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Perspectives on Consciousness-Raising:
A Modernist Intersectional Feminist Agenda

By: Ariana Cacoulidis

A thesis submitted in conformity
with the requirements for the
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Perspectives on Consciousness-Raising:
A Modernist Intersectional Feminist Agenda

By: Ariana Cacoulidis

My thesis objective is to extend women's understanding of the palpable second-wave feminist term, "consciousness-raising," and its applications through curating a fictitious exhibition. My fabricated exhibition "Great Women Artists: Consciousness-Raising among Intersectional Feminists" will juxtapose the works of iconic feminist artists who practiced consciousness-raising with emerging and iconic female artists to advocate consciousness-raising's applicability for practicing women artists. Curating "Great Women Artists" will support the idea of raising a female class consciousness via mass consciousness-raising. I will utilize the voices of iconic second-wave feminists, such as Kathie Sarachild, who have discussed consciousness-raising's impacts and supported the founding female class consciousness of feminist artists. Meanwhile, female class consciousness is rooted in the Marxist idea of ego and economic duality; male-representation's dominance only exists with the subjugation of female artists. Raising a female class consciousness would acknowledge women artists' lack of diversified representation in the male-dominated art world. Feminist artists may adapt consciousness-raising as a tool to elevate suppressed thoughts and feelings to change the dominant male visual practices, mutually draw conclusions, and command political activism, demanding institutional representation of women artists. If contemporary women artists practiced consciousness-raising in small intimate groups of women, they would uniquely contribute to modernism and create an essential dialogue between diverse women artists demanding intersectional women's art representation.

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Ariana.

Introduction

In the fall of 1967, a group of daring, independent young women craved a female revolution. They coalesced in New York City's Lower East Side to investigate modern-day woes of society and womanhood.¹ Primarily in their twenties, this troop consisted of legendary feminists, including Shulamith Firestone and Pamela Allen. Early members such as Carol Hanisch, Robin Morgan, and Kathie Sarachild united privately, away from their suspecting husbands, partners, families, and housework. In an oral history of New York Radical Women, writer Joy Press details the reciprocities between their voices and the savagely polarized political movements in the era of Black Power and the Vietnam War.² These womens' discussions echoed the potential for the power they felt within themselves and the brewing political revolutions at that time.³ Their group name, New York Radical Women (NYRW), would go down in history as having shaken New York to its core through its demands for a feminist agenda enacted by well-educated women. Feminists scholars recognize these women as signature pioneers of modern feminism through their voices and actions.

The NYRW conceived of radical concepts associated with the development of early second-wave feminism. Members empowered each other through confidential "consciousness-raising" sessions and mottos such as "sisterhood is powerful" and "the personal is political."⁴ Among various expressions coined by NYRW, "consciousness-raising" stands out. Judith Weston, NYRW, asserted consciousness-raising had such a significant impact that, "If you said

¹ Joy Press, "The Life and Death of a Radical Sisterhood." The Cut, Oral History/Interview, November 15, 2017. <https://www.thecut.com/2017/11/an-oral-history-of-feminist-group-new-york-radical-women.html>

² Press, "Life and Death of a Radical Sisterhood."

³ Press, "Life and Death of a Radical Sisterhood."

⁴ Press, "Life and Death of a Radical Sisterhood."

something, it changed everything.”⁵ So what is “consciousness-raising,” and how did these meetings make its impact?

According to humanities author Ruth R. Iskin, consciousness-raising is a tool for uncovering oppression and developing critical insights that often lead to activism.⁶ In the late 1960s and early 1970s, United States feminists popularized consciousness-raising to verbalize shared feelings of oppression related to evident inequalities between men and women in social, political, academic, economic, and artistic life. Early consciousness-raising questions intended to illuminate these inequalities included “How do you feel about dividing the housework if you live with a man? How do you feel about friendship? Therapy? Your difficulties in working? What if anything do you need from a man? What can we do about men in power? How does male supremacy poison communication between men and men?”⁷ The NYRW were the first to use consciousness-raising to command awareness to their common cause. However, women faced diverse problems across their identities. Therefore, consciousness-raising united women regarding similar, negative patriarchal-imposed experiences.

Consciousness-raising is a challenging term to unpack. A rather obtuse concept, consciousness-raising refers to articulating personal thought or feeling within an intimate group meeting of women. Consciousness-raising occurs in a discrete moment in time, concurrently fleeting in its expression yet lasting in impact. Consciousness-raising’s contradictory nature is further explicated through its two applications: one scenario is its use as a noun, and the other is its use as a verb. As a noun, consciousness-raising is a tool that feminists keep in their

⁵ Press, “Life and Death of a Radical Sisterhood.”

⁶ Ruth E. Iskin, “Feminism, Exhibitions and Museums in Los Angeles, Then and Now.” *Woman’s Art Journal* 37, no. 1 (2016): 13. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26452050>

⁷ Wiley, “Towards Feminist Structures - Web: West-East Coast Bag Newsletter”

“toolboxes” to further their activist agendas regarding group contributions and the formation of feminist social strategies. As a verb, consciousness-raising intends to apply a nostalgic feeling and an empowered effect of togetherness and community. The act of verbalization through consciousness-raising empowers women to rise against subjection. This concept has been deemed fundamental for the feminist agenda and its roots. I was compelled to research consciousness-raising because of its varied applications across feminist agendas and its intentional personalization among the groups who subscribe to its use. Members’ conclusions in a consciousness-raising session often have impacts that surpass the lifespan of the participants, although if not directly recorded.

This thesis delves into consciousness-raising’s various implications because I believe this complicated term deserves much more attention and unraveling. Researching consciousness-raising has proven significantly complex due to its ephemeral aspects since the first consciousness-raising session hosted by Kathie Sarachild occurred in 1968.⁸ Popularized in the 1970s, consciousness-raising took place in small personal group settings, under twelve women per meeting. In modest settings, the rules banned participants from publicly recording or disseminating information and topics; feminists fashioned such groups to keep their members’ privacy. Based on these findings, my thesis refers to various voices I discovered throughout my research, which were necessary to diversify and deepen my knowledge of the topic. I will refer to these voices through quotes and other representative passages. In addition to citing feminist scholars and other leaders’ accounts and interpretations of consciousness-raising, I will also explore its impacts in the world of feminist artists. First, however, I would like to acknowledge

⁸ Redstockings Organization, “Redstockings, Consciousness-Raising & Pro-Woman Line Papers, 1968-72.” *Consciousness-Raising Papers 1968-72*. Accessed January 27, 2022. <https://www.redstockings.org/index.php/main/consciousness-raising-papers-1968-72>

my study's limitations which involve my interpretations of the various voices, ranging from feminist writers, scholars, and artist accounts I have read. Any consciousness-raising experience varies across the range of different groups. However, for my thesis, I am retaining the ultimate goal of collective thought to heighten awareness of social circumstances and class conditions.

Thus, this thesis intends to uncover consciousness-raising's roots and why it became popularized as a fundamental tool for second-wave feminists. Furthermore, I hope to draw parallels from some 1970s feminist artists who used consciousness-raising. I also intend to explain why visual artists with social agendas should practice consciousness-raising. My ultimate goal is to expand my research by applying consciousness-raising in a fictitious exhibition to advocate for modern applicability for practicing women artists and support the idea of a female class consciousness via mass consciousness-raising.

In the first chapter, I will focus on feminist's use of consciousness-raising as a fundamental tool, thus contextualizing the term within feminist political history. This discussion will include the history of groups who coined the term consciousness-raising and how the concept has evolved from its historical inception by the NYRW to its practice rejuvenation. I will state the general rules of consciousness-raising and how they applied to women artists who practiced consciousness-raising throughout their careers. Then, I hope to define what consciousness-raising is not and how consciousness-raising furthered the agendas of the feminist art movement. Chapter one will also discuss feminist activist groups that utilized consciousness-raising to address inequality amongst gendered artists, such as Women Artists in Revolution (WAR), among others. I will conclude by expounding upon these groups' demands for institutional representation from museums and galleries through women artists' class consciousness-raising.

Chapter two will begin with feminist scholar Lucy Lippard's ideologies explaining how the second-wave feminist artist groups understand that consciousness-raising is essential to the feminist art movement and is also a factor in its relation to modernism. Next, I will demonstrate how artists have applied consciousness-raising in the feminist art movement's visual practices and how it has furthered the feminist art movement's agenda. In chapter two, I will examine the career and practices of artist Judy Chicago. Chapter three will expand upon consciousness-raising's application through the career and practices of feminist artists Miriam Schapiro and Joan Jonas. Chicago, Schapiro, and Jonas used consciousness-raising to transform their pedagogical, visual, and performance mediums.

My thesis conclusion will present a framework for modernizing consciousness-raising by curating a fictional exhibition proposal including notable diverse women artists who would benefit from consciousness-raising. In my exhibition, I will present the works of Judy Chicago, Miriam Shapiro, and Joan Jonas juxtaposed with Jenna Gribbon, Tala Madani, and Cindy Sherman to draw parallels between their art exhibiting common consciousness-raising thoughts. Through my fictional exhibition "Great Women Artists: Consciousness-Raising among Intersectional Feminists," I plan to advocate for women artists to reclaim consciousness-raising to revitalize the vision for a mass female consciousness consisting of diversified and intersectional women artists. My hope is by illuminating consciousness-raising rules in tandem with my fictional exhibition; this will elevate the suppressed and underprivileged voices of feminist artists to a greater sphere of influence among the art world's women and men. I hope to refrain from creating an echo chamber of voices and draw political activist conclusions to demand more women's art representation.

Chapter 1: Roots of Feminist Theory and Consciousness-Raising

i. Feminist History and Consciousness-Raising Theory

Consciousness-raising is historically a noun applicable as a method central to second-wave feminism in the United States.⁹ As a verb, i.e., raising consciousness, the concept indicates the verbalizing of individual experiences as a strategy to question the contingency of subjective experiences intertwined with response to facets of the social world. In feminist terms, consciousness-raising explores how such lived experiences subsequently impacted women.¹⁰

The NYRW conceived of consciousness-raising in 1967 through their meetings where members would go around the room sharing personal experiences. NYRW started with twelve participants, approximately the ideal number of members according to consciousness-raising rules, i.e., “WEB (West-East Coast Bag), ‘Consciousness Raising Rules’” (1972).¹¹ Significant early members of the NYRW included Chude Pamela Allen, Susan Brownmiller, Peggy Dobbins, Carol Hanisch, Bev Grant, Kathy Barrett, Shulamith Firestone, Robin Morgan, Kathie Sarachild, Alix Kates Shulman, Judith Weston, and Ellen Willis.¹² Second-wave feminism flourished in the United States, broadening the term to expand upon issues these women discussed, including sexuality, family, reproductive rights, women in the workforce, and preponderance of patriarchal institutions dominating society. Criticizing the problems associated with male dominance in these areas, the group proliferated and attracted educated women of

⁹ Madeline Murphy Turner, “The Archival Impulse: Magali Lara and Carmen Boulosa's Collaborative Artists' Books.” AWARE Women artists / Femmes artistes, September 7, 2019. <https://awarewomenartists.com/en/magazine/pulsion-darchivage-les-livres-dartiste-collaboratifs-de-magali-lara-et-carmen-boulosa/>

¹⁰ Turner, “The Archival Impulse.”

¹¹ Wiley, “Towards Feminist Structures - Web: West-East Coast Bag Newsletter”

¹² Press, “Life and Death of a Radical Sisterhood.”

dynamic backgrounds. The 1960s counterculture movement and political dissonance inspired NYRW to break from narrow-minded confines. Each woman possessed an eloquent rage that drove them to change women's endured class conditions.

NYRW were best known for their performance activism, a signature goal associated with consciousness-raising. Consciousness-raising initially occurred within small, private groups. However, the activism and action evolved also into more prominent public protests calling on women of different demographics into action to raise awareness and protest for their equal rights. NYRW first appeared on January 15, 1968, at an Anti-Vietnam War march in Washington D.C. (Fig. 1). During this protest, participants caught wind of radical slogans such as "sisterhood is powerful" and "the personal is political," easily distributable via posters and buttons.¹³ With coined terminology, political performance allowed copious women to hear NYRW's rally cries. As a result, men and women began to pay attention to feminism, including its slogans and actions.

Word of NYRW's first protest and consciousness-raising ignited the organization of the national women's liberation movement in the spring of 1967. Group membership grew as women hungered to share personal experiences in group settings. They relished seemingly new strategies to expose the invisible slights women members encountered in their daily lives. Experiences once tainted with guilt and remorse became articulated with newfound power. For example, members' favorite consciousness-raising questions included: *when you have a baby, do you want a boy or a girl?* In response, Peggy Dobbins, an early member of NYRW, answered with honesty, "Kathie, you know that I had a baby, and I had to give him away because I

¹³ Press, "Life and Death of a Radical Sisterhood."

couldn't find an abortion doctor."¹⁴ Other women revealed the sexual narratives imposed on women; for example, in 1973, New York Times writer Susan Jacoby wrote about one woman's revelation regarding menopausal sex with her husband found in a consciousness-raising session.¹⁵ Jacoby recalls the woman's account, "Like most of us here, I never really talked about these things with my husband. When I finally got up the nerve to say something, [I] found out he thought the change of life meant that a woman would find it difficult —physically difficult, that is —to have sex."¹⁶ The emotion driving these invisible moments summed to insurmountable oppression, and consciousness-raising was the activity that allowed women to unleash their inherent shame and resentment, burdens from a society that took control of women's bodies.

Writer Kathie Sarachild recalls in her Redstockings essay in "Consciousness-Raising: A Radical Weapon" that the group decided to raise its consciousness "by studying women's lives by topics like childhood, jobs, motherhood, etc."¹⁷ Specifically, women could release relationship woes and motherhood fears, for example, "How do you feel about being a mother? How do you feel about your own mother?"¹⁸ These women had thought they had once been the only ones to have such an experience, but these suppressed feelings would be what bonded these women. Consciousness-raising brought the NYRW closer to their activist goals. Sarachild highlights one question posed by Anne Forester, which is essential to consciousness-raising studies, "who and what has an interest in maintaining the oppression in our lives?"¹⁹

¹⁴ Press, "Life and Death of a Radical Sisterhood."

¹⁵ Susan Jacoby, "Feminism in the \$12,000-a-Year Family; 'What Do I Do for the next 20 Years?'" The New York Times. The New York Times, June 17, 1973. <https://www.nytimes.com/1973/06/17/archives/what-do-i-do-for-the-next-20-years-feminism-in-the-12000ayear.html>

¹⁶ Jacoby, "Feminism in the \$12,000-a-Year Family."

¹⁷ Kathie Sarachild, "Consciousness-Raising: A Radical Weapon." Essay. In *Feminist Revolution*, 144–50. New York: Random House, 1978.

<http://www.redstockings.org/images/stories/CatalogPDFs/FR/26-Feminist-Revolution-Consciousness-Raising--A-Radical-Weapon-Kathie-Sarachild.pdf>

¹⁸ Wiley, "Towards Feminist Structures - Web: West-East Coast Bag Newsletter"

¹⁹ Sarachild, "Consciousness-Raising: A Radical Weapon," 145.

In her “Program for Feminist Consciousness-Raising,” Kathie Sarachild recounts consciousness-raising as feelings revolving around self-interest.²⁰ She notes that women’s feelings, woes, worries, and fears are worth analyzing to find the political undertaking of the origin of these feelings’ imposed notions from society. Consciousness-raising allows members to be present with and acknowledge their feelings of oppression, to be consumed by feeling without stifling or stopping an oncoming thought. When women gather together in a consciousness-raising session and resonate with a mutual feeling, there is great power to release, share, and draw conclusions leading to activism.

According to Sarachild, “Feelings” have been condemned by societal norms through the male perspective of women as “overly emotional,” when instead, feminists would view feelings as their greatest strength.²¹ A woman’s ability to be in touch with her emotions unleashes a weapon of defense against the patriarchy. Through consciousness-raising, women were no longer encouraged to fight their feelings but to battle for strategic representation and release societal expectations. Sarachild notes consciousness-raising’s onset begins with a feeling, forging ideas, theories, and then actions towards a mass-liberation movement of female class consciousness.²² The idea of mass consciousness-raising was revolutionary for the time.

In my thesis, I advocate consciousness-raising’s goal to elevate feminist thought and art into a women’s class consciousness, a thought backed by significant feminists such as Sarachild and Simone de Beauvoir. First, I must further unravel the idea of female class consciousness concerning the fundamental perceptions of “class” and duality. De Beauvoir explains that

²⁰ Kathie Sarachild. “A Program For Feminist ‘Consciousness-Raising.’” *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation Major Writings by Radical Feminists*, 1968.
<https://womenwhatistobedone.files.wordpress.com/2013/09/notes-from-the-second-year-a-program-for-feminist-consciousness-raising.pdf>

²¹ Sarachild, “Program For Feminist ‘Consciousness-Raising.’”

