Women Artists in Pop: Connections to Feminism in Non-Feminist Art

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ABSTRACT

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The women artists who began their careers shortly before the feminist art movement of the 1970s hold a unique position in the history of art. They were among the last generation of women to be educated before the feminist art movement, yet they were also among the first to benefit from the paradigm shift it created. Using examples from a handful of women artists working in the era when pop was prominent, this writing examines the uses of proto feminist ideals covertly included within their work. A more in-depth look is given to the careers of two artists among this generation, Elizabeth Murray and Jennifer Bartlett, both of whom used aspects of pop and subversive feminism in their art.

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CHAPTER 1: POP AND FEMINISM

Feminist art of the 1970s significantly changed the way women were regarded as professional artists. Women have historically been excluded from the "boys club" atmosphere of mainstream art. It was extremely difficult for women to be taken seriously as artists, especially when their art alluded to their gender. This attitude began to shift as the feminist movement gained momentum in the United States during the 1960s. The changes could be felt in the work of women artists who began their careers in the decade prior to the feminist art movement. This period of change within the frontier of American art came while pop art was in its prime. Women were often stereotyped and objectified within mainstream pop, provoking critics and scholars such as Linda Nochlin and Lucy Lippard to perceive it as sexist. Several women artists were not only influenced by pop, but actively used popular culture in their work. The artwork created by these women reflected the influence of a male dominated popular culture as well as the increasingly influential principles of feminist art. Being at the cusp of a significant paradigm shift, these women held unique positions in the history of art. As one of the last generations of professional female artists to feel widespread discrimination, they were among the first to benefit from the effects of the feminist art movement.

Inspired by the exhibition *Women Artists II* at the Kennedy Museum of Art, I began to question the connections between pop art and feminist art, and the relationship of both to the art that was being produced by these women. The majority

of the artists represented in *Women Artists II* were not associated with either pop or feminism. Both movements held such significance for the time period that their influences were incorporated into a great deal of the contemporary art scene. Women who worked within the pop genre are rarely referred to even within art history compendiums of women artists. Many of these artists produced bodies of artwork just as compelling and innovative as their male counterparts. The majority of the work they generated not only used images from popular culture, it also transformed those images into a kind of catalyst for personal narrative and social commentary. Yet because of the prevailing sexist attitudes towards women as professionals, their work has been virtually ignored and forgotten by art history.

The anti-female disposition of pop has led to the general supposition that there were virtually no women who worked in a pop style. This was, of course a completely erroneous assumption. There were several women who used imagery derived from consumer culture and household items. Women who created art from objects associated with the domestic domain were taking a great risk, yet some did take up the challenge. Many of them even exhibited their work alongside that of their more successful male contemporaries. In the 1960s, the modernist idea that art was the domain of men was still prevalent. The number of women artists shown in galleries and museums was only a small fraction compared to the multitude of male artists exhibited. Only the art produced by male artists was included in the traditional pop canon. The

women who did consider themselves part of the pop movement either remained in obscurity or were remembered for other aspects of their careers.

Of course, the exclusion of women from the pages of art history books is not a new phenomenon. Women have largely been omitted from art historical writings from its very beginnings. Pop art, in fact, was one of the last large American art movements to exclude the contribution of women from its history.[1] The revision of art history to include women began only within the last few decades – directly due to the impact of achievements attained as a result of second wave feminism and feminist art. The women artists that were actively making art and participating in Pop were part of an awkward transitional point in history in which they were tentatively inserting new ideas into the old regime of the art world. Changes had been set in motion in literature and politics that were leading up to the emergence of feminism, yet women were still officially made to conform to the male rules that predominated in mainstream art.[2]

The culture of postwar America was especially oppressive to women who attempted to have careers outside of the home. Pop art was derived from popular culture, which characterized women into two basic stereotypes: the housewife/mother and the sexual object of the male gaze. This polarity can be traced back to the

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[1] Pop art as a movement was unequal in its representations of men and women precisely because of what it was. Its imagery came directly from mass culture and consumerism, which was itself very derogatory towards women and the social roles of women. The reflection of a sexist culture inevitably uses sexist imagery.

[2] Most particularly, the publication of influential texts like *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan (1963), which addressed issues of women's identity and forced domestic roles. The response to this book propagated the issues that began the second wave feminist movement. In the next year, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed, outlawing discrimination based on race and gender.

modernist paradigms of femininity and its social constructions of women. Critic Griselda Pollock asserts that these social roles have been historically produced based on a natural biological order.[3] These ideologies of women as domestic and sexually submissive beings were common in pop art. Women appeared quite frequently as the passive object, as though the female body were just another commodity to be consumed.[4] Such stereotypical depictions were proliferated by the prevailing artists of pop. These artists were predominantly men who created art to be viewed by other men. It was never an easy accomplishment for a woman to make a successful career as an artist, yet in these circumstances it was even more of a challenge.

Despite pop's anti-female reputation, it offered women artists considerably more freedom than previous trends. According to Lucy Lippard, the women of earlier generations who worked in the abstract expressionist school were only accepted as artists if they renounced any associations with femininity and identified more closely with men.[5] This approach became especially prevalent in post-war America, when the number of women artists increased, yet the prejudice against the representation of feminine imagery remained strong. Women essentially divested themselves and their

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[3] Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and the Histories of Art* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 36. The idea of femininity was a carefully constructed model upon which women were judged and categorized based on their relationships with men. This was especially applicable to the images of women in postwar advertising, which typically depicted women as either perfect housewives or pinup-like objects of sexual desire.

[4] Anna C. Chave, "New Encounters with Les Demoiselles D'Avignon: Gender, Race and the Origins of Cubism," in *Reclaiming Female Agency: Feminist Art History After Postmodernism*, eds. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 302. There are those who expand on the idea of the female body as not just an objectified icon for the male gaze. It has also been characterized as a representational tool which continually stretched the boundaries of cultural acceptance.

[5] Lucy R Lippard,"The Women Artists' Movement – What's Next?" in *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co, 1976), 145.

art from any associations with feminine points of view and experiences. They generally avoided any associations with other women artists, often refusing to support any younger or lesser artist of the same sex. Lippard points out that supporting other women artists brought forth fears of competition in an already limited field, and made it more likely for their art to be categorized or ghettoized into a generic, easily dismissible heading of "women's work."[6] Being treated as "one of the boys" was seen as the only way for a woman to be taken seriously, yet it still placed them at a considerable disadvantage. The blatant denial of a woman's self-identity, as well as the deprivation of female support and mentoring created an even harder struggle to achieve success.

The various expressive possibilities of pop were a major selling point for women artists who were seeking an alternative to the established conventions of abstract expressionism. Deliberate denial of the artist's sexual identity was made possible by the nature of abstraction.[7] But with pop came the resurgence of the figure and with it the reestablishment of narrative capabilities. This became an important step for women who wished to make a statement with their art, because within the narrative there was the possibility for critique.[8] Male pop tentatively touched on this capability, leaving the viewer to decide if they are looking at an affirmation or a repudiation of mass culture. But the work made by women was typically less ambiguous. In using/criticizing mass

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[6] Lucy R Lippard, "Sexual Politics: Art Style," in *The Pink Glass Swan: Selected Essays on Feminist Art* (New York: The New Press, 1995), 45.
[7] Martha Rosler, "The Figure of the Artist, the Figure of the Woman," in *Seductive Subversion: Women Pop Artists,* eds. Sid Sachs and Kaliopi Minioudaki, (New York and London: Abbeville Press Publishers, 2010), 182.
[8] Ibid.

culture, their art often became an outlet for commentary on the iniquities of popular culture and the subjugated roles of women within it. Their work in pop, while still subversive, gave them more freedom as women artists than that experienced by their predecessors.

The differences between male and female pop became one of the major justifications for women's exclusion from the pop canon and subsequently why so little is written about their work. For instance, the overt objectification of women's bodies throughout mainstream pop has erroneously become one of its defining characteristics.[9] This would be a severely limiting characteristic to apply to an entire movement whose attributes varied widely from artist to artist. It would also exclude the work of women artists by proxy. Pop artists in general were not a collective or collaborative group. Both men and women were creating art that displayed reactions to the saturation of popular culture, mass communication and consumerism. However, their approaches to their work did not manifest in a set or uniform structure. The different creative and expressive tactics utilized by each artist displayed the wide range of possibilities within the movement. To exclude women from this artistic category would be to ignore the movement's obvious influence as seen in the work of a great many women artists of this generation. Their work represents a period in art history when women were

[9] Kalliopi Minioudaki, "Pop Proto-Feminisms: Beyond the Paradox of the Woman Pop Artist," in *Seductive Subversion: Women Pop Artists,* eds. Sid Sachs and Kaliopi Minioudaki, (New York and London: Abbeville Press Publishers, 2010), 94.

transitioning from repressing their femininity to openly addressing women's issues and experiences.

