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## Three American Women Artists

Cynthia Lenore Stansil

*Eastern Illinois University*

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THREE AMERICAN WOMEN

ARTISTS  
(TITLE)

BY

CYNTHIA LENORE STANSIL

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER of ART

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY  
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

1977  
YEAR

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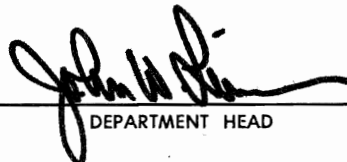
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THREE  
AMERICAN WOMEN  
ARTISTS

BY

CYNTHIA LENORE STANSIL

B. A. in Art, Southern Illinois University, 1973

ABSTRACT OF A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Art in Art at the Graduate School  
of Eastern Illinois University

CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS  
1977

**353428**

The basis of the thesis centers around my opinion of the contemporary topic of women artists. I feel the only relevant statement a women artist can make is through her work. As a result I have discussed the work of three well known women artists eliminating any information of their personal lives. Circumstances effecting their growth is so opinionated I find it irrelevant. In addition, there is a discussion of my own work and development. Unique aspects of my work, are brought out through individual comparisons to each of the three other women artists.

The three well known women artists I discussed are Marisol Escobar, Georgia O'Keeffe, and Mary Cassatt. To briefly describe each artist's work Marisol Escobar primarily does modern figurative sculpture, Georgia O'Keeffe a modern painter uses natural objects depicting them with a play between precise realism and abstraction, lastly Mary Cassatt an American Impressionist painter portrays mostly women and children with her unusual style and attitude. My own painting is characterized as a form of abstract-realism, figurative, and recorded directly from life or through photographs. The strongest element of my painting is the geometric character, geometry is the bases of the comparison to each artist's individual style.

The format in describing each artist is presented through

subject matter, composition, and contributions made by each.

Illustrations are included representing the various works of each artist. The comparison of my geometric style with the other artists is also discussed through subject matter and composition.

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## INTRODUCTION

Concerning the contemporary topic of women artists, I feel the only statement relevant is through their work. As a result, this is a discussion of the work of some women artists. Thus, two new unique aspects are presented in this thesis. One, is a new point of view, presenting three well known women artists through only their work, eliminating information concerning their personal lives. The other, a presentation of the unique style of my work, with new insights brought forth through individual comparisons of my work to each of the three other women artists.

The unusual productivity of the three outstanding artists I will be discussing are Marisol Escobar,<sup>1</sup> Georgia O'Keeffe,<sup>2</sup> and Mary Cassatt.<sup>3</sup> To briefly describe each artist's work,

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<sup>1</sup>Marisol Escobar- Born in Paris of Venezuelan parents, but spent most of her youth in Los Angeles. She studied at the Academie des Beaux-Arts and the Academie Julian in Paris. Also she studied at the Hans Hoffman School and the Art Students League in New York, which is still her home. Lawrence Campbell, "Marisol's Magic Mixtures," Art News, March 1964, p. 39.

<sup>2</sup>Georgia O'Keeffe- Born 1887 in Sun Prairie, Wisconsin. Attended Art Institute of Chicago, Arts Student League of New York, and studied with Arthur Dow in New York. Doris Bry and Lloyd Goodrich, Georgia O'Keeffe, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970), pp. 7-8.

<sup>3</sup>Mary Cassatt- Born 1844 in Allegheny City, Pennsylvania. Attended the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Lived most of her life in Paris and studied with various sources in Europe. E. John Bullard, Mary Cassatt Oils and Pastels, (New York: Watson-Guptill Publications, 1973), p. 9.

Marisol Escobar primarily does modern figurative sculpture (figure 1), Georgia O'Keeffe a modern painter uses natural objects depicting them with a play between precise realism and abstraction (figure 5), lastly Mary Cassatt an American Impressionist painter portrays mostly women and children with her unusual style and attitude (figure 7). The format used in describing each artist is based on their subject matter, composition, and contributions to art. My own work will be discussed in the same manner.

Especially in the last decade, ground is being broken concerning women artists. Organizations such as the Women's Caucus for Art have been formed and books, such as Art and Sexual Politics recognizing women artists from the past and present are informing the public. A statement made by Linda Nochlin in her essay Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists? is a topic being discussed often with many varying opinions: "there have been no supremely great women artists, as far as we know, although there have been many interesting and very good ones."<sup>4</sup> This is only one, of the many verbal and printed statements being presented, about women artists, which all center around sociology. There are no conclusions only opinions as to why, for example, there are not more good women artists or what effects the result of the one's that are superior. The end result of all my reading and listening to others formulated my opinion finding everything irrelevant besides the work of the artist. I realize that when speaking of artist's

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<sup>4</sup>Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" Art News, January 1971, p. 25.

as Marisol Escobar, Georgia O'Keeffe, and Mary Cassatt that many things came into play in effecting their growth as an artist, but the information concerning this is so opinionated of circumstances that I tend to disregard and find it secondary.

The information contained in this paper, about the three women artists, is based upon authoritative sources as indicated in the bibliography. The information on my own work gives an idea of my development till now. To define my painting, (figure 10) I would characterize it as a form of abstract-realism, figurative, and recorded directly from life or through photographs. I chose, to compare my work to, Marisol Escobar, Georgia O'Keeffe, and Mary Cassatt as the women artists, because of the amount of material written about them is far greater than most other well-known women artists of today and past. I do not feel in any way have I been influenced by these three artists nor do I feel that my work has any strong similar, qualities. Since, the strongest element of my painting is the geometric character, geometry will be the bases of the comparison to each artist's individual style. Again, new insights will be brought forth, by comparing the geometric character of my work to each individual artist and a interesting discussion will result. Since, I will be discussing each artist through their subject matter and composition I will use this same format in the comparisons. Thus, the effect of geometry on their subject matter and composition will be stated. In addition, I will compare the influence upon the work of the three artists and my own.

I

MARISOL ESCOBAR

SUBJECT MATTER

Marisol's characteristic is the recurrent portrayal of her own body parts as motifs of her sculpture. She makes replicas of her expressive slim hands, her feet, her ears, derriere, and in particular she uses her strikingly beautiful face. She has invented a sophisticated technique for combining an interplay of three-dimensional forms with drawn and painted surfaces. The well known Four Women and Dog (figure 1) is representative of her work. Marisol depicts ordinary American life in dazzling form and some sculptures of famous personalities as Mao-Tse-tung, de Gaulle, and the British Royal Family. Lawrence Campbell's description of her first exhibition in New York in 1958 is instructive:

...her work consisted of four main types. There were playful and erotic terra cottas, units fired individually and assembled like tiles or crazy pavement. Some were enclosed in glass-fronted boxes. A second group was of tiny clay figures pulling out from the surface like ducks caught in the mud. She thinks of them as having been influenced by Rodin's Gates of Hell. There were also free-standing terra cottas--active dabs of clay figures, wriggling upward in a kind of column. The rest of the show consisted of woodcarvings of animals and human figures, sometimes in groups, in a rough-hewn style suggesting peasant carving. Some of these figure groups stood on small, wheeled platforms.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Lawrence Campbell, "Marisol's Magic Mixtures," Art News, March 1964, p. 38.

It seems Marisol is at her wittiest in works closer to her own surroundings or environment. An example is the Portrait of Sidney Janis Selling a Portrait of Sidney Janis by Marisol by Marisol or another entitled Guy. Both these pieces are highly successful. Guy, of sophisticated simplicity, is carved from a narrow block (84"x12") with the appearance of a slim cigarette lighter. The face of Guy is cast in plaster along with a portion of one hand suggesting it is slipped into a pocket of his pinstriped suit, and a phallic erection is discreetly traced.

The Party is a display of Marisol in fifteen free-standing versions of herself. Each manikin is wearing an evening gown, which again is made up of her combined technique of sculpture-in-the-round and graphic elements.

Marisol states the reason she keeps repeating herself in some way as the subject of her sculpture is that whatever the artist makes, it is always a kind of representation of self. She feels using her own face, hands, or feet brings her back to reality. Fantasy is another major feature of her work:

To be able to view oneself as a spirit object or as human furniture is the far-out point of impersonality of her fantastic and powerful sculpture.<sup>2</sup>

Marisol portrays a succession of movements as Duchamp does in Nude Descending a Staircase, whereas art generally has been static or a

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<sup>2</sup>Sam Hunter, American Art of the Twentieth Century, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers), p. 271.

single moment in time.<sup>3</sup> By using herself in numerous positions in the same work she destroys "logical" illusionistic time, "Like certain seraphim, Marisol appears in several places at once."<sup>4</sup> Without any apparent means of transportation she suddenly appears in a different place. Her sculptures have a strange inner life combining a haunting feeling with the commonplace. One description is:

They are like houses where the clocks continue to tick, the bathwater has been left running, the electric lights all turned on, and all the people are out-of-town.<sup>5</sup>

Another role of Marisol is that of the folk artist: she is not involved in tasteful selection, but uses things because they are available and seem "right" at the time. These materials provide an instant interpretation of subject-matter, which is coupled with a sense of ironic and bemused enjoyment of their availability.