²² Sarachild, “Program For Feminist ‘Consciousness-Raising.’”

defining women as a class, like other persecuted groups, she mentions Jews and Blacks, is a part of nominalism.²³ The characteristic defining women as “other” is reactant dependent on a situation, i.e., societal class division. De Beauvoir justifies the apparent existence of women as a class in affiliation with its male counterpart and that the idea of women as the “other” is dependent on the duality of “self” and the “other.”²⁴ Duality explicitly leads to women’s class inferiority, juxtaposing their “consciousness” as portrayed as inessential objects. Mass female class consciousness means that women would reclaim the nihilistic view of succumbing to otherness by defining themselves as an oppressed proletariat. Women will remain inessential if they deny their existence as a subjugated class. Consciousness-raising defends women’s proletariat positioning in society and thus the autonomy to change this position by its existence. Before consciousness-raising, there was no apparent method for women to organize themselves, fight for equal rights, and emancipate themselves from class conditions.

Furthermore, female class consciousness relates to Marxism and the class conditions placed on women. A woman’s sexuality only expresses her economic status as lesser in complexity.²⁵ However, when society robustly contextualizes women in the disciplines of biology, psychoanalysis, and historical materialism, it exposes the patriarchy's oppressive class system. In Marxism, women participated in relinquishing the “conventional sexual division of labor,” i.e., housewifization through anti-patriarchal consciousness.²⁶ A feminist class-consciousness through consciousness-raising similarly takes on the ideas of liberation through

²³ Simone de Beauvoir, “Introduction: Woman as Other.” *Simone De Beauvoir the Second Sex, Woman as Other 1949*, 1949, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/ethics/de-beauvoir/2nd-sex/introduction.htm>

From the text of book *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir

²⁴ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, Introduction.

²⁵ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, Conclusion.

²⁶ Archana Prasad, “Feminism and Class Consciousness.” *Communist Party of India (Marxist)*, 29 June 2020, <https://cpim.org/content/feminism-and-class-consciousness>

Marxism. Kathie Sarachild supported consciousness-raising and Marxism as a mass liberation. In Sarachild's "Program for Feminist Consciousness-raising," she recalls consciousness-raising's power through NYRW Anne Forer's quote, "I've only begun thinking about women as an oppressed group [class], and each day, I'm still learning more about it—my consciousness gets higher."²⁷ Moreover, as the popular term "sexual harassment" did not exist in the 1960s and early 1970s, not until 1975, consciousness-raising was essential to bond women towards a mutual cause to take down the oppressive systemic patriarchy.²⁸

In this early feminist era, men were unaccepting of consciousness-raising because they suspected this activity would give power to women's unheard voices. As a result, men suggested women refrain from performing consciousness-raising by using oppressive words and stereotyping. In NYRW's oral history, Carol Hanish recalls, "A lot of left men didn't like consciousness-raising because they suspected we were talking about all the bad things they did to women. Which was absolutely true."²⁹ Sarachild reminisces, "when we merely brought up concrete examples in our lives of discrimination against women, or exploitation of women, we were accused of 'man-hating' or 'sour grapes.'"³⁰ However, these stereotypes fueled the NYRW to raise a mass consciousness of women even amidst adversity and opposition through comments such as "'You can't say that men are the oppressors of women! Men are oppressed, too! And women discriminate against women!'"³¹ Men continued to deny the relevance of such stereotypes.

²⁷ Sarachild, "Consciousness-Raising: A Radical Weapon," 144.

²⁸ Amanda Reed, Communications Intern, National Organization for Women. "A Brief History of Sexual Harassment in the United States," Posted on May 7, 2013 By National Organization for Women, last modified September 10, 2015. <https://now.org/blog/a-brief-history-of-sexual-harassment-in-the-united-states/>

²⁹ Press, "Life and Death of a Radical Sisterhood."

³⁰ Sarachild, "Consciousness-Raising: A Radical Weapon," 146.

³¹ Sarachild, "Consciousness-Raising: A Radical Weapon," 146.

In the summer of 1968, NYRW were still craving action to accomplish their consciousness-raising conclusions. The drive for action materialized as a second protest against the 1968 Miss America Pageant in Atlantic City. Radical women hung a banner across the pageant stage reading "Women's Liberation." They publicly burned women's paraphernalia, *Playboy* magazines, girdles, and other oppression articles, in a "Freedom Trashcan" based on Press's recollection of events.³² The Miss America protest led to many participants' arrests yet also furthered NYRW members' un-denying support because of the protest's national publication. The revolt awakened widespread awareness of the "Women's Liberation Movement."³³ Consequently, feminists became inspired by their outcries, and NYRW's meetings grew significantly.

After 1968, the NYRW split into smaller groups because members had conflicting opinions on prioritizing theory or action. These factions included Redstockings, The Feminists, and W.I.T.C.H. (Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell). W.I.T.C.H. advocated for action while Redstockings delved into theory, prioritizing consciousness-raising as the method of discovery. Significant members of Redstockings included Anne Koedt, Irene Peslikis, Pat Mainardi, Rosalyn Baxandall, and Kathie Sarachild.

Redstockings members organized consciousness-raising as meetings became crowded with women who were inspired to be a part of the ever-growing feminist agenda. Redstockings decided that to host consciousness-raising sessions most effectively with equitable speaking time, they should cap consciousness-raising sessions to approximately ten to twelve members.³⁴

³² Press, "Life and Death of a Radical Sisterhood."

³³ Sarachild, "Consciousness-Raising: A Radical Weapon," 147.

³⁴ Wiley, "Towards Feminist Structures - Web: West-East Coast Bag Newsletter"

Sarachild discloses the ever-changing adaptability of consciousness-raising because feminists have published and distributed several consciousness-raising formalized ‘rules’ or ‘guidelines’ with an air of authority “...but new knowledge is the source of consciousness-raising’s strength and power.”³⁵ I believe that consciousness-raising’s conformability allows for its lasting impact and solidification as a tactic that feminists and artists alike can perform.

By 1973, at the height of consciousness-raising, approximately 100,000 women reportedly belonged to feminist groups.³⁶ The movement was gaining traction, but limitations still existed as most women participating in consciousness-raising were primarily white. One former NYRW, Chude Pamela Allen, noted, “This was the period of [racial] separatism, when a lot of the black women that I knew weren’t interested in joining.”³⁷ Black women would eventually join in consciousness-raising, for example, The National Women’s Liberation Women of Color Caucus.³⁸ However, in the 1970s, Howarda Pinell, a participant in A.I.R., a women’s co-op which hosted consciousness-raising sessions, acknowledged consciousness-raising’s racial limitations. She “felt disappointed that, as the only black member, my personal experiences were considered "political" by some and therefore not worthy of being addressed.”³⁹ Therefore, second-wave feminists and their feminist successors needed to evolve by including intersectional activists to achieve their consciousness-raising goal of raising female class consciousness in modern interracial society. Female class consciousness rooted in Marxism also indicates we must

³⁵ Sarachild, “Consciousness-Raising: A Radical Weapon,” 147.

³⁶ Cynthia Eller, *Living in the Lap of the Goddess*, *op. cit.*, p. 43 & n. 8 (p. 43 n. 8 citing Shreve, Anita, *Women Together*, *Women Alone*, *op. cit.*, pp. 5–6 & 9–14).

³⁷ Press, “Life and Death of a Radical Sisterhood.”

³⁸ “Women of Color Caucus.” *National Women's Liberation*, 23 Mar. 2021, <https://womensliberation.org/women-of-color-caucus/>

³⁹ Howarda Pinell, “Contemporary Feminism: Art Practice, Theory, and Activism--An Intergenerational Perspective.” *Art Journal* 58, no. 4 (1999): 22. <https://doi.org/10.2307/777908>

acknowledge and liberate exploited racial classes in tandem with the overarching female “class” definition.

ii. Consciousness-Raising Rules

In section i., I discussed the theory behind verbalization of thought and feeling through consciousness-raising to acknowledge the social disparity between men and women. Again acknowledging women as a persecuted class allows for their liberation through Marxist principles. Below is an example of consciousness-raising rules feminists followed in sessions.

“WEB (West-East Coast Bag), ‘Consciousness Raising Rules’” (1972)⁴⁰:

1. Select a topic
2. Go around the room, each woman speaking in term. Don’t interrupt, let each woman speak up to 15 minutes and then ask questions only for clarification
3. Don’t give advice, don’t chastise, don’t be critical.
4. Don’t generalize after everyone has spoken or, before that, go around the room and talk again.
5. Draw political conclusions – if you can.
6. Keep the group below 10 women.
7. In order to develop trust and confidence, don’t repeat what has been said in the meeting or talk about members outside of the group.
8. This is not a therapy, encounter, or sensitivity group simulation

My second chapter will explain feminist artists who either use or adapted these rules, including Judy Chicago, Miriam Schapiro, and Joan Jonas. Questions women artists posed to each other through the WEB rules included, “How do you feel about other women? Why did you become an artist? How do you feel about yourself as a woman artist? About passivity? About your body? About growing older? Do you think of yourself as a woman artist or an artist that

⁴⁰ Wiley, “Towards Feminist Structures - Web: West-East Coast Bag Newsletter”

happens to be a woman?”⁴¹ Finally, my third chapter will develop a contemporary dialogue with consciousness-raising through a sample exhibition discussing the modernist feminist movement concerning women and intersectional identities.

iii. What Consciousness-Raising is Not:

Contextualizing consciousness-raising further requires an understanding of what it is not. Feminists and feminist artists alike have distinguished consciousness-raising from the term “group therapy.”⁴² Therapy’s definition is a treatment to relieve or heal a disorder.⁴³ In contrast, feminists prescribe consciousness-raising as a tool to deconstruct disorderly patriarchal society. If consciousness-raising was synonymous with “group therapy,” feminists feared it would emphasize women’s preoccupation with fixing feelings rather than facilitating them. A taboo term for the 1970s, “therapy” would diminish consciousness-raising as a method to heal broken women and their “over-emotional” tendencies. Feminists avoided “group therapy” altogether to emphasize consciousness-raising’s importance as a weapon for political organizing.⁴⁴ Therefore, clarifying consciousness-raising is not therapy; it allows feminists to understand that their feelings are accepted and encouraged to expose inequity and fight for equality.

Having defined consciousness-raising as both a noun and verb, dissociating it from “group therapy,” this elusive term becomes a straightforward fundamental tool to the women’s liberation movement. Concurrently consciousness-raising affected the arts and feminist art’s

⁴¹ Wiley, “Towards Feminist Structures - Web: West-East Coast Bag Newsletter”

⁴² Amy Tobin, “I’ll Show You Mine, If You Show Me Yours: Collaboration, Consciousness-Raising and Feminist-Influenced Art in the 1970s – Tate Papers.” Tate. Accessed January 4, 2022.

<https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/25/i-show-you-mine-if-you-show-me-yours>

⁴³ “Therapy Definition & Meaning.” *Merriam-Webster*, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/therapy>

⁴⁴ Tobin, “Consciousness-Raising and Feminist-Influenced Art in the 1970s – Tate.”

fundamental idea to represent the NYRW coined statement “the personal is political.”⁴⁵

Consciousness-raising affirmed women’s oppression by society while simultaneously facilitating women to speak out against male hegemony. Consequently, how does consciousness-raising’s onset coincide with the foundations of feminist artist groups that demanded representation amongst male artists by institutions?

iv. Feminist Artist Activist Group History and Demands:

As more second-wave feminists practiced consciousness-raising, women artists burned to demand representation and raise female class consciousness with awareness of their subservient status to men. Journalist Carey Lovelace reflects on the baffling data from the 1969 *Whitney Annual*, now called the Biennial: only 8 percent of the artists shown were women.⁴⁶ However, the lack of women artists was a problem that extended beyond museum institutions. That same year, in high-profile New York City galleries, staggering information showed that only one artist in twenty was a woman.⁴⁷ Museums’ lame counterargument response to women artists’ outcries was ““We just can’t find women of quality.””⁴⁸ This response outraged female artists as society’s rejection of women’s art became unmistakable.⁴⁹ Therefore, female artists realized they could change these staggering statistics by utilizing consciousness-raising to express themselves and thus bring attention to self-representation and a new female consciousness. Through consciousness-raising, they would instigate transformation requiring equal institutional respect and placements with men while fostering a sense of credibility and confidence in the relevance

⁴⁵ Press, “Life and Death of a Radical Sisterhood.”

⁴⁶ Carey Lovelace, “Optimism and Rage: The Women’s Movement in Art in New York, 1969–1975.” *Woman’s Art Journal* 37, no. 1 (2016): 5. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26452049>

⁴⁷ Lovelace, “Optimism and Rage,” 5.

⁴⁸ Lovelace, “Optimism and Rage,” 6.

⁴⁹ Lovelace, “Optimism and Rage,” 5.

of their experiences. Consciousness-raising helped female artists break free from modernist traditions that held them closely compared with men.

By early 1969, the revolting lack of representation drove women artists to found WAR (Women Artists in Revolution), “the first feminist artist organization, an offshoot of the legendary antiwar Art Workers’ Coalition.”⁵⁰ The Art Workers’ Coalition was a radical, white, upper-class, male-dominated organization, and the notion of a women’s wing produced uproarious laughter at the time.⁵¹ Therefore, WAR decided to abandon the Art Workers’ Coalition to make serious feminist appeals. WAR’s foundation was revolutionary in defying its male counterpart, the Art Workers’ Coalition, inciting “a whirlwind of activism, protests, women-run galleries [and] journals.”⁵² WAR activated consciousness-raising feminist demands on behalf of female artists.

Although WAR did not form until 1969, female artists had already been practicing consciousness-raising among NYRW and Redstockings, significantly impacting their art.⁵³ As pointed out by journalist Carey Lovelace, early consciousness-raising adherents included art historian Eunice Lipton, artists Nancy Azara and Joan Jonas, and curators Marcia Tucker and Elke Solomon.⁵⁴ Lovelace recounts consciousness-raising as women speaking “without interruption on a particular subject (body image, housework, sex, money, and children)” that resulted in the startling realization of similar feelings of isolation. Recognizing the exploited female “class” united women, raised collective consciousness, and created a political agenda.

⁵⁰ Lovelace, “Optimism and Rage,” 5.

⁵¹ Cindy Nemser, “The Women Artists’ Movement.” *Art Education* 28, no. 7 (1975): 18. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3192015>

⁵² Lovelace, “Optimism and Rage,” 4.

⁵³ Lovelace, “Optimism and Rage,” 4.

⁵⁴ Lovelace, “Optimism and Rage,” 5.

However, Lovelace intentionally asserts that consciousness-raising was NOT a “simply therapeutic or political exercise.” Instead, consciousness-raising articulated “new realms of experience and reality that come to the surface,” especially for second-wave feminist artists experiencing a lack of institutional representation.⁵⁵

WAR members appealed to correct the astonishing statistics that only 8 percent of represented artists were women, and only one artist in twenty was a woman.⁵⁶ Consciousness-raising became a tactic to organize demonstrations against systemic institutional oppression of women artists. WAR infamously met with museums, MoMA, and the Whitney, to advocate consistent, non-juried exhibitions of women’s work, more solo women’s shows, a women’s advisory board, and fifty percent representation in all museum exhibitions.⁵⁷ Board members barely acknowledged these demands, yet WAR members were unwavering. WAR took over a graphics and silk-screen workshop in the Lower East Side for group meetings, notably consciousness-raising sessions.⁵⁸ As WAR expanded, aesthetically diverse women artists inspired new feminist art groups, i.e., the Ad Hoc Committee of the Art Workers’ Coalition, Women in the Arts, Where We At, and the Women’s Interart Center.⁵⁹ However, second-wave feminist representatives still needed diversification of women artists with intersection identities. The formation of WASABAL (Women’s studies and artists for black liberation) was a small win for this feat.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Lovelace, “Optimism and Rage,” 4.

⁵⁶ Lovelace, “Optimism and Rage,” 5.

⁵⁷ Nemser, “The Women Artist’s Movement,” 18.

⁵⁸ Nemser, “The Women Artist’s Movement,” 19.

⁵⁹ Lovelace, “Optimism and Rage,” 4.

⁶⁰ Nemser, “The Women Artist’s Movement,” 19.