Some women artists used the popular objectification of women's bodies as a catalyst for social commentary. One artist who used this tactic was Marjorie Strider. After receiving her B.A. from the Kansas City Art Institute, she immersed herself in the contemporary New York art scene. She created a clever grouping of paintings that received immediate attention as pop 'girlie images.'[10] They were so well received by the director of New York's Pace Gallery that they inspired an entire exhibition. The show was called "The International Girlie Show," which featured sexually provocative images of the female body. The show included the work of several major pop artists like Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, Mel Ramos, Tom Wesselmann and the only other woman artist to be included, Rosalyn Drexler.[11] In one of the paintings she submitted to the show called *Green Triptych* (1963), she painted a bikini clad woman in three provocative poses against a flat grey background (figure 1). Strider created these images in a way that bridged the gap between painting and sculpture. Though the body of the woman was painted in flat blocks of color, the canvas itself had been built up to display the breasts and buttocks in three dimensional, sculptural space.[12]

With paintings like *Green Triptych*, Strider used male misogynistic attitudes to her advantage. Images of women as sign, commodity, and sexual object flooded the

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[10] Raphael Rubenstein, Preface to *Marjorie Strider: Dramatic Gestures,* ed. Anne Bei Rice (Lenox, MA: Hard Press Editions, 2004), 9.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Just a few years after Strider's exhibition, this amalgamation of painting and sculpture was picked up by Elizabeth Murray, who also experimented with three dimensional, sculptural aspects within her paintings.

media leaving all women struggling to transcend such stereotypes. The paintings of sexy women were sure to be accepted along with the other Burlesque-inspired images in the show which included Wesselmann's porn inspired female nudes and Lichtenstein's flattened, idealized images of female glamour. But Strider included a more subversive subtext in her work. She managed to both fit within the parameters of pop and make subtle commentary on the objectification of women's bodies. The flatness of the large areas of color was also a nod to minimalist and abstract painting.[13] Her paintings made reference to the use of female bodies as objects of the male gaze, but in a satirical, tongue-in-cheek way. The three dimensional protrusions of the painted woman's body referenced the sexual nature of women's images in art and society in general. They made a joke of it in their absurdity – as if openly mocking those who looked at women in such chauvinistic terms. Though Strider never made blatantly feminist art, she continued with this kind of subversive commentary throughout her artistic career.

The women pop artists of this decade often approached their subject matter in a way that would be echoed by feminist artists in later years. A characteristic that became associated with pop was a distinct coolness and detached attitude from personal, political and social issues. This attitude was personified by Andy Warhol's deliberately ambiguous works of the early 1960s which included mass produced images

[13] Sid Sachs, "Beyond the Surface: Women and Pop Art 1958-1968" in *Seductive Subversion: Women Pop Artists 1958-1968*, eds. Sid Sachs and Kalliopi Minioudaki (New York and London: Abbeville Press Publishers, 2010), 52. Strider was friends with abstract sculptor Eva Hesse, who strongly influenced her work throughout the 1960s.

of soup cans, money and Coca-Cola bottles. Women of pop did not share this attitude, which led many to discount their work as not belonging to the pop movement.[14] Their work often made statements that correlated directly with contemporary issues including statements, commentaries and critiques of society and popular culture. Some were even brave enough to include personal or political content that was still considered taboo, especially from women. They also made rather oblique statements about gender roles and sexism through the guise of appropriated images.

Women pop artists created a variety of work which incorporated popular culture with a mixture of social and gender issues. In a society where women were the supportive subjugates of men, it was distasteful for a woman to create art that openly challenged the anti-female regime. One can see this beginning to change in the pop art made by women. Men who made pop art were critically commended for their creativity, ingenuity and their rebellion against the prevailing rules of modernism.[15] They could use this everyday, domestic language with a certain sense of distance and irony. For women, this was not the case. Consumer goods, beauty products, and advertisements were part of their daily lives. As their experiences were different, the art men and women produced also took on different meanings. Though their imagery originated from the same sources, the art made by women included more personal and political commentary than that of the politically ambiguous male pop artists.[16]

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[14]Kalliopi Minioudaki, "Pop Proto-Feminisms," 92.
[15]Lucy R Lippard, "Household Images in Art," in *The Pink Glass Swan: Selected Essays on Feminist Art* (New York: The New Press, 1995), 62.
[16] Sid Sachs, "Beyond the Surface," 86.

The women artists of this decade also made significant strides in the use of nonconventional materials to create their art. They began using materials traditionally associated with "women's work," elevating their status from craft to valid artistic media. A significant example of this was the invention of soft sculpture. This technique involved creating three dimensional sculptures from various soft fabrics, such as cloth or other pliable materials. These materials were connected with women and domesticity, yet they were becoming more widely used by both men and women to create contemporary art. The development of this type of sculpture was often attributed to the work of Claes Oldenburg. Other artists, such as Yayoi Kusama and Jann Haworth were working independent of one another at approximately the same time, yet they are rarely credited with soft sculpture's initial development.

In fact, it was Jann Haworth that began to create soft sculptures about a year before Oldenberg. Born and raised in Hollywood, CA, she received her education at the Slade School of Art in London. Haworth was one of the few women recognized as part of the British pop movement. She had close ties with the most prominent pop artists in Britain including David Hockney, Peter Phillips and Allan Jones. In 1963, her work was included along with theirs in exhibitions at the Whitechapel Art Gallery and the Institute for Contemporary Arts in London. She also exhibited in the US in group and solo shows at the Sidney Janis Gallery in New York. A great deal of her time was spent in Britain, but she continually used references to American popular culture in her art.[17] Because

[17] Ibid, 42.

her father was a film production designer, she spent a great deal of her youth working behind the scenes on sets. It was these experiences that Haworth credits as her inspiration for her sculptures.

Having grown up in the Hollywood lifestyle, her art presented a unique perspective on celebrities and cultural references. She often used her soft sculptures to reference common stereotypes and to raise questions of representation and reality. For instance, in *May West Dressing Table* (1965), she presented a meticulously crafted soft sculpture of May West set behind glass to mimic a mirror image (figure 2). Identical items were also placed on either side of the glass to give further emphasis on the mirror effect. Haworth selected an atypical Hollywood blond (a non-Marilyn) – with a reputation for being sexy, intelligent and independent, yet she was displayed in a way that cleverly diminished all those things for which she was famous. She was only a superficial likeness of the movie star – which was only an artificial persona of the actual woman. She was "a mirror reflection – a double without a sitter, a simulacrum without original."[18]

Haworth's career as an artist was often devalued because she was the wife of a successful male artist. It was often that women artists were seen only as part-timers, their careers considered secondary to any other status they may hold - be it wife, girlfriend or mistress.[19] There were many male artists whose careers greatly benefited

[18] Kalliopi Minioudaki, "Pop Proto-Feminisms," 114.
[19] Lucy R Lippard, "Prefaces to Catalogues of Three Women's Exhibitions," in *The Pink Glass Swan: Selected Essays on Feminist Art* (New York: The New Press, 1995), 52.

from the collaborative, unrecognized efforts of their wives.[20] Haworth and her fellow pop artist husband Peter Blake both received the commission to create the iconic album cover of the Beatles' *Sergeant Peppers* album in 1967, yet Haworth seldom receives recognition for her contribution (figure 3). Another even more extreme case was Patty Mucha's involvement in Claes Oldenburg's work. His soft sculptures of the '60s were essentially collaborative pieces between Mucha and Oldenburg, yet her name was never mentioned in his exhibitions or in writings about his sculptures.[21] Though artists like Mucha and Haworth were influential and sometimes essential to their husbands' artistic success, they have been regarded as little more than footnotes within their spouses' careers.

Some women in pop were making art that included statements regarding the social role of women. As a young artist and art student, Martha Rosler was among those who pushed the established limits in her work. It seems incongruous to associate Rosler's name with a movement like pop because of her later success as a prominent feminist artist and writer during and after the 1970s. Though her fame came from her feminist work, she was in fact an active pop artist throughout the 1960s. As a student at Brooklyn College, she would have been exposed to the plethora of New York galleries and exhibition spaces that were exhibiting pop art. Like many young artists who were

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[20] Sid Sachs, "Beyond the Surface," 25. Sachs provides an entire list of artist couples whose art was collaborative, yet only the man received the credit.

[21] Patty Mucha, "Soft Sculpture Sunshine," in *Seductive Subversion: Women Pop Artists,* eds. Sid Sachs and Kaliopi Minioudaki (New York anad London: Abbeville Press Publishers, 2010), 146. Mucha not only helped Oldenberg to develop his method of creating soft sculptures, she actually hand sewed every single sculpture of his from 1962 until their divorce in 1970.

becoming tired of the male centered dominance of abstract expressionism, Rosler saw the new trend for pop as a means to challenge the existing status quo. As an advocate for women's rights, she utilized pop's potential to carry a critique of the gender and sexual roles imposed on women through popular culture.

She created collages from advertisements and photographs. Her work held more similarities with British pop than with her fellow American pop artists. Like the pop images of Richard Hamilton and Peter Blake, she loaded her images with social and political commentary, which she used to make statements regarding sexualized roles of women. These images were not initially created to be placed in a gallery setting. In fact, they were made as reproducible flyers distributed to raise awareness.[22] As in *Cleaning the Drapes* (1967-72), she used media images of women in sexualized or domestic situations and superimposed them onto various backgrounds as a protest of sexism and the violence of the Vietnam War (figure 4). In this piece, a woman from a vacuum advertisement pulls back the drapery to reveal a scene in which soldiers sit in trenches in the battlefield. Neither the soldiers nor the woman seem aware of one another, yet the juxtaposition of the American home and housewife and the foreign battlefield speak of both the political and social situations of the era. Rosler continued to use these types of collages to create several other series of works, combining reality with illusion to produce several other series that connect with contemporary issues.

[22] Juan Vicente Aliaga, "Public and Private: Productive Intersections, Some Notes on the Work of Martha Rosler," in *Martha Rosler: The House, The Street, The Kitchen*, eds. Marina Guillien and Raquel Lopez Munoz (Granada: Centro Jose Guerrero, 2009), 81.