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<sup>3</sup>Marcel Duchamp- French painter and sculpture, who did experimental work revealing his own highly original talent. His Nude Descending a Staircase is related to Futurism, in its attempt to represent movement. The painting incorporates five silhouettes, almost superimposed upon one another. The movement down a spiral staircase with the five successive movements as represented in a simple image, as in a photographic film. Praeger Encyclopedia of Art, 1971 ed., s.v. "Marcel Duchamp."

<sup>4</sup>Michael Andre, "New York Reviews," Art News, May 1975, p. 95.

<sup>5</sup>Campbell, "Marisol's Magic Mixtures," p. 271.



## COMPOSITION

Using herself as the model, Marisol creates a trinity of images for all three of the women in her Four Women and Dog (figure 1) have identical features. Creating little variation in the size of each adult figure Marisol limits herself by representing them with three equally hollow wooden cases. The child is represented half-height in relation to the adults and each figure has a hat block for a head, which is treated with elaborate variation. The woman standing next to the child shows four faces of Marisol with three additional faces set in the back of the head. The woman on the left has three faces with only the center face wearing lip-stick. The center woman has a very curious face with a deep projection framing a photograph of Marisol. Excluding the heads and legs, each figure is made up of a rectangular block of wood, painted, decorated, and worked in ways to dramatize the flatness of the surface and nature of the wood. Moreover, the effect is denying the surface and its material to suggest almost as in trompe l'oeil, depth and dimension. There is a continuous alternation between reality and illusion throughout the sculptural complex. Along with stenciling and painting the figures are accompanied by such accessories as a handbag, child's hair ribbon, a leash, and a dog's collar. The grain of the wood is clearly

visible in the legs of each figure. The feet vary from the fully delineated black high-heeled shoes of the women holding the leash to the women next to the child with stumplike feet. The hand holding the leash and the hand on the child's shoulder are cast from Marisol as the model.

Marisol portrays a perfunctory dinner engagement in Dinner Date (figure 3). Here Marisol is having dinner with Marisol. She uses real objects as painted TV dinners as well as paint and pencil on wood blocks. The otherwise, serene grouping of the figures is accompanied by the disturbing effect of the upraised hand clutching the fork. These are eleven boxed in figures in The Dealers. This piece has a very complex assemblage and many head variations. This has been described as one figure's head:

...seen frontally, the overlapping petal-like fragments of face masks form a curiously beautiful whole; seen from the sides, the eight fragments fall apart disjointedly, mounted as they are on staggered rods of varying length.<sup>6</sup>

Marisol's Women Sitting on a Mirror is humorous with the figures dressed in brightly decorated plastic hats and oversized sunglasses. Another characteristic of Marisol's work appears after looking closer at this piece; the disconnected knees and mirrored reflectors create an eerie feeling. A work similar to Women Sitting on a Mirror is Marisol's Sunbathers. The human form of the three figures are represented all in white by just faces, hands, and one

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<sup>6</sup>Nicolas Calas and Elena Calas, Icons and Images of the Sixties (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1971), p. 98.

set of disconnected toes. The feeling is that not only are these figures sunbathers, but they are actually praying to the sun.

Marisol's constructions can be taken apart for moving. Her solid-looking cubes turn out to light and hollow, but reinforced from the inside. She always prepares her wood surfaces with preservative and uses Liquitex for the actual painting.

Marisol works with mixed media. The wood boxes she works with frequently are built of pine planks. Also, she works with mahogany, and various stones such as alabaster. In addition to using the regular sculptor's tools such as rasps, chisels, and files she uses power handsaws, power drills, and a power sander.

A description of what takes place when Marisol works:

Sometimes she starts from a shape without detail, but silhouetted in paint and jumps to a three-dimensional form from which she leads the eye to a form drawn in pencil. And drawing leads to painting, or a sculptured shape may merge with a rendering in trompe-l'oeil. She juggles with realities: the reality of illusion, the reality of tangible substance, the reality of the symbol.<sup>7</sup>

Even when confronted with a two-dimensional, surface Marisol applies her attitude of using her own body. She traces her own hand, arm, or foot if she wants a hand, arm, or foot. An impression of her body is made on a lithographic stone by coating it with oil and lying on it. With the lithograph she then adds outlining contours to suggest volume. The main purpose of this approach is to avoid what she calls "handwriting," whereas the

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<sup>7</sup>Campbell, "Marisol's Magic Mixtures," p. 39.

realist artist has conventionally been forced to use a personal style of line or brushwork. One of her prints called Catalpa Maiden About to Touch Herself represents leaves, pre-cut into bodily shapes serving as anatomical parts. The leaves are transferred directly to the stone and gain additional strength from gestural hatching. This print is one of the many prints, which has a bizarre relationship between found objects and human body parts. Another of her prints, Hand in Leaf, is of a leaf-textured hand grasping for a leaf.

## CONTRIBUTIONS

In 1961 Marisol first became familiar to a large audience due to her showing at the museum of Modern Art. In 1962 a show at the Stable Gallery furthered her reputation. A more recent show, which is important to Marisol, was her one woman show in 1971 at the Worcester Museum. Lawrence Campbell's review of her showing at the Museum of Modern Art:

Visitors to the Museum of Modern Art's "Assemblage" exhibition stopped to smile at the comic appearance of her From France, a wooden constru-beam enclosing two strange little figures. The heads with absurd hats popped out at the top, and the legs dropped from the bottom. One of the figures had only one leg. When one walked around it, the four-sidedness, which free-standing sculpture is supposed to have, was hinted at by two small, pink bottoms glued to the surface of the beam. It reminded one of the type of American rural humor in which people have their clothes stolen while in swimming and go home dressed in barrels.<sup>8</sup>

Marisol has various influences effecting her work. She has a primitive yet sophisticated vocabulary of the folk artist. Her images are puzzling, but communicate universally rather than locally. The Egyptians procedure for carving a figure out of a block was to first draw the figures front view and side view upon the surface. Marisol simply regards a hollow rectangle as the figure. Even so, she is influenced by Egyptian art such as the

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

heads in such pieces mentioned before as the Sun Bathers and Portrait of Sidney Janis Selling a Portrait of Sidney Janis by Marisol by Marisol. These heads are similar to Egyptian headdresses. It may be that Marisol is influenced by Picasso's work such as in Ionesco's Three-Nosed Fiance with her use of many profiles representing one head as in Four Women and Dog (figure 1). In the Pop tradition she uses identifiable artifacts. Strong patterns and modish styles also are a characteristic of Pop art. Jasper Johns made a strong impression upon Marisol with his, Target With Four Faces.<sup>9</sup> He also makes casts of human faces and incorporates them into his work. Marisol said of her early work that not until turning to sculpture did she find her true calling. Everything seemed so serious to her and through sculpture she was able to do something funny, Katherine Kuh says:

Delicate plaster hands, impassive wooden faces, an occasional painted area of elegance—these ingredients tell little or nothing about Marisol's work, about the pathos, irony and outrageous satire with which she invests her sculpture. Whether she designs a single figure or a large group, she invariably ends up with a biting comment on human foibles. That so young an artist has mature technical control seems less surprising than that she has something of her own to say. With fertile imagination Marisol transforms daily experiences into unexpected phenomena. No one has deflated human pomposity with greater insight.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Jasper Johns— American painter interested in forcing the viewer to readjust his responses. Began painting flags, targets, numbers, and alphabets. This was common imagery treated in such a way that the viewer was confused by such devices as painterly fracture, neutralization of color, and violation of flatness. Praeger Encyclopedia of Art, 1971 ed., s.v. "Jasper Johns."

<sup>10</sup>Dorothy Miller, American 1942-1963: Six Group Exhibitions, (New York: The Museum of Modern Art by Arno Press 1972), p. 68.

### A COMPARISON

The geometric quality of both Marisol Escobar's work and mine certainly reflects upon the subject matter whether it's use is intentional or not. A stiffness to her figures, is a result of, the squared off boxes they are built upon. The atmosphere, static with little or no movement. The figures appear to me like they are robots stopped. The erect posture of the seated women in Dinner Date (figure 3) does not seem natural. Somewhat, the geometrics, of my work, create a similar quality. This is particularly true in Salesperson I (figure 15). The center woman's hand is broken down to look almost like a mechanical device and stopped. Even so, the contrasting colors bouncing off each other create the movement, in my work.

Obviously the fact that I am comparing the geometrics of Marisol's sculpture with my two-dimensional work makes a major difference. Not only am I depicting figures, but also I show their surroundings. Whereas, Marisol is working three-dimensional and only suggests where the figures are situated as in Dinner Date (figure 3). The two women are sitting at a table. The rest is up to the viewers imagination. The squared off figure on the left side has a painted profile against a stenciled background. This

suggests there is wallpaper in the room they are sitting in. On the other hand, my figure's environment is precisely defined with geometric forms on the picture plane. In The Family (figure 4) Marisol does not leave the background to be defined by the imagination of the viewer as in other works. Here the box figures are incorporated into the stenciled background of the doors, which sit behind the figures.

