kozloff," interview by Robin White, in View, 12.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ McGill, 43.

¹¹² Joyce Kozloff, "Joyce Kozloff," interview by Robin White, in View, 13.

that Kozloff's work is extremely meticulous and painstaking, and Kozloff agrees: "Whatever medium I've used, I always manage to make it labor intensive. I don't know why."¹¹³ In an interview, Kozloff remarked, "In my case, I work in many different materials. I am restless. I am not a good technician, and I don't really master with problems. I never really became good at ceramics...very labor intensive with so many man-hours involved in a day. I can't stand it anymore, and before long I was in another labor-intensive material. So maybe that's just my nature."¹¹⁴

Gouma-Peterson notes that the process of Kozloff's work has not changed from her early works to her larger scale public art. Her dedication to the labor and handicraft of the individual tile works remains as the initial engagement in the studio.¹¹⁵ But gradually she has let go of many of the noncreative stages of the process; she reserves for herself the painting of the surfaces and the composition of the imagery.

In a comment made when she was in Italy in 1972, Kozloff said she admired "the craft, the beauty, the care" that went into the making of fifteenth-century Italian paintings, recognizing "the pleasure there could be in that kind of concentration, in putting love into a work with small brushes and exquisite strokes."¹¹⁶ While she was painting the ceramic tiles in An Interior Decorated, she found that the method and process of her work were actually a domestic-oriented type of handiwork. She moved the same utensils back and forth from the kitchen to the studio. The clay was rolled with a

¹¹³ Joyce Kozloff, interview by Herrera, 30.

¹¹⁴ Kozloff, interview by author, tape recording, New York, New York, 24 June 1999.

¹¹⁵ Thalia Gouma-Peterson, "Decorated Walls for Public Spaces: Joyce Kozloff's Architectural Installations," in Joyce Kozloff: Visionary Ornament, (Boston University Art Gallery, 1986), 49.

¹¹⁶ Gouma-Peterson, "Decorated Walls for Public Spaces," 45.

rolling pin, and the tiles were cut with cookie cutters. After glazing and firing, the pieces were grouted in panels.¹¹⁷

Carter Ratcliff interprets the sensuousness in Kozloff's work in relation to the bodily experience of touch and caress. "Joyce Kozloff's patterns glitter. They shimmer. They seduce the eye by reminding it how much it knows about tactility. Kozloff's geometries are sinuous, not barbed. She extends them over the surface like a caress, yet there is no sensual oblivion to be had here...."¹¹⁸ Ratcliff acknowledges that there is an intellectuality to Kozloff's patterning, pointing out that she has long insisted on making her work a site for looking at feminist issues and intends to put domestic materials such as tile and embroidery into a high art context.¹¹⁹

In an interesting generalization, Perreault links pattern to handicraft with his idea that the origin of such patterning is weaving. He claims, "Patterning is probably the most ancient and most universal means of enlivening surfaces...Weaving would seem to be the most logical of origins, for in the warp and weft of loom work and in basketry are the inevitable grid structures."¹²⁰ Kozloff expresses similar thoughts about the origin of patterns along with her feminist perspective:

I think there are archetypal patterns—that is, geometrical patterns that one can find in disparate places and cultures. These may be the result of working with certain materials and processes like the warp and the woof. Visual anthropologists have found that in traditional cultures, men's art is

¹¹⁷ Joyce Kozloff, untitled essay by Joyce Kozloff, as cited in Tibor de Nagy Gallery, 8.

¹¹⁸ Carter Ratcliff, "The Decorative Impulse," in New Decorative Works from the Collection of Norma and William Roth (Florida: Loch Haven Art Center, 1983), 13.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Perreault, "Patterning," in Patterning Painting, n.p. Perreault states, "Far too often we have tended to dismiss patterning as sub-cultural, primitive, or as belonging merely to the realm of craft rather than art."

anthropomorphic (carved and modeled figures, for instance) and used for ritual and religious purposes. Women's art in these cultures is abstract and functional (weaving and pottery, for instance) and rarely defined as art. I am interested in redefining what art is, who does it, and the nature of female creativity.¹²¹

Kozloff attempts to bring female creativity, as evidenced by handicraft, to the arena of traditionally male-defined art. She brings out a female sensibility--one connected to the body.

Schapiro discusses craft as a female traditional art and mentions the craft process in Kozloff's works:

An honored and ancient way of working is called lap work. It is what it sounds like. In order to maintain an inconspicuous role in the family and for the sake of preserving the dictum which commended busy hands for keeping out of trouble and doing the Lord's work, women could sit in corners, take up the least amount of territory and let their minds run wild.¹²²

Schapiro takes as an example the immense subway installation by Kozloff in Wilmington and states that the entire work is built on "the module of a tile, which would fit in her lap." Schapiro's statements give a sense of how handiwork is more closely connected to the body than the mind.

In his essay "Usable Art," John Perreault poses the question, "Why then does the doctrine of the nonutilitarian nature of art persist?" His speculations concern the separation of art and work, art and play, art and life, home and workplace; even the compartmentalization of time can contribute to this phenomenon.¹²³ He argues,

¹²¹ Joyce Kozloff, "Interview with Joyce Kozloff," interview by Heibrunn, 18.

¹²² Schapiro, "Femmage," 306.

¹²³ John Perreault, *Usable Art* (Plattsburgh, N.Y: Myers Fine Arts Gallery, Plattsburgh State University of New York, 1981), 4. Perreault defines usable art as "contemporary art that has uses other than or along with esthetic contemplation. It usually has the recognizable form of something useful—a pot, a chair, a screen, a car."

Also we should never underestimate the power of puritanism and its symmetrical relationship to industrialism. Art, because it is often pleasurable, is disruptive of order. Experimental or avant-garde art is even worse; it sows the seeds of doubt and the pleasure of doubting.