The strong messages her pop images evoked easily transitioned into the feminist work for which she later became renowned.[23]

Several women artists active at this time produced art that was relevant to the social status of women, but unlike Rosler, they were not as readily willing to openly align themselves with feminist art. It was a common occurrence for women to deny associations with the feminist movement. But the extraordinary element of this phenomenon was that in the midst of their denial, they created poignant images that directly correlate to the principles of feminist art. An outstanding example of this was Rosalyn Drexler. Drexler's work successfully reflected the current mood in both the artistic and social atmospheres of the day. Her earliest works were sculptural forms made from found objects similar in style to those of Louise Nevelson, but she transitioned to a more pop oriented style around 1960. She used appropriated imagery from posters, newspapers, magazines and photographs to create unique and compelling paintings.

Though her work came from commercial and popular sources, it contained much deeper commentaries on society than the more traditionally known pop art. In some ways, her work was comparable to that of Roy Lichtenstein, in that they both created isolated scenes appropriated from the media, emphasizing the drama or narrative each image suggests. But whereas Lichtenstein combined the process of reproduction through Benday dots with the shallow banality of his chosen image,

[23] Sachs, "Beyond the Surface," 78.

Drexler's images tapped into much deeper elements of the human condition.[24] She also chose to eliminate the traces of reproduction by placing the cut out images on the canvas and directly painting over them, transforming the Benday dot image into solid areas of paint. She chose to isolate the subjects of her paintings (including celebrities, gangsters and people from current news stories) by placing them on a monotone background and painting out the details of their images.[25] She used these images to address issues in society that were disturbing.

Her painting, *Marilyn Pursued by Death* (1963), used a media image of Marilyn Monroe being closely stalked by a man (figure 5). Rather than emphasizing her celebrity or commodity status, Drexler used the recognizable image of a female victim in a potential crime. She simplified the image with flat layers of paint, making the figures appear as a dream or memory. The figures were placed against a flat grey background, but were given a heightened sense of tension by surrounding them with a red outline. This image, and several others made by Drexler, suggested the male's propensity for violence toward women. They tend to hover on the brink of depicting either an intimate scene or a violent encounter, leaving the viewer to ponder the underlying tension and psychological unease invoked by these images.

The potency of these images belied the artist's continual claim that her work was not associated with feminism, nor did she connect her work to any political agenda. She

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[24] Arne Glimcher, *Rosalyn Drexler: I am the Beautiful Stranger, Paintings of the '60s* (New York: Pacewildenstein, 2007), 5.

[25] Sid Sachs, "Rosalyn Drexler," in *Power Up: Female Pop Art,* eds. Angela Stief and Martin Walkner (Cologne: DuMont Buchverlag, 2010), 129. Sachs describes her work as creating "an almost expressionistic original from something that initially sprang from mundane mass material."

was among the group of women artists including Elaine deKooning, Marjorie Strider and Louise Nevelson who negatively replied to Linda Nochlin's 1971 article "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" In her response, Drexler made it clear that she was unaffiliated with feminism's goals, stating that "I don't object to being called a woman artist as long as the word 'woman' isn't used to define the kind of art I create," and "no one thinks collectively unless they are involved with propaganda."[26] Regardless of her stated intentions, her work was seething with the same ideals that fueled feminist art. Her work, like that of many other women in this decade, represented a mixture of surreptitious defiance of established rules against female subjectivity while still openly complying with its rules.

Conformity to the male dominated art world was not limited to women artists, but was even perpetuated by women who were working as historians in the 60's. Lucy Lippard, for example, was at the beginning of her career as an art historian. Lippard would later (in the early 1970s) become known for her feminist writings, but in 1966, she was still working under the established presumption that artists, viewers and even critics were almost exclusively male.[27] Her book entitled *Pop Art*, published that same year, consisted of roughly 200 pages, and referenced roughly 300 artists.[28] Out of these 300 artists, only 5 of them were women – mentioned very briefly. Though she was obviously sensitive to the plight of the female artist before the 1970s, her writings still

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[26] Rosalyn Drexler et al., "Eight Artists Reply: Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" *ArtNews* 69 (1971): 40.
[27] Lucy R. Lippard, "Changing Since *Changing*," introduction to *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co, 1976), 4.
[28] Lucy R Lippard, *Pop Art* (New York: Fredrick A. Praeger, 1966).

maintained the status quo against taking women artists seriously. She later addressed this snub as an unconscious result of a historical trend: "I'd slighted [women artists], unintentionally, in the past. I have recently become aware of my own previous reluctance to take women's work as seriously as men's, the result of a common conditioning from which we all suffer. When I was an art historian, the problem rarely arose; most women artists have already been "evaluated" out of the picture by male-oriented historians."[29]

Lippard's observation on the lack of women within the art history educational system was the literal truth. The art departments within most major institutions were run by a large majority of male professors. Women in the 1960s who received an education in the arts were taught the standard curriculum, which included the established progression of artistic movements and the respective male champions of each. The number of female students attending art courses rose to unprecedented numbers, yet they continued to receive little support or encouragement from within their educational institutions. It was understood that women were expected to abandon their work as artists in favor of their familial duties to their husbands and children. Thus, their presence in art school was not meant to result in a career; it was rather the pursuit of a pastime that would terminate upon marriage.[30] In fact, it has been asserted that female students were chosen because of their looks rather than their

[29] Lucy R. Lippard, "Prefaces to Catalogs of Three Women's Exhibitions," 52.
[30] Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" in *Women, Art and Power and Other Essays* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), 166.

talent. As an art student in the early sixties, Jann Haworth was told by one of her male professors that female students were "there to keep the boys happy."[31]

With this kind of attitude prevalent in the educational system, it was little wonder that these women were beginning to rebel against it using dissident tactics within their artwork. As more and more female students began gravitating towards strategies popularized by feminism, they found themselves in opposition to the more traditional opinions of their teachers.[32] In 1970, Judy Chicago initiated an experimental program at the Fresno State College which was the first to attempt a revolutionary break from traditional methods of teaching art. The all-female class was intended as a radical departure from the misogynistic regime of accepted studio practices in an attempt to create a completely new learning environment. For the first time, female students found themselves in an educational environment specifically structured for women and mentored by fellow women artists and students. They were encouraged to work collaboratively and to create artwork derived directly from their own lived experiences as women.[33]

With the end of the sixties came the upsurge of feminist art and with it a plethora of new opportunities for women to create art. By this time, pop was becoming

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[31] Mark Rappolt, "Jann Haworth," in *Power Up: Female Pop Art,* eds. Angela Stief and Martin Walkner (Cologne: DuMont Buchverlag, 2010),213.

[32] Griselda Pollock, "Art, Art School, Culture: Individualism after the Death of the Artist," in *Feminism–Art–Theory: an Anthology 1968-2000*, ed. Hilary Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 130.

[33] Faith Wilding, "The Feminist Art Programs at Fresno and CalArts, 1970-75," in *The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact*, eds. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 34. This program led to the creation of the Feminist Art Program at the California Institute for the Arts in 1971. The program was headed by Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro.

less prevalent in lieu of other art forms such as minimalism, performance, video, installation and mixed media. This significant shift within the American art scene resulted in much of the pop art produced by women during the sixties to be virtually forgotten. A large majority of these women have either been overlooked for their artistic contributions or have come to be known for other aspects of their careers. Rosalyn Drexler became less known for her work as an artist and more recognized for her work as an award winning playwright and novelist.[34] Then there were others like Martha Rosler that continued to use their pop roots in combination with personal and feminist agendas.

The women who participated in the pop movement provided new ways of handling materials and afforded more diverse perspectives on popular society and the commodification of culture in the 1960s. Their work also displayed the changing attitudes of women artists as the feminist movement was just beginning to surface. The years just preceding feminism were still a difficult time for women to create art with a message, yet these artists found ways to express much deeper issues than the accepted standards of the time. The women of pop were able to stretch the social boundaries of art, using popular imagery to explore the larger problems within society instead of sticking to the cool disinterest of their male contemporaries. Their use of uncommon materials and methods not only helped break boundaries of high and low art, they also provided a greater appreciation for practices traditionally referred to as "women's

[34] Arne Glimcher, *Rosalyn Drexler: I am the Beautiful Stranger*, 6.

work" or "craft." The issues they raised regarding the misogynistic treatment and depictions of women in popular culture would directly resurface within the work of subsequent feminist artists. Their art represented a break from the stereotype of women as part time amateurs and further validated them as professional artists.

Perhaps the most significant and lasting contribution of the women artists of this generation was their questioning of the established rules and methods of artistic practice. Their work reintroduced individual expression and personal content in the forms of autobiography and narrative that had been prohibited under modernism. In attempting to find a means of expression relevant for women, they discarded the rules and developed new ways of conceptualizing, creating and studying art. The innovations that ensued helped to redefine artistic parameters, not just for women, but for all those who produced art. According to feminist writer Lisa Tickner, the breakdown of rigid modernist structures allowed art to become "whatever is professionally discussed, displayed and marketed as art."[35] The legacy that feminism wished to leave was one of new artistic developments in form and content, as well as a more comprehensive picture of historical and contemporary artistic study.[36]

The impact of feminist ideologies undoubtedly altered the trajectory of artistic development for those women artists who began their careers before and during the rise of feminism. The following two chapters examine the careers of two women,

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[35] Lisa Tickner, "Modernist Art History: The Challenge of Feminism," in *Feminism-Art-Theory: An Anthology 1968-2000*, ed. Hilary Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 253.