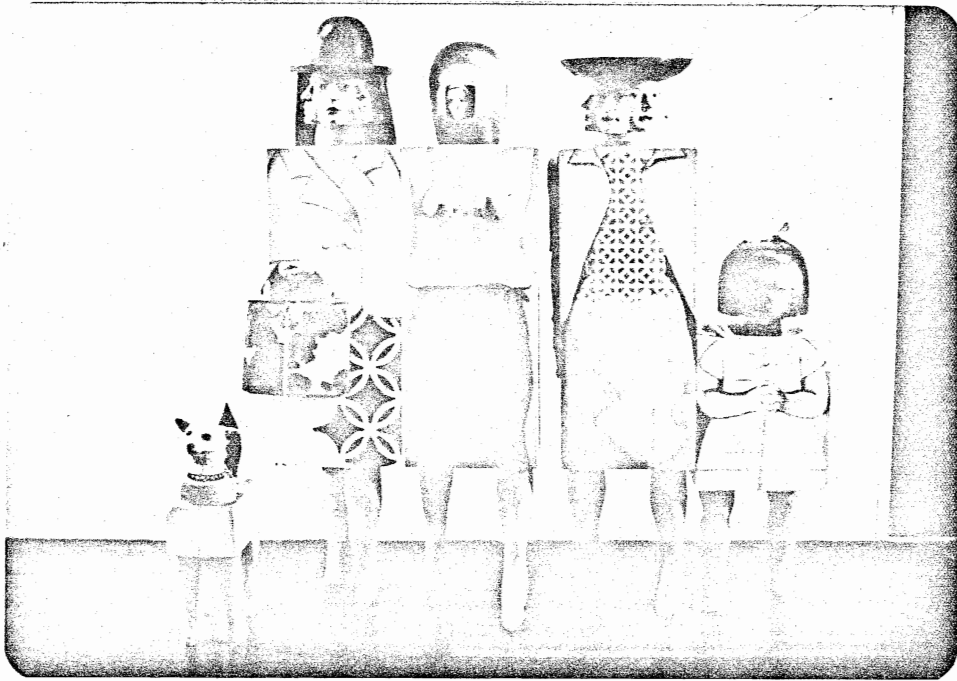
The composition, of both our work, is boldly defined through geometry. Repetition of the same size box shape figures in Four Women and Dog (figure 1) is simply stated. My use of repetition is much more complex. Salesperson II (figure 16) repeats many of the same shapes over and over, but they are somewhat altered by the play of colors. For instance, underneath the counter, there are major divisions. One really has to look to see them for all the objects sitting on the shelves distracts from these divisions. Balance in each of our compositions is done in a very sophisticated manner through geometry. The equality of weight is more obvious when breaking down the composition in geometric forms. In my piece, Beats Working In the Five-and-Ten I (figure 13) the larger forms in the left side foreground balance off the numerous objects behind the counter on the right side background. Again using the example of Four Women and Dog (figure 1) Marisol's use of balance here is superb. The rectangular base of the dog and square shaped purse balanced by the girl on the other side of the three women.



This is only one of the many things she has done to create balance with such a difficult group of figures.

Because Marisol works on so many surfaces in her sculpture there are many relations to my two-dimensional work. We both break down the figure into basic geometric shapes with only certain areas suggesting the three-dimensional quality of the figure. Baby Girl (figure 2) is broken down into very simple terms. The arms and hands are drawn upon the square base. The legs stick out like two elongated rectangles and the feet are suggested with shapes relating to baby's shoes. Her dress is suggested by a drawn ribbon in the front, a actual cloth ruffle, and puffy sleeves. Similarly, Waiting (figure 10) does this same thing. The figure is suggested and only defined by the face and hands. Thus, everything is not spelled out and, the viewers mind is forced to work. It's as though parts of the body are suggested in the average person's view point.

I feel Marisol's use of geometry is much more sophisticated than mine because her use of it is obvious and it implies more. there are similarities in our work, but I could not name any particular artist that has influenced the work of both of us equally. Marisol was influenced by Egyptian and Pop Art, whereas I feel closer to Art Nouveau and Japanese Art.

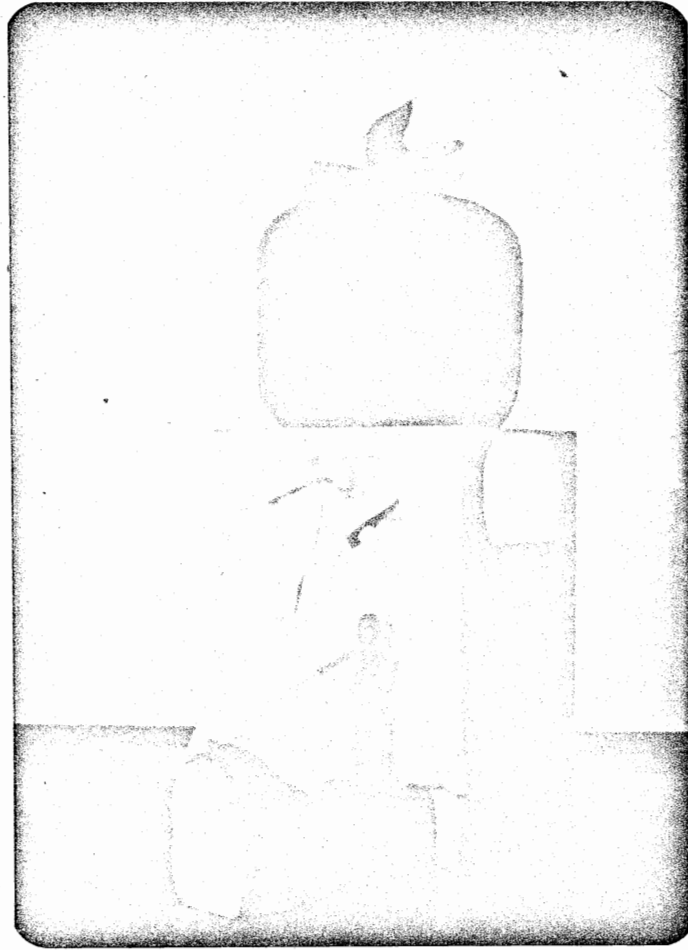


(figure 1)

MARISOL ESCOBAR

Four Women and Dog

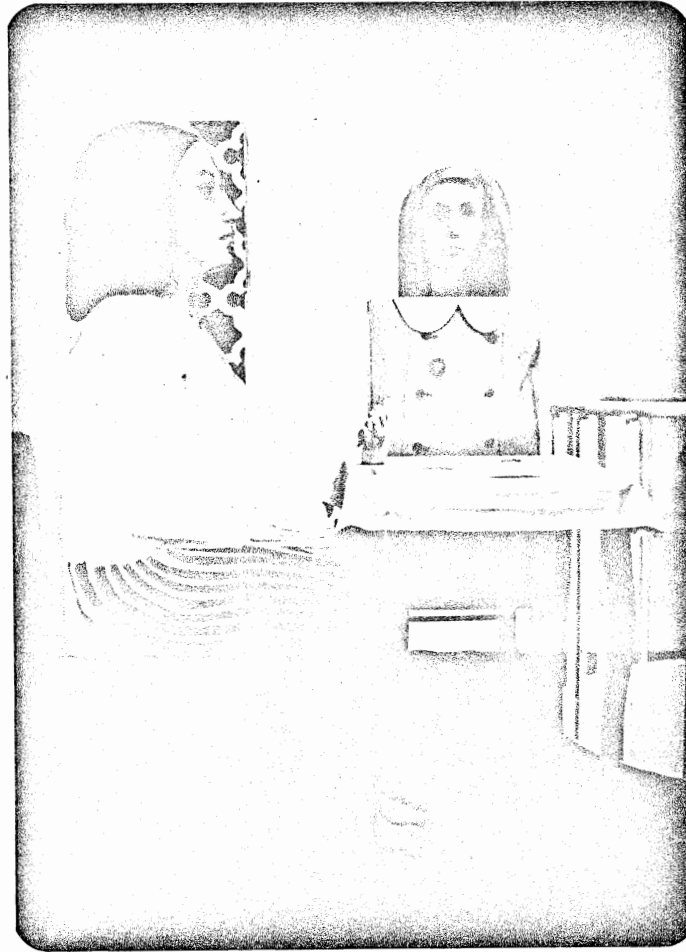
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(figure 2)

MARISOL ESCOBAR

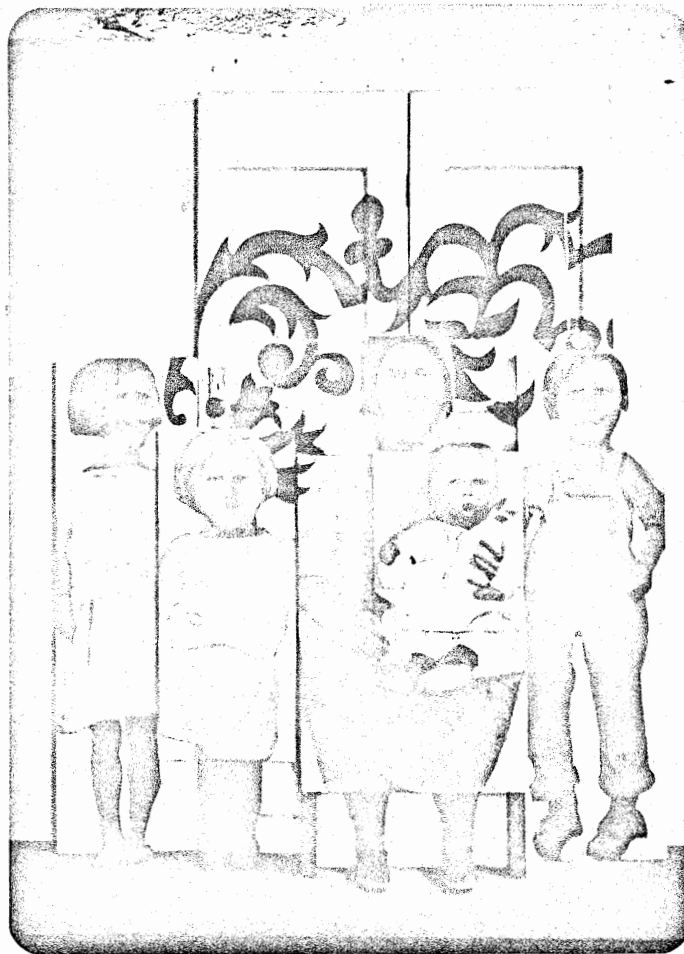
Baby Girl



(figure 3)