Journalist Lucy Lippard joined the Ad Hoc Committee of the Art Workers' Coalition in 1970 and assisted in targeting the Whitney's baffling misrepresentation of women. In the *Whitney Annual*, women artists' representation had never exceeded 16 percent and was only 5 percent in 1969.⁶¹ The Ad Hoc Committee insisted on 50 percent women artist representation, but the Whitney refused to make an acknowledgment based on a quota system.⁶² The Whitney's blatant rejection of a quota system, reminiscing affirmative action, led to dissident action by the Ad Hoc Committee. Members "[secreted] eggs and Tampax plungers marked 50 percent around the museum, besieging the museum with [supporter] telegrams...and issuing fake press releases."⁶³ Members forged invitations for the grand *Whitney Annual* and orchestrated a sit-in in the middle of the exhibition space.⁶⁴ The feminist group credited themselves for the Whitney's 21 percent women artist representation by 1970.⁶⁵ By 2019, the *Whitney Biennial* had 40 percent women artist representation, but the Ad Hoc Committee still has not met its 50 percent goal.⁶⁶

As the Ad Hoc Committee fought for equal artist gender representation in the 1970s, consciousness-raising began loosely unfolding as a free-form discussion among artists visiting each other's studios. The Ad Hoc Committee inspired WEB (West-East Coast Bag) to distribute a new variation of consciousness-raising rules.⁶⁷ Initiating consciousness-raising as a free-form discussion would dispel rumors of women's art being highly imitative of male practices. "Free-form" consciousness-raising, as I refer to it, applied flexible session rules, fostering a deeper

⁶¹ Nemser, "The Women Artist's Movement," 19.

⁶² Nemser, "The Women Artist's Movement," 19.

⁶³ Lovelace, "Optimism and Rage," 6.

⁶⁴ Nemser, "The Women Artist's Movement," 19.

⁶⁵ Nemser, "The Women Artist's Movement," 19.

⁶⁶ Alex Greenberger, "The 2019 Whitney Biennial Artist List: By the Numbers." ARTnews.com. ARTnews.com, November 18, 2019. <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/2019-whitney-biennial-by-the-numbers-11986/>

⁶⁷ Nemser, "The Women Artist's Movement," 19.

understanding of women's newfound uniqueness in self-representation and use of alternative materials.⁶⁸ In addition, the ideological factor changed to accredit quality to a woman artist's work for the first time.⁶⁹ Through free-form consciousness-raising, women artists could question what was good or bad in their visual practices, deepening the form of their expression and connection to the arts. Lippard, journalist and Ad Hoc Committee member, helped spearhead consciousness-raising's transformation and application to women artists. However, women would continue to face prejudice against their art. Critics suggested it was "craft" if made of different mediums and had little ideological representation from major institutions and journals.

Many early feminist artist historians, artists, and curators continued to practice consciousness-raising if only by free-form discussion, i.e., free-form consciousness-raising. These women would subsequently broaden consciousness-raising's applications. Free-form consciousness-raising would take fire across both coasts of the United States when iconic feminist artist Judy Chicago started a women's only art class at Fresno State College in 1970.⁷⁰ Chicago used free-form consciousness-raising to advocate for a women-centered alternative art scene and female class-consciousness.⁷¹ In September 1970, another unnamed feminist art group used consciousness-raising to critique each other's art.⁷² This peer critique between women artists structured a healthy power dynamic to create female-oriented content before artists coined the term feminist art.⁷³ For example, Patsy Norvell initially worked with mirrors and metal pieces. However, due to her consciousness-raising group's critiques, she began to soften her

⁶⁸ Lovelace, "Optimism and Rage," 6.

⁶⁹ Lovelace, "Optimism and Rage," 6.

⁷⁰ Nemser, "The Women Artist's Movement," 19.

⁷¹ Francesca DeBiao, "Judy Chicago: Visions for Feminist Art." Thesis, The Cupola, 2012, 13. https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1008&context=student_scholarship

⁷² Lovelace, "Optimism and Rage," 5.

⁷³ Lovelace, "Optimism and Rage," 5.

work with a sewing machine, creating a tribute to forgotten women.⁷⁴ Likewise, Harmony Hammon made feminine bags, tokens of affection to her female friends for their consciousness-raising critiques. Finally, Louise Fishman created “angry” paintings dedicated to consciousness-raising group members by releasing her once pent-up rage.⁷⁵

The women’s art movement, consciousness-raising, and free-form methods gained even more traction with the wide publication of Linda Nochlin’s famed 1971 essay “Why Are There No Great Female Artists?” In 1971, the newly formed LACWA (Los Angeles Council of Women Artists) criticized the overbearing male-dominated west coast art scene and the LACMA museum. LACWA demanded women artist representation from the museum and achieved a women’s retrospective from seventeen hundred to present set for 1974.⁷⁶ One scholar specifically attributes consciousness-raising groups’ formation to this win. She describes that women unite through mutual feelings of isolation to dissent oppression, congregating, sharing ideas, " nurturing intimacy, and trust among small consciousness-raising groups."⁷⁷ Second-wave feminist artists meaningfully engaged in consciousness-raising to make a difference in women’s representation across the country. In addition, the foundation of women’s only collectives and exhibition spaces intended for consciousness-raising and art-making, such as *Womanspace*, produced pride amongst Los Angeles women artists. Across the country, women artists foster a safe space for self-representation and instigate action through teaching their peers to engage with consciousness-raising tactics. Their efforts reflected the subsequent formation of women’s alliances, exhibition spaces, and political activism.

⁷⁴ Lovelace, “Optimism and Rage,” 5.

⁷⁵ Lovelace, “Optimism and Rage,” 5.

⁷⁶ Nemser, “The Women Artist's Movement,” 20.

⁷⁷ Nemser, “The Women Artist's Movement,” 20.

In 1973, painter Joan Semmel curated “Contemporary Women: Consciousness and Content,” a Brooklyn Museum exhibition.⁷⁸ Semmel identified four essential themes that expanded within women’s art at this time: “sexual imagery, both abstract and figurative; autobiography and self-image; the celebration of devalued subject matter and media which have been traditionally relegated to women; and anthropomorphic or nature forms....”⁷⁹ The first theme, “sexual imagery, both abstract and figurative,” fits into the dialogue of furthering women’s self-representation including vaginal and phallic forms. For example, Chicago’s prescribed “Cunt Art” fits this nature and her consciousness-raising students’ favorite topic of sexuality and representation. The theme of sexual imagery also expands upon the art produced at women’s co-ops such as A.I.R., which opened in September 1972 on Wooster Street.⁸⁰ The early art produced at A.I.R. represented phallic images, and an understanding of genitalia evolved from conclusions drawn in consciousness-raising sessions.⁸¹

Semmel’s second theme, identified as “autobiographical and self-image,” directly used consciousness-raising as a basis to uncover and understand women’s feelings of subjection as a class concerning the patriarchal world. Additionally, Semmel expanded on her second theme, noting, “the constant recurrence of self-images and autobiographical references in women’s art has paralleled feminist preoccupation with the connections between the personal and the public.”⁸² Consciousness-raising was an essential exercise in producing images that blurred lines between self-representation, the act of seeing, and being seen. Women looked deep within to find honest self-perspectives and perspectives expressed through being watched by the public. Artist

⁷⁸ Lovelace, “Optimism and Rage,” 8.

⁷⁹ Lovelace, “Optimism and Rage,” 8.

⁸⁰ Lovelace, “Optimism and Rage,” 8.

⁸¹ Lovelace, “Optimism and Rage,” 8.

⁸² Lovelace, “Optimism and Rage,” 8.

Joan Jonas attributed consciousness-raising as one of the factors which helped her develop her 1970 piece, *Mirror Check*.⁸³ *Mirror Check*, 1970, (Fig. 2), is a performance piece in which Jonas portrays female sensibility by examining her body with a small round mirror in front of a live audience. She simultaneously embodies the self-critical and public critical aspects of her image and body, inspecting narcissism and ego intimately in front of a crowd.⁸⁴ Women artists who practiced consciousness-raising looked within themselves for an eloquent rage relating to representation as a tool for fighting their male oppressors.

Women continued engaging in consciousness-raising's introspection to expose and produce inherently feminine qualities to visual and performance art to distinguish themselves from male-dominated modernism, for example, abstract expressionism, in fighting for equal representation. Therefore, Semmel's third theme, "the celebration of devalued subject matter and media which have been traditionally relegated to women" represented consciousness-raising's ability to transform a woman artist's medium from minimalist materials, likely utilized due to male-centric view of "high art," to an honest, softer representation of oneself. Consciousness-raising advocated for women's use of textiles, which were considered craft and diminished as "low art" by the male sphere. For example, I stated above; Patsy Norvell initially utilized metal and mirror pieces.⁸⁵ However, through criticisms made by her consciousness-raising group, she began using a sewing machine, creating a tribute to forgotten women.⁸⁶ Norvell continued to capitalize on alternative materials, becoming more radical through consciousness-raising. For example, she used hair from her consciousness-raising group's members at A.I.R. to craft a

⁸³ Lovelace, "Optimism and Rage," 5.

⁸⁴ Lovelace, "Optimism and Rage," 5.

⁸⁵ Lovelace, "Optimism and Rage," 5.

⁸⁶ Lovelace, "Optimism and Rage," 5.

nearly translucent quilt, an unusual yet affectionate medium.⁸⁷ Additionally, Howarda Pinell notes her participation in A.I.R. changed her work drastically, “using materials such as fragrant powders, perfumes, sequins, and glitter.”⁸⁸ She also cut and sewed her canvas in a textile format. Consciousness-raising reworked both Norvell and Pinell’s work into more intimate mediums.

Semmel’s fourth theme, “anthropomorphic or nature forms,” is the vaguest of her themes. However, it characterizes feminist artists using consciousness-raising to contextualize feminist imagery with the outside world in new ways. For example, Anita Sekel’s exhibition *The Feminist Art of Sexual Politics*, 1973, included her “Giant Women Series” of photo-collages “featuring a monumental female nude (Steckel’s own face superimposed) overpowering various urban settings.”

By 1973, women’s arts groups had evolved, and there were many classes inputting consciousness-raising into their regular programming. *Feminist Studio Workshop*, a companion to *Womanhouse* in Los Angeles, was headed by Ruth Iskin and Arlene Raven.⁸⁹ *Women’s Building* was a women’s only space formed in L.A., and *The Women’s Interart Center*, a women’s only museum, formed in New York.⁹⁰ In 1974, Women’s Co-op galleries only began to grow, thus reflecting the monumental impact consciousness-raising had at its height with 100,000 women belonging to feminist groups.⁹¹

Since its inception, consciousness-raising has had a material impact, drawing feminists and artists alike to teach each other and embrace feelings of oppression. They created a class of

⁸⁷ Lovelace, “Optimism and Rage,” 7.

⁸⁸ Pinell, “Contemporary Feminism,” 22.

⁸⁹ Nemser, “The Women Artist’s Movement,” 21.

⁹⁰ Nemser, “The Women Artist’s Movement,” 22.

⁹¹ Eller, *Living in the Lap of the Goddess*.

women by acknowledging their maltreatment and “otherness” within the patriarchy. These mutual feelings and activation of a mass class consciousness via consciousness-raising would aid them in their fight for political activism and found women’s only spaces, from small groups to coalitions practicing consciousness-raising. For example, A.I.R. is a standing example of today’s consciousness-raising space.⁹² Although WAR was the first women's art group in the consciousness-raising era, it should not be the last. Consciousness-raising should be a topic dusted off by women artists today to advocate for women artists' intersectionality identities. Through my examples of Chicago, Schapiro, and Jonas, I will advocate for how consciousness-raising is a tactic easily adaptable by women artists to heighten their female consciousness in their artworld practices.

⁹² Pinell, “Contemporary Feminism,” 22.

Chapter 2: Consciousness-Raising in the Feminist Art Movement

i. Consciousness-Raising Theory and Application by Female Artists

Consciousness-raising is an active research method that feminists have used since the inception of second-wave feminism in the late 1960s, the early 1970s, and up to the present. Consciousness-raising, as a noun, historically allowed women to meet, share, and receive feedback from others on mutual sentiments regarding womanhood, sexuality, family, reproductive rights, and the workforce. Through raising consciousness, the verb developed from consciousness-raising, feminists can draw conclusions about everyday experiences regarding women's oppression, looking for consistencies and inconsistencies across diverse perspectives. Women can expose mutual experiences and form conclusions as a tool to reclaim womanhood as a subjugated class, thereby raising female class consciousness. Additionally, consciousness-raising allows women to complete a power analysis of the people and systems that benefit from their oppression, and the direct subjugates that pay for these experiences. Consequently, how does consciousness-raising relate to the foundations and inception of the feminist art movement, and how has it furthered their goals?

Expert art historians know that consciousness-raising simultaneously roots itself in criticism and self-criticism of the performance group. During a consciousness-raising session, feminists reflect inwards, imposing self-criticism on women innately perform actions to fit society's expectations of the idealized female role. Feminists analyze women's actions, performed both consciously and unconsciously, as self-criticism of how each group member enacts and therefore upholds female standards. For example, in a consciousness-raising session for WEB (West-East Coast Bag)⁹³, the topic "Do you think of yourself as a woman artist or an

⁹³ Wiley, "Towards Feminist Structures - Web: West-East Coast Bag Newsletter"

artist who happens to be a woman?” is a conscious choice the woman makes to identify herself within the art sphere. Additional examples of questions feminists use from the same list of topics from WEB (West-East Coast Bag) are as follows: “Do you feel that masochism or ‘being the victim’ has been a large part of your life? Why is this?”⁹⁴ These questions analyze how women unconsciously perform the female role in society, i.e., if they further their victimized status through denial or active acceptance into female class consciousness.

Consciousness-raising allows feminists to release inner self-reflection of consciousness and unconscious thoughts through personal reflection and verbalization in an intimate group setting. When feminists identify their current class conditions, both inherently placed on women and performed by women in society, they create a basis for the criticism of political systems that have kept women’s persecution in place in a male-dominated world. Thus, feminists can complete a power analysis, evaluate and question societal gender roles, and create activist momentum to demand equality.

In 1980, in “Sweeping Exchanges: The Contributions of Feminism to the Art of the 1970s,” feminist writer and art critic, Lucy R. Lippard, argues that second-wave feminism significantly contributed to the “male Avante-garde and/or modernist arts of the 1970s.” Lippard explains that feminists' contributions to modernism come from their rejection to fit the artistic methods presented by men, such as male-dominated art movements, such as Abstract Expressionism or Minimalism. Therefore, feminist artists have feminized modernism in their contributions by constructing a unique dialogue of women’s art techniques that depart from male-dominated art movements. Lippard also rehashes consciousness-raising’s establishment in feminist self-criticism and feminist’s outward critique, along with the subsequent deconstruction

⁹⁴ Wiley, “Towards Feminist Structures - Web: West-East Coast Bag Newsletter”

of patriarchal social structures. The use of consciousness-raising by feminists provided a tool for self-critique and an accompanying diagnostic approach to society, enabling feminist artists to contribute to art's future at a time when there were limited opportunities for women artists to achieve greatness in art.⁹⁵ Lippard pinpoints "public consciousness-raising and interaction through visual images, environments, and performances also insist on an inclusive and expansive structure that is inherent in these forms."⁹⁶ Thereby, Lippard ultimately claims that consciousness-raising weaponized modern feminists with the tools to create the great art of the women's movement and expanded modernism's definition.

Continuing to discuss Lippard's 1980 essay "Sweeping Exchanges...", reflecting on the establishment of feminist art, Lippard, from my perspective, recaps NYRW, Kathie Sarachild's, affection towards "feelings." Both Lippard and Sarachild hold the idea that "feelings" indicate emotional strength, allowing women to sit with and ultimately act on conscious oppression. Lippard holds that the "real emotion" of a feminine response to art elevated non-traditional forms of art in the era of the avant-garde.⁹⁷ Therefore, women who practiced consciousness-raising could elevate feminist art into "high art" as they actively acknowledged their feelings in a group setting. Non-traditional forms of art inducing such emotive responses included performance and body art and societal perceived "low" mediums of sewing and collage, the creative domains in which women have traditionally excelled.⁹⁸ For example, Lippard continues to explain that feminist art "raises consciousness, invites dialogue, and transforms culture."⁹⁹ She claims

⁹⁵ Lucy R Lippard, "Sweeping Exchanges: The Contribution of Feminism to the Art of the 1970s." *Art Journal* 40, no. 1/2 (1980): 362. <https://doi.org/10.2307/776601>

⁹⁶ Lippard, "Sweeping Exchanges," 364.

⁹⁷ Lippard, "Sweeping Exchanges," 362.

⁹⁸ Lippard, "Sweeping Exchanges," 362.