[36] Griselda Pollock, introduction to *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and the Histories of Art*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), xxvii.

Elizabeth Murray and Jennifer Bartlett, who immerged as artists during the 1960s. They did not consider themselves feminist artists, yet their work reflects the changing ideologies brought about by feminist art, giving them the freedom to find their own means of personal expression within their own work. The art they produced shared a great deal in common with that of other artists who worked during this time, yet they are seldom discussed within the contexts of pop or feminism. Both Murray and Bartlett were heavily influenced by the pop movement, using various elements of popular culture throughout their careers. They also shared significant connections to the feminist art movement. Neither was counted among the ranks of feminist artists, however the impact of feminist art undoubtedly altered their work, as demonstrated by their chosen use of materials, symbolic imagery and personal commentaries. Examining the work of these artists makes evident the level of influence the feminist movement produced on even those artists working outside of feminism.

CHAPTER 2: ELIZABETH MURRAY

Elizabeth Murray began her career as an artist during the 1960s: a decade when a great many changes were occurring for women. Murray was among those women artists discussed in the previous chapter who were completing their education and entering into the world of professional art just before the immergence of the feminist art movement. As such, she was witness to the changing paradigms that would revolutionize artistic practices and usher in the postmodern age. The passion that Murray fostered for studying and creating art inspired her to take influences from popular culture, contemporary artists and historical sources to create a hybrid style unique to her own work. The work she created throughout her career acts as a reflection of the artistic environment of the 60s and 70s, combining various elements of modernist painters, her love of pop art and the growing influence of feminism. Murray's body of work shows her struggle to incorporate these elements to create a unique expression of female perspective and artistic initiative.

Before attending art school, Murray had experienced very little exposure to fine arts. Having shown talent in drawing at an early age, she was encouraged by her parents to become a commercial artist. Her mother had shown inclinations toward commercial art, but like many women of her generation, she put aside career ambitions in order to care for her family.[37] Recognizing Murray's drawing abilities, her parents encouraged the development of her talent. She became enamored of the artwork

[37] Elizabeth Murray, "Elizabeth Murray," interview with Jessica Hagedorn, *Bomb* 62 (1998): 59.

found in popular movies, cartoons and comic strips, and was especially infatuated by Disney animation.[38] Her love for popular culture along with the ability to mimic her favorite characters in drawings inspired the pursuit of a career path previously abandoned by her mother. With this simple ambition and virtually no knowledge of historical and contemporary art, she began to study at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1958.

It was during this time at the Art Institute that Murray discovered a deep love for historical and contemporary art. She was exposed to the vast collection of works displayed at the art institute. These included paintings by Juan Miro, Pablo Picasso, Willem deKooning and Paul Cezanne. Also influential were artists like Ellsworth Kelly, Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg, who represented the new, younger generation of artists. Drawn to their formal and technical innovations and the freedom of their brushwork, she was attracted to their ability to alter the nature of painting: to defy expectation and create a unique style of artistic expression through their chosen medium.[39] The influence of these works led her to abandon the idea of becoming a commercial artist and to pursue the study of painting. After she received her BA from the Art Institute, she attended Mills College in Oakland, CA, earning her MFA in painting in 1964.

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[38] Elizabeth Murray, "Interview," interview with Sue Graze and Kathy Halbreich, *Elizabeth Murray: Paintings and Drawings*, ed. Edith M. Pavese (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1987), 130.
[39] Robert Storr, *Elizabeth Murray* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2005), 26.

The pursuit of a career as an artist was an enormous step. The ability to support oneself via a career in fine arts was exceedingly difficult for any artist, but it was especially challenging for women. The number of female students seeking education in the arts had significantly increased during the 1960s, but the sexist attitude remained a significant hindrance to women of Murray's generation. As a woman without financial independence, it made the decision even more difficult for Murray. The choice of painting as her medium was an odd one, considering the emphasis on the genius male painters of previous decades. Furthermore, the majority of Murray's peers were beginning to move away from more traditional media in favor of other forms such as video, performance and multi-media installations. Painting underwent a drastic drop in popularity during this time period and was largely considered obsolete by many young artists.[40] Murray's love of painting was so great that she was willing to face the risks. Instead of following along with the current trends, she decided to dedicate herself to the reinvention of painting as an innovative medium.[41]

The majority of the work she produced during this time was very pop-oriented, incorporating dense pop imagery, three-dimensional found objects and a kind of tongue-in-cheek playfulness. Jim Nutt, founder of the Hairy Who, had been a student at

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[40] Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986), 190. Modernist artists had been struggling against more conservative art forms roughly since the middle of the nineteenth century. Then as modernism became the dominant aesthetic, it then became the idea to be rebelled against by the newest generation of postmodern artists. This feeling of direct rebellion was a national one. It was only strongly felt in the united states. The American feminist movement was in some ways a contributor to this.

[41] Roberta Smith, "Elizabeth Murray, 66, Artist of Vivid Forms, Dies," *New York Times*, August 13, 2007. Accessed August 24, 2012.
http://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/13/arts/design/13murray.html?pagewanted=all

the same time as Murray at the Art Institute. Though she did not share his inclination toward vulgar imagery and more impersonal techniques, she was impressed by his disdain for the authority of "high art."[42] Likewise, she was affected by Andy Warhol's exhibitions in which he created images of soup cans and Brillo boxes. It was this enormous jump in focus from the ultra-serious abstract expressionists to the cynical, satirical pop artists that impressed upon Murray the fleeting nature of trendy or popular art. She appreciated the freedom these artists embodied, and realized the importance of following her own artistic instincts rather than adhering to established trends.[43] Many of the prevalent pop artists and the artists involved in the Hairy Who were using found objects, printing and silkscreening. She experimented with these techniques as well, using pop culture imagery in her work, but her adherence to hands-on techniques continued to set Murray apart from these mainstream groups.

For a woman artist in the 1960s and 70s, the choice to create pop art was problematic. Mainstream pop was created by male artists and meant to appeal to male viewers. The use of readymade objects, advertisements and household goods was considered innovative by the men who used them. However, a woman using the same imagery (taken from what was considered the woman's domain) would not be taken seriously as an artist. As Lucy Lippard has stated, "If the first major pop artists had been

[42] Ibid, 32. Murray was a student at the Art Institute of Chicago with Jim Nutt and was impressed by both his crude, commercially based style as well as his rebellious nature towards educational and museum establishment. She was also heavily influenced by the work of Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg. She admired the combinations of the objective and the personal in their work.
[43] Elizabeth Murray, "Elizabeth Murray," interview with Jessica Hagedorn, 59.

women, the movement might never have gotten out of the kitchen."[44] For Murray to align herself with this sort of imagery was to risk being negatively labeled as a low, feminine, or genre artist. The majority of mainstream pop was expressly misogynistic, and even became synonymous with the exploitation of women's bodies. This made it difficult for women artists to find acceptance in pop, and eventually led many women including Murray to apply their efforts in different directions.[45]

Aside from pop artists, Murray encountered other influential sources during her time on the west coast. The Bay Area Funk artists were embodying the same individualistic attitude that had appealed to her in Chicago. These artists used figural imagery similar to that used by pop, yet their focus was on a more personal form of expression rather than commercial or social content. This, along with their inclusion of humor and playfulness were elements that would emerge as important features in Murrays own work. She was also introduced to the work of Joan Brown, who was not only one of the few women painters that Murray knew; she was also one of the few painters at the time who were creating strong figural work. She used thick, messy brush strokes to create large figural pieces that Murray found to be "refreshing and gutsy."[46] During her time at Mills, Murray met Jennifer Bartlett, who was also an aspiring painter. Bartlett became not only a lifelong friend, but also a professional collaborator and colleague for Murray in the years to come. These connections were important for

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[44] Lucy R. Lippard, "Household Images in Art," 62.
[45] Kalliopi Minioudaki, "Pop Proto-Feminisms," 90.
[46] Elizabeth Murray, "An Interview with Elizabeth Murray," interview with Joan Simon, *Elizabeth Murray: Recent Paintings* (New York: Pacewildenstein, 1997), 13.

Murray's development as a professional artist. Strong women artists – especially painters – were scarce. Thus, the support and encouragement she received from artists like Bartlett and Brown gave a sense of connection and even competition among female peers, inspiring her to work even harder in pursuit of her own artistic objectives.

Much of the work Murray produced during this time involved experimentation with abstraction, figuration, collage and sculptural techniques. Not many of Murray's works from this time period exist today, but one surviving example from the late 1960s was *Night Empire* (figure 6). Painted shortly after moving to New York City, Murray isolated the iconic building in a seemingly rural setting amidst a cartoonish starry sky. The image was framed with a painted white fringe on a pink cloth featuring cartoon images of Dick Tracy and Little Orphan Annie riding an elephant. Murray uses the famous building as a staple of pop culture. This representation of New York's signature landmark was a popular image used by other pop artists like Andy Warhol in his 1964 film *Empire*. It was also similar to Jann Haworth's quilted piece entitled *L.A. Times Bedspread II* (1965) (figure 7), which also incorporated the logos of Dick Tracy and Little Orphan Annie and was framed by a pink cloth border. Murray chose these elements because they were meaningful to her as an individual, creating an intimate, playful and personal piece.