MARISOL ESCOBAR

Dinner Date



(figure 4)

MARISOL ESCOBAR

The Family

II

GEORGIA O'KEEFFE

SUBJECT MATTER

O'Keeffe's magic is a mixture of the awe at nature's power over man and the love of the physical objects of nature as flowers, plants, and bones. Her traditional theme is the close, realistic, examination of a single isolated natural object taken from the everyday world and placed within imaginative contexts of the grandeur and vastness of the American landscape. An example of her work, the subject a blanched skull, is Cow Skull With Calico Roses (figure 6). Her gigantic flowers as Black Iris (figure 5) seem especially suggestive where she reveals the sensuality and dramatizes their lushness through a close-up view. Yet, O'Keeffe's sensuality is ambiguous always remaining poised with colors of mystical and oriental sensitivity. A statement by O'Keeffe is that sexuality is not her intent:

Well, I made you take time to look at what I say and when you took time to really notice my flower you hung all your own associations with flowers on my flower and you write about my flowers as if I think and see what you think and see of the flower--and I don't.<sup>1</sup>

Frequently in her early work a flower was enlarged until its identity

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<sup>1</sup>"Art Across the U.S.A.," Apollo, January 1971, pp. 63-4.

was lost with the pistil filling the entire canvas. These enlarged flowers became abstract compositions with rhythmic line and bold arrangements of color. However, her subject matter of various natural forms as the flower become clearly recognizable in her later work. Whether the form is recognizable or not she transforms commonplace experiences of her love for nature and the land, strongly expressed in her paintings, with clear and elegant patterns. Her work is always based upon visual reality even though there is some simplification of form.

From the beginning O'Keeffe established a play between abstraction and representation of which her drawing Blue Lines 1916 is typical. Through severe reduction she forces the natural subject to conform to the formal demands of abstraction. During the twenties she fluctuated between total abstraction and straightforward representation. Abstraction 1926, is more non-objective. However, works such as Closed Clam Shell 1926 and Black Iris 1926 (figure 5) are a precise representation. Throughout O'Keeffe's career she has often produced a series of paintings on one theme as the Jack-in-the-Pulpit series. This consists of a motif of six pictures in succession transforming from a relatively naturalistic portrayal of the plant to semiabstraction in the final representation while still retaining the character of the form.

Sky Above Clouds IV 1965 is one work based upon a series O'Keeffe did of cloud formations. With these cloud paintings we

do not picture ourselves in relation to looking at something rather we are forced to project ourselves imaginatively. She gives the viewer the sensation of floating and seeing clouds and sky as what the bird sees when flying. A similar sensation is experienced with Monet's water lily paintings where the viewer feels as if he is floating along with the lily pads:<sup>2</sup>

The greater immediacy gained by placing the sensation of movement within the viewer's own body has a great deal in common with certain advances made by Monet in his late water lily paintings. In these paintings the absence of a horizon line forces us to perceive the view as if we were floating along with the lily pads. When Pollock, who studied Monet's paintings closely, spoke of being "in" his paintings, he referred also to this sensation of a physical projection of the body into the painting space.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Claude Monet- Landscape painter of the French Impressionist group. He developed a broken-color technique and is notable for applying his method to "series" paintings of the same subject under changing light conditions. Encyclopedia of Painting, 1970 ed., s.v. "Claude Monet."

<sup>3</sup>Barbara Rose, "Georgia O'Keeffe: The Painting of the Sixties." Art Forum, November 1970, p. 44.



### COMPOSITION

In the Sky Above Clouds series O'Keeffe successfully creates a sense of rhythmic flow and movement. The use of whites, a translucent palette, the absence of cast shadows, and the avoidance of sharp angles or hard linear contours all give the impression that light is suffused from within rather than focussed on forms from a source outside the paintings. There are four paintings to this series beginning with the first clouds which are smallest in size, relatively realistic and freely painted. In the next three paintings the clouds are gradually refined, the cloud shapes are more individual, and the number of clouds becomes more numerous. In the intermediate second and third phases of the cloud series the impression of what we view is gradually receding from us by overlapping of clouds in the foreground and the reduction of scale in the clouds. The series comes to a climax in the large twenty-four foot wide mural. Here she achieves an overwhelming sense of great distance and serene limitless space. Above the clouds appears a strip of clear blue and rose sky.

Each painting of O'Keeffes is a individual creation except when working deliberately in a series. In 1924 she began painting

magnified single flowers as Black Iris (figure 5). The magnification reveals the structure of the flower with complete clarity. This approach to presenting a flower is another kind of abstraction and separates it from ordinary reality. O'Keeffe's explanation for painting flowers:

'A flower is relatively small," she wrote in 1939. "Everyone has many associations with a flower--the idea of flowers. You put out your hand to touch the flower--lean forward to smell it--maybe touch it with your lips almost without thinking--or give it to someone to please them. Still--in a way--nobody sees a flower--really--it is so small--we haven't time--and to see takes time like to have a friend takes time. If I could paint the flower exactly as I see it no one would see what I see because I would paint it small like the flower is small.

"So I said to myself--I'll paint what I see--what the flower is to me but I'll paint it big and they will be surprised into taking time to look at it--I will make even busy New Yorkers take time to see what I see of flowers.<sup>4</sup>

In the six paintings representing her Jack-in-the-Pulpit series each painting is not merely a repetition, but presents a new concept. Her portrayal of the image is large, bold with colors of deep grayed purple and strong greens. The first painting of the series is relatively naturalistic, the second is an enlarged close-up view, and the third is a simplification of the jack-in-the-pulpit. The fourth goes on to combine simplification with magnifying the plant. Number five is completely different expanding into abstraction only holding onto the original form of the plant and colors used. It has a powerful swirling movement to it. Number six is just the pistil of the flower.

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<sup>4</sup>Doris Bry and Lloyd Goodrich, Georgia O'Keeffe (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970), pp. 17-18.

## CONTRIBUTIONS

With a spirit that simply appears to have been born modern, Georgia O'Keeffe is a unique figure in contemporary American art. There is a consistent unity to her work which has continued to grow and evolve. To compare her early work with recent, one finds the same control with originality and freshness. She is unafraid to express her experiences in simple terms with sophistication and directness. From the beginning she had developed an interest in Japanese art with its simple forms and bold patterning. Also having a appreciation of negative areas around forms are part of her natural ability as a modernist. It was working with Arthur Dow that she could break away from a academic background.<sup>5</sup> He taught her to think of color and design as abstract elements expressing her own ideas and emotions. Her feeling of expressing herself naturally:

'One day she placed all her pictures around her room, locked the door, and studied them. She saw that every work showed the influence of someone else. "I realized that I had a lot of things in my head that others didn't have," she had said. I made up my mind to put down what was in my head.'<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Arthur Dow- One of the few sophisticated American art educators of his time rejecting realism and based his system on the principles of design as he interpreted them in Far Eastern art; flat patterning, simplification, harmony. He had spent years abroad, had Gauguin at Pont Aven, and through the Orientalist Ernest Fenollosa had become an ardent admirer of Japanese and Chinese Art. Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

O'Keeffe's Sky Above Clouds series painted in isolation at her adobe home high on a plateau in the hills of New Mexico are of the most sophisticated abstract paintings of the sixties. It is believed these paintings will endure when the media favorites of today have long faded. Along with such artists as Demuth, Dove, Hartley, and Marin, O'Keeffe was a pioneer of native modern art over fifty years ago. Stieglitz, who at the time was running his 291 Gallery in New York, showed her work for the first time in 1916. Stieglitz was the first to show work of many European modernists in this country. He also believed strongly in the future of American art and promoted certain young artists as Georgia O'Keeffe. Along with almost yearly showings with Stieglitz, O'Keeffe had other shows as the retrospective at the Brooklyn Museum in 1927, a major exhibition in Chicago in 1943, and a large show at the Museum of Modern Art in 1946. Considering the exposure she had to the growth of abstract art in America her paintings are not influenced and remain remarkably personal. The relationships one sees between her work and other abstract artists of the time is too fluting to be valid. An example would be the occasional attempt to put Surrealism into works as her Ladder to the Moon 1958 or some of the animal skull paintings. Her work has no fundamental connection with the subconscious processes of Surrealism.