⁹⁹ Lippard, "Sweeping Exchanges," 362.

consciousness-raising is a tool feminists continue to use and have transformed the discourse between women, their art-making practices, society's perceptions of feminist art, and vice versa.

Lippard continues to convey the meaning of feminist art in "Sweeping Exchanges" through multiple ideas essential to understanding feminist art's reliance on consciousness-raising for 1970s artists. She states that feminist artists "must make art that reflects a political consciousness of what it means to be a woman in a patriarchal culture."¹⁰⁰ Therefore, Lippard's initial idea of feminist art connects to consciousness-raising via the NYRW coined phrase "the personal is political;" feminist artists present works based on their political situation and gender inequality.¹⁰¹ Consciousness-raising exposes the political system of power relationships, and feminist art presents women's lived experiences as aesthetic experiences, varying distinctly across artists and mediums. Lippard confirms her belief that a woman's political status connects to feminist art through the idea, "feminist art is a political position, a set of ideas about the future of the world which includes information about the history of women and our struggles and recognition of women as a class."¹⁰² Lippard conveys that feminist art must display men's political positioning above women. Consciousness-raising directly relates to Sarachild's idea of a mass class consciousness of recognizing women as a persecuted class. Therefore, Lippard and Sarachild's ideas connect feminist art with consciousness-raising as the vehicle to acknowledge and elevate women as a class.

Lippard contends that art historians have called male modernist art superior due to its self-critical qualities. Lippard disagrees with these art historians as male modernist art's self criticism is "in fact a narrow, highly mystified, and often egotistical monologue. The element of

¹⁰⁰ Lippard, "Sweeping Exchanges," 362.

¹⁰¹ Press, "Life and Death of a Radical Sisterhood."

¹⁰² Lippard, "Sweeping Exchanges," 362.

dialogue can be entirely lacking...”¹⁰³ First we must know modernism is rooted in criticism to achieve a unique aesthetic similar to Enlightenment’s criticisms.¹⁰⁴ Second, I believe Lippard’s statement undermines male modernist art’s superiority for it’s self-critical qualities because feminist art’s consciousness-raising method is inherently self-critical. Feminists desire group collaboration to create feminist art and thus reintegrate the aesthetic self and the social self within self-critical aspects into their work rather than working independently. Lippard reasons society teaches women to be competitive, often reiterating the phrase “‘I’ve got to get back to my own work.’”¹⁰⁵ Thus I believe consciousness-raising allows feminist artists to reintegrate self-critical views collaboratively to politically respond to “what it means to be a woman in a patriarchal society” of women as a class. Similarly, I believe consciousness-raising will not allow women to fall into an elitist mindset that feminist art is “the unthinking acceptance of anything done by a woman.”¹⁰⁶ Lippard explains that collaboration and dialogue are essential to feminist response to society; feminists can make authentic mutual exchanges regarding their notions of art.¹⁰⁷ Therefore, I believe Lippard encourages feminist artists to use consciousness-raising as a method of real self-criticism from collaboration and dialogue rooted in society’s political structures of women as a class.

Lippard advocates that feminists have agreed that “art can be aesthetically and socially effective at the same time.”¹⁰⁸ Feminist artists must critique the same structures that uphold their art as rebuttals to society’s male standards, which may be contradictory as they rely upon each

¹⁰³ Lippard, “Sweeping Exchanges,” 363.

¹⁰⁴ Clement Greenberg, “Modernist Painting,” [1965] reprinted in Frascina, Francis, Charles Harrison, and Deirdre Paul. 1987. *Modern art and modernism: a critical anthology*. [Boulder, Colo.]: Westview Press. http://www.columbia.edu/itc/barnard/arthist/wolff/pdfs/week4_greenberg.pdf

¹⁰⁵ Lippard, “Sweeping Exchanges,” 363.

¹⁰⁶ Lippard, “Sweeping Exchanges,” 362.

¹⁰⁷ Lippard, “Sweeping Exchanges,” 363.

¹⁰⁸ Lippard, “Sweeping Exchanges,” 364.

other. However, Lippard affirms feminist art depends on consciousness-raising for the dialogue of criticism/self-criticism through her statement, “these structures are grounded in the interaction techniques adapted (and feminized) from revolutionary socialist practice-techniques on which the women's movement itself is based: consciousness-raising, going around the circle with equal time for all speakers, and criticism/self-criticism.”¹⁰⁹ Lippard’s idea solidifies the connection between consciousness-raising and feminist art, adopting consciousness-raising as a method used by feminist artists to achieve representation of women politically as a class. Lippard defines the three methods by which second-wave feminist artists were able to adapt consciousness-raising’s perverse response to society to achieve critical/self-critical aspects to art:¹¹⁰

1. Group or public ritual
2. Public consciousness-raising and interaction through visual images, environments, and performances
3. Cooperative/Collaborative/Collective or anonymous artmaking

Lippard expands consciousness-raising’s application to art through these methods, which feminists can loosely apply through free-form consciousness-raising. Using Lippard’s methods, we also understand that second-wave feminist artists separated themselves from the male avant-garde while contributing to the modern art scene in new and unique ways.

Consciousness-raising embedded itself in second-wave feminist’s artistic practices through active participation in Lippard’s first of three methods, “group or public ritual.”¹¹¹ Lippard explains ritual activities are a tactic for self-development, helping communities, such as feminist artists, connect to the past, present, and future. I believe consciousness-raising connects feminist political ideas to the aesthetic representation of women as a class, past, present, and

¹⁰⁹ Lippard, “Sweeping Exchanges,” 364.

¹¹⁰ Lippard, “Sweeping Exchanges,” 364.

¹¹¹ Lippard, “Sweeping Exchanges,” 364.

future. I also consider that Lippard advocates consciousness-raising helped create the feminist art community through group or public ritual. Feminists participated in consciousness-raising to engage in dialogue to elevate their art form based on social/political commentary and mutual emotional responses.

Lippard further explains that the first method of “group or public ritual” is intertwined with the second method, “public consciousness-raising and interaction through visual images, environments, and performances,” by ritualizing group consciousness-raising to apply to feminist art. Lippard explains consciousness-raising enabled the group to discover “mass-produced mediums...new aesthetics of paintings, sculptures, drawings, and prints” to be inherently stimulating, “feminist,” and worthy of study and display. Therefore, I believe feminist art is an intentional group effort; elevating materials once considered “low art,” fundamentally political in association with women’s craft. I also believe consciousness-raising’s ritualization further promotes feminist art as an interaction between feminist artists, their work, their performances as feminist artists, and their art spaces. Through these interactions, I believe Lippard contextualizes the gap between art and life into a movement or an art form, i.e. the feminist art movement.¹¹² Consciousness-raising added a new vernacular to feminist art as art would no longer be about expressing oneself but expanding to speaking on behalf of a larger group or community and contributing to a social movement of artists. Therefore, consciousness-raising has bridged the gap between the second-wave feminist movement’s thought processes and the feminist art movement’s material practices.

The ritualization of consciousness-raising models a mutual inclusivity and responsibility amongst women artists to realize a vision for the breakdown of race, class, and gender barriers,

¹¹² Lippard, “Sweeping Exchanges,” 364.

connected through communication and furthered through visual activism.¹¹³ Consequently, consciousness-raising asserts Lippard's final point that feminist art is rooted in a self-critique/critique of society through "cooperative/collaborative/collective or anonymous artmaking."¹¹⁴ The collaboration of these women changed the dialogue of women's art to become uniquely feminist, contributing to the future of art while subverting male authority and refusing to contribute to 1970s modernist art scene. Instead, feminist art through consciousness-raising offers a socially concerned alternative that revolutionized the connections between social agendas and visual practice.¹¹⁵ Through these methods, Lippard also disputes the idea that feminist art reaches its goal to change the character of art, elevating mediums once thought of as "low" art, such as textiles and handcraft, and creating a political self-critical/critical representation of society. These aesthetics do not depend on political correctness, but rather on the transformation of women's emotions and the political into substantial art.

Lippard amends that consciousness-raising and the inclusivity of feminist art change feminist art practices by capitalizing on women's critiques towards one another and the male-dominated art sphere. It is essential to understand that the practice of different mediums, once regarded as "low" art, such as mass-produced mediums, textiles, etc., have a relationship to the belief of forms that convey them.¹¹⁶ There are many examples of women who practiced consciousness-raising and how it changed their art through commentary and feminist relationships to the political and social-self.

I will continue to discuss consciousness-raising's contextualization in feminist art and how this method furthered the movement with successive examples of feminist artists who

¹¹³ Lippard, "Sweeping Exchanges," 364.

¹¹⁴ Lippard, "Sweeping Exchanges," 364.

¹¹⁵ Lippard, "Sweeping Exchanges," 362.

¹¹⁶ Lippard, "Sweeping Exchanges," 364.

practiced consciousness-raising and transformed their art. In my examples of feminist artists who practiced consciousness-raising, I will initially discuss the impact of Judy Chicago's inception of what I describe as "free-form consciousness-raising" in the first "women's only" art class at Fresno State College in 1970. This discussion will include how Chicago formed her sodiacratic method of free-form consciousness-raising at Fresno State College having raised her own consciousness through the study of feminist texts and a discussion with other identified feminist artists. Second, I will discuss Chicago's relationship to Miriam Shapiro and their mutual establishment of *Womanhouse*, a consciousness-raising project space. Additional examples of women artists who fundamentally shifted the feminist art movement and their own inherent work through consciousness-raising include direct quotations from Joan Jonas on the transformation of her medium and themes present in her works.

ii. Judy Chicago

Judy Chicago started a women's only art class at Fresno State College in 1970.¹¹⁷ Chicago experimented with her pedagogy in her class, including a version of free-form consciousness-raising, which I will explore primarily through the voices of art historians and writers Cindy Nemser and Gail Levin. Nemser explains she encouraged students to "express their feelings about themselves as women through their art."¹¹⁸ She expounds that Chicago intended her students to address their "real concerns" of women's political positioning through consciousness-raising, thus assisting in creating political activism and the inception of "feminist art."¹¹⁹ "Feminist Art," directly according to Chicago, is "art that is authentic to one's lived

¹¹⁷ Nemser, "The Women Artist's Movement," 19.

¹¹⁸ Nemser, "The Women Artist's Movement," 19.

¹¹⁹ Nemser, "The Women Artist's Movement," 19.

experience,” is a direct manifestation of consciousness-raising by an individual.¹²⁰ American art historian Gail Levin further clarifies that Chicago wanted her students to “share and bear witness to their own experiences in a non-judgmental atmosphere.”¹²¹ Her teaching method, highly comparable to my term, free-form consciousness-raising, is a “political tool because it teaches women the commonality of their oppression and leads them to analyze its causes and effects,” according to Levin.¹²² However, Chicago was unaware of “classical consciousness-raising” at that time. Later, Levin contends that art historians would define Chicago’s methods as consciousness-raising due to their fundamental commonalities and effectiveness.¹²³

Chicago’s class and her work embodied the transformative nature of free-form consciousness-raising to art, including its contribution to the future of art, distinct from male-dominated modernism. Frequent topics of interest for Chicago’s students were sexuality and representation. As Chicago’s students explored the notion of the “female role,” criticizing their contributions to rigid societal norms, they opened up new windows to unique mediums and female-dominated political messages through art. Therefore, Chicago created a basis for “feminist art” that departed from male-dominated modernism that embraced both abstract and realist art embodying NYRW coined phrase “the personal is political.” Gail Levin demonstrates that to Chicago, her pedagogy of free-form consciousness-raising was “connected to content search in terms of art-making” and “enabled each participant to be heard uninterrupted and to have her say.”¹²⁴ This method was integral to Chicago’s teaching methods. Levin reflects on

¹²⁰ DeBiaso, “Judy Chicago,” 13.

¹²¹ Gail Levin, *Becoming Judy Chicago. A Biography of the Artist*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2019, 30.

<https://www.csus.edu/indiv/o/obriene/art116/Readings/Gail%20Levin%20Becoming%20Judy%20Chicago%20Feminist%20Class.pdf>

¹²² Levin, *Becoming Judy Chicago*, 30.

¹²³ Levin, *Becoming Judy Chicago*, 30.

¹²⁴ Levin, *Becoming Judy Chicago*, 30.

behalf of Chicago that it pushed and demanded these young women to grow as she had, rapidly changing their personalities to accommodate the highest conscious version of their feminine selves. Chicago not only used consciousness-raising to change her students' art, but she also used its fundamental self-reflective ideas to change her art through her break from male-modernist dominated society.

Chicago's art changed significantly, drawing the fundamental ideas of female class consciousness and consciousness-raising as early as the 1960s, as discussed by student Francesca DeBiaso in a thesis entitled "Judy Chicago: Visions of Feminist Art."¹²⁵ Initially, Chicago created art that mimicked male-dominated, industrial sculpture in Los Angeles called the Finish Fetish art movement in the 1960s.¹²⁶ The Getty Museum characterizes this movement as utilizing materials such as paints and plastics, "adopting fabrication processes to create seamless, bright, and pristine-looking objects directly inspired by California culture."¹²⁷ The materials and seamless look of Finish Fetish art were male-dominated and accommodated a masculine interest devoid of feelings. Chicago felt pressured to submit her art to the dominance of male authority by emasculating her identity as a woman. To be a "real artist," she had to prove that she was capable of working with the materials available to the male-dominated art world. By the mid-1960s, Chicago was making colorful yet minimalist works such as *Rainbow Pickett*, 1965, (Fig. 3.). Chicago's focus on minimalism denied any personal expression or narrative to her work; she was determined to constitute herself as a "real artist" in the Los Angeles art scene.

¹²⁵ DeBiaso, "Judy Chicago."

¹²⁶ DeBiaso, "Judy Chicago," 6.

¹²⁷ Rachel Rivenc, Emma Richardson, and Tom Lerner, The Getty, "The L.A. Look from Start to Finish - Getty." Accessed January 7, 2022.

https://www.getty.edu/conservation/our_projects/science/art_LA/article_2011_icom_cc.pdf

Chicago soon became frustrated with the lack of personal connection in her art. She decided she must express her true self. Instinctively, DeBaiso uncovers that Chicago adopted free-form consciousness-raising as a primary tactic to validate her experiences as a female artist, allowing her to realize both her sexual and gender identities.¹²⁸ Chicago's emotional investment with her processes gradually transformed her minimalist methods into personal anecdotes. For example, in her first autobiography *Through the Flower: My Struggle as a Woman Artist* (1975), Chicago explains her choice to represent her sexuality in her *Domes* series, (fig. 4), through "three dome shapes, the simplest forms that [she] could think of that had reference to [her] own body, breasts, and fecundity."¹²⁹ Using the forms Chicago already knew and inherent in her practices, she explored "what it was like to be a female and to have a multi-orgasmic sexuality" through her art.¹³⁰ However, when identified as feminine work referencing the ancient figurine Venus of Willendorf (Fig. 5), Chicago still felt ashamed.

Gail Levin indicates Judy Chicago found her consciousness-raising voice by educating herself on activism and civil rights, thoroughly advocating for women's rights as well. She absorbed concerns and divulged with women artists such as DeFeo and O'Keeffe and filmmakers Clarke, Varda, and Zetterling.¹³¹ She capitalized on feminist texts and committed herself to raise the female class consciousness of artists "aware of themselves as women" and "able to be emotionally honest with themselves & others."¹³² Chicago's response to these texts admitted feminists such as Valerie Solana, and her book, as "extreme." Chicago also "recognized [the]

¹²⁸ DeBaiso, "Judy Chicago," 6.

¹²⁹ DeBaiso, "Judy Chicago," 6.

¹³⁰ DeBaiso, "Judy Chicago," 6.

¹³¹ Levin, *Becoming Judy Chicago*, 28.

¹³² Levin, *Becoming Judy Chicago*, 30.

truth of her observations...[that] ‘Great Art’ is great because male authorities have told us so.”¹³³ Chicago deeply and personally understood the women's liberation movement and wanted to discuss it among her colleagues, rooted in her experiences and a new “framework of reality...beginning with critiquing the old.”¹³⁴ Therefore, Chicago’s intimate understanding of the women’s liberation movement gave her the basis to understand feminist art to practice free-form consciousness-raising.