Therefore it is necessary to keep art under control. Art is dangerous. It must be defined so it cannot be part of everyday life. It must be confined to museums, for its own protection certainly, but also to protect the body politics from discord, self-indulgence and desire. It must be made of special art materials; it must be precious and useless.¹²⁴

As Perreault points out, a great deal of contemporary art exhibits "the untouched-by-human hands look" and "the suppression of craft and of the artist's touch," which causes the separation of art from use. Perreault eventually posits that a body politics is involved in handicraft and usable art.¹²⁵

When Kozloff first worked on her public mural projects, she insisted on painting every tile herself. Later, she did have assistants do this work. But no matter how labor intensive her project was, the patterning and decoration in her rendering never really achieved the refinement of Islamic art. Nor did her efforts exceed the beauty of the classical decorative patterns she appropriated from other cultures. The technical aspects in her public art projects have provoked discussions about the validity of her quotations and her technical ability. Has her original intention to draw the viewer into the beauty and intimacy of decorative visual experience been hindered by her more-or-less cruder rendering? I would argue that it has not from two perspectives: first, postmodern appropriations are often rendered, in simulation or reproduction, in a much cruder form than the original; second, the Islamic idea of imperfection also gives Kozloff's technical

¹²⁴ Ibid., 5-6.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 6.

work a justification—an art bearing the touch of the human world.¹²⁶ As described earlier, her tile work is handicraft-oriented with the intimacy and detail of lap work. Viewing a few of the individual tiles (fig. 48, 49), one can see how Kozloff emphasized the pictorial effect. Each tile looks like a small painting in and of itself. In viewing the whole mural installation, the work gives a sense of surface that is very close to an impressionistic effect.

Kozloff admits, "My work has always been very refined, but the tile work is a lot cruder, just because of the craft, which I haven't really mastered."¹²⁷ Although Kozloff is dedicated to the craft process, her works do not attempt to compete with the original source. For her, contemporary craft, like art, acts as a double-edged sword, cutting through the autonomy of art and the autonomy of craft and creating a hybrid form.

Body Politics of Kozloff's Decoration in Public Space

I naturally turn to architecture in a study of Kozloff's work, to be considered in addition to feminist issue related to decoration and handicraft. Her body of works, no matter whether they are paintings, installations, public murals, or maps, concern decoration related to buildings, architecture, and, in an even larger sense, space. All of these are, accordingly, related to human dwellings as well as bodily experience with space.

In a discussion of how Kozloff's works construct a feminist body politics, two questions have to be asked. First, how did architecture or space become a gendered issue? Here, I take Arron Betsky's perspectives of gender division and architectural space as a

¹²⁶ Goldin, "Pattern, Grids and Painting," 51. According to Goldin, "Islamic artisans traditionally put 'mistakes' in their pattern as a religious renunciation of perfection, which belongs only to God."

¹²⁷ Joyce Kozloff, "Joyce Kozloff," interviewed by Robin White, in *View*, 22.

point of departure for my discussion.¹²⁸ Second, how are buildings, architecture, and space related to the body and a feminized bodily experience? In his original and compelling contemplation of the body in urban space, Richard Sennett's Flesh and Stone offers a closely knit argument that enhances our understanding of how Kozloff has constructed a space for feminized experiences.¹²⁹

More than once, we recall Kozloff's statement, "Decoration is where painting and sculpture meet architecture...." She comments,

I really think in some way my work is quite austere. It's highly structured, and it's often been influenced by architecture. I get into elaborate intricacies within the forms. I create a severe format with contextualized, zoned off areas of pattern because I don't want to create an allover repeat, which would become a grid or a field.¹³⁰

When Kozloff talks about her art, she is interested in creating a process enabling the viewer to experience a space or a visual field rather than an overall painting. In this sense Kozloff's work is utterly different from minimalist art's repetitive field, which is registered in grids and general over-allness. Perrone observes,

Close up, Kozloff's art refuses the modernist allover saturation, and gives us instead a variety of intervals, densities, balances and imbalances, weights, and lots of color. Her ideology and practice mediates between the informal, customary rules and values of the craft workplace and the formal authority structure of High Art, producing a new Decorative Art in the human space where they meet.¹³¹

¹²⁸ Aaron Betsky, Building Sex: Men, Women, Architecture, and the Construction of Sexuality (New York: William Morrow), 1995.

¹²⁹ Richard Sennett, Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilization (New York: W.W. Norton), 1994.

¹³⁰ Kozloff, "Excerpts from Tapes Made with Judy Seigel About Decoration in Art," 38.

¹³¹ Jeff Perrone, review of exhibition, "Joyce Kozloff at Tibor de Nagy Gallery," Artforum 18, no. 3 (November 1979), 78-79.

In her public art, Kozloff creates a gendered bodily experience of space, which also refers to the relationship of a body's perception in the environment. Investigating the construction of sexuality in architecture, Arron Betsky was asked by a woman why she has felt out of place on Paris's Boulevard Champs-Élysées. Betsky responds that she feels this way by answering, "because you are a woman," and explaining that the Champs-Élysées was designed by men: "It represents their power. You might even say that it represents the body of a man."¹³² Although this is simplistic, Betsky then describes how the parks and stores, which are extended from the main street, present more intimacy and texture and therefore may be considered a feminine space: "Here, grand purpose gave way to sensual but contained delights." Betsky reflects on the psychological background of the formation of the female realm: "Most of us see our world as alien, uncomfortable, and even dangerous. We want to go to shopping malls, to parks, and into our homes. In our society these are the realms of women." The main characteristic of a shopping mall is that it is, on the outside, a façade, but it has a "serpentine route inside." As Betsky notes, "Space dissolves; textures emerge. This is a world that we think of as feminine."¹³³

Betsky comments, "Women had a role and a place to make livable the world men made. In her view, men planned, designed, built, and ran the towns, suburbs, and cities we live in." Nevertheless, "women were the ones who made this world livable." In Betsky's study, "Men rule the outside, women the inside....the rule of men came first. In a culture dominated by men, it was assumed that men should build and women should

¹³² Aaron Betsky, *Building Sex*, xi.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, xii.

decorate...."¹³⁴ Such a statement corresponds to Kozloff's response to the traditional female role and sensibility in decorating the public space. Betsky is certainly not the only one to claim that the art of building is dominated by men. Diana Agrest, writing about the issue of sex and architecture, proposes a similar premise concerning gender division in space and its corporeal dimension. She writes,

Sex. The rod is layered with meaning and provocation. Embedded within it are the corporeal and the carnal, sensuality and desire, male and female, human reproduction.

If sex condensed the notions of body and power that have permeated architectural criticism since the Renaissance revival of Classicism, an analysis of gender in modern architectural criticism reveals a social system that has historically functioned to contain, control, or exclude women. It is from these perspectives...[that we] reexamine some long-suspect "truth": that man builds and woman inhabits; that man is outside and woman is inside; that man is public and woman is private...¹³⁵

The dichotomies of male and female, building and interior, public and private, office work and domestic life, as well as working space and pleasurable (or entertaining) space were not imposed in feminist theory to strengthen stereotypes, but rather as a critique of this division and hierarchy, which has contributed to the suppression of the female and the feminine. While there have always been great designers of decorative interiors (for example, in the Arts and Crafts Movement and Art Nouveau), it is 1970s feminist artists who took up the issue of how the private becomes public and the personal become political. Investigating the female sphere, they took issue with domesticity and interior and examined them in the feminist context socially, historically, and politically. In Womanhouse, the whole interior was transformed into an embodiment of a female life,

¹³⁴ Ibid., xiii-xiv.