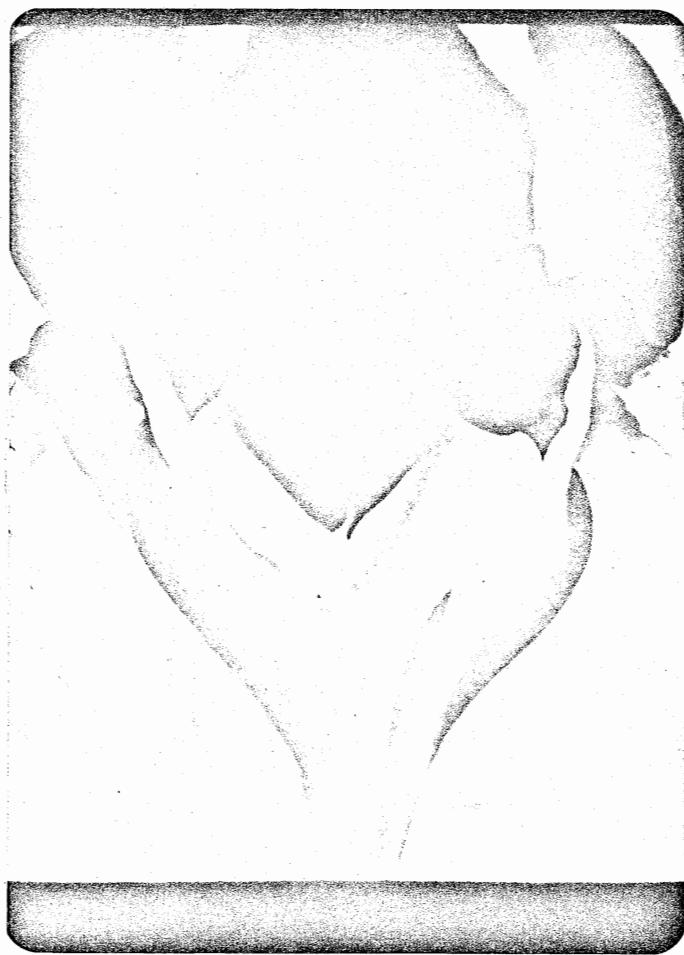
## A. COMPARISON

The subject matter of Georgia O'Keeffe's work and my own is very different. I work figuratively, whereas her images are organic. Her subjects are isolated in contrast to my figures which fit into defined environments. There is little or no use of geometry, except obvious symmetry, in her work which consist mostly of flowing forms. So the strong geometric quality of my work has little similarity to her style. Both O'Keeffe and I work abstractly, but her work is much more plastic while mine is flat. In, our own way, both of us abstract the subject to a point. The object can still be recognized. For example, her Black Iris (figure 5) is a close up view of the iris, which she simplifies. The iris is painted in a realistic manner, but the close up view point obscures what the form is. In O'Keeffe's Cow Skull With Calico Roses (figure 6) again the unusual close up view of the skull certainly puts new meaning into the object. My method of abstraction is to break down objects into geometric forms as in Salesperson II (figure 16) demanding closer observation. Both forms of abstraction make the viewer think. Neither of us totally define a theme in a realistic manner.

O'Keeffe uses a gradual variation in tone with slight contrasts and shading. My color is much more striking and bold

having some gradual variations within color areas. The black and grays of the male figure's coat in Beats Working In the Five-and-Ten I (figure 13) is an example of this although these still just represent similar colors in definite areas next to each other, instead of the bold contrasts.

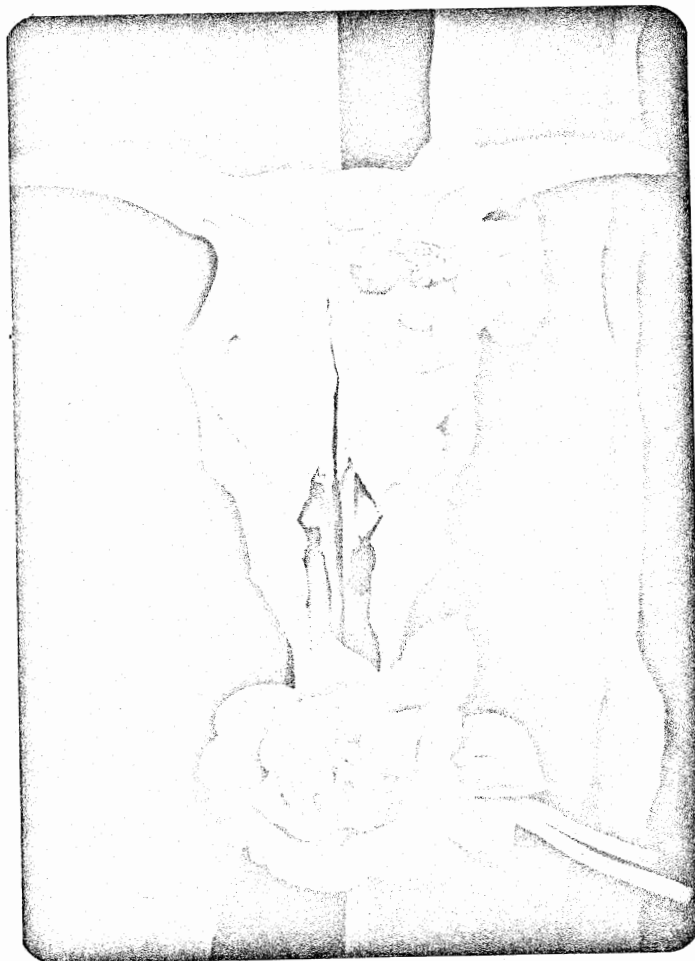
Occasionally I will find a slight use of geometry in O'Keeffe's compositions. An example Cow Skull With Calico Roses (figure 6) has a definite vertical black strip running behind the skull. This strip balances off the strong horizontal movement created by the horns of the skull. Both of us have relations of Japanese art to our work. The use of flat areas and allowing objects to flow off pages reflect this.



(figure 5)

GEORGIA O'KEEFFE

Black Iris



(figure 6)

GEORGIA O'KEEFFE

Cow Skull With Calico Roses



### III

MARY CASSATT

#### SUBJECT MATTER

As a member of the Impressionist's group Mary Cassatt's work is stylistic. Primarily a figure rather than a landscape painter her imagery is unique within the context of the Impressionists. Cassatt's art offers a vision of everyday bourgeois life limiting herself to depicting primarily the domestic, feminine world. The subject with which she is so popularly identified and, which consists of nearly a third of her production, is that, of the mother and child. A typical example is, Emmie and Her Child (figure 7). Often her models were close friends and relatives, but her preference was simple peasant women for models. She felt these women brought a straightforwardness and originality to these pictures, thus saving her from the over sentimentality of this subject. The intimate relationship between mother and child was more believable with peasant women, who had complete care of their babies. On the other hand the more worldly women delegated most of the child's care to nursemaids. A writer in the Century Magazine, March,

1899, says:

'Of the colony of American artists, who for a decade or two past have made Paris their home few have been more interesting and none more serious than Miss Cassatt....Miss Cassatt has found her true bent in her recent pictures of children and in the delineation of happy maternity. These she has portrayed with delicacy, refinement, and sentiment. Her technique appeals equally to the layman and the artist, and her color has all the tenderness and charm that accompanies so engaging a motif.<sup>1</sup>

Mary Cassatt often posed her models outdoors as in the painting Picking Flowers In a Field. This landscape is the most beautiful of the few she painted. Still, she has concentrated her attention on the small child in the foreground, who is gathering poppies, iris, and Queen Anne's Lace. This composition was inspired by the works of Monet, Renoir, and Sisley through the use of bright color, brushwork, as well as the subject. The vigorous brushwork conveys the impression of a fresh, spontaneously observed, scene certainly painted in the field. Another subject of hers is centered around the theater as in At the Opera. Here Cassatt shows a woman, whose attention is taken by events on stage she is observing through opera glasses. Rather than facing the viewer the subject is shown in side view. The auditorium is darkened and the probability that she is attending an afternoon matinee is suggested by her dark business-like street dress. However, another of her paintings of this subject gives a very different feel to the theater as in

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<sup>1</sup>Clara Erskine Clement, Women In the Fine Arts (New York: Hacker Art Books, 1974), p. 77.

The Loge. Here the young woman in evening dress whose figure dominates the canvas faces the viewer. The painting is vibrant defining the distant background with rows of tiny heads. One can sense her solid draftsmanship with which she skillfully interprets the true gesture of flesh and costume. There is a strong Japanese element to her work as in the painting The Bath (figure 8). This Japanese influence is even more definite in The Letter where the model even appears to have oriental features.

It is often said of Mary Cassatt that by painting the theme of mother and child over and over she received a kind of maternal compensation. Consciously or unconsciously she may have regretted not having children of her own. This analysis, however, maybe misleading for both Cassatt and Degas limited themselves to certain subjects.