Chicago practiced free-form consciousness-raising by discussing feminist texts with like-minded women and through the later inception of her class at Fresno State College. Free-form consciousness-raising assisted Chicago in providing a self-understanding to her work and changing her art to display her famed vaginal forms, embracing the minimalist woman’s body in *Domes* (Fig. 4) resembling the *Venus of Willendorf* (Fig. 5). By 1968, Levin points out Chicago had embraced “non-traditional methods of art collaboration and the use of women’s craft and the highly provocative use of vaginal imagery.” Chicago had even changed her name, her surname once Gerowitz, to become Chicago as referenced, “as an act of identifying [herself] as an independent woman.”¹³⁵ Her name change was recognized by an ArtForum ad she took out with the text: “Judy Gerowitz hereby divests herself of all names imposed upon her through male social dominance and freely chooses her own name—Judy Chicago.”¹³⁶ In that same ad, she changed the title of her first show to, “Judy Gerowitz One ~~Man~~ WOMAN Show Cal State Fullerton October 23 THRU November 25.”¹³⁷ Chicago intended to establish herself through these actions while concurrently sharing her knowledge with other oppressed women in her

¹³³ Levin, *Becoming Judy Chicago*, 26.

¹³⁴ Levin, *Becoming Judy Chicago*, 26.

¹³⁵ Levin, *Becoming Judy Chicago*, 27.

¹³⁶ Levin, *Becoming Judy Chicago*, 27.

¹³⁷ Levin, *Becoming Judy Chicago*, 27.

class. Chicago would forever change the dialogue of art with any students who dared to follow her in the 1970 class at Fresno State College. In doing so, she recognized the fruition of their personal and professional struggles into original work of dynamic and new mediums in provocative styles.

Chicago was honored for her determination to change the male modernist dialogue of art with her class at Fresno State College. Heinz Kusel, the Fresno State College art department chair, who thought she had an “aggressive, hostile feminist” attitude, also said she was “interesting and dynamic.”¹³⁸ The transfer of Kusel’s masculine power through gatekeeping was evident in the creation of Chicago’s all-women class. Kusel noted:

“Despite severe opposition, I decided she would be good for the department and hired her. I allowed her to create a strictly Woman’s Art Program. It became the first of its kind in any university and a key contribution to the feminist movement in America.”¹³⁹

Therefore, Judy Chicago assumed the power of a man in her own class, demanding her students commit to and practice raising consciousness through their works.

Chicago’s inherent level of commitment to making her students grow nearly shattered them, even leaving some with post-traumatic stress. However, her drive furthered her pursuit of free form consciousness-raising as a primary teaching method. Nonetheless, as noted, Chicago “didn’t know about classical consciousness-raising then” and she preferred to characterize her practice as “going around the circle and including everyone, which is something [she] started doing when [she] first started teaching in the sixties, prior to the women’s movement.”¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Levin, *Becoming Judy Chicago*, 26.

¹³⁹ Levin, *Becoming Judy Chicago*, 26.

¹⁴⁰ Levin, *Becoming Judy Chicago*, 31.

Gail Levin recalls Chicago's first-class at Fresno State College suffered from attrition as she found her footing, as one student noted a critical phase to Chicago's intensive teaching methods and thereby raising consciousness was "personality reconstruction."¹⁴¹ The same student recalled, "she took us seriously and made us accountable," even once having demanded that she get out of bed for class. Through her requirement to be a part of the class, she "suggested that we be accountable, that we communicate rather than withdraw," supporting her consciousness-raising ideologies.¹⁴² Another student remembers "she was pretty confrontational with everybody," and on occasion would explode with comments such as, "If you were a group of men artists, you'd be discussing your work. You'll have to change."¹⁴³ Chicago's prerequisite was for young women artists in her group to constantly grow through questioning the inherent experiences that had established themselves as "female." She wanted them to probe their relationship to the male-dominated art world, and she used free-form consciousness-raising as primary art pedagogy.

After her initial student commitment requirement to the class, Levin expounds that Chicago asked her students to review the literature of other feminists such as Suzanne Lacy while simultaneously founding a "personal struggle for identity" in their art and "an understanding of our history as women."¹⁴⁴ Both topics relating to the NYRW phrase, "the personal is political," directly relate to the intended results of consciousness-raising and a mass female consciousness. Through their study of literature, Chicago's students were encouraged to discuss "feelings [of being] invaded by men," and "to make images of these feelings" producing

¹⁴¹ Levin, *Becoming Judy Chicago*, 31.

¹⁴² Levin, *Becoming Judy Chicago*, 31.

¹⁴³ Levin, *Becoming Judy Chicago*, 29.

¹⁴⁴ Levin, *Becoming Judy Chicago*, 31.

radical and life-changing results. Chicago was shocked at how direct the produced works were, translating feelings of violation into confronting images.¹⁴⁵ Only through raising free-form consciousness could her students address such ideas. Chicago also asked her students to perform studied art historical movements. They attempted to display interdependence between women in the group to raise each other's consciousness, rather than rely on her as their teacher.¹⁴⁶ However, Chicago struggled to allow her students to function independently, and eventually, she looked to friend Miriam Schapiro for guidance.¹⁴⁷ By the end of Chicago's time with her students, she "made everyone in the program believe they could do whatever they wanted to do," which I believe is the fundamental goal of activism through consciousness-raising.¹⁴⁸

After Chicago's class at Fresno State College, she significantly developed her oeuvre from free-form consciousness-raising tactics to represent phallic symbolism which Chicago considered "Cunt Art," as stated by Cindy Nesmer.¹⁴⁹ Although outwardly crude, Nesmer accounts that "Cunt Art" advocated for profound self-reflective imagery on women's bodies, creating "pulsating 'womb-like' forms."¹⁵⁰ "Cunt Art" also insisted on reclaiming phallic imagery that men initially only portrayed.¹⁵¹ Additionally, "Cunt Art" insisted that its counterpart, the vagina, may only contextualize a phallic symbol. "Cunt Art" consequently acknowledged the vagina's inherent "dependence, subservience, and submission" but intended to match the power of phallic symbolism if phallic and vaginal images are co-dependent.¹⁵² The

¹⁴⁵ Levin, *Becoming Judy Chicago*, 32.

¹⁴⁶ Levin, *Becoming Judy Chicago*, 32.

¹⁴⁷ Levin, *Becoming Judy Chicago*, 32.

¹⁴⁸ Levin, *Becoming Judy Chicago*, 31.

¹⁴⁹ Nesmer, "The Women Artist's Movement," 20.

¹⁵⁰ Nesmer, "The Women Artist's Movement," 20.

¹⁵¹ DeBiaso, "Judy Chicago," 15.

¹⁵² DeBiaso, "Judy Chicago," 15.

idea of vaginal suppression by phallic imagery similarly represents the duality and reclaiming of female oppression to acknowledge the power of a female class consciousness. Chicago asserted that some of the world's most famous feminist artists, such as Georgia O'Keeffe and Miriam Shapiro, practiced "Cunt Art." Chicago embraced the concept with her famed piece, *The Dinner Party*, 1979, (Fig. 6). *The Dinner Party*, 1979, is an installation artwork piece that frames a massive, ceremonious banquet with motifs based on vulva and butterfly forms, unique to the women honored at the table.¹⁵³ The dawn of Chicago's "Cunt Art" could not have been achieved without her instruction of free-form consciousness-raising in her class and developed methods of criticism/self-criticism projected and shared among other artists.

However, Chicago's free-form consciousness-raising tactics and development of "Cunt Art" were not met with certainty by all feminist artists. She faced significant opposition that inspired a "counter-Cunt Art" movement, emanating from the conclusions drawn by her free-form consciousness-raising sessions to construct such phallic imagery visually. In the 1972 *Feminist Art Journal*, critics shamed Chicago for her practices and use of "Cunt Art," speaking out against its narrow-minded theorizing.¹⁵⁴ However, as culture and counter-culture existed simultaneously, Chicago persevered on. Chicago would establish feminist art to include free-form consciousness-raising pedagogies, inciting political activism towards a feminist class consciousness that was radical in ideas and figurative representation. Miriam Schapiro would work directly with Chicago to conceive their next consciousness-raising project, *Womanhouse*, and Joan Jonas would simultaneously use consciousness-raising to inform and change her work.

¹⁵³ "The Dinner Party by Judy Chicago." Brooklyn Museum: The Dinner Party by Judy Chicago. Accessed December 21, 2021. https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/dinner_party/

¹⁵⁴ Nemser, "The Women Artist's Movement," 20.

Chapter 3: Consciousness-Raising in the Feminist Art Movement Expanded

i. Miriam Schapiro

In 1970, as Judy Chicago spearheaded the feminist movement with her all-women arts class. Art historian Gail Levin recalls that same year that Miriam Schapiro, artist, and teacher at CalArts, was participating in a similar discipline, determined to reconcile her mother and artist identities.¹⁵⁵ Schapiro initially worked in gestural abstraction, referencing male-dominated modernist movements, i.e., Abstract Expressionism, similar to Chicago's antecedent male-dominated practice, in the Finish Fetish art movement. However, Schapiro felt disconnected from the abstract practices once she became a mother in 1957. She sought materials and symbols that would help harmonize her dual identities, reflected in the theorizing of consciousness-raising to acknowledge and reclaim her womanhood.

Examples of works where Schapiro attempted to negotiate her dual identities included some of her early feminist works from 1961-1963, such as *Shrine (for R.K.) II*, 1963, (Fig. 7). In *Shrine (for R.K.) II*, Schapiro used spherical structures to reference female forms such as an egg.¹⁵⁶ The egg was a symbol traditionally associated with "revival and rebirth." Student Katherine M. Duncan suggests in her thesis "The Early Work of Miriam Schapiro" that Schapiro took shelter in this image to represent her duality as a mother and artist.¹⁵⁷ The unborn egg allowed for infinite possibilities for Schapiro's feminist vision, suggesting her self-discovery and fostering additional women's identities through mutual support and eventually consciousness-

¹⁵⁵ Levin, *Becoming Judy Chicago*, 29.

¹⁵⁶ Levin, *Becoming Judy Chicago*, 29.

¹⁵⁷ Katherine M. Duncan, "The Early Work of Miriam Schapiro: Beginnings of Reconciliation between Artist and Woman," (Thesis, Florida State University, n.d.,) 45.

raising strategies.¹⁵⁸ Additionally, these *Shrines* would use historical references to male artists that depicted women, such as *Shrine, Hommage to Cezanne*, 1963, (Fig. 8), indicating that there were no classical female artists of this notoriety.¹⁵⁹ Schapiro's *Shrines* destined her future self-discovery of her female artistic identity in art history. They reflected relics of her past inscribed with a new vision for her identity.¹⁶⁰

By 1967, Duncan explains that Schapiro embraced her “egg” forms in new compositional formats. She used computer-imaging techniques to create hard-geometric works, superimposing the sacred “O” on the letter “X.”¹⁶¹ *Big Ox*, 1967, (Fig. 9), resembled Schapiro's move from New York to California, referencing the state's natural light patterns and modernist architecture.¹⁶² However, *Big Ox* was also significant for Schapiro's creation of a new feminist vernacular in the feminist art movement. Schapiro would communicate a “feminist aesthetic that would embody the political in visual language” where the “geometry masked its sexual meaning.”¹⁶³ Her forms ascribed minimalistic lines and light but visually represented the vagina and an egg. Schapiro battled for recognition in a male-dominated world which she represented visually through the stark contrast between her hard-edged forms and symbolic soft eggs. *Big Ox*'s vulnerable shades of pink and orange are notable for how Schapiro would continually open her awareness through new practices and forms of art.¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁸ Duncan, “The Early Work of Miriam Schapiro,” 45.

¹⁵⁹ Duncan, “The Early Work of Miriam Schapiro,” 43.

¹⁶⁰ Duncan, “The Early Work of Miriam Schapiro,” 43.

¹⁶¹ “Big Ox, 1967.” *Art Basel 2019 Catalogue*. Art Basel, 2019. Eric Firestone Gallery.

<https://artbasel.com/catalog/artwork/91252/Miriam-Schapiro-Big-Ox>

¹⁶² “Big Ox, 1967.” *Art Basel 2019 Catalogue*, Eric Firestone Gallery.

¹⁶³ “Big Ox, 1967.” *Art Basel 2019 Catalogue*, Eric Firestone Gallery.

¹⁶⁴ “Big Ox, 1967.” *Art Basel 2019 Catalogue*, Eric Firestone Gallery.

In 1970, Miriam Schapiro met Judy Chicago when Chicago struggled to give her students independence rather than strict instruction in her all-women art class. Gail Levin narrates that Schapiro and Chicago were instantly fond of one another when Schapiro brought her class to Chicago's show. Chicago later recalled, "it was obvious that she could 'read' my work, identify with it, and affirm it."¹⁶⁵ Chicago could relay her worries and fears to Schapiro, feeling unjudged, a vital realization of consciousness-raising bonds, which would lead to Schapiro's 1970 November visit to Chicago's all-women art class.¹⁶⁶ Schapiro observed Chicago's new program and was "impressed with the students' performance pieces that expressed their feelings...and the development of new female iconography."¹⁶⁷ Schapiro, baffled by the students' connections to their true feminine identities, strongly felt they had discovered their feminine art calling through consciousness-raising. She suggested that she and Chicago collaborate and conceptualize a new progressive class at CalArts.¹⁶⁸

By 1972, the Women's Liberation movement was equally crucial to Chicago and Schapiro. The pair founded *Womanhouse*, a new feminist art project. Levin states Chicago's "primal desire" was to "build an environment based on [the] needs of a woman artist," thereby including consciousness-raising in this new project.¹⁶⁹ Schapiro and Chicago invited twenty-one women artists to join *Womanhouse*, a feminist art installation work, and performance space.¹⁷⁰ Schapiro and Chicago's teaching methods were not unilateral, solving Chicago's grievances in her facilitator role at Fresno State College. Schapiro wrote for *Art Journal* in 1972 that

¹⁶⁵ Levin, *Becoming Judy Chicago*, 29.

¹⁶⁶ Levin, *Becoming Judy Chicago*, 32.

¹⁶⁷ Levin, *Becoming Judy Chicago*, 32.

¹⁶⁸ Levin, *Becoming Judy Chicago*, 32.

¹⁶⁹ Levin, *Becoming Judy Chicago*, 32.

¹⁷⁰ Miriam Schapiro, "The Education of Women as Artists: Project Womanhouse." *Art Journal* 31, no. 3 (1972): 268. <https://doi.org/10.2307/775513>

Womanhouse's teaching methods were "circular" and "womb-like."¹⁷¹ The circular teaching methods perhaps referenced Schapiro's circular egg-like images to realize her dual identities. *Womanhouse*'s circular teaching method is also directly related to consciousness-raising's use as an art pedagogy. Students and teachers received equal feedback, raising awareness and changing their art practices. Schapiro summarized the feeling between Chicago and her that "one does not have to carry the entire responsibility for the Program frees us."¹⁷² Due to these circular teaching methods, facilitators and students collaborated towards uncovering oppression, consciousness-raising's fundamental goal.

Schapiro recalls her desire for each member of *Womanhouse* to reach her "highest level of perception" through a mutual sharing of experiences, assuming responsibility for herself.¹⁷³ Schapiro directly relates *Womanhouse* to the Women's Liberation Movement statement "the personal is political" by normalizing privatized thoughts or "hang-ups."¹⁷⁴ *Womanhouse*'s relationship to the feminist art movement's establishment is undeniably rooted in consciousness-raising, simultaneously changing the dialogue of modernism regarding what "high" art could be. In these sessions, Schapiro noted that participants applied consciousness-raising to seek out subject matter based on mutual dissidence with the male patriarchy and undeniable real feelings about each participant's womanhood.¹⁷⁵ Students would turn the subject matter, arrived at through consciousness-raising, into aesthetic practices "[encouraging] and [supporting] the most

¹⁷¹ Schapiro, "Project Womanhouse," 268.

¹⁷² Schapiro, "Project Womanhouse," 268.

¹⁷³ Schapiro, "Project Womanhouse," 268.

¹⁷⁴ Schapiro, "Project Womanhouse," 268.

¹⁷⁵ Schapiro, "Project Womanhouse," 268.

profound artistic needs of the group.”¹⁷⁶ Consciousness-raising was thereby essential to the content and practices of feminist art at *Womanhouse*.

Womanhouse's members drastically changed the feminist art movement, reversing modern art laws. Shapiro explains consciousness-raising changed “high” art materials’ essence; “what was formerly considered trivial was heightened to the level of serious art-making: dolls, pillows, cosmetics, sanitary napkins, silk stockings.”¹⁷⁷ The name *Womanhouse* and the space itself, an abandoned house in California, arose from personal sentiments uncovered in one consciousness-raising session for how women contextualized a “safe space.” A consciousness-raising question that caused students to arrive at *Womanhouse*'s structure included, “What would happen, we asked, if we created a home in which we pleased no one but ourselves?”¹⁷⁸ The home, also directly tied to the sociological structure of women’s place in society, was meant to be elevated from a confined social structure to a workplace for creating highly conscious art. Women intended to nourish one another with creative thoughts and criticisms meant to elevate women’s art.