Night Empire shows Murray's interest in pop as a genre as well as a desire to create more personal narrative work as a woman artist. It was rendered as such that anyone familiar with American culture could easily recognize and identify with the

central image. It obviously paid homage to her newly adopted home city, but it also included elements from her past that had particular meanings, including the beloved comic characters of her youth, the palm trees and the childlike starry sky. Perhaps the most significant personal touch within this painting was the border. Much like Haworth's earlier work, the bright pink background and painted fringe gave an unmistakably feminine air to the entire piece in a time when many women artists continued to censor themselves from feminine imagery. These elements within *Night Empire* demonstrate Murray's penchant for breaking or redefining the established rules.[47] This painting establishes Murray's ability to express herself as an individual and as a woman that was rarely seen before this transitional period.

She was firmly established as a New York artist at the beginning of the 1970s. After the birth of a son in 1969, Murray decided to forego the experimentations with media and adhere strictly to oil painting. This was in part due to a desire to reestablish herself in the medium which first peaked her interest as an artist. Also, painting was better suited to the new demands on her time as a mother. In previous decades, motherhood essentially meant the end of a woman's career. Women with husbands and children were branded as "housewives" and were automatically considered amateur artists at best.[48] This had begun to change during the 1960s and 70s. Several of Murray's contemporary artists, such as Susan Rothenberg and Jennifer Bartlett had become mothers and continued on with their careers. Much like these artists, the time

[47] Robert Storr, *Elizabeth Murray*, 57.
[48] Lucy R. Lippard, "Household Images In Art," 64.

spent in isolation at home and in the studio allowed Murray to reevaluate her work and eventually find a distinct style of her own.

She began to reinvent her approach to painting, combining both abstract, painterly forms of cubism and surrealism with the figural, narrative qualities of pop. The strong trend toward pop in many New York galleries had begun to fade in favor of more conceptual, minimal and process-based work. Murray responded to these changes by reducing the emphasis on cartoonish pop, yet she refused to abandon either her medium or the use of figural and domestic imagery derived from a pop past. The paintings she produced during the 1970s utilized amorphous shapes and bold color which brought an increasing sense of life and vivacity to her canvases.[49] Despite their abstract nature, the images she created held a certain relationship to figural ideas, using shapes that deliberately trigger figural identifications by the viewer.[50]

The paintings Murray began creating consisted of various abstracted forms seemingly derived from an art historical background. Several paintings made references to old masters such as Paul Cezanne in *Madame Cezanne in Rocking Chair* (1972) (figure 8). She also nods to the cubist painters in still-life images like *Beer Glass at Noon* (1971) (figure 9). But these paintings had a meaning that went beyond admiration for former

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[49] The work Murray produced after 1971 could no longer be considered pop, but she continued to use its influence in her work. This can be seen in her bold colors and in the recognizable shapes she incorporated into her abstractions which were often cartoonish in nature. The more historical influences of the cubists and surrealists are also clearly recognizable. Whereas the prevailing minimalists were reducing their work to basic elements, Murray was further complicating hers.

[50] Robert Storr, *Elizabeth Murray*, 44. Her work since the early 1970s has carried associations with sexuality, but it was heavily masked by abstraction. The amorphous shapes are reminiscent of bodily organs, orifices, tongues, etc., yet they are deliberately rendered so that their meanings remain open to interpretation.

modernist masters. The style was still at this point more quotation than original, but it was Murray's choice of subject matter that was becoming more important and significant to the development of her work.[51] These paintings were in fact making a statement on the personal connections with the images and her interpretations of the contemporary art scene.

Murray was very conscious about the feminist art movement that was gaining momentum at the time. Its influence and presence within the New York art scene was increasing with the activities of organizations like the Women Artists in Revolution and the Ad Hoc Women Artists' Group.[52] Murray herself was involved in a consciousness-raising group that encouraged women to share female issues and experiences. She was also well versed in popular feminist literature of Betty Friedan and Germaine Greer.[53] Despite an obvious interest in feminism, Murray chose not to align herself with the feminist art movement. Still an advocate of the art object and the universal power it could evoke, she did not want her work to be limited by the political connotations of feminist art. Murray was in agreement with many contemporary female artists like Marjorie Strider and Rosalyn Drexler who continued their distance from overt feminine

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[51] Roberta Smith," Motion Pictures," in *Elizabeth Murray: Paintings and Drawings*, ed. Edith M. Pavese (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1987), 15. On quotation, Murray has stated that "everything has been done a million times. Sometimes you use something and its yours; another time you use it and it's still theirs."

[52] Mary D. Garrard, "Feminist Politics: Networks and Organizations," in *The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact*, eds. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 91.

[53] Elizabeth Murray, "Interview with Elizabeth Murray," interview with Robert Storr, *Elizabeth Murray* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2005), 167. Betty Friedan was the author of *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) and Germaine Greer was the author of *The Female Eunuch* (1970).

statements. They feared that to openly associate themselves with feminist artists would be to assign a limiting, feminine stereotype to their work.[54]

However, this did not mean that Murray's work was devoid of women's issues. On the contrary, it often referenced female issues on a more private scale. In the case of *Madame Cezanne in Rocking Chair*, she was referencing her own sense of identification with the image of Cezanne's wife in *Madame Cezanne in a Red Dress* (1890). Murray's fascination stemmed from the uncertainty created by this image: the awkward tilt, the facial expression and the abstract rendering of the hands.[55] But her identification with Madame Cezanne stems from the domestic tension between sitter and artist. In her interpretation, Murray creates a narrative from the comic-like grid of images, showing an abstracted version of Madame Cezanne while she sits for her portrait and gazes through the open window. In the progression of images, the figure was seated so long, she fell asleep waiting for her husband to complete his task.[56] Murray's slightly comical narration held a commentary on women's traditional roles within the home. The monotonous depiction of domestic isolation referenced Murray's own struggle to balance familial duties with the demands of an artistic career.

Murray also created paintings that referenced common household objects. In *Beer Glass at Noon*, she presented an abstracted version of an ordinary glass in the

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[54] Rosalyn Drexler et al., "Eight Artists Reply: Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?," 41. In this article, Drexler and seven other women artists protest against feminist tactics and the idea of a collective feminine aesthetic.

[55] Michael Kimmelman, "At the Met with Elizabeth Murray: Looking for the Magic in Painting," *New York Times*, October 21, 1994, accessed September 10, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/1994/10/21/arts/at-the-met-with-elizabeth-murray-looking-for-the-magic-in-painting.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm

[56] Roberta Smith, "Motion Pictures," 15.

midst of an indistinct cubist background. The glass itself was the focal point of the painting, rendered so that it would be easily recognizable for what it was, and yet abstracted enough to complicate its interpretation. The cup itself features several mysterious curves, shapes and sections. The stem of the glass leans to the right, giving it an air of instability. Likewise, the liquid contained within the glass sloshes the same direction, making it seem even more off balance. The image seems to be teetering on the brink of falling over, spilling its contents at any moment. This was the first painting in which she toyed with the notions of turning mundane shapes into symbols. She was intrigued by the idea that the cup or vessel could stand as a metaphor for herself and the balance she was attempting to manage in her own life.[57]

By the late 1970s, Murray had achieved a notable level of success. After her first group exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art, she began showing more regularly in galleries throughout New York. In 1975 she was picked up by the Paula Cooper Gallery, which continued to represent her for the rest of her career.[58] Murray's work was shown in more prestigious venues in group shows at the New Museum with fellow artists such as Joel Schapiro, Ron Gorchov, Dennis Oppenheim and Dorothea Rockburne.[59] The boost in confidence in Murray's professional life was tempered by dissolution of the marriage to Don Sunseri. The adjustments in life triggered a change in her work. Murray's canvases began to break up, often using several irregular shapes

[57] Stephen Westfall, "Elizabeth Murray: Scary Funny," *Art in America* 94 (2006): 83.
[58] Paul Gardner, "Elizabeth Murray Shapes Up," *ArtNews* 83 (1984): 49.
[59] Robert Storr, *Elizabeth Murray*, 51.

within one painting. This added a three-dimensional, sculptural element to the work reminiscent of Marjorie Strider's girlie paintings of the mid '60s. She also refocused the paintings on more recognizable figures. Referencing back to her cartoonish pop past, she decided to use the objects of her everyday life as subjects. In effect, she began creating personal narratives by using images of common household objects.

Murray returned to the image of the vessel and the underlying meanings it could hold. Not only was the cup a pleasing shape, but it also held a great deal of personal meaning for her. According to Murray, the glass was a strong image that could symbolize the female body, and it could also signify male athleticism.[60] The vessel also metaphorically symbolized the container of the blood of Christ in her upbringing as a Catholic.[61] In *Breaking* (1980) (figure 10), she used an image of a glass depicted just at the point of shattering into pieces. Much like the glass used in *Beer Glass at Noon*, the cup was distorted and off center. Foregoing the homage to cubism in the earlier painting, she took the same image and made it completely her own. The bright, bold colors, the yellow zigzag lines and cartoonish shapes give the piece a comical flair that was characteristic of Murray's work. But this was also an autobiographical piece. The vessel represented her emotional state at the time of divorce. The glass was rendered on two shaped canvases and positioned in such a way that the center was filled by the negative space in between. Thus the core, or the "heart" of the image was the central

[60] Paul Gardner, "Elizabeth Murray Shapes Up," 55.
[61] Elizabeth Murray, "An Interview with Elizabeth Murray," interview with Joan Simon, 9.

breakage point.[62] The breaking glass functioned as a kind of vanitas for the artist. As a representation of herself, the fragile glass could not withstand the external pressures surrounding it.