Degas states his feeling of repetition upon a theme in the following:

'...it is essential to do the same subject over again, ten times, a hundred times. Nothing in art must seem to be chance not even movement.'<sup>2</sup>

Mary Cassatt joined the Impressionists group in 1877 when asked by Degas. This group was formed because the Salon consistently rejected their innovative work. Her response to this invitation:

'I accepted with joy. Now I could work with absolute independence without considering the opinion of a jury. I had already recognized who were my true masters. I admired Manet, Courbet, and Degas. I took leave of conventional art. I began to live.'<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>John Bullard, Mary Cassatt Oils and Pastels (New York: Watson-Guption Publications, 1973), pp. 15-16.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 13.

### COMPOSITION

The emotional unity is felt by the mother and child in Mary Cassatt's painting Emmie and Her Child (figure 7). A tight unified group is found by placing the baby's small hand upon the mother's two hands. One of the mother's hands grasps her own wrist, while the other grasps the child's thigh. The heads and limbs of the two figures stand out against their dress and the background. The color scheme is limited within shades of brown, red, and white. The broadly brushed flowered dress of the woman provides the only pattern to the composition. The white in the garment of the baby is repeated with the pitcher in the background.

With the feeling of hovering over the figures, a type of oriental perspective, the scene of The Bath (figure 8) is observed from above. The interaction of the woman and child creates interlocking gesture. The two shades are connected by the diagonal of the child's arm and leg. Also the woman's hand holds the child's foot along with the touching of hands at the knee. Each form in this painting is defined by strong contours. With color the composition is divided into two major sections. One section is the general area of the figure, made up of pinks and white. The other section is the surrounding red and green of the carpet and background.

The painting contains many rich patterns especially the broadly striped dress, which stresses the child's body against it. Other patterns are of the flowered wallpaper, the painted chest, and the geometric rug. The large pitcher in the foreground pins down the composition and acts as a focal point.

In 1892 Mary Cassatt did a mural for the Women's Building of the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition. Unfortunately the mural was lost and only a vague idea of its appearance is left by some photographs. It is believed that her painting Baby Reaching For An Apple is closely related and may have been a study for a background figure in the mural's central panel. The center of the mural was entitled Young Women Plucking the Fruits of Knowledge and Science. The scene showed women and children picking apples. Again the models used in the mural as well as the painting, Baby Reaching For An Apple were farm girls. She dressed them up in expensive gowns and felt they were the only women that could properly hold a baby. The center of interest in the painting is the coming together of the child's and women's hands reaching for the apple. Also the weight and pressure of the baby on the woman's arm is convincingly rendered. A severely limited color scheme of green and pink creates a definite contrast.

The figure fills nearly half of the canvas in Girl Arranging Her Hair (figure 9). The firm modeling of the form and the cool whiteness of her cotton chemise contrasts with the warmth of the

background. The palette has been restricted primarily to white, lavender, and shades of rose and brown. Cassatt's young girl has a definite personality and seems unobserved while absent mindedly coiling her hair. Her left elbow is high and a continuous S-curve is formed from the head to the lower hand holding the braid.

Mary Cassatt often depicted her older sister Lydia in her works as Lydia In a Loge, Wearing a Pearl Necklace. She is posed before a mirror, which reflects the interior of the opera house with bright lights and vivid colors. Similarly is a pastel version again of Lydia at the opera called Lydia Leaning On Her Arms, Seated In a Loge. The light has a shimmering effect over richly colored surfaces concentrating upon the performance the figure leans forward.

As in Cassatt's painting Susan On a Balcony Holding a Dog she often dressed her models in white. The changing light caused subtle variations in color of the cloth. The luminosity and transparency in the flesh tones, as the effect of daylight upon her face filtered through her hat are achieved by layering different colors.

Again Lydia is depicted in Woman and Child Driving. This large oil achieves the intimacy of a snapshot with its severely cropped composition reflecting her influence of Japanese prints. The three figures of the woman and two children are concentrated in the right half of the picture. A linear pattern crosses the canvas from right to left with the curve of the carriage, the harness, and

reins tying the composition together.

Again Cassatt's influence of Japanese prints is evident in the painting The Boating Party. This is reflected with the simplicity of composition and elimination of much details. Having the male model's back to the viewers, in the foreground, with his arm straight forms an angle with the oar pointing directly at the baby. Also, the curves of the boat's sides and the point of the sail directs attention to the child, which is the center of the composition. The interacting glances of mother and child with the man who stares back connects the foreground and background along with the line formed by the arms of the man and the woman and the top edge of the sail. Sharp contours define the figures and parts of the boat, which are all separate units.

Mary Cassatt also produced a number of outstanding prints. She was profoundly influenced by Japanese prints with their flat decorative colors, strong line, and beautiful designs. Originally, Degas persuaded her to develop her drawing and to do this she must draw on copper. She chose to draw directly from the model excluding all trickery and inexactitude. Not satisfied drawing with a pencil; instead she chose to use metal and steel point so that the plate would hold every trace of her mistakes or corrections. Cassatt used soft-ground, rather than straight etching, with aquatint in her early prints. This medium was natural to her, which she gradually developed. It was

closely related to her painting for she used it largely as a tonal process. For her later drawing she found drypoint more of a discipline for recording the live model.



### CONTRIBUTIONS

Mary Cassatt the only American of the original group sharing the revolutionary ideals of Degas, Monet, Pissarro and others. They proclaimed the individual artist's right to choose subject matter and expression, exhibiting free from restrictions set by the official French Academy. She was generally considered a pupil of Degas, who most importantly introduced her to new pictorial possibilities offered by Japanese prints and photography. Between 1881 and 1889 Cassatt reached her artistic maturity under the immediate impact of Degas. She did not produce an especially large body of work even though she was a conscientious artist. Between 1868 and 1914 she produced 617 oils and pastels plus 225 prints. Cassatt played a key role in building several important private collections, which would eventually enrich American museums.

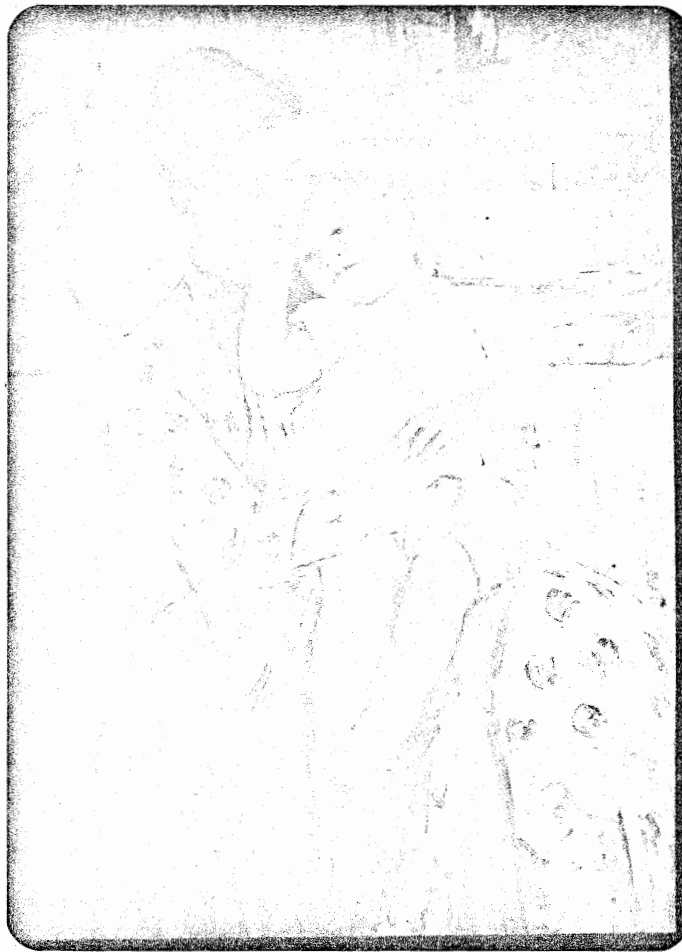
## A COMPARISON

Mary Cassatt's work is figurative and personable. My work, tends to obscure meaning, although using a figurative base. There are many geometric qualities to Cassatt's work, but done in a unobvious manner. She conveys much more detail, a point I would like to depict realism. Her style is to simplify and some parts of the painting almost to a flat effect as in Emmie and Her Child (figure 7). The strong pattern of the woman's dress is vague in the lower left corner not to distract from the subject matter, which is the interaction of mother and child. Everything in her work is carefully set up and thought out in advance. My work is extremely simplified compared to her work. The basic geometric forms I use overwhelm the subject matter. Her use of geometry is only suggested.

I tend to see Cassatt's Emmie and Her Child (figure 7) as set up upon a grid. Behind the figures are some horizontal lines created by the table. The lines are balanced off by the vertical back of the chair and the vertical position of the mother. These major divisions are basically flat geometric areas. She only suggests what these areas are again not to distract from the figures. My work is set upon obvious and bold grids. In works like Beats Working In the Five-and-Ten I (figure 13) I built the composition around the interaction

of the two figures, but the eye still tends to move around the picture plane not really settling upon the figures as in Cassatt's paintings. Cassatt's subject matter throughout her paintings is much more obvious. My intent is to play down my geometric quality and bring out the subject further in future paintings.

My work and Cassatt's is directly related to Japanese art. This is to evolve composition related to the Japanese practice of flat areas and forms running off the edges. The Japanese element is particularly evident in The Bath (figure 8) by an aerial view. The figures are presented as if looking down.