¹³⁵ Diana Agrest, Patricia Conway and Leslie Kanes Weisman, The Sex of Architecture (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996), 11.

with its household drudgery, confinement, fear, anxiety, and unrelenting labor demands. All these compelling messages about the ambivalence and struggle of female life were hidden behind the facade of the celebratory appearance of this endeavor.¹³⁶

While working on the Wilmington Station project, Kozloff gained inspiration from reading Jane Jacobs's book Cities and the Wealth of Nations (1984), in which she discussed transportation systems and how essential they are to the vitality of a city.¹³⁷ Kozloff said, "I like the idea of my work being in such a place....I like more public spaces....When you go to other countries, the stations have been treated in a decorative manner; you feel this sense of community and sociality, which the ornament contributes to. It makes you want to be there...."¹³⁸ Kozloff felt that she had to think about subways; she considers herself an urban person. She has lived her adult life in New York; therefore, it is natural for her public projects to be about cities and urban transportation systems.

Earlier, when Kozloff was still painting, she was already aware of the sense of architecture and urban space in her narration. Asked about why she made her paintings

¹³⁶ Jane Blocker, "Woman-House: Architecture, Gender and Hybridity in What's Eating Gilbert Grape?" Camera Obscura 39 (September 1996), 126-50. Addressing the oppression of domestic space, the author applies Louise Bourgeois' Femme-Maison and the project Womanhouse to compare with the film *What's Eating Gilbert Grape?*. According to the author, in Bourgeois' print, "the room produces a sense both humorous and monstrous..., the house has become a body and the female body has become a house." In this essay, Blocker "attempts to draw a blueprint that can accommodate the hybrid creature illustrated by these examples, the woman-house in whom gender and architecture, body and commodity, surveillance and spectacle find physical form"(130).

In the contemporary study of gender and space, Womanhouse set an early model that home/house can lead to the reconstruction of gender and the control of female sexuality. While Kozloff is creating a space in the public sphere with feminist perspectives, the private home-like space constructed in Womanhouse, embodying the subjugation of women by their compulsory domesticity, has been torn down both realistically and symbolically. Just like the burning of the house at the end of the film, the demolition of both houses tells the story of the past of women's lives and a history of oppression--a past which most women don't want to live again.

¹³⁷ Jane Jacobs, Cities and the Wealth of Nations (New York: Random House), 1984.

¹³⁸ Joyce Kozloff, "Two Ethnics," interview by Perrone, 81.

long, she answered,

I make them long so they will be experienced sequentially, rather than taken in all at once. The patterns and motifs change as you take a visual trip across the painting. It is a form of non-verbal narrative, in a way. It also relates to architecture, which is experienced sequentially, as one walks through the streets of a city.¹³⁹

How does one walk through the city? What is one's experience? Where does one find the most desirable spaces? Having witnessed the gentrification of urban industrial neighborhoods, ranging from Manhattan's SoHo to San Diego's Gaslight District, these questions inspired Kozloff to create an art improving public space.¹⁴⁰ "Kozloff has always necessarily dealt with the world of interface, not only because she is a painter and her work has to coexist with architecture, but because she lives...at a time when available space is to be redesigned and renovated for modern needs."¹⁴¹

In Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilization, Richard Sennett provides a vision of "a history of the city told through people's bodily experience."¹⁴²

Western civilization has had persistent trouble in honoring the dignity of the body and diversity of human bodies; I have sought to understand how these body-troubles have been expressed in architecture, in urban design, and in planning practice...I was prompted to write this history out of bafflement with a contemporary problem; the sensory deprivation which seems to curse most modern buildings; the dullness, the monotony, and

¹³⁹ Joyce Kozloff, "Interview with Joyce Kozloff," interview by Heibrunn, 18.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Untitled essay by Carrie Rickey, as cited in Tibor de Nagy Gallery, 5.

¹⁴² Richard Sennett, Flesh and Stone, 15. Regarding the analogy of body form and urban form, Sennett mentions, "One's need for a master image of the body is conveyed by the phrase 'the body politics'; it expresses the need for social order. The philosopher John of Salisbury gave perhaps the most literal definition of the body politics, declaring in 1159 simply that 'the state (*republica*) is a body.' Salisbury has 'a hierarchical image; social order begins in the brain, the organ of the ruler.' He then 'connected the shape of the human body and the forms of city: the city's palace or cathedral he thought of as its head, the central market as its stomach, the city's hands and feet as its houses.' Later he also related the transportation system to vein and artery" (23).

the tactile sterility which afflicts the urban environment. This sensory deprivation is all the more remarkable because modern times have so privileged the sensations of the body and the freedom of physical life.¹⁴³

Sennett suggests that even though modern technology in the urban space has given people more freedom of movement and sensation of the body, people also have become more alienated from their bodies and from each other because of sensory deprivation.

The physical condition of the travelling body reinforces this sense of disconnection from space. Sheer velocity makes it hard to focus one's attention on the passing scene.... Navigating the geography of modern society requires very little physical effort, hence engagement.... The traveller, like the television viewer, experiences the world in narcotic terms; the body moves passively, desensitized in space, to destinations set in a fragmented and discontinuous urban geography.¹⁴⁴

If this is true, we can consider that the bodily experience of and sensory response to Kozloff's work is a modern and urban one. Kozloff's public tile works, which invite viewers to walk through a passageway, present her audience with the bodily experience of modern urban space. Ironically, while her intention is to make the viewers pause and pay attention to the detailed images and handwork of the tiles, her public works are often ignored by the passersby. The quest for intimacy is further explored by a discussion of the sense of touch. Sennett claims, "the desire to free the body from resistance is coupled with the fear of touch, a fear made evident in modern urban design...Through the sense of touch we risk feeling something or someone as alien. Our technology permits us to

¹⁴³ Ibid., 15. The author continues to cite the examples of Paris and New York to illustrate his point about the conflict of modern communal space, which also contributes to alienation among people. He writes, "In revolutionary Paris, its new imagery of bodily freedom came into conflict with the need for communal space and communal ritual, and the modern signs of sensate passivity first appeared. The triumph of individualized movement in the formation of the great cities of the nineteenth century led to the particular dilemma with which we now live, in which the freely moving individual body lacks physical awareness of other human being...and the civic costs of this dilemma are apparent today in multi-cultural New York" (23).