Womanhouse began as a genuinely decrepit space, yet *Womanhouse*'s members committed to continuing transforming the space through ideas brought up in consciousness-raising sessions. For example, Robin Weltsch and Vicki Hodgetts created *Womanhouse*'s kitchen (Fig. 10) from a consciousness-raising session.¹⁷⁹ The kitchen was significant to mother and daughter teaching one another, a place fostering both frustration and love, the frequent outcomes of consciousness-raising sentiments. Weltsch and Hodgetts transformed the kitchen into a purely

¹⁷⁶ Schapiro, “Project Womanhouse,” 268.

¹⁷⁷ Schapiro, “Project Womanhouse,” 268.

¹⁷⁸ Schapiro, “Project Womanhouse,” 268.

¹⁷⁹ Schapiro, “Project Womanhouse,” 268.

pink room, with the ceiling and walls adorned with eggs, a feminist installation named “Eggs to Breasts” to mimic breasts, and Schapiro’s sentiment of motherhood and rebirth.¹⁸⁰ The other rooms would also become feminist installation pieces. The women learned to glaze, install windows, and wallpaper to refurbish their space as a home.

Womanhouse’s rooms, specifically its three bathrooms, were “site-specific” works, notably related to thoughts that arose in consciousness-raising sessions about ideas related to the portrayal of women’s hygiene.¹⁸¹ The first, *Menstruation Bathroom* (Fig. 11), idealized reproduction thoughts, representing Tampax and other feminine hygiene products.¹⁸² The last, *Nightmare Bathroom* (Fig. 12), represented the horrors of societal pressure to cover the feminine aesthetic with makeup.¹⁸³ A woman’s body made of sand lay in the tub with an ominous black crow hanging from the ceiling.¹⁸⁴ Members designated the larger upstairs rooms for performance sessions, such as Chicago’s application and makeup removal, a room designed with opulence to reflect an ideal women’s aesthetic.¹⁸⁵ Additionally, the *Womb Room* (Fig. 13), by Faith Wielding, was filled with a massive web of rope and yarn, netted to visualize “oval apertures and overtones of womb-like space that suggested a primitive hut.”¹⁸⁶ *Womanhouse*’s members loved showing their works there because they found the natural setting conducive to their feminist goals.¹⁸⁷ These women were able to project the idealized women relationships to home and the

¹⁸⁰ Judy Chicago Research Portal: Learning, Making, Culture, “Womanhouse | Judy Chicago Research Portal,” Accessed January 17, 2022. <https://judychicagportal.org/projects/womanhouse>

¹⁸¹ Schapiro, “Project Womanhouse,” 269.

¹⁸² Lauren Elkin, “Womanhouse.” *ArtReview.com*. Art Review, May 4, 2018. <https://artreview.com/ar-april-2018-feature-womanhouse/>

¹⁸³ Judy Chicago Research Portal, “Womanhouse.”

¹⁸⁴ Schapiro, “Project Womanhouse,” 269.

¹⁸⁵ Schapiro, “Project Womanhouse,” 269.

¹⁸⁶ Schapiro, “Project Womanhouse,” 269.

¹⁸⁷ Schapiro, “Project Womanhouse,” 270.

nightmares of women's performances through thoughts that arose in consciousness-raising sessions.

Womanhouse embodied consciousness-raising's impact within the feminist art movement. Its installations, such as *Womb Room*, elevated materials such as yarn once considered "low" art while creating politically conscious art while collaborating with other artists. As reviewed by *ArtReview*: "This combination of site-specific work, performance and installation unabashedly made women's experiences the subject of art."¹⁸⁸ Other *Womanhouse* projects included Judy Chicago's workshop performances, *Three Women*, *Cock and Cunt play*, *Waiting*, *The Birth Trilogy*, performed in a space that embodied aspects of women's everyday lives.¹⁸⁹ Sociologist Howard Becker demonstrates *Womanhouse*'s connection to consciousness-raising as a project which intentionally reminds the viewer that "art is social...and a form of collective action."¹⁹⁰ His idea of collective action recalls one of Lippard's three methods in consciousness-raising's transformation of feminist art. As a safe space, *Womanhouse* provided members with an open space to act and perform, furthering the intentions of feminist art and revolutionizing it past modernism as "an attempt to pioneer a new pedagogy: collaborative, nonhierarchical, [and] feminist."¹⁹¹ *Womanhouse*'s utopian feminist art project and installation space allowed further creation of feminist art ideas.

ii. Joan Jonas

¹⁸⁸ Elkin, "Womanhouse."

¹⁸⁹ Balasz Takac, "Inside Womanhouse, A Beacon of Feminist Art." *WideWalls*. WideWalls, June 2, 2019. <https://www.widewalls.ch/magazine/judy-chicago-womanhouse>

¹⁹⁰ Elkin, "Womanhouse."

¹⁹¹ Elkin, "Womanhouse."

As Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro changed the discourse of feminist art through consciousness-raising pedagogy and visual practices, artist Joan Jonas also transformed her art via consciousness-raising. A New York performance artist, Jonas was known for installation and video, progressive mediums in the 1970s. These mediums were not considered “high” art at the time.¹⁹² Jonas explained that her use of alternative mediums became “more about communicating from one culture to another,” a valuable interpretation of consciousness-raising to the dialogue of feminist art and feminist artists.¹⁹³ Jonas credits much of the outlook and success of her work to her early interests in feminist ideologies and her subsequent participation in consciousness-raising groups, “as a way to meet, talk about issues, share experiences, and understand what their places were in society.”¹⁹⁴ Feminist culture through consciousness-raising transcended male-dominated modernism through outlooks similar to Jonas.

Jonas indicates consciousness-raising changed her artistic mediums. She also credits women teachers in establishing consciousness-raising as a primary instructional method. In an interview, Jonas says, “when I went into art school, there were no women teachers. Even when I was teaching, I was often the first woman, or the only woman. Many women went into performance, dance, and video then, because the fields of sculpture and painting were so dominated by men.”¹⁹⁵ Jonas, primarily trained in sculpture, evolved her medium to include performance, installation, and video production via consciousness-raising. For example, her work *Mirror Piece I*, 1969 (Fig. 2), used her male-dominated sculpture education to “turn the

¹⁹² Rosie Prata, “Joan Jonas: A US Legend Raises Cape Breton's Ghosts.” *Canadian Art*, June 20, 2018. <https://canadianart.ca/features/joan-jonas/>

¹⁹³ Prata, “Joan Jonas”

¹⁹⁴ Prata, “Joan Jonas”

¹⁹⁵ Prata, “Joan Jonas”

mirror on the audience, using it to implicate them and destabilize their surroundings.”¹⁹⁶ A structured device, the mirror, divided Jonas’s perspective from the audience. However, the mirror further contextualized into performance, in which “performers [carried] oblong mirrors in slowly choreographed movements...alternately reflecting their own bodies and the surroundings, and offering the audience a flattened view of itself as an image within the performance.”¹⁹⁷ The Guggenheim’s photograph acquisition indicates her performance's importance to the narrative of changing male-dominated mediums into fresh performance mediums.

Jonas pinpoints her attraction to performance and mirrors as perfecting acts of self-confidence when she taught different groups.¹⁹⁸ Jonas’s attribution to consciousness-raising as a primary female teaching method explains her art’s relationship transformation. Jonas fully submitted herself to becoming a performing artist in the late 1960s, coinciding with her participation in consciousness-raising groups. In her interview, Jonas says that she intended to deconstruct male-dominated narcissism in her mirror pieces, because “people would be uneasy when they saw themselves in those mirrors, and I played on that...it [made] people uncomfortable to be caught looking at themselves in the mirror.”¹⁹⁹ The mirror also signified the development of body images within children, “stepping stones from the narcissistic self to relationships.”²⁰⁰ Jonas’s concentration on body image is a modern feminist regarding unattainable societal beauty standards.

¹⁹⁶ Prata, “Joan Jonas”

¹⁹⁷ Nat Trotman, “Mirror Piece I.” The Guggenheim Museums and Foundation. Accessed January 17, 2022. <https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/24749>

¹⁹⁸ Rachel Corbett, “Failure Was around the Corner’: Why Joan Jonas, at Age 85, Is Still Looking for New Ways to Perform and Spaces to Inhabit.” Artnet News. Artnet News, November 8, 2021. <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/joan-jonas-2028608>

¹⁹⁹ Corbett, “Joan Jonas, at Age 85, Is Still Looking for New Ways to Perform.”

²⁰⁰ JOAN JONAS and Karin Schneider. “JOAN JONAS.” Interview, *BOMB*, no. 112 (2010): 6. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27801164>

Jonas features mirrors in her performance pieces to intentionally make her audiences uncomfortable. *Mirror Check*, 1971 (Fig. 2), is a well-known feminist performance piece “in which she scrutinized every inch of her body using a handheld mirror.”²⁰¹ Even with this piece’s success, Jonas indicates how could she ever feel entirely comfortable in a male-dominated society? Jonas’s work is rooted in the self-critical ideas of consciousness-raising that it engages with questioning the portrayals of “female identity in theatrical and self-reflexive ways, using ritual-like gestures, masks, mirrors, and costumes.”²⁰² Her pieces reflect consciousness-raising’s alternative materials, methods, presentation, and subject matter focusing on narcissism, body image, and portrayal of the female form. *Mirror Check* highlights women's private actions, constantly scrutinizing their bodies to meet female beauty standards.

By 1976, Jonas recalled, “those consciousness-raising groups radically changed [her] relationship to other women.”²⁰³ Specifically, works such as *The Juniper Tree*, 1976 (Fig. 15), and *Volcano Saga*, 1989 (Fig. 16), presented ideas that mused on “women and the roles they play in myth and fairy tales.”²⁰⁴ *The Juniper Tree* is a “site-specific” work, presented as a performance set based on a Brothers’ Grimm tale. The Tate notes it “is an important work of Jonas’s, as she deftly suggests the theatrics she’s known for without presenting any action per se.”²⁰⁵ In *The Juniper Tree*, Jonas plays various mythological roles, foreshadowing a “dramatic birth to a child (played by a live rabbit)” set within feminist iconography such as “pine stools to

²⁰¹ Prata, “Joan Jonas”

²⁰² “Joan Jonas: Mirror Check (1970).” Artsy. Accessed January 19, 2022. <https://www.artsy.net/artwork/joan-jonas-mirror-check>

²⁰³ Prata, “Joan Jonas”

²⁰⁴ Prata, “Joan Jonas”

²⁰⁵ Oliver Basciano, “Joan Jonas at Tate Modern.” *SpikeArt Magazine*. SpikeArt, August 3, 2018. <https://www.spikeartmagazine.com/?q=articles%2Fjoan-jonas-tate-modern>.

knit twine with nine-foot ‘knitting needles.’”²⁰⁶ Even as folklore was once stigmatized subject matter, Jonas intentionally unravels culture, not considered serious by male-modernists. By 1989, *Volcano Saga* similarly explored a matured version of Joan’s myth and dream narratives in the context of her visual style. The twenty-eight-minute video work includes two actors who perform an “Icelandic folk tale of a woman named Gudrun and a soothsayer who helps navigate her dreams.”²⁰⁷

Jonas indicated her work did not always convey the feminist political agenda, yet, she still reflected her inner feelings of strength as a woman in this world.²⁰⁸ Jonas represents the inner mind's workings and folklore developed around women's narratives. She visualized “meeting with other women, fish swimming, a bee doing its round dance and mirrors, and memory surfaces of being at this women-only water-circuit spa and seeing variously shaped and aged nude bodies of other women in real life for the first time.”²⁰⁹ Jonas’s work embodies consciousness-raising’s transformative nature of art into modernist techniques transcribed by her comments crediting the practice and its teachers. Additionally, the change in Jonas’s work from sculpture to performance, a once “low” medium of art, and her ability to elevate this medium indicates consciousness-raising’s power as an activist tool.

Lucy Lippard defined consciousness-raising as one of the three tools feminists utilize to respond to society critically.²¹⁰ Through consciousness-raising, feminist artists transformed their

²⁰⁶ ARTnews, The Editors of. “From the Archives: Joan Jonas's First Site-Specific Installation, in 1977.” ARTnews.com. ARTnews.com, November 18, 2019. <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/retrospective/archives-joan-jonass-first-site-specific-installation-1977-10006/>

²⁰⁷ Susanna Davies-Crook, “Joan Jonas' Volcano Saga.” *Dazed*. Dazed, October 21, 2011. <https://www.dazeddigital.com/artsandculture/article/11860/1/joan-jonas-volcano-saga>

²⁰⁸ Prata, “Joan Jonas”

²⁰⁹ Prata, “Joan Jonas”

²¹⁰ Lippard, “Sweeping Exchanges,” 364.

art via self-criticism, furthering their art's development and uniqueness without contributing to male-dominated modernism. Consciousness-raising also elevated non-traditional forms of art-making, performance, textiles, sewing, and collage and its emotive responses. Lippard explained, "Feminist art raises consciousness, invites dialogue, and transforms culture." However, consciousness-raising in tandem with feminist art takes the form of a cultural narrative and a political stance. Consciousness-raising reflected a set of ideas deciphering the world's future concerning women's history. Judy Chicago, Miriam Schapiro, and Joan Jonas portray consciousness-raising's connection to feminist art through enhancing self-critique. Departing from male-modernism, these artists elevated non-traditional art forms, including weaving, sculpture, and subject matter, such as Judy Chicago's "Cunt Art." These feminist artists intended to take personal and political positions, embodying "the personal is political." Bonding women together in the societal commentary to change norms, they emerged from the male-dominated past into a new, feminist approach to art. Consciousness-raising's impact on these artists ignited the ideas of the feminist art revolution.

Conclusion: Curating an Exhibition, “Great Women Artists”

Feminist consciousness-raising’s history directly connects to feminist artists who practiced consciousness-raising. My fictitious curated exhibition, “Great Women Artists: Consciousness-Raising among Intersectional Feminists,” presents the works of Judy Chicago, Miriam Schapiro, and Joan Jonas. Juxtaposed with works by Jenna Gribbon, Tala Madani, and Cindy Sherman, this fictitious exhibit emphasizes the distinct connections between visual representations and practices of the artists, exhibiting elements similar to consciousness-raising.

i. “Great Women Artists,” Chicago, Schapiro, and Jonas

In “Great Women Artists,” specific works are presented from the oeuvre of Chicago, Schapiro, and Jonas. The works exemplify feminist art’s progress towards a female class consciousness. The works presented acknowledge each woman’s transformational journey to become intrinsically more feminine through representing “otherness,” identifying a female class. Chicago and Schapiro began working in mediums that appeased masculine modernism, referencing the Finish Fetish Art Movement and Abstract Expressionism. Chicago, Schapiro, and Jonas’s works exemplify the self-representation of womanhood through figurative forms, i.e., phallic symbolism and “Cunt Art.” Through the performance of the female role, i.e., arts incepted through *Womanhouse* or Jonas’s mirrors that provide root exploitation of ego, duality, and “otherness.” These works also transform softer mediums such as textile and performance, once considered “low art.”

“Great Women Artists” presents Judy Chicago’s oeuvre through the following works. *Rainbow Pickett*, 1965 (Fig. 3), displays Chicago’s initial obsession to present herself as inherently masculine to be deemed a “worthy” artist, with a sleek minimalist look from the

Finish Fetish art movement. *Red Flag*, 1971 (Fig. 17), *Love Story*, 1971 (Fig. 18), *Gunsmoke*, 1971 (Fig. 19), and *Heaven is for White Men Only*, 1973 (Fig. 20), display Chicago's departure from minimalism, changing her medium to photo-lithography and acrylic on canvas. These works also present her radical change in displaying feminist narratives in her work through taboo topics such as menstruation and power dynamics and men's exploitation of women in relationships. *Heaven is for White Men Only* displays consciousness-raising through symbolism and the titling of the work. *Birth Tear*, 1982 (Fig. 21), and *Birth Power*, 1984 (Fig. 22), display Chicago's work in *The Birth Project*, highlighting her elevation of textiles and embroidery to "high art." Additionally, these works portray unspoken elements referencing a woman's mother experience.