(figure 7)

MARY CASSATT

Emmie and Her Child



(figure 8)

MARY CASSATT

The Bath



(figure 9)

MARY CASSATT

Girl Arranging Her Hair

IV

CYNTHIA STANSIL

SUBJECT MATTER

The strong geometric quality of my painting often dominates the subject matter. From the first, I have been very much interested in the figure, which I place in various environments. The decorative quality almost overwhelm's the figures as in the two paintings Waiting (figure 10) and Fly Sisters (figure 11), representing my early work of 1973. Overall, my work is flat with some areas slightly three-dimensional such as the faces. As a whole, the compositions are divided into definite contour areas with a play of color between each section. These extreme color changes from section to section bounce off each other and create contrast. I have a tendency to handle the figure in the same geometrical, manner as everything else. An extreme example of this is my Salesperson I (figure 15), where the main center figure has almost a robot quality to it. I like to use brilliant, vivid colors with black accents.

I have done a series of paintings centered around the idea of women working. My idea was to depict women in the average

position held by women today. These jobs include salespersons, waitresses, and secretaries. Another one of my goals, for this series, was a experiment with technique. I would like to evolve my painting to a more sophisticated end with much more detail. By leaning more towards realism I feel I can get more meaning in my subject matter. When drawing a subject, the result is much more detailed. I have a tendency to simplify the subject in oil. My goal, is to develop more skill in handling oil paints and portray the subject with much more detail in the media. In the first attempt at each of these situations of women working I used watercolor. My ability to handle watercolor is more precise as evident in Beats Working In the Five-and-Ten I (figure 13), Salesperson I (figure 15), and Secretary I (figure 17). I felt that if I attempted the subject in a media over which I had more control the second attempt in oil would already have be planned out. Working rather small on a picture plane of (22"x30") in both the watercolor and oil paintings, my first attempt at the subject was the same size as the second. The result of this entire experiment was somewhat successful, and I did reach further detail with the oil paintings. I feel my painting Portrait (figure 12) leans more toward this goal of realism with oil as the media. Here the geometric style persists, but realism is dominant. My work displays the unconscious tendency I have to perceive things differently. My



point of view, when observing the environment, is to put things in order and geometric forms such as circles, squares, ect., enable me to do this. For example in the painting Beats Working In the Five-and-Ten I (figure 13), which was derived from a scene in a dreary five-and-ten store, I seemed to have made it into some fantastic place. Everything has been ordered into simplified geometric shapes and the use of bright colors create a lively atmosphere. People and their lives fascinate me and I want to paint them in the manner that expresses my feelings about them.

## COMPOSITION

My paintings force the viewer to "dance" through the composition. I build the subject matter never allowing the decorative element to dominate. I paint the main figure first making sure it is the dominant aspect.

In my early painting Waiting (figure 10) creating a sense of depth was my goal. This was achieved through an overlapping effect. The figure of the woman holding a handkerchief, done mostly in red, exhibits strong linear contrasts of black and white. This overall red of the figure is quite bold against the golden background as looking at a sunset through a grove of darkened trees. The composition almost seems set upon a grid with sharp horizontal lines of light blue, black, and red.

Fly Sisters (figure 11), an oil painting, done the same time as the previous painting is quite similar. The two women are sitting in a carriage, seen from a low angle. Most of the canvas is taken up by these two figures, which are very close to each other. Here, I have used a variation of pinks with bold black areas. For a bit of accent, mossy green represents the trees in the background. The definite areas of color are flat, but on a whole the composition does have a sense of depth. The faces of the two women are shaded from the sun by their umbrella.

The first painting of the women's series I did was Beats Working In the Five-and-Ten I (figure 13). The strong geometric forms of the articles, are obvious, simplified into circles, rectangles, with just a suggestion of what they represent. There is a interaction of the salesperson with the customer, who is reaching into his pocket. The store is crowded with merchandise and a sense of depth is created from foreground, to middleground of the customer, and background of the salesperson behind the counter receiving currency. In the oil version of this same picture (figure 14) some of the articles have been eliminated. The color is more vivid and the accents of darks stand out more. The figures in the oil version fit more into the decorative scheme than in the watercolor.

There is a similar outcome to the oil and watercolor attempts with Salesperson I and II (figure 15 and 16). The watercolor is broken up into many more areas and details. The oil again has much more simplification and brighter colors. The main figure of the woman behind the candy counter in the watercolor, has a hand like a robot where she grasps the candy and puts it into bags; another woman on the right handside peers over the high counter. There is a sense of perspective as the main line of the counter recedes into space and a smaller figure is represented in the background. A shadow from the candy counter appears upon the floor before the main figure. This is even cut off at an extreme angle rather than

gradually fading as shadows do. The store is crowded with articles even underneath the counter, which are all simplified into geometric shapes with different colors playing off each other.

The subject of the secretary (figure 17 and 18) reveal the isolation and distance created by sitting behind a desk. Purposely, I left a lot of open space on the right hand side for often this job revolves around a room, which is rather blank. Even the plants sitting behind the figure are represented by their main contour lines. A sense of movement is created by the plants, which is a nice variation to the straight lines. The play between colors is soft grays, orange, and yellows.

## CONTRIBUTIONS

My painting is developing into a very unique and exciting style. Hopefully, my insight into subjects as women working and others will be developed even further and I will be able to get across my feelings on a canvas, even more so, in the future. Most artist's goal is to have a universal language, which can be communicated to all walks of life. I paint about my life in an articulate manner for I have been a secretary, waitress, and I have stood behind a counter and sold merchandise.

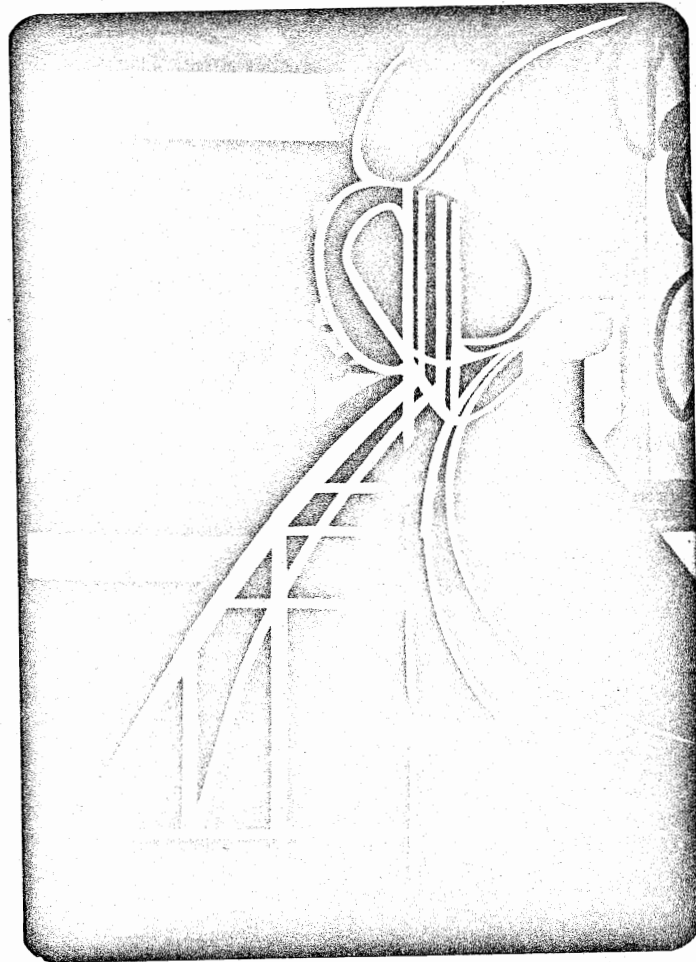
I feel my geometric style just comes out naturally and a direct intent of its use is not predetermined. I do not think of myself as having been influenced by any particular artist, but I have found relationships between various works and my own. In particular, the break down of the picture plane into definite defined areas is similar in the work of Lyonel Feininger.<sup>1</sup>

Japanese art is related to mine with flat areas and the way figures and

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<sup>1</sup>Lyonel Feininger- American born painter whose work is generally related to the Munich Blue Rider school. His relationship to the Blue Rider group may be seen in the generally lyrical character of his space penetrations; designed as creators of mood and as a means of breaking through surface reality toward an underlying truth. Encyclopedia of Painting, 1970 ed., s. v. "Lyonel Feininger!"

objects run off the page. Art Nouveau based upon organic flowing forms in a linear manner is another relation. Gustav Klimt, an artist of the Art Nouveau movement, has many similarities to my work. First of all, he often portrays women, his decorative quality covers the entire canvas, and the figure is only defined by such exposed areas as the face and hands, in a somewhat three-dimensional manner.