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 18.

avoid that risk."¹⁴⁵ Does Kozloff's urban design invite a sense of touch, as she intended? While Kozloff experiences a sense of touch herself when making the tiles and has incorporated the embroidery-like brushstrokes and format of a quilt on a conceptual level, the presentation of the artwork remains in an eclectic stage of shifting closeness and distance. For Perrone, a sense of touch was only slightly suggested by Kozloff's use of tiles or mosaic; instead, intimacy was more strongly provoked by the scrutiny of detailed images. Perrone describes the experience as comparable to seeing an ignored period gallery in a museum.¹⁴⁶ Although a sincere expression of Kozloff's desire for intimacy, in the frustrating and contradictory experience of urban space, her mural is often ignored. It could embody alienation in the city and the hidden and futile desire for intimacy, touch, and detailed narration.

Conclusion

No matter whether Kozloff is creating a painting, an installation, an interior environment or public art, her passages and patterns often evoke an architectural space full of color, fantasy, beauty, and luxury. One is invited to pause while passing through.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Perrone, "Two Ethnics," 81-83. Perrone comments on Kozloff's work, "To me, your piece is like taking a walk through the part of the museum that people don't often walk through, like the period rooms." Kozloff explained, "I tried to work out a narrative to facilitate the reading of the mural. The piece is a long, narrow strip the sequences have different rhythms, some faster, some slower. Many people in Boston will be passing it every day-twice a day. I didn't think about the person who would go to Boston just to look at subway art. It was more concerned with the riders who go through that passageway all their lives, and I wanted to give them something different to look at on different days. They won't exhaust the piece the first time they see it. I can't affect the people who are running by at rush hour, but sometime they may get there a little early, notice something new, and then see the piece from a different perspective." By creating a narration and details, Kozloff attempts to call attention to the spectator passing by and pause." Perrone asked Kozloff, "Is it important they understand that this mural is art?" Kozloff answered, "It has to have a more communal function. You have to take the chance of being general, familiar, and tread that thin line. I see it as a risk I have to take. It's again like decoration being a third category."

The body in motion is halted by this visual invitation. Kozloff's passageway leads spectators into a fantasy world full of beauty and exotic culture. Her patterns lure viewers with a visual feast, an event often produced (or served) by women. With the opulent decoration in her works, Kozloff synthesizes elements of pattern and craft to construct an intimate and humanized space.

Being an avid feminist, Kozloff performs feminist body politics by exploring the female traditional arts of decoration and handicraft in a contemporary context. She has created a gendered space with her patterns, a nonhierarchical, nonelitist and conversational communal space, intended to function between the artwork and the viewer. In her public art, Kozloff offers us a feminist sensibility and perspective.

Chapter V

Conclusion: Continuation, Continuity, Controversies and Consolidation

Continuation

As you may have heard, The Dinner Party is going to be exhibited at the Brooklyn Museum from mid-September until early February in the very same space where it was exhibited in 1980. Then, in 2004, it will be permanently housed in the museum, in the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art. This is, of course, a historic moment--a big step in ending the erasure of women's achievements and I am thrilled. – Judy Chicago¹

"Each generation opens the wounds, which close in the night behind them," laments Miriam Schapiro.² Now that Judy Chicago's controversial piece The Dinner Party, after years of being in the storage room, will finally be permanently installed at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, could this be "the closing of the night"?

As Roberta Smith remarks in a review of the recent exhibition of The Dinner Party,

The Dinner Party outlines what might be called the second greatest story ever told and does so using ceramics and textiles--that is, two of the world's first, most essential and continuously developing art mediums. The story is simply this: the persistence of women in their struggle to achieve an equal chance to determine their own destinies and to be acknowledged for their full contribution to the survival and thriving of the human race as a whole. That survival and thriving is, of course, the No. 1 greatest story.³

Continuity

¹ Judy Chicago, e-mail to author, 6 May, 2002.

² Miriam Schapiro, "Conversations," interview by Broude and Garrard, in The Power of Feminist Art, 83.

³ Roberta Smith, "For a Paean to Heroic Women, a Place at History's Table," New York Times, 20 September, 2002, sec. E, p. 34.

During the six years I have worked on this project, the history of The Dinner Party has dramatically changed. In 1992, when I first arrived in New York to pursue my study of feminist art history, there was not much discussion about this area among academics. In general, the generation of 1970s feminist art was still deemed "essentialist," which was considered limiting and restrictive. In 1994, The Power of Feminist Art was published, containing well-documented essays and examples of feminist art. The following year, the Bronx Museum of the Arts presented Division of Labor: Women's Work in Contemporary Art, an exhibition on 1970s feminist art and its legacy. The show included a representation of the works of Womanhouse, including The Dollhouse and Faith Wilding's The Crocheted Environment.⁴

In 1996, Amelia Jones curated the exhibition Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago's Dinner Party in Feminist Art History at UCLA at the Armand Hammer Museum of Art and Cultural Center, and published a catalogue including fair scholarship on Chicago's piece. In 1999, the Schlesinger Women's Library on the History of Women in America acquired more than 80 boxes of archives of The Dinner Party project. Based on research on more than 200 women artists working in the 1970s, Laura Cottingham's documentary film, Not for Sale, debuted at Apex Art, a SoHo gallery, on 12 February, 1998, and was presented at MoMA in May

⁴ Bronx Museum of the Arts, Division of Labor: Women's Work in Contemporary Art. New York: Bronx Museum of the Arts, 1995; see also Knight, 59. Knight comments, "'Division of Labor: Women's Work in Contemporary Art' is a pretty terrible exhibition that you certainly should see. It's terrible because, as a 35 year history of art that concerns itself with gender roles and stereotypes within the domestic sphere, the show can best be described as a parochial mess. And you should see it anyhow, because the subject is of such importance that, for once, anything really might be better than nothing." The exhibition was shown at both the Bronx Museum of the Arts in New York as well as MOCA in Los Angeles and included 60 works by 35 artists (seven were men, four were foreigners). Knight also compares this show to another titled "Guys Who Sew," a small but controversial presentation at UC Santa Barbara, featuring work by seven male artists.

1998.⁵ In the Whitney Museum of American Art's millennium show "The American Century: Art and Culture 1900-2000," 1970s feminist art, including examples from the Pattern and Decoration movement, were presented. In late 2002, the New York art gallery White Columns exhibited a 1970s feminist art show titled Gloria: Another Look at Feminist Art in the 1970s.