Miriam Schapiro's works presented in "Great Women Artists" exemplify her departure from masculine Abstract Expressionism to focus on motherhood. *Mother and Child*, 1959 (Fig. 23), presents Schapiro's early abstract expressionist style and her struggle to portray motherhood. *Big Ox*, 1967 (Fig. 9) and *Audit*, 1971 (Fig. 24), represent Schapiro's experimentation with rigid technical forms and multi-colored computer-like elements attempting to depart from male-dominated abstract expressionism. *Big Ox* abstractly represents female genitalia and shows Schapiro's motherhood desires, the womb, and egg forms. *Dollhouse*, 1972 (Fig. 25), represents Schapiro's *Womanhouse* collaboration with Chicago. *Dollhouse's* mixed media elements depart from "high art" and represent Schapiro's exposure of imagination and fantasy with women's lived experiences.²¹¹ *Anatomy of a Kimono*, 1976 (Fig. 26), indicates

²¹¹ "Miriam Schapiro: Dollhouse." Smithsonian American Art Museum. Accessed January 29, 2022. <https://americanart.si.edu/artwork/dollhouse-35885>

Schapiro's establishment of her "femmage" practice. Details of *Anatomy of a Kimono* evoke Japanese kimonos and elevate textiles to "high art" at an abstract expressionist work scale.²¹²

Joan Jonas's "Great Women Artists" works primarily include performance photos and videos. *Mirror Piece I*, 1969 (Fig. 14), represents Jonas's early performance work. She presents the viewer with mirrors mimicking structured devices to examine the relationship between narcissism and the self rooted in consciousness-raising. In *Organic Honey's Video Telepathy*, 1972 (Fig. 27), Jonas utilizes video not typically considered "high art" with mirrors, masks, and costumes to present authority and women's societal pressures she has experienced.²¹³ *The Juniper Tree*, 1976 (Fig. 15), presents Jonas's set design elements and intertwining folklore and fairytale in women's narratives. *Volcano Saga*, 1989 (Fig. 16), and *The Shape, the Scent, the Feel of Things*, 2004 (Fig. 28), similarly portray Jonas's career trajectory in analyzing the self-rooted in societal norms and fascinating mythological symbolism.²¹⁴

ii. "Great Women Artists," Gribbon, Madani, and Sherman

The works of Jenna Gribbon, Tala Madani, and Cindy Sherman stand juxtaposed with Chicago, Schapiro, and Jonas's work. Each work presented by Gribbon, Madani, and Sherman exemplifies how female class-consciousness can be elevated through consciousness-raising by modern female artists. I will explain how each artist, utilizing consciousness-raising, has likely transformed the feminist nature of their works and deepened their understanding of womanhood.

²¹² Emily Anngisler, "Miriam Schapiro 'Anatomy of a Kimono' 1977-80 (Chapter 12)." *Women & Art*, May 2, 2017. <https://womenandartblog.wordpress.com/2017/05/02/miriam-schapiro-anatomy-of-a-kimono-1977-80-chapter-12/>

²¹³ "Joan Jonas: Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy," MACBA Museum of Contemporary Art of Barcelona, January 1, 1972. <https://www.macba.cat/en/art-artists/artists/jonas-joan/organic-honeys-visual-telepathy>

²¹⁴ "Joan Jonas," Dia Art Foundation, Accessed January 29, 2022. <https://www.diaart.org/exhibition/exhibitions-projects/joan-jonas-exhibition/>

Madani, Gribbon, and Sherman's work also add dimensions to Chicago, Schapiro, and Jonas's work. Their work illuminates intersectional woman identities: Madani as an Iranian born American artist; Gribbon as a lesbian figurative artist; and Sherman as one of the great female artists representing woman and performance of female roles.

Jenna Gribbon, a figurative lesbian artist, presents the works of her partner, Mackenzie, through a voyeuristic lens. Her eye trained on the female form represents a unique perspective society often fetishizes regarding women's relationships. Gribbon explains her works are resolutely queer, exploring figuration's escapist aspects and self-consciousness.²¹⁵ They are simultaneously intimate yet mistakenly conceived as sexual by society misinterpreting lesbian sex. For example, *Tick Check*, 2021 (Fig. 29), shows a non-sexual moment between the two, often mistaken for women's sex. Gribbon indicates that it merely illustrates a humble relational moment that visually transcends the mundane and ordinary connection. Gribbon also intentionally enjoys accentuating Mackenzie's aspects, such as her expressive faces, her stomach rolls when she slouches, and her fluorescent nipples, for example, *Interior Lightscape*, 2021 (Fig. 30), and *Red Curtain Stagescape*, 2021 (Fig. 31). Specifically, Gribbon highlights Mackenzie's fluorescent nipples, drawing the eye to an over-censored body part. She spotlights body parts around which society teaches women to be self-conscious. Other works, such as *Comment Section*, 2021 (Fig. 32) and *Unwanted Opinions*, 2021 (Fig. 33), indicate socially self-conscious aspects of lesbian and heterosexual women's relationships with over-scrutinizing society. Although Gribbon's figurative works do not directly relate to Chicago, Schapiro, and Jonas's works, she imitates similar ideas of sexual representation, vaginal forms, and consciousness. Gribbon's queer, voyeuristic figuration, escapist aspects, and exploration of self-consciousness

²¹⁵ "Jenna Gribbon." *Fredericks & Freiser*, <https://www.fredericksfreisergallery.com/exhibitions/jenna-gribbon2>

would provide her with the basis and interest to deepen her relationship to figurative painting via consciousness-raising.

Drawing influences from European painting and the Dutch Golden Age in terms of loose brushstrokes and technique, Gribbon revitalizes these era's methods.²¹⁶ However, Gribbon indicates she encounters the hurdle of reinforcing the white beauty standards of blonde women. However, she hopes that someone might see her work with little representation of lesbian relationships and identify with her.²¹⁷ If Gribbon had practiced consciousness-raising, she could have overcome her hurdle of white representation through identifying with a female class of intersectional women, including lesbianism. Gribbon indicates that she enjoyed going to friends' studios to talk about their paintings and work. She had a positive experience with consciousness-raising and bringing a new perspective regarding lesbianism to the female class consciousness of artists. Therefore, juxtaposing Gribbon's works with the work of Chicago, Schapiro, and Jonas would highlight the ability of consciousness-raising to elevate women's thoughts toward powerful female class consciousness and diversity inclusion.

An Iranian-born American artist, Tala Madani, makes paintings and animation based on language, gender, and political authority.²¹⁸ Her most recent exhibition, *Shit Moms*, 2019, at David Kordansky Gallery, pointedly dramatizes vulnerable, violent, perplexed, and humorous relationships among mothers and children, offering critical insights into motherhood.²¹⁹ When Madani moved to Los Angeles, she did not speak English, indicating her "otherness" through the

²¹⁶ "Jenna Gribbon." *Fredericks & Freiser*, <https://www.fredericksfreisergallery.com/news/jenna-gribbon-in-the-real-real>.

²¹⁷ "Jenna Gribbon," Talk Art Podcast, 2021, January 27, Season 12, Episode 1. <https://podcasts.apple.com/is/podcast/talk-art/id1439567112>

²¹⁸ "Tala Madani." *David Kordansky Gallery*, <https://www.davidkordanskygallery.com/artist/tala-madani>.

²¹⁹ "Tala Madani." *David Kordansky Gallery*, <https://www.davidkordanskygallery.com/exhibitions/tala-madani3>

visual language of painting. Madani's paintings use various motifs of defecation such as semen, feces, etc., as modern dialogues. For example, *At My Toilet #2*, 2019 (Fig. 34), represents mother and child; the mother rendered through brown fluid brushstrokes depicting feces represents a feared political politeness of mother-daughter relationships. Through these works, including *Shit Moms (Sandcastles)*, 2019 (Fig. 35) and *Nature Nurture*, 2019 (Fig. 36), Madani takes "a literal approach to the colloquial phrase used to describe mothers who fail their children."²²⁰ However, Madani creates a safe space for these "shit moms," representing mothers' common difficulties. The idealized "pristine mother" does not exist in her work, exposing the underbelly of social commentary on motherhood represented through second-wave feminist ideas and "housewifization." Housewifization refers to the division of sexual labor and that for women to be considered fruitful providers, they must enhance their mother role. Madani's use of feces to represent trivial insights of motherhood and contrast in light and shadow solidifies shifts in the public consciousness of how society projects idealized aspects of motherhood.

In her animation *The Womb*, 2019 (Fig. 37), Madani represents motherhood, explicitly drawing attention to Schapiro's womb visual representation. Both artists struggle to indicate the roles of both mother and artist through their art. As Madani's baby grows, her animation indicates the chronological evolution of children to motherhood in aesthetics that are simultaneously sad, frightening, and hilarious metaphors for the ways cultural knowledge passes generationally.²²¹ Madani also represents the political authority of the patriarchy through works such as *Cum Shot #3*, 2019 (Fig. 38), relating to Chicago's brutal representation of men's

²²⁰ "Tala Madani." *David Kordansky Gallery*

²²¹ "Tala Madani." *David Kordansky Gallery*

authority in relationships such as *Love Story*, 1971 (Fig. 18), or *Gunsmoke*, 1971 (Fig. 19). Both artists have a similar quality of representing the male phallus metaphorically as a gun.

Madani's identification with "otherness" and use of atypical visual constructs, i.e., brown, sludgy, excretion, representing motherhood, would allow consciousness-raising to heighten her works. Consciousness-raising lends power to her "otherness" and indicates a female class consciousness of mothers who detach themselves from fantasies of idealized motherhood. Furthermore, Madani's blatant representation of motherhood's struggles and the aggression of men's sexual tendencies illuminate unspoken feelings about the role of women in society. Direct consciousness-raising questions relating to Madani's work are as follows: "How do you feel about being a mother? How do you feel about your own mother?"²²² I believe consciousness-raising would deepen Madani's work and provide a foundation for more diversity in female class consciousness.

Iconic artist of the Pictures Generation, Cindy Sherman's works indicate both humor and criticism regarding the female role in society.²²³ Most famously, Sherman's series *Untitled Film Stills* explore intentionally constructed stereotypical gender roles through examples of *Untitled Film Still #3*, 1977 (Fig. 39), the unhappy housewife, *Untitled Film Still #7*, 1978 (Fig. 40), the female seductress, and *Untitled Film Still #13*, 1978 (Fig. 41), the vulnerable babe.²²⁴ Although Sherman is known not to have formally practiced consciousness-raising, historians speculate second-wave feminists informed her work as she creates cinematic conventions of post-modernism. Her medium of photography in the 1970s subverted society's perception of "high

²²² Wiley, "Towards Feminist Structures - Web: West-East Coast Bag Newsletter"

²²³ "Cindy Sherman: Moma." *The Museum of Modern Art*, <https://www.moma.org/artists/5392>

²²⁴ "Cindy Sherman: Moma." *The Museum of Modern Art*

art” and displayed society's jaded perceptions of femininity. Sherman’s premeditated intention to expose women’s vulnerabilities indicates her female consciousness in her art. She uses her body as a mannequin rather than an autobiographical context to portray women's struggles as a collective class.²²⁵ These *Untitled Film Stills* relate to Chicago, and Sherman’s exposure of the female role, beauty routines, and housework positioning in society in *Womanhouse*. Concurrently, *Untitled Film Stills* relate specifically to Jonas’s designed performance instruction and reveal sentiments with women's self-representation.

Cindy Sherman’s most recent exhibition with Metro Pictures Gallery in 2020 indicates her continued fascination with gender norms, identity, self-representation, and sexual stereotypes. In *Untitled #603*, 2019 (Fig. 42) and *Untitled #602*, 2019 (Fig. 43), Sherman represents androgynous characters departing from traditional gender norms. Like Chicago, Sherman gives her female characters a powerfully masculine aspect, and like Jonas, she makes the viewer uncomfortable by reflecting the gaze. Sherman indicates she relates to these women in how she presents herself authoritatively yet still struggles within her “performance” to conform to women’s stereotypes. If Sherman utilized consciousness-raising, she would elevate her work to explore modern, nuanced topics to further her exploration of androgyny and other sexual stereotypes. Consciousness-raising would heighten Sherman’s representation and performance of society’s perceptions of women. In conversation with her newer works, her infamous *Untitled Film Stills* draws upon the goal of consciousness-raising to create a female class consciousness.

iii. “Great Women Artists,” Final Statements

²²⁵ Blake Gopnik, “Cindy Sherman Takes on Aging (Her Own).” *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 21 Apr. 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/24/arts/design/cindy-sherman-takes-on-aging-her-own.html>

“Great Women Artists” presents iconic feminist artists’ who utilized consciousness-raising works: Chicago, Schapiro, and Jonas juxtaposed with women who should utilize consciousness-raising: Gribbon, Madani, and Sherman. These artists draw upon women’s lived experiences, whether autobiographical or constructed. Their works simultaneously depart from traditional methods present new mediums, abstract figurative forms, and language in constructed visual performance. Iconic feminist artists Chicago, Schapiro, and Jonas, in conversation with newer artists, Gribbon and Madani, and iconic artist Sherman indicate how consciousness-raising may enable a new, diversified class of women artists. These artists acknowledge the social position of women persecuted by men and the ideas of lesbianism, motherhood, and female performance, which artists must deconstruct. I believe consciousness-raising should be an essential method for all female artists, especially those practicing inherently feminist disciplines, to raise a class consciousness of modern diverse women artists. This exhibition and these works will bring attention and thus hopefully achieve consciousness-raising’s reinstatement in women’s art practices.

Illustrations



Fig. 1, Jeannette Rankin Women's Peace Parade in front of the Capitol. Photo: Stan Wayman/The LIFE Picture Collection/Getty.



Fig. 2, Joan Jonas, *Mirror Check*, 1970, Performance Art, Photo: Courtesy Manchester City Galleries, Courtesy Manchester City Galleries

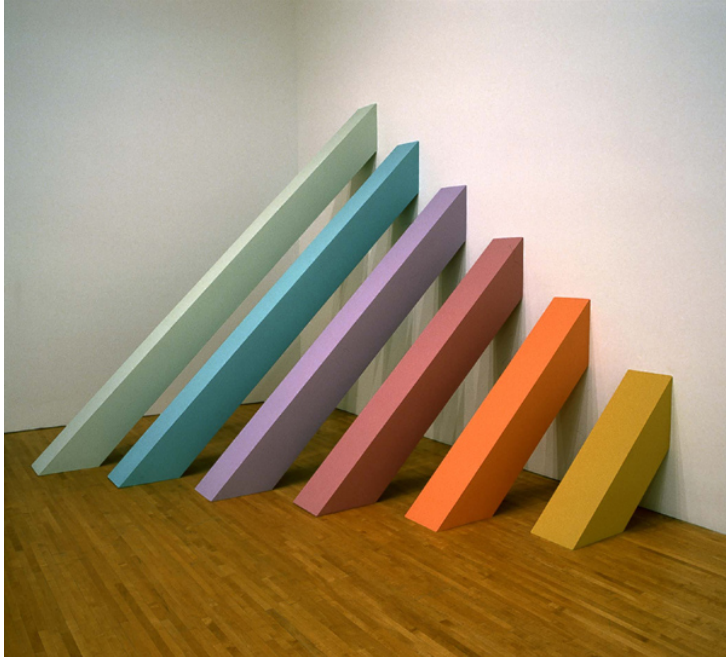


Fig. 3, Judy Chicago, *Rainbow Pickett*, 1965 (recreated 2004), latex paint on canvas covered plywood, 126 x 126 x 110 in.



Fig. 4, Judy Chicago, *Polished Stainless Steel Domes (Small)*, 1968, Polished stainless steel, 15 x 15 x 4 in.



Fig. 5, Venus figurine dating to 28,000–25,000 BCE found in Willendorf, Austria; in the Natural History Museum, Vienna.

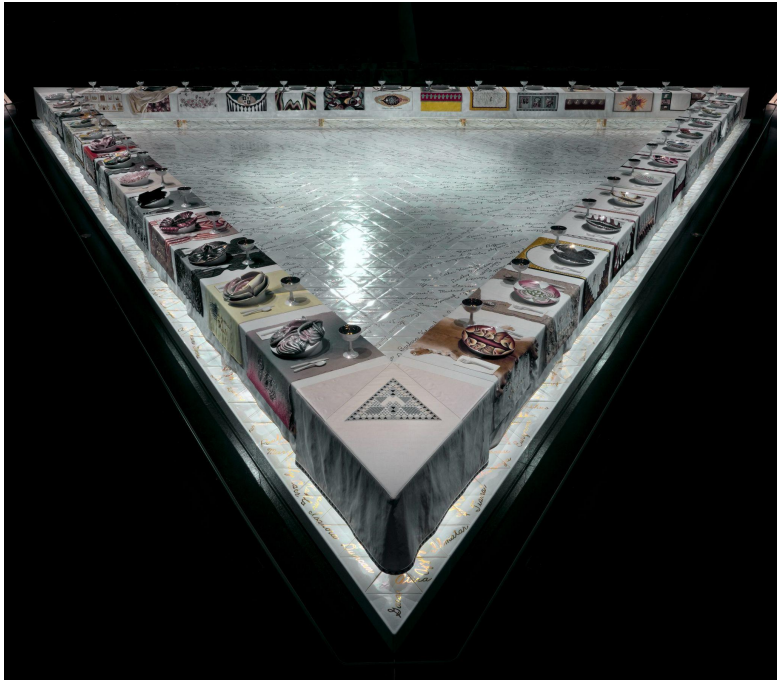


Fig. 6, Judy Chicago (American, born 1939). *The Dinner Party*, 1974–79. Ceramic, porcelain, textile, 576 × 576 in. (1463 × 1463 cm). Brooklyn Museum



Fig. 7, Miriam Schapiro, *Shrine (for R.K.) II*, 1963, Oil, metallic paint, and pencil on canvas, 50 x 60 in., Collection of Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington DC



Fig. 8, Miriam Schapiro, *Shrine, Hommage to Cezanne*, 1963, Oil, metallic paint, and pencil on canvas, unknown dimensions.