Murray's personal feelings were expressed in a similar way in another painting from the same year entitled *Join* (figure 11). It was also constructed of two separate canvases. This time, the amorphous shapes were rendered in a contrasting green and red paint against a hot pink background. The jagged edges where the two shapes meet are bisected by two lines: one black, one white. The shapes seem to fit together, but they are not a perfect match. Murray had intended this piece to represent polar opposites, but during a studio visit, Jennifer Bartlett made a comment that the piece was a broken heart. Murray was at first dismayed by this comment, believing that such imagery from a woman artist would be construed by critics as sappy sentimentality.[63] But Bartlett was correct in her assessment. Though *Join* was a broken heart, the nature of its rendering left little hint of the cliché Murray feared. This heart featured tongue-like protuberances in the jagged edges and an odd purple line at the top that was far too reminiscent of intestines to be interpreted as overly romantic.

Murray was becoming bolder in projecting herself into her artwork. By adding more personal experiences as a wife, a mother and an artist, she was in fact creating artwork that spoke directly to issues within feminist art. An initial sense of distance

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[62] Elizabeth Murray, "Plates of Drawings and Artist's Commentary," in *Elizabeth Murray: Paintings and Drawings*, ed. Edith M. Pavese (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1987), 42.
[63] Corinne Robins, "Elizabeth Murray: Deconstructing our Interiors," *Art Journal* 50 (1991): 58.

from feminist art began to wane as Murray's subject matter increasingly focused on her own life. She never considered herself a feminist artist, claiming that "if the feminist emphasis seems too calculated, I find the art hard to take."[64] She wished to avoid the categorization of "feminist artist" by creating work that embodied her point of view as a woman on a more subversive scale. To achieve this, she devised a language of abstract imagery and personal content. This became more apparent in the early 1980s when she began to combine the metaphor of the vessel from *Breaking* with the biological referent in *Join*.

In 1982, Murray produced several paintings featuring common objects, primarily consisting of coffee cups, saucers, tables and long stemmed glasses. The objects were abstracted, but most were rendered so that they could be easily recognized as vessels. However, there are several cup paintings that make clear representations of female experiences. In particular, *Beam* depicted a long stemmed glass as it fell to the floor and spilled its contents (figure 12). The painting was rendered in a way that gives room for personal interpretations, yet unmistakable references to the female anatomy abound within the image. The body of the glass consists of a dark ovoid shape with a gaping green opening at the top that closely resembles a womb. Amorphous green liquid spills out in a manner that suggests the release of bodily fluids. The wavy and off-center stem of the glass could be interpreted as an umbilical cord or even a cartoonish foot. A blue square glances off the side of the womblike glass, leaving in its wake a yellow beam. Its

[64] Paul Gardner, "Elizabeth Murray Shapes Up," 55.

point of contact is very near a vaginal pink triangle. In effect, the glass was rendered as an abstract interpretation of the process of insemination and conception.[65] This interpretation of the symbols within the painting can be further validated by examining her personal life at the time. *Beam* was painted in the same year she gave birth to a second child.

Despite Murray's expressed interest in keeping her art ambiguous enough for open interpretations, paintings like *Beam* were undeniably feminine in their content and symbolic meanings.[66] In fact, they held several formal similarities with the work of contemporary feminist artists. In a video performance entitled *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1975) by Martha Rosler, the artist used a demonstration of common kitchen objects as a metaphor for the traditional roles of women in the home. This was also during the same time frame that feminist artist Judy Chicago began exhibiting her controversial installation, *The Dinner Party* (1979). Chicago's work also utilized household imagery by using table settings and sculpted dinner plates to represent historical women. Works such as these were highly visible and influential to the artists of Murray's generation. Much like Rosler and Chicago, Murray was validating the use of domestic imagery through her work. She was very conscious of the stigma of inferiority attached to the imagery she was using.[67] Though she wished to avoid the calculated political statements

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[65] Robert Storr, "Elizabeth Murray," 55. Also, Murray again referenced her Catholic upbringing here, as her cartoonish womb is impregnated by a beam of light, much like the biblical account of the Immaculate Conception.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Elizabeth Murray, "Elizabeth Murray," interview with Jessica Hagedorn, 58. In this interview, Murray discussed the element of dismissal that comes with a woman who chooses a domestic subject. The terms

within feminist art, Murray's work represents a parallel affinity that symbolically references the overt statements made by feminist artists.

She makes reference to the physical, functional and emotional states of female subjectivity which continued to increase in the following decade. Still using objects as metaphors, she created more images of wombs, limbs, organs, intestines and bodily fluids to illustrate narratives concerning birth, death, life, sex and relationships and various other life events. It was Murray's belief that artists primarily created artwork about themselves.[68] She adhered to this statement, creating work that essentially elevated the seemingly mundane objects and events of everyday life into the stuff of artistic inspiration. Murray's paintings captured the conventional flotsam of everyday existence and portrayed it as an artistic theme worthy of consideration. Always using a vocabulary of cartoonish shapes and mundane objects, she never renounced her pop roots or the ability to transform objects into thematic ideas. By choosing personal occasions within her life as subjects, Murray's work supports the efforts of feminist artists simply by revealing a strong female perspective.[69]

Murray accomplished many things during her career as an artist. Aside from a long standing relationship with the Paula Cooper Gallery, she also had several group and solo exhibitions in some of the most prestigious museums throughout the country.

"ordinary" and "domestic" hold negative connotations when applied to the art of women, which Murray referred to as a device by which society "keeps you in your place… they cut you off and corner you, an then they can dismiss your work more easily."

[68] Paul Gardner, "Elizabeth Murray Shapes Up," 55.

[69] Dave Hickey, "Elizabeth Murray: On Zabriskie Point," in *Elizabeth Murray: Recent Paintings* (New York: Pacewildenstein, 1997), 6.

These included the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Hirschorn Museum, and the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C, and the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art. Murray's accomplishments and activities also extended to the advancement of women artists exhibitions within museums. In fact, she was one of a handful of artists chosen by the Museum of Modern art to participate in their Artist's Choice series. This program allowed the chosen artist to guest curate an exhibition from the museum's collections. Immediately, Murray chose to create a show that displayed artworks of various women within the archives of MoMA.[70] Murray was the first to organize a show of this kind at MoMA, choosing well-known artists and those whose work had previously received little recognition.

While drawing upon both the historical and contemporary artworks she admired, Murray developed an individualistic and expressive body of work. Despite the fact that her work did not fit within the popular artistic categorizations of the day, she managed to produce a considerable level of success within the art community. She continued to incorporate pop roots long after they were considered passé by mainstream art. As Murray's outward detachment from feminist art waned, her work correspondingly became stronger and more communicative. The whimsical and even comical forms she favored allowed Murray to create work that explored both female sexuality and her own personal life in ways that were thought provoking and entertaining to viewers.

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[70] Elizabeth Murray, "An Interview with Elizabeth Murray," interview with Joan Simon, 19.

CHAPTER 3: JENNIFER BARTLETT

Jennifer Losch Bartlett was an artist who began her career shortly before the onset of the feminist movement. She received educational training in the 1960s when women were primarily encouraged to avoid feminine associations in their work. As the feminist movement began in the following decade, she chose not to openly align with feminism. Bartlett's choices in technique and subject matter culminated in an amalgam of style that evaded easy categorization. Among the art historical texts that mention her, she is often grouped with the minimalist and conceptualist artists of the 1970s, including Sol LeWitt, Mel Bochner, Robert Mangold and Richard Serra. Bartlett's work was exhibited along with theirs in prominent venues such as the Paula Cooper Gallery, the Art Institute of Chicago and the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Her work was formally related to these predominant artistic styles, but there were also the underlying elements of popular culture, feminism and personal commentary that correlated closer to the work of women pop artists as discussed in the first chapter. These elements were extremely significant to Bartlett's work and though they appeared subversively at first, their presence intensified as her career progressed.

From a very early age, Bartlett was highly ambitious and motivated to make a career as an artist. A love of drawing and painting led her to enter Mills College in 1960. As was typical of the time, she was enamored of the paintings of the modernist artists such as Van Gogh, Cezanne, Picasso and Manet.[71] The time at Mills gave her exposure

[71] Jennifer Bartlett, "Jennifer Bartlett," interview with Elizabeth Murray, *Bomb* 93 (2005): 55.

to a wider range of historical artists as well as an introduction to more contemporary artists. It was there she met Elizabeth Murray, who became a lifelong friend and colleague. Heavily influenced by the male abstract expressionists – especially the paintings of Arshile Gorky, she gravitated toward abstraction in her own work.[72] She was admitted into the graduate art program at Yale University and was quickly accepted among a group of the most talented young artists in the country. These artists included Richard Serra, Chuck Close, Sylvia Plimack-Mangod and Nancy Graves.[73]

Bartlett was among a group of several promising art students that were women. Like many of these female students, she was driven and highly ambitious. These traits motivated her towards success in a learning environment that was still biased toward male supremacy in the arts. Sexist attitudes were still prevalent at Yale, and Bartlett found herself immersed in the "man's world" atmosphere of the art department. Though she was confident in her work and talent, she was the brunt of some discriminatory criticism and underhanded compliments. Reportedly, a fellow (male) student commented that her paintings were so good "you'd never know they had been painted by a woman."[74] She tried to combat these kinds of attitudes by adopting a strategy commonly used by several other women artists. She made a deliberate attempt to make herself more "macho." By stripping herself of attributes considered

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[72] This refers to her early undergraduate work. Her attraction to abstraction never led her to abandon figural work. Bartlett has famously never chosen between abstraction and figural representation which both appear in her work throughout her career.