For me, the acquisition of The Dinner Party by one of the country's major art institutions means an opportunity for another awakening and period of growth for feminism and feminist art, which have often been considered to be passing phases. There is much opportunity for scholarship in this field, which is waiting to be explored and further expanded.

Controversies

When the feminist movement was at its social and political height, there were intellectual debates between different feminists, and the contention surrounding female imagery, cunt imagery, female style, or female sensibility was acute. In the subsequent expansion of feminist art history and criticism in the 1980s and 1990s, the works of 1970s artists committed to using decoration and handicraft were often criticized on the basis of their perceived "essentialism," a derogatory term that became increasingly contentious in feminist writings from the late 1970s forward. In a 1989 issue of Heresies: A Feminist Publication on Art and Politics, Mira Schor describes "the three phases of the historical and political development of feminism—from the demand for equality, through the rejection of patriarchy by radical feminism, toward a third position that sees the

⁵ Laura Cottingham's Not for Sale: Feminism and Art in the USA during the 1970s, a 90-minute documentary (or a "video essay," as Cottingham called it), features over 100 visual artists, with music by Yoko Ono.

male/female dichotomy as 'metaphysical.'"⁶ This issue of Heresies centered on the debate between essentialism and anti-essentialism and the attempt to de-polarize it. In it there are attempts to open up the restrictive definition of feminist art; an emphasizing of "difference" instead of "femaleness"; discussions of English, French and American feminism; mapping theory (English and French) with practice (conditions of production, historical context-generation and geography); mapping intellect and feeling; and negotiations between production (Marxism--social and economic) and representation (semiotic--content and image).

Schor also relates different feminist authors to different phases, for example, Linda Nochlin and Virginia Woolf to the "stage of equality," Lucy Lippard to "radical feminism," and Griselda Pollock, Elaine Marks, Jane Gallop, Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, and Toril Moi to the stage she calls "rejecting dichotomy."⁷ Because of generational differences, essentialism versus anti-essentialism (or constructionism) was often the core debate among feminist art historians.

In an interview, Cottingham comments on the achievement in 1970s feminist art:

First and foremost I think that I would have to assert the autobiographical issue and, with autobiography, obviously there comes a sense of subjectivity and a different relationship between the artist and the viewer. The seventies came in against abstract expressionism and minimalism. When you think of a classic minimalist sculpture, there is no subjectivity. Its function is to exist without a unique gesture or a sign of the human hand. Most of the materials are made primarily in industrial settings. The emotional, subjective, autobiographical aspects permeate all of first generation feminist art practices.⁸

⁶ Mira Schor, "From Liberation to Lack," Heresies 24 (Fall 1989), 15.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Laura Cottingham, interview by author, tape recording, 9 May 2002, New York, New York. In an earlier interview, Mira Schor expressed the parallel thought and said, "I think the battle of feminism has never

In the decades since the feminist movement, it has been generally acknowledged that 1970s feminist art belongs to the first generation of essentialism and 1980s feminist art to the second generation of anti-essentialism. Thalia Gouma-Peterson and Patricia Mathews's important essay "The Feminist Critique of Art History" established these generational differences. According to the authors, feminist art history moved from a first generation, in which "the condition and experience of being female" was emphasized, to a second generation, influenced by other disciplines and offering a more complex critique (in both art and culture) through an investigation of the production and evaluation of art and the artist.⁹

For Gouma-Peterson and Mathews, feminist inquiry started in 1971 with Nochlin's question "Why have there been no great women artists?" and the deconstruction of "the myth of greatness." First-generation feminist art focused on reclaiming the position of women artists' creativity through women's exhibitions, activities, publications and so on. First-generation feminist art criticism is more political and spiritual than theoretical. The works of Linda Nochlin and Lucy Lippard focused on the discovery and presentation of art by women, past and present; the development of a new language for writing about this art; and the creation of a history and concepts about the forms and meaning of this art. The authors explore female creative expression in the

changed--the battle for subjectivity, by which I mean that to speak the voice and experience of a woman" (Mira Schor, interview by author, tape recording, New York, New York, 14 March 2002.)

⁹ Thalia Gouma-Peterson and Patricia Mathews, "The Feminist Critique of Art History," *Art Bulletin* 69 (September 1987), 342-50.

themes of art and craft, female imagery, and sensibility and female sexuality in first-generation feminist art.¹⁰

Deconstructive and psychoanalytical methodologies have been introduced into second-generation feminist art criticism. The emphases are more on representation and social construction of gender differences, such as Griselda Pollock's discussion of sexual difference and Craig Owens's theory of feminism and postmodernism. According to Gouma-Peterson and Mathews, Pollock, in her studies of Mary Cassatt and Berthe Morisot, tries to show "how the socially contrived orders of sexual difference structure the lives of Cassatt and Morisot and that, in turn, structures their art."¹¹

Lippard also discusses cultural versus socialist feminism in her later development of feminist thought in the eighties. The first position, sometimes called essentialist, conceives of woman as a fixed category determined through societal and cultural institutions, and less often through the concept of an inherent and biological female nature. It attempts to characterize or celebrate specifically female attributes in a separatist mode. It also reveals the history and the nature of the repression of woman within those categories. The second position sees woman as an unfixed category, constantly in process, which is examined through her representations and ideological construction within a male system. Rather than a definition of gender--that is, of woman--the issue becomes, as Lisa Tickner puts it, "the problematic of culture itself, in which

¹⁰ Ibid., 329-42.

¹¹ Griselda Pollock, "Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity," in Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art (London: Routledge, 1988), 50-90, cited in Gouma-Peterson and Mathews, "The Feminist Critique of Art History," 337.

definitions of femininity are produced and contested and in which cultural practices cannot be derived from or mapped directly onto a biological gender."¹²

To put the development of feminism and feminist art in context, one also cannot completely deny the different stages of feminist evolution, which helps one to understand the conflicts and the main debates. However, the call for depolarization is significant in illuminating the bias, controversy, preoccupations, and preconceptions, which can occur in any vanguard movement, addressing the conflicts raised by limited views and division. Artists such as Judy Chicago, Miriam Schapiro, Faith Ringgold, and others continued to work in the 1980s and modified their thoughts and strategies with the new generational developments, including postmodern ideas and different aspects of visual culture. But a generational study only presents a generalized or arbitrary division, which does not reflect the subtle reality. It takes time to develop different views and terms in order to study a defined generation in broader and more complex ways. In hindsight, we realize how the term "essentialism" was used in relation to the separatism and biological determinism of 1970s feminist art, which was considered limiting. This terminology has continuously created so much confusion and rejection of early feminist art that Norma Broude and Mary Garrard have proposed three categories of essentialism--biological, political, and cultural--to combat the limited interpretation of essentialism and to make a convincing case for 1970s feminist art.