(figure 10)

CYNTHIA STANSIL

Waiting



(figure 11)

CYNTHIA STANSIL

Fly Sisters

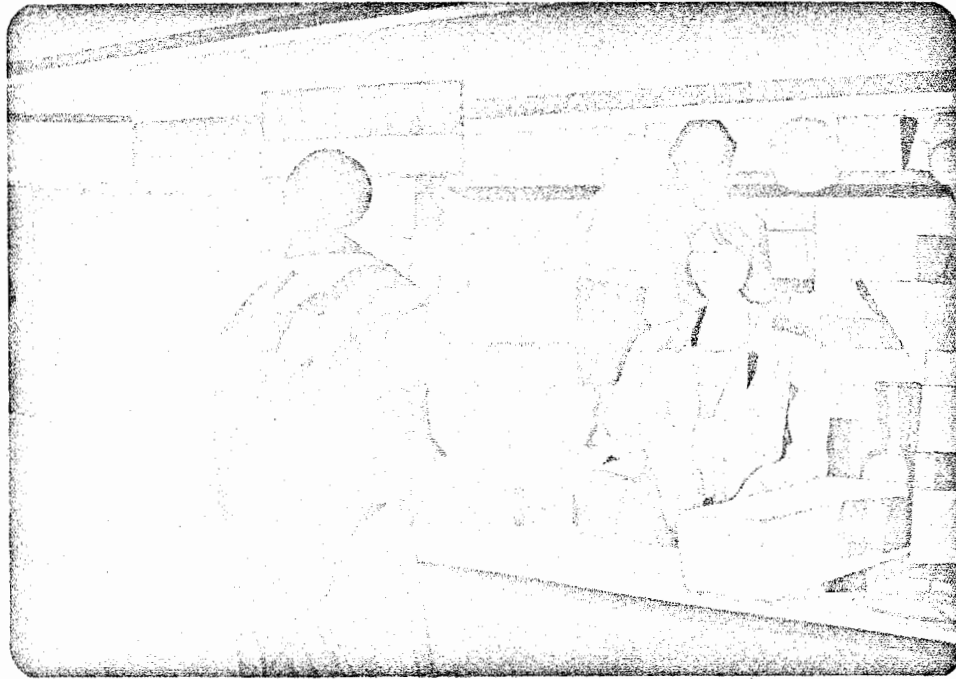




(figure 12)

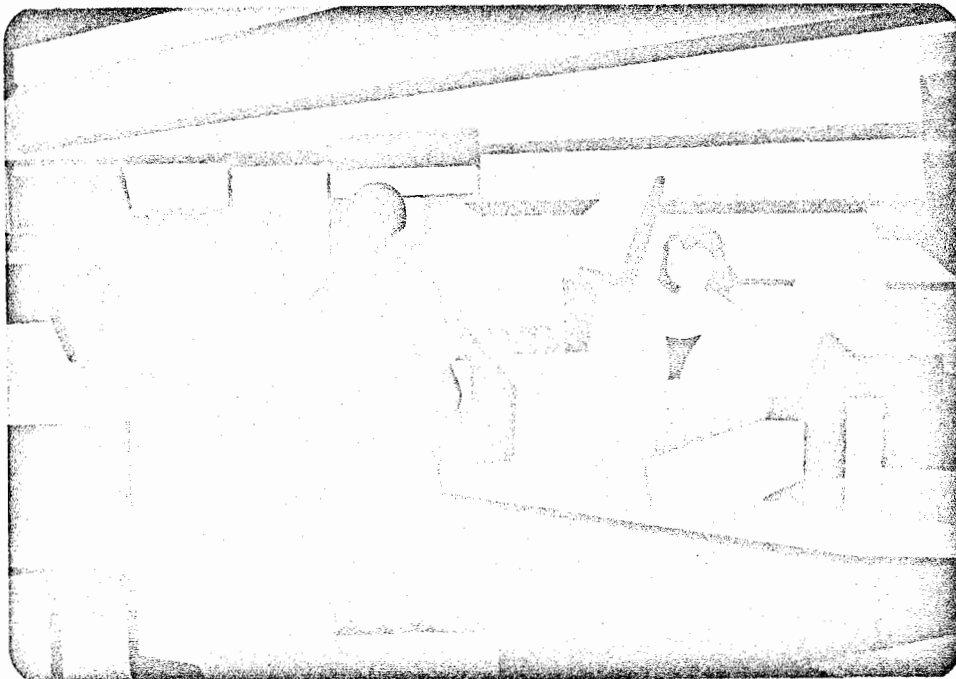
CYNTHIA STANSIL

Portrait



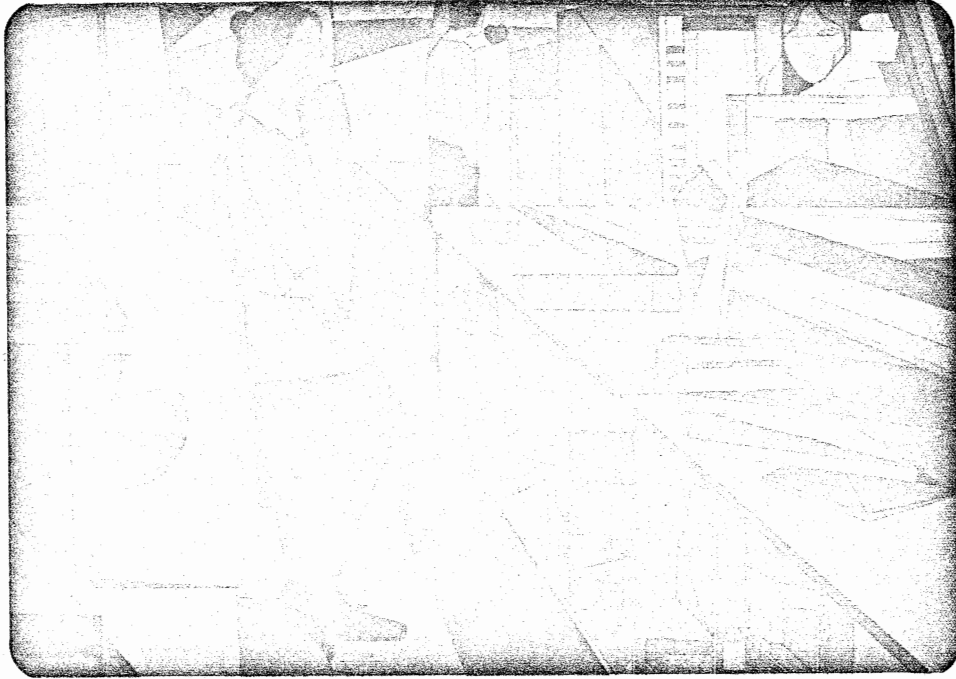
(figure 13)

Beats Working In the Five-and-Ten I



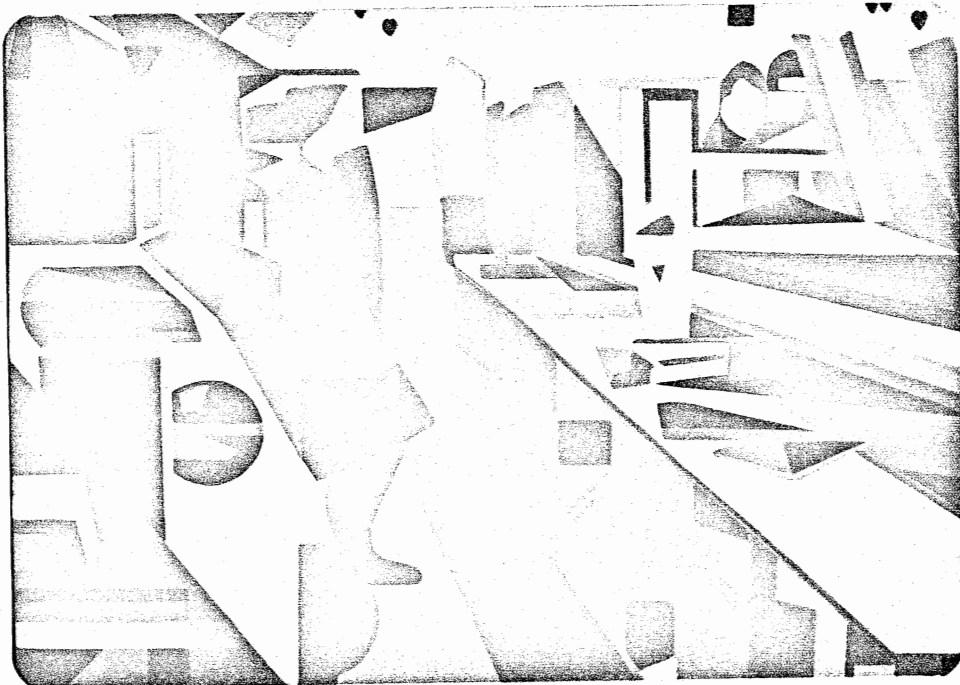
(figure 14)

Beats Working In the Five-and-Ten II



(figure 15)

Salesperson I



(figure 16)

Salesperson II



(figure 17)

Secretary I



(figure 18)

Secretary II

### CONCLUSION

The work of Marisol Escobar, Georgia O'Keeffe, Mary Cassatt, and Cynthia Stansil has been presented. Each has struggled and worked to develop a unique point of view. Much has been said about each by only speaking of their work and one can draw conclusions relative to the type of person each is without knowing anything about their personal lives. Certainly each is a dynamic, sensitive person to have created such bold imagery in an articulate manner.

As far as my own work is concerned I have learned a great deal by researching these three artists. I feel my objectives of this thesis have been accomplished. I have discussed the work of three well known women artists. Also I have discussed my own work and development. Through comparisons to each of the other artists I have made new insights into my work.

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