[73] Calvin Tomkins, "Drawing and Painting," in *Jennifer Bartlett*, eds.Marge Goldwater, Roberta Smith and Calvin Tomkins, (New York: Abbeville Press, 1985), 12.

[74] Ibid.

feminine she could transform herself into "one of the boys," thus gaining a higher level of acceptance as an artist.[75]

The graduate program at Yale produced a great many successful artists during this time frame. Even though the art department faculty remained conservative, it drew in several contemporary artists that were highly influential to Bartlett and her colleagues. Among the visiting artists were names like James Rosenquist, Al Held, Jim Dine, Claes Oldenberg and Robert Rauschenberg.[76] These were some of the biggest names in the new generation of artists that were working primarily in pop. As such, the Yale students gravitated toward them and their innovative attitudes. Many of them saw themselves as the successors of the varying artforms, new galleries and shifting tastes that were characteristic of the New York art scene.[77] By the time Bartlett moved to New York in 1968, many of her Yale classmates had already set up studios in what would later be known as SoHo. This gave Bartlett an instant network of friends, including Close, Serra, Graves and John Borofsky, as well as her close friend from Mills, Elizabeth Murray. It also provided the opportunity to meet artists who had already achieved success, such as Richard Artschwager, Roy Lichtenstein and Jasper Johns, all three of whom would prove highly influential to her artistic development.

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[75]Lucy Lippard, "Prefaces to Catalogs of Three Women's Exhibitions," 53. Lucy Lippard describes this same situation as typical among many women artists of this time period. The sexist and discriminatory attitudes of the New York art scene and the lack of female art teachers left few female role models for young artists to look up to. Many women did not want to characterize themselves as "women artists" because to do so was to immediately imply a level of inferiority to male artists.

[76] Jennifer Bartlett, "Jennifer Bartlett," interview with Elizabeth Murray, 56.

[77] Tomkins, "Drawing and Painting," 11.

During this period, Bartlett struggled to find an individual style, particularly because she could not set her mind to one particular mode of working. All the art she was seeing was good to her, and she wanted to somehow use it all in her own work.[78] This led to a series of experimentations that combined elements of pop art, process art and found art assemblages with the more historical aspects of abstraction and representational imagery. She used common objects from hardware stores then manipulated them in various ways to create sculptures and assemblage paintings. These experiments were largely unsuccessful in themselves, but they did function as stepping stones towards later use of color, medium and methodical processes. Minimalism had recently gained validity within the gallery circuit, and its reductive nature had a profound impact on Bartlett's work. Though she was by no means a minimalist artist, Bartlett did use some of its fundamental ideas that helped to simplify and focus her work.

She wanted to find a method of working that was highly controllable and befitting to her ambitions to create large work. Bartlett's idea to use steel plates as a canvas for paintings came while admiring the enamel coated steel signs hanging in the New York subway stations. Steel signs were commonly used for commercial advertisement and company logos. This appealed to Bartlett because not only did it reference the pop roots of her previous mentors at Yale, but it also provided a highly

[78] Ibid, 13.

versatile canvas that was commercially made and easily reproducible.[79] She used a silkscreen technique to place a faint grey grid onto the plates. The images she painted would be dictated by implementing precise mathematical rules within the grid. Using these tools gleaned from the varied sources around her, she created a systematic and highly controllable method of producing paintings. The multitude of rules and restrictions Bartlett placed on her work seem restrictive and limiting, but it provided a method for self-expression that complimented the obsessive need for her work to fill every hour of the day.[80]

Bartlett's early plate work was often likened to the minimal and conceptual work that was replacing pop as the dominant style of the late 1960s. Though her work does retain some similarities of both, the intentions and motivations are quite different. Bartlett's use of the grid silkscreened onto the majority of her plate paintings was likened to the grid-based work of Carl Andre and Sol LeWitt. They also used mathematical based formulae to determine where and how they would paint. For them, the grid and the mathematical system used to fill it was the entire purpose for the piece. The process was the subject matter and any object created by that process was simply a byproduct.[81] Bartlett admired the work of these artists, but her use of the same tools was quite the opposite to that of Andre and LeWitt. The end result of the

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[79] Jennifer Bartlett, "Jennifer Bartlett," interview with Elizabeth Murray, 56.
[80] Brenda Richardson, "What If?" in *Jennifer Bartlett: Early Plate Work*, ed. Joseph N Newland (Andover: Addison Gallery of American Art, 2006), 22.
[81] Daniel Wheeler, ed., *Modern Art*, 3rd ed. (New York: Prentice Hall and Harry N Abrams, 1992), 358. In a quote from Sol LeWitt, he states that "the idea or the concept is the most important aspect of the work… The idea becomes the machine that makes the art."

painting itself was the important thing to Bartlett; the process by which it was completed was simply a means.[82] She felt a distance from the popular feeling for conceptualism and was insecure about her understanding of its precepts. In response to LeWitt's 1967 publication "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," she stated that "on a good day I could follow 15 of his 32 rules."[83]

Bartlett continued to develop the idea of the represented object, often simple images derived from her surroundings or past experiences, and the meanings they could invoke as symbolic metaphors. Even in the earliest, most reductive pieces, the underlying subject matter was always personal. Despite the extreme order and mathematical exactitude to which Bartlett adhered, she managed to include aspects of herself within her paintings. Even among the most abstract work, one can detect obvious mistakes and miscalculations within the systems used to create them. These mistakes were not due to an oversight by the artist. In fact, she used these mistakes and discrepancies to her advantage, often redirecting the patterns as it suited her. She often left drips and smudges as they occurred instead of correcting them. The flaws in her paintings functioned as reflections of her personality and the way she turned personal flaws and mistakes into individualistic assets.[84] In this way, Bartlett was highlighting the importance of personal content over conceptual emphasis. Each

[82] Calvin Tomkins, "Drawing and Painting," 20. Bartlett often bent or broke the rules of the system she was using when it served her purposes. This fact further attests to her lack of concern for the conceptual content and affirms her interest in the final outcome of her paintings.
[83] Jennifer Bartlett, "Jennifer Bartlett," interview with Elizabeth Murray, 57.
[84] Ibid, 30.

imperfection came from the artist's hand and served as evidence of Bartlett's presence in the work.

In 1970, she began using the simplified image of a house, using only the minimal geometric shapes of a triangle on top of a square. One of the earliest to use this image was *House* (figure 13). In this painting, Bartlett created 61 plates that each represented a different version of the same house rendered in painted dots within a grid structure. Each plate displays a house, a car, a pond a white fence and mountains. The house image was presented in both inside and outside angles and subjected to various alterations, including the omission of various elements and changing color schemes. The reiteration of this seemingly simple and even childlike representation could be likened to the repetitious images in Warhol's coke bottles and Marilyn Monroe images in that they gave their viewer numerous variations on an easily recognizable piece of American culture. They also share a kinship with the house images used in Martha Rosler's early collage series *House Beautiful: Bringing the War Home* (1967-1972), in which she used images of idealized American homes to make political commentary. Much like these pop artists, Bartlett used this painting as a means to re-represent the easily recognizable icon of an American house in a way that allows her viewers to rethink such a common, simplistic image.[85]

After *House*, Bartlett decided to continue with the house image, using it repeatedly in many of her paintings for years to come. Like many women of her

[85] Gregory Galligan, "Jennifer Bartlett: In and Out of the Garden," *Arts Magazine* 60 (1985): 90.

generation, she avoided using imagery that was openly personal for fear her male contemporaries would dismiss her work out of hand. The house was an easily recognizable and innocuous form. Its image had been repeated constantly in American popular culture as the center of family life and the goal of the 'American dream.' It also carried with it connotative gender associations of the domestic roles of women. For Bartlett, it was a symbol with a great deal of personal meaning. She used the house as a metaphor for her own emotional states and feelings. The images of houses represented her moods, expressed by various color schemes, changing angles and distances – all of which were created using the standard of the grid.[86] The houses and other more abstract paintings were confined to the highly controlled parameters of dots within the grid, but by mid-decade, Bartlett began to relax these rules, allowing herself greater freedom to create more expressive and intimate work.

As feminist art became more prevalent in the 1970s, Bartlett remained outwardly faithful to her earlier decision to disassociate herself from feminist associations. Though feminist art was gaining more recognition for women artists, a significant gap remained between male and female artists. There were several women within her circle of friends and colleagues, yet none of them were achieving the same levels of fame or financial success as their male contemporaries. As stated in chapter two, various organizations for women were being established to combat these iniquities, including the Ad Hoc Women Artists Group in 1970 and Women in the Arts

[86] Kay Larson, *Jennifer Bartlett: New Paintings* (Philadelphia: Locks Art Piblications, 1998), 4.

(WIA) in 1971. These groups were taking action against the discriminatory practices against women in museums throughout New York. Bartlett shied away from these groups and continued to avoid reference to any social or political issues in her work. Any personal content was presented in such a way to exclude any gender association. In setting out to create a genderless form of art, she was attempting to avoid the sexual bias upon which her art would inevitably be judged.