Today, the founders of feminist art do not renounce or deny their characterization as essentialist, and it is perhaps more useful to further articulate the term than to resist it. We would do well to replace the term

¹² Lisa Tickner, "Sexuality and /in Representation: Five British Artists," Difference: On Representation and Sexuality, exhibition catalogue (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984), 19, quoted in Gouma-Peterson and Mathews, 346-47.

biological essentialism (which no known feminist has ever championed) with two others--cultural essentialism and political essentialism--which can be historically distinguished.¹³

Addressing the problem of essentialism, Broude and Garrard clarified the debates on female sensibility. As Broude and Garrard note, Patricia Mainardi and Cindy Nemser are against coding the female aesthetic and Chicago's centralized-core imagery, referring to "formal organization of central orifice as a metaphor for a woman's body." Equally controversial was Lucy Lippard's view of female sensibility raised in the 1973 exhibition "Women Choose Women." As Broude and Garrard argue, "The choice of pinks and pastels, fruit and vaginal imagery, eggs and breasts, the common awareness of the broader women's movement was a political act, a defiance of conventions...with forms and iconography that had been stereotypically and pejoratively deemed 'feminine.'"¹⁴ They further defend the work by stating that "The 'visual symbology' they [Chicago, Schapiro and Lippard] described should not be seen simplistically as 'vaginal or womb art,' but rather as the framework for an imagery that would reverse the loathing and devaluation of female anatomy in patriarchal culture."¹⁵ They call on us "to view our physicality as a resource, rather than a destiny" as represented in this art. "The question to be posed is not whether the form language is essentially female or male, but, rather, what is *signified* when that form language is used by women or men." Broude and Garrard deny that the first generation feminists' re-examination of the "female" is meant to limit it to "a biological essence, but, rather, to test the culturally constructed definitions of the

¹³ Broude and Garrard, eds., "Introduction," The Power of Feminist Art, .25.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 23-25.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

'feminine' that they knew."¹⁶ Therefore, cultural and social essentialism were the terms to replace biological essentialism to define this generations of feminism.

Broude and Garrard discuss the connection between the construction of femininity and the female role. They affirm, "If femininity is a social construction, then we must acknowledge that women have had a role in constructing it, simply by their gradual, ever-self-implicating acceptance and perpetuation of its term."¹⁷

Lippard, while calling for the reconciliation between the two sides of feminism, has consistently embraced the idea of female experiences:

I am convinced that there are experiences I share only with other women. My experience cannot be fully regulated, controlled, or interpreted by bodies and minds that do not know it. There are some aspects of femaleness that simply escape men. They provide the firm ground, the grass roots, from which women can analyze and act.¹⁸

She finds it impossible to "disavow the idea of female sensibility because women and men still have totally different experiences in this world, biologically, socially, politically and sexually....it is also socially constructed."¹⁹ Lippard is trying to defend the female experience and also calling for an embracing of contradictions and differences among various feminisms.

One could depolarize the dichotomy of essentialism and anti-essentialism as acknowledged by Chicago: "Femininity is a construct and masculinity is a construct. I certainly think most gender differences are cultural, but there's also some intersection

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Broude and Garrard, eds., "Introduction," *The Power of Feminist Art*, 25.

¹⁸ Lucy R. Lippard, "Both Sides Now [a Reprise]" *Heresies* 24 (Fall 1989), 30.

¹⁹ Ibid., 31.

between culture and biology."²⁰ Decoration and handicraft in art reflect a collective women's culture in their historical domestication and trivialized circumstances. Beyond the essential female style, they also precipitate the revolt against Modernism and the deconstruction of the hierarchy of high art and low craft.

Consolidation

The application of the traditionally female arts of decoration and handicraft by feminist artists has risked the charge of deliberately separating the male and female worlds. Because of this approach, feminist art of the 1970s was often susceptible to the criticisms of being self-limiting, of reversing the power struggle from the patriarchal to the matriarchal; of reiterating the traditional hierarchy with separatist strategy; and of essentialism

According to Broude and Garrard, "Anti-essentialist critics argued that to glorify the female categories of art production was to 'ghettoize' women's art, by reifying modern women's association with female-stereotyped art forms."²¹ In defense of Schapiro's and Kozloff's separatism, it should be acknowledged that Schapiro was not saying that "female traditionalist" categories should be perpetuated--but because they are under severe social constraint caused by gender structure and artistic hierarchy, they deserve admiration, attention, and commemoration. Schapiro and Kozloff did not attempt to embrace biological essentialism. They instead raised a culturally specific challenge to it with the "intention of liberating an area of visual expression that had long been gendered as feminine by male Euroculture and hence devalued, policed and controlled in Western

²⁰ Jones., 39.

²¹ Broude and Garrard, eds., "Introduction," The Power of Feminist Art, 25.

art." In addition, their practices were "founded in experience rather than theory." Often, "the 1970s debate about women's art was consistently misdirected to the question of 'whether' rather than 'how' women used certain forms."²²

If decoration and handicraft are the artistic focus of Chicago, Kozloff, and Schapiro, they certainly deal with them in completely different ways. Chicago's The Dinner Party is a sculpture event based in the female community. Her intention to celebrate female traditional art through the revival of collaboration in an artistic community is a significant one, despite the conflicting purpose of educating women practicing art/craft and achieving success as an individual artist. Schapiro instead created her own style through female collage, mostly in the private studio, connected to the domestic context. Her focus on feminine material and female imagery created a strong feminist statement to challenge the canon of modernist purism. Besides being a fine craftsman, Kozloff is probably more interested in the intellectual aspect of decoration in both feminist and multicultural contexts. With an academic approach of studying and researching decoration, she developed a dialectical course by experimenting in different forms, from painting to installation to public art.

Regarding the image of the body in the artists' works, Chicago uses bodily images to directly address female sexuality, as well as explore bodily experience through the use of women's traditional practices of handicraft. Schapiro has a more intimate and personal take on decoration, presented in bodily related images of eggs, shrines, houses, fans, hearts, and costumes. In her decorative female images, Schapiro constantly explores the representation of the female body as either visible or absent. Her femmage series also involved pasting

²² Ibid.

and collaging that related to the tactility of craft practice. Imbued by the fantasy and desire evoked by decoration and the sensation of traveling to exotic cultures, Kozloff attempts to humanize the pictorial (and later, public) space with a feminized bodily experience and sensibility in her various works.