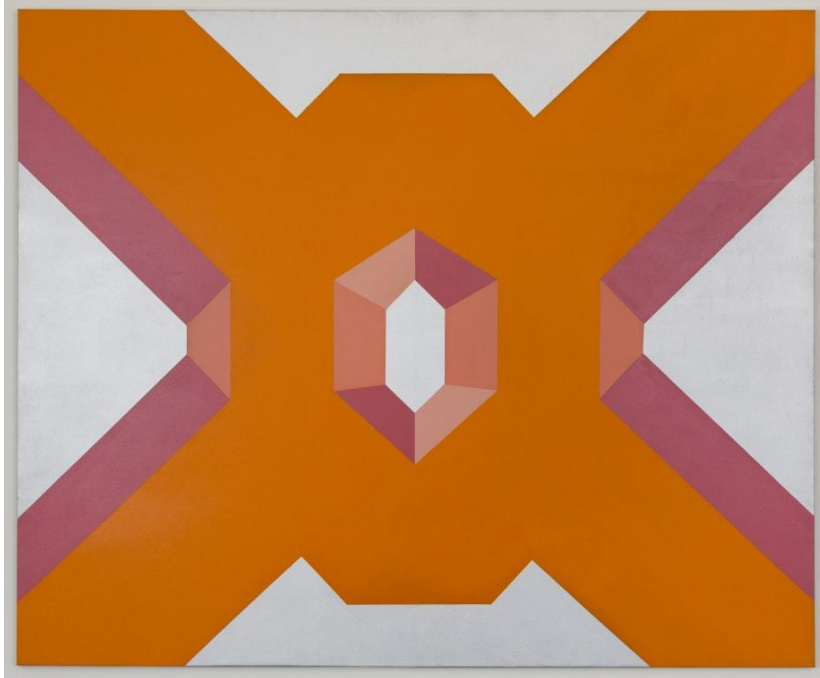


Fig. 9, Miriam Schapiro, *Big Ox*, 1967, acrylic on canvas, 90h x 108w in.



Fig. 10, Robin Weltsch, *Kitchen*, and Vicki Hodgetts, *Eggs to Breasts, Womanhouse*, Site-specific installation, 1972. Image courtesy of the CalArts Institute Archives.



Fig. 11, Judy Chicago, *Mestruation Bathroom*, *Womanhouse*, Site-specific installation, 1972

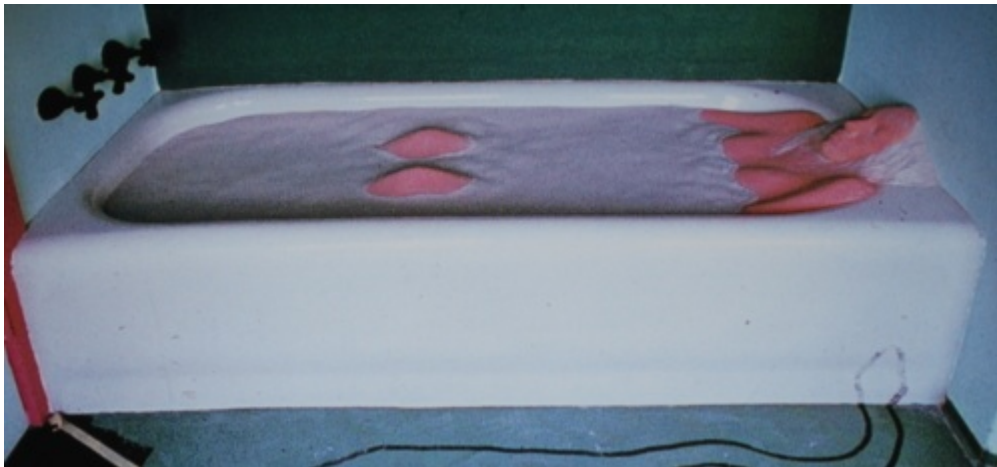


Fig. 12, Robin Schiff, *Nightmare Bathroom*, *Womanhouse*, Site-specific installation, 1972

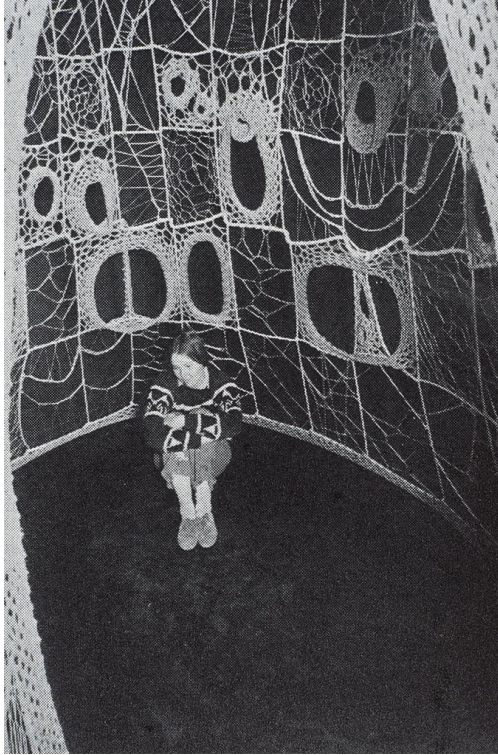


Fig. 13, Faith Wielding, *Womb Room, Womanhouse*, Site-specific installation, 1972



Fig. 14, Joan Jonas, *Mirror Piece I*, 1969, chromogenic print, 40 x 22 ¼ in. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York Purchased with funds contributed by the Photography Committee, 2009



Fig. 15, Jonas, *The Juniper Tree*, 1976/94, 24 works on silk, acrylic paint, wooden structure, string of 29 wooden balls, ladder, kimono, mirror, glass jars, 78 slides, box and other materials.



Fig. 16, Jonas, *Volcano Saga*, 1989, video performance.



Fig. 17, Judy Chicago, *Red Flag*, 1971, photo-lithograph, 20 x 24 in.



Fig. 18, Judy Chicago, *Love Story*, 1971, offset lithography, 16.25 x 12.5 in.



Fig. 19, Judy Chicago, *Gun Smoke*, 1971, offset lithography, 17.5 x 21.5 in.

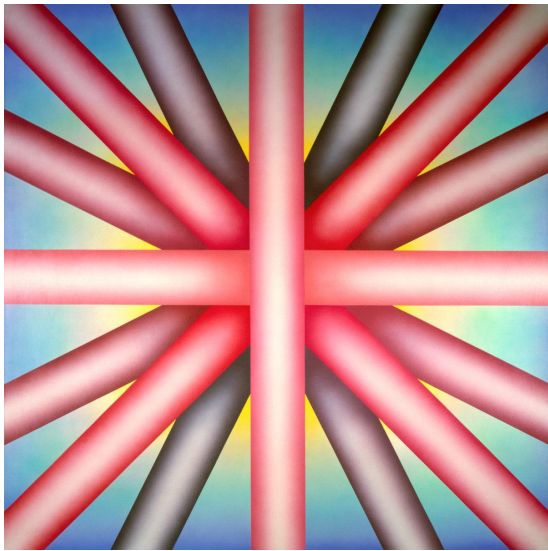


Fig. 20, Judy Chicago, *Heaven is for White Men Only*, 1973, sprayed acrylic on canvas, 80 x 80 in.



Fig. 21, Judy Chicago, *Birth Tear*, 1982, embroidery on silk, 20 x 27.5 in.



Fig. 22, Judy Chicago, *Birth Power*, 1984, embroidery over drawing on silk, 20 x 20.5 in.



Fig. 23, Miriam Schapiro, *Mother and Child*, 1959, oil on canvas, 59 1/4h x 49 1/4w in.



Fig. 24, Miriam Schapiro, *Audit*, 1971, acrylic on canvas, 84h x 78 1/2w in.



Fig. 25, Miriam Schapiro, *Dollhouse*, 1972, wood and mixed media, 79 ¾ in. x 82 x 8 ½ in.



Fig. 26, Miriam Schapiro, *Anatomy of a Kimono*, 1976, acrylic and fabric on canvas, 78 x 685 in.



Fig. 27, Joan Jonas, *Organic Honey's Video Telepathy*, 1972, video performance



Fig. 28, Joan Jonas, *The Shape, the Scent, the Feel of Things*, 2004, video performance



Fig. 29, Jenna Gribbon, *Tick Check*, 2021, oil on linen, 12 x 6 in.



Fig. 30, Jenna Gribbon, *Interior Lightscape*, 2021, oil on linen, 80 x 64 in.



Fig. 31, Jenna Gribbon, *Red Curtain Stagescape*, 2021, oil on linen, 80 x 64 in.



Fig. 32, Jenna Gribbon, *Comments Section*, 2021, oil on linen, 20 x 16 in.

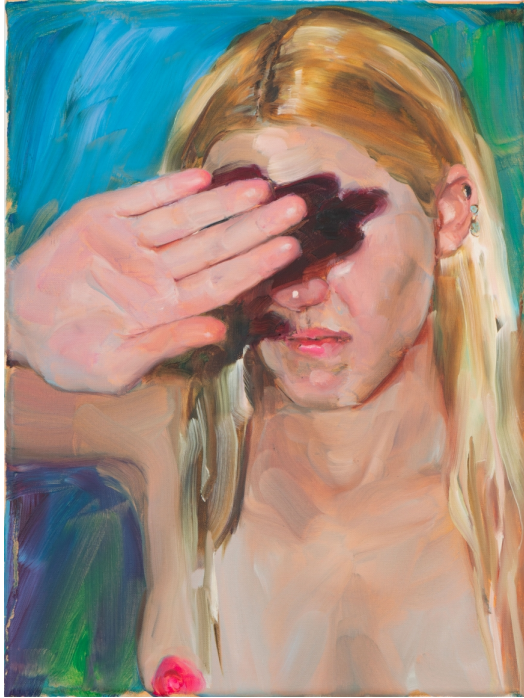


Fig. 33, Jenna Gribbon, *Unwanted Opinions*, 2021, oil on linen, 16 x 12 in.



Fig. 34, Tala Madani, *At My Toilette #2*, 2019, oil on linen, 15 x 12 x 1 in.



Fig. 35, Tala Madani, *Shit Mom (Sandcastles)*, 2019, oil on linen, 22 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 15 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 1 in.

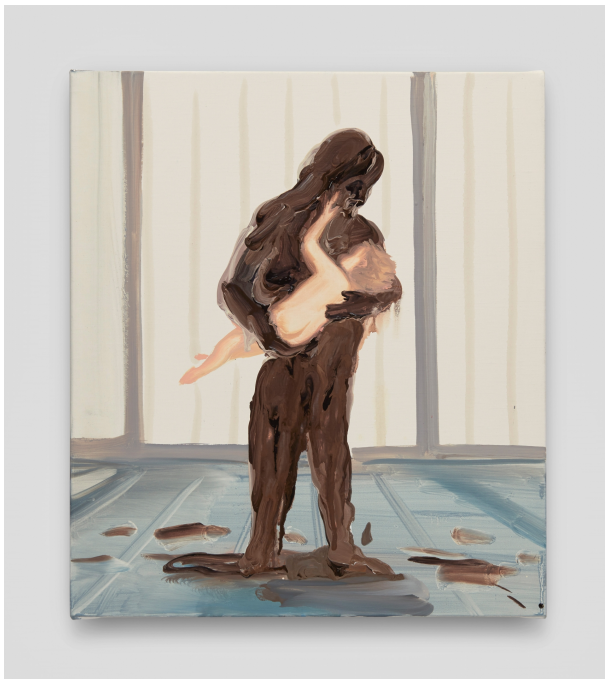


Fig. 36, Tala Madani, *Nature, Nurture*, 2019, oil on linen, 16 x 13 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 1 in.

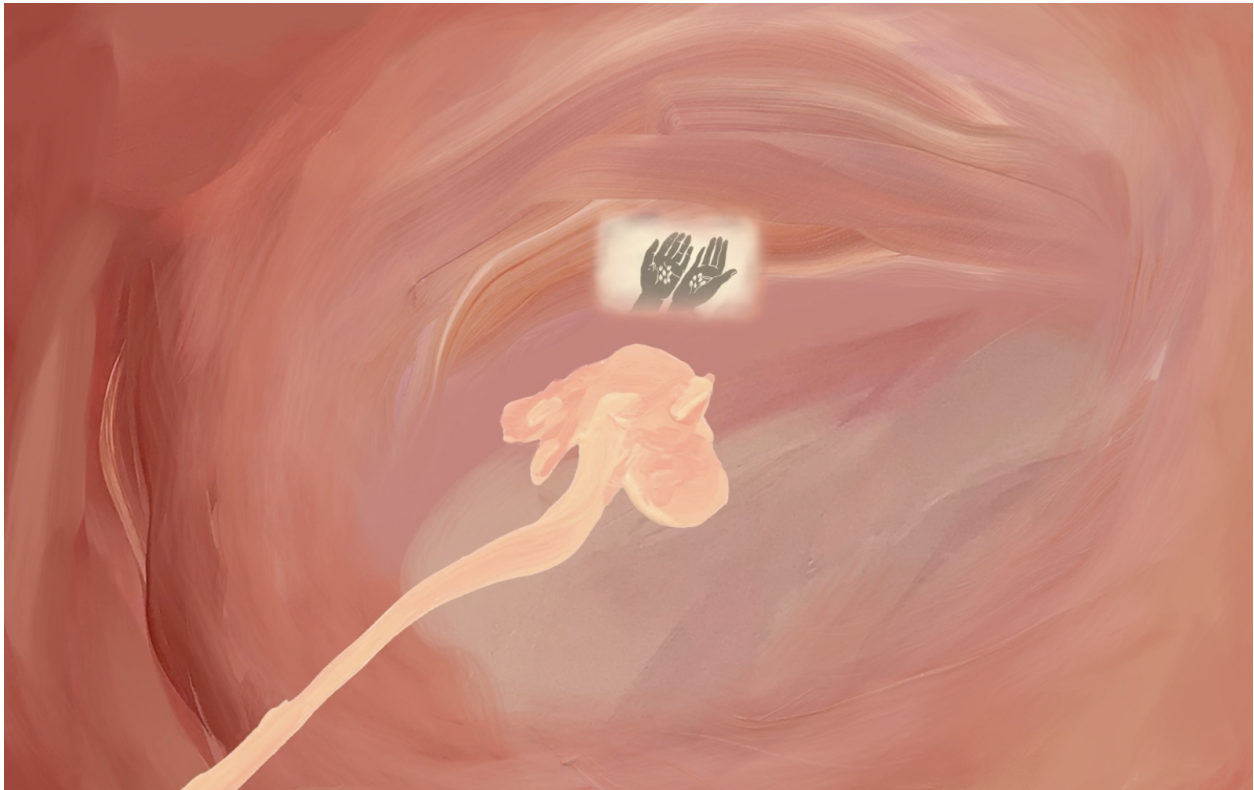


Fig. 37, Tala Madani, *The Womb*, 2019, single-channel color animation



Fig. 38, Tala Madani, *Cum Shot #3*, 2019, oil on linen, 20 x 17 1/8 x 1 in.



Fig. 39, Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Still #3*, 1977, gelatin silver print, 7 1/16 x 9 7/16 in.



Fig. 40, Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Still #7*, 1978, gelatin silver print, 9 1/2 x 7 9/16 in.



Fig. 41, Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Still #13*, 1978, gelatin silver print, 9 7/16 x 7 1/2 in.



Fig. 42, Cindy Sherman, *Untitled #603*, 2019, Dye sublimation print, 84 3/4 x 77 in.



Fig. 43, Cindy Sherman, *Untitled #602*, 2019, Dye sublimation print, 76 1/4 x 87 1/2, in.

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