In some ways, Bartlett's attempts were successful. The plates were exhibited in her first solo show in New York in Alan Saret's loft in 1970, then at the Reese Palley Gallery in early 1972. She also exhibited in several group shows in 1972 like the *Small Series* at the Paula Cooper Gallery and the Whitney's *Annual Exhibition*, receiving mostly positive reactions and favorable reviews.[87] The level of acceptance Bartlett achieved was in part due to her hybridist and inclusive style. The paintings reflected the unique position she held as an artist working between abstraction and figuration – between modernism and more contemporary material. She used abstraction and simplistic forms that catered to fans of both the abstract expressionist school and the more current minimalists. Bartlett also added elements of obvious narrative and figural details that were more closely associated with pop and feminist art. Critics like Michael Brenson praised her for creating an eclectic mix of "control and irrationality" and characterized

[87] Calvin Tomkins, "Drawing and Painting," 17. Critics like John Russell, Laurie Anderson and Ellen Lubell wrote positive and encouraging reviews of Bartlett's work.

her as inventive and novelistic.[88] This was intended as sincere praise, but it illustrated that the work was commercially successful while still being considered other.

In addition to acceptance into the mainstream art community in New York, there were aspects of Bartlett's work that connected her to both historical women's art and more contemporary feminist art. Much like Jann Haworth's decision to use fibers and needlework, Bartlett chose materials that retained a sexual stereotype. Because of the industrial nature of steel plates and enamel paints, her work was likened to that of pottery decorators and print colorers of the early twentieth century.[89] Such work was typically done by women and was considered more craftwork than art. Bartlett's method of applying paint in dots contained by a rigid grid pattern was also considered similar to domestic decorative items that were mass produced for use within the home. Responding to these assertions, Bartlett defended the use of decorative elements, claiming that all painting was decorative to some degree but it was the additional elements an artist included that mattered.[90] This statement was neither an abjuration nor an affirmation to this correlation, but it showed an inclination for following her own instincts as an artist.

The pinnacle of Bartlett's success in the 1970s was the creation of her largest piece of plate work entitled *Rhapsody* (1976, figure 14). This enormous work was

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[88] Michael Brenson, "Art: Jennifer Bartlett, 15 Year Retrospective," *New York Times*, November 29, 1985, accessed October 7, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/1985/11/29/arts/art-jennifer-barlett-15-year-retrospective.html.
[89] Brenda Richardson, "What If?" 28.
[90] Calvin Tomkins, "Drawing and Painting," 37.

comprised of about 987 one foot square plates and was 153 feet long.[91] Bartlett's use of seemingly simplistic guidelines belied the complex and active narrative piece that resulted from them.[92] *Rhapsody*, as its musical name suggests, forms a narrative sequence which crests and falls in a series of changing images, styles and colors. She used abstract imagery along with four repeating images that she claims were chosen arbitrarily: tree, mountain, ocean and house. Bartlett describes the piece as "a conversation between the elements in the painting," but it can also be characterized as a display of the workings of Bartlett's mind.[93] Both of these assertions can be considered true. This enormous painting gives address to the formal interaction between painting techniques, but the strong feeling that there was a personal narrative being presented was undeniable. Bartlett included a great deal of personal content within *Rhapsody* yet presented it in such a way that viewers can interpret common meanings throughout the piece.

The personal content became even more prevalent in Bartlett's work created after *Rhapsody*. In the same year *Rhapsody* was completed, she experienced two life changing events. First was the death of her father which caused a great deal of emotional strain. Only a month after his death, she discovered she was pregnant and quickly decided to have an abortion. The decision was partially due to her recent

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[91] Ibid, 28. *Rhapsody* was first exhibited in the Paula Cooper Gallery in Bartlett's second solo exhibit there. Because of its enormous size, it took up the entire exhibition wall space and was the only work featured in the show.

[92] Brenda Richardson, "What If?" 32. The guidelines consisted of: twenty five colors; horizontal, vertical, diagonal and curved lines; squares triangles and circles; large, medium and small sizes; images of mountain, house, tree and ocean; dotted, freehand, ruled and measured painting techniques.

[93] Jennifer Bartlett, "Jennifer Bartlett," interview with Elizabeth Murray, 59.

bereavement, but was primarily driven by the long-held belief that a woman had to choose between a career as an artist and having a child.[94] Both experiences had a tremendous impact on her, which manifested in the more open and expressive works of the late 70s and 80s. Bartlett began to relax the strictness that had dominated her work thus far. The vocabulary of grids and dots, as well as the steel plates and enamel paints remained, but were expanded to include a wider variety of colors, painting styles and materials.

Bartlett created a series of paintings that again used the image of the house as a metaphor. This time, each house she created was a representation of someone close to her in life. She made representations of friends and family, but the most poignant were those that represented herself. One such painting was entitled *Falcon Avenue, Seaside Walk, Dwight Street, Jarvis Street, Greene Street* (1976, figure 15). It included 80 plates and five different depictions of a house. The five houses were named after five streets on which she had previously lived, which represented five stages in her life: birth, childhood, marriage, graduate education, and divorce and confusion.[95] Each house was rendered in a different style chosen to represent the artist's developmental and emotional state. In the last section, the "house" was comprised of the various elements of the previous four, indicating a jumble of emotions involving past and present life

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[94] Eleanor Munro, *Originals: American Women Artists* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2000), 408. Bartlett's own mother had been a fashion illustrator, but like so many women of her generation, she gave up her career after her first child (Bartlett) was born. Bartlett felt that she was to blame for the end of her mother's artistic career.

[95] Marge Goldwater, "Jennifer Bartlett: On Land and at Sea," in *Jennifer Bartlett*, eds. Marge Goldwater, Roberta Smith and Calvin Tomkins (New York: Abbeville Press, 1985), 51.

events. These houses, as well as several others she created, emanated a sense of personal turmoil and self-awareness that had previously been missing in her work.

Producing art that was more obviously personal was a difficult step for Bartlett, but her work became increasingly more self-indicative by the end of the 1970s. After finishing a series of house paintings in 1978, she began a new series that focused on the images of water that she first explored within *Rhapsody*. These paintings contain images of bodies of water which contained smaller ovoid shapes she referred to as "swimmers." She chose to paint these images of water not only because she had always held a personal affinity to lakes and oceans, but also because of their potential to reference her own body in an abstract way. Contemporary women artists who made feminist art had been working with images of the female body in a positive fashion, attempting to reclaim the female body as a valid artistic subject rather than a sexual object.[96] Representations of feminine anatomy were becoming less taboo for women, which allowed Bartlett to relax her earlier self-restrictions on gendered content. Though she was unwilling to include more overt bodily images, she made a significant personal leap in the use of abstract imagery that could easily be interpreted as both autobiographical and indicative of the female body.

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[96] Joanna Frueh, "The Body through Women's Eyes," in *The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact*, eds. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994), 192. Examples of such women were performance artists Hannah Wilke (S.O.S Starafication Object Series, 1974-82), and Carolee Schneeman (Interior Scroll, 1975), who used their own bodies in their work as tools to humanize the female form, elevating it from a passive object of beauty to an active producer of meaning. Both of these artists were active in New York in the mid-1970s and were among the most significant and highly influential feminist artists of the decade.

Among the earlier examples of these works was the series of three paintings entitled *At the Lake* (1979, figure 16). Each painting presented two mirror images of a lake scene, one comprised of 45 steel plates and the other of 2 canvases. The two sections were then interlocked in such a way that each image was overlapped by the other. These paintings displayed Bartlett's increasing boldness in her use of different formats and expressive brush strokes, but the most innovative element for the artist was the content of these works. The image of the lake was rendered as an organic shape reminiscent of human bodily organs. Within the fluidic form, the artist placed egg-shaped swimmers that seemed to bob in and out of the water. Their shape, combined with the choice of flesh-toned colors was strongly suggestive of a womb. As in the case of the house series, this was a kind of self-portrait for Bartlett. But she took it a step farther by adding referents to the female body, her own in particular. She used these paintings to express the personal turmoil within while still maintaining a certain amount of distance with the use of abstraction.[97] Through multiple repetitions of the scene at various times of day (morning, day and night), the viewer can appreciate the range of emotions and variable moods the artist was experiencing.

Because of the progress made by feminist artists, the inclusion of personal content and female imagery was not a hindrance for Bartlett's career. As she embraced the idea of a more personal, female perspective, her work gained a stronger sense of communication and understanding between artist and viewer. Bartlett spent the

[97] Marge Goldwater, "Jennifer Bartlett: On Land and at Sea," 56.

majority of the 1980s working on other successful series such as *In the Garden* (1981-83) and *The Creek Series* (1984), which included mixed media drawings, paintings and prints that revisited her earlier motifs of water and house as metaphor for the human presence. These works placed her once again amidst critical scrutiny for their decorative landscape qualities, yet it was the fact that she could make these images so relatable to a wide audience that gained her paintings such notoriety.[98] Bartlett's popularity earned her several private commissions as well as large scale commissions from companies like the Institute for Scientific Information in Philadelphia and the U. S. courthouse in Atlanta, Georgia. She also published a novel in 1985 entitled *History of the Universe*. Written as a piece of fiction, it was actually an autobiographical novel chronicling her life and struggles as a woman artist.

In her series *Air 24 Hours* (1991-92, figures 17, 18, and 19), Bartlett seems to have found an artistic configuration in which the major phases throughout her career culminated into one group of paintings. This series represented a fusion of ideas stemming from the representation of common objects and transforming them into both personal and universal signifiers.[99] It consisted of 24 large canvases each painted as a representation of one hour during the day. Recalling her pop heritage, the images depicted were of the interior and exterior spaces of a home, including a wide array of mundane scenery and everyday objects. Within these paintings, the artist expanded upon the notion of time and mood previously used in earlier paintings. She