Since body politics is often discussed in the context of performance art, my proposal of a connection between body politics and the feminist practice of decoration and handicraft may seem peculiar at first. Yet I have argued for an understanding of the erotic aspect of decoration, and for the corporeal dimension of handicraft. It is ironic that my initial idea of linking body politics to decoration and handicraft was actually derived from my study of the material written by male writers such as Adolf Loos, whom I eventually argued against.

In Miriam Schapiro and Faith Wilding's essay, "Cunts/Quilts/Consciousness," the authors make reference to the linkage between cunt image and body image through female handicraft. They describe ways of doing cunt art by crocheting, stitching, sculpting in lint, quilting, and collaging.²³ According to Schapiro and Wilding, women appreciate handicraft as a method for creativity and desire of beauty: "From earliest times women's hands have not been still and their creation of decoration and embellishment in the domestic arena have been their expression of desire--desire for beauty, for a greater life, for embellishing necessity."²⁴

Laura Cottingham intelligently argues that body art does not end with the body, but actually starts *from* the body. As an extension of this origin at the body, feminist practice of

²³ Miriam Schapiro and Faith Wilding, "Cunts/Quilts/Consciousness," *Heresies* 24 (Fall 1989), 7.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

decoration and handicraft present a phase of "art practiced through the body." Cottingham asserts,

The deliberate assertion of the body and the artist's own self into art making as art, especially in the emergence of work that first called itself performance, functioned for many artists as a direct, unmediated act of *taking a position*....In another respect, "body art" has perhaps never really been all but the body at all. Instead, it is a form of self-assertion that doesn't *end* with the corporeal body, but actually begins there.²⁵

Broude and Garrard have clarified that body identity is more than just a shared mystical point of view.²⁶ In my view, the handicraft and decoration practiced through the female body are also not limited to the biological aspect of body but also the function, operation, and extension of it at social, political, and psychological levels. Cottingham continues,

Many of the artistic processes that have incorporated the artist's body are really about transcending it, getting outside of the corporal limitations of the human frame, challenging the ideological frames that regulate the movement of bodies in space (for instance, the historical confinement specific to nonwhite and female bodies), and more philosophically, attempting to resolve the "mind/body problem" as it is entrenched in Western metaphysics.²⁷

I agree that the hierarchy of art and craft is also mirrored by the hierarchy of mind and body, of male and female. As I have already argued, feminist artists attempt to break down the hierarchy of mind/body, art/craft, and male/female.

Since essentialism was often narrowly defined in terms of the biologically predetermined sexual differences, the issue was usually located in the discussion of the

²⁵ Cottingham, *Seeing Through the Seventies*, 121.

²⁶ Broude and Garrard, eds., "Introduction," *The Power of Feminist Art*, 25.

²⁷ Cottingham, *Seeing Through the Seventies*, 121.

representation of the female body and sexual imagery in feminist art. I propose that decoration and handicraft, although considered primarily as form, technique, and material, can reflect and constitute another phase of body politics of feminist art. The tactility and hands-on process involved in handicraft has its corporeal connection. Decoration, with its visual and sensual pleasure, is applied through various bodily connected images and contexts.

Marcia Tucker, in the catalogue for the exhibition A Labor of Love, agrees: "In the mind/body dichotomy set in motion by the Enlightenment, the pleasures of the senses are denied."²⁸ She relates the practice of decoration and handicraft to the body, which was considered inferior to the practice of the mind and art in the context of modernist purism.

Simply put, the reasoning goes something like this; that which is associated with the mind is a higher order, of a purer and rarer form, than that which is associated with the body. Bodily experience threatens to unsettle "pure" taste, ...It is no wonder that craft and decorative arts, particularly those which are detailed and labor-intensive—a sure sign of the body at work—came to be considered inferior, capable of immediate visual appeal but lacking in higher purpose.²⁹

By curating this show, she says, she is challenging the separation of "the formal from the informal, the sublime from the decorative, thinking from feeling, the intellectual from the corporeal, high art from Kitsch."³⁰

In the tradition of Western philosophy, the dichotomy of mind over body has contributed to the differentiation of thought over physical labor and therefore the

²⁸ Marcia Tucker, A Labor of Love, exhibition catalogue (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1996), 31-2.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 31-2.

hierarchy of high art and low craft. In their reclaiming of the body, and by connecting it to tactility and sensuality in a particular phase of gender practice, feminist artists working in handicraft and decoration were engaged in the pleasures of the hands-on process and sensuality instead of the asceticism of abstract, purist, and minimalist painting. This is the reason why Judy Chicago revived the labor-intensive crafts of china painting and embroidery in her Dinner Party project. Likewise, Miriam Schapiro engaged in painting, pasting, layering, and appliqu  ing her femmage with busy and detailed handiwork, and Kozloff insisted on hand-painting each of the tiles in her works. This corporeal experience of the decorative handicrafts traditionally practiced in the private female domain can be subservient to or transformed into a public political intervention in feminist art. It accentuates the tension between aesthetics and function, form and content, high and low, feminine or non-feminine, and intervenes in these debates in an attempt to debunk the dichotomy and challenge the established hierarchy.

Melissa Meyer's and Miriam Schapiro's essay on femmage makes the case that quilts, samplers, and scrapbooks were precursors to art collage and ecological recycling.³¹ It is interesting that Schapiro sees craft as an art of the future rather than art of the past. She asserts, "As seen by feminists, craft is the bridge into the newly democratized art of the future....," especially with the emergence of computer and technology and fusion of multi-medium art. She continues, "But because painting itself is a craft, I foresee that it will always continue."³² She mentions the AIDS Memorial Quilt Project ("The Names

³¹ Melissa Meyer and Miriam Schapiro, "Waste Not, Want Not: An Inquiry into What Women Saved and Assembled," 66-69. Cited in Carrie Rickey, "Writing (and Righting) Wrongs: Feminist Art Publications," in The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact, ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 128.

³² Schapiro, "Conversations," interview by Broude and Garrard, in The Power of Feminist Art, 83.

Quilt"), an on-going project begun in 1985, as an example. For Schapiro, "Quilts are 'metaphors of women's life.' Women are conservators, we collect, we save, we curate our lives, keep our diaries, journals, scrapbooks, so that we can prove we lived." The Names Quilt follows women's traditions of making friendship quilts, commemorative quilts, birthday quilts, wedding quilts, and mourning quilts, but is made by both men and women.³³

Since the mid-1990s, The New Museum of Contemporary Art has been the major museum championing feminist art. Bad Girls, an exhibition organized by Marcia Tucker in 1994, attempted to deal with contemporary feminist issues among wildly differing ideas about the feminisms of today, and to deliberately use "a delicious and outrageous sense of humor."³⁴ Tucker explains,

Bad Girls has had its genesis, for me in an ongoing engagement with feminism, starting way back in 1968 when the Women's Movement hit New York. In recent years I began to see the work of an increasing number of artists who were dealing with feminist issues in new and refreshing ways, and the idea for an exhibition gathered momentum. The work that particularly fascinated me and pushed me to rethink a lot of old issues had two characteristics in common. It was funny, really funny, and it went "too far."³⁵

About A Labor of Love, a craft-oriented show also curated by Tucker, she asserts,

Labor-intensive and/or handcrafted work, folk and outsider art aren't locked into an ideologically pure, out-moded time zone somewhere in the past, inert and neutralized...the artists in A Labor of Love, from a wide

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Marcia Tucker, "Introduction and Acknowledgments," Bad Girls, exhibition catalogue (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1994), 4-5.

³⁵ Ibid. Laura Cottingham gives a critical view of the show, questioning the exhibition's title--"Bad girl' implies subculture rather than dominant culture"--and asks whether "Bad Girls" ignores the 1970s feminist legacy. See "What's So 'Bad' About 'Em?" and "How many 'bad' feminists does it take to change a lightbulb?" in Seeing Through the Seventies, 73-116.

variety of backgrounds and training, have made work that elicits critical thinking about the way we experience and understand the past and the present...the work is an invitation to engage in those large dialogues which are important not only to the arts today, but to the health and well-being—dare I say the continued existence?—of American cultural life at large.³⁶

In A Labor of Love, Liza Lou's Kitchen, an entire room made up of tiny, colorful beads that the artist beaded by hand over the course of five years, represents the legacy of 1970s feminist art's reclaiming of decoration and handicraft.

How do we reconstruct 1970s feminist art after three decades when feminism has already gone through the transformation from a movement to an ideology to a discourse? The purpose of this dissertation is not to study the development of feminist theory, but rather to work on an empirical and historical level. The artists I have focused on are still alive and continue to work and practice their feminist ideas. Many younger contemporary women artists also take up the issues raised by 1970s feminist artists and incorporate them into their works.

In 1999, Joyce Kozloff was awarded a Jules Guerin Fellowship in Visual Arts (The Rome Prize), and went to the American Academy in Rome to work for one year. After her return, a show of her work titled "Target," combining images of maps and globes with the same colorful decorative effect as her previous works, opened at New York's D.C. Moore Gallery. While Eleanor Heartney interprets Kozloff's maps as a metaphor through which she can "explore her larger interests--the psychology of domination, the seductions of power, and the fallacies of the patriarchal and Western-centric vision of history,"³⁷ my interest is in her employment of body and space as

³⁶ Marcia Tucker, A Labor of Love, 75.

³⁷ Eleanor Heartney, "Maps as Metaphors: Recent Works by Joyce Kozloff, " in Joyce Kozloff: Targets

expressed in this new form of decorative image.

In 2002, Judy Chicago had three exhibitions on the East Coast. The Dinner Party opened at the Brooklyn Museum of Art on 20 September, where it will be permanently installed in 2004. A retrospective of Chicago's work opened at The National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, D.C. on 11 October, and her Holocaust Project opened on 12 August at the Orlando Museum of Art. The exhibition at the National Museum of Women in the Arts featured over 90 works from the 1960s to the present. As the museum press release remarked,

With The Dinner Party, Chicago distinguished herself further as an artist determined to change the way women, and women artists in particular, are remembered and regarded. Going against traditional societal taboos in choosing the vulva as her main symbolic image, Chicago also rejected art hierarchies by working with craft as well as fine arts, and foregrounded the idea of artistic collaboration rather than lone artistic genius. The Dinner Party solidified Chicago's place as a feminist and has become an icon of feminist art.³⁸

The August 2002 press release from the Brooklyn Museum of Art traced the exhibition history of this influential work: "Since it was first presented at the San Francisco Museum of Modern art in 1979, The Dinner Party has been seen by more than a million people at 15 venues in six countries on three continents. The Brooklyn Museum, where it was on view

(New York: DC Moore Gallery, 2001), n.p. Heartney remarks...."For the past nine years, cartography has provided Joyce Kozloff with a steady source of inspiration...She has drawn on many sources--cosmological charts, antique maps, topographical maps, nautical charts, and even nineteenth-century real estate maps--and has incorporated them into works that explore a range of topics; the spread of Spanish, French, and British colonialism; the mix of fact and fantasy that constitutes America's consciousness of Vietnam; the relation between earth, surface, and body; and the physical manifestations of the imperialist impulse."

³⁸ National Museum of Women in the Arts, Exhibition press release, 3 September, 2002, n.p.. This press release was distributed on the occasion of the museum's retrospective exhibition of Judy Chicago, 11 October, 2002-5 January, 2003. The works exhibited were divided into following sections: Early California Years, 1964-71; Breaking Through Years, 1972-75; The Dinner Party, 1974-79; Birth Project, 1980-85; Powerplay, 1983-86; Holocaust Project, 1985-93; and the End of the Century, 1993-2000.

October 18, 1980 through January 18, 1981, was the fourth venue." More than 20 years later, the work will be returning to the same place.³⁹

At the 2002 College Art Association Annual Conference in Philadelphia, Miriam Schapiro received CAA's Distinguished Artist Award for Lifetime Achievement to a standing ovation by hundreds of attendees. Asked later about this award, Schapiro responded, "I guess I must have done the right thing."⁴⁰

In their practice of decoration and handicraft, Judy Chicago's urge to educate women artists and nurture the female community, Miriam Schapiro's exploration of female experience in domestic contexts through her femmage, and Joyce Kozloff's decorative work enlivening public space all deserve their recognition. The body politics of their feminist art and the bodily connected images created by them encourage human touch and the touch of humanity, both of which are so vital for the value of artistic expression, the subjectivity of female role and the survival for the expanded dialogue of artistic tradition.

³⁹ Brooklyn Museum of Art, Exhibition press release, August 2002, 2.

⁴⁰ Schapiro, interview by author, tape recording, East Hampton, New York, 24 March 2002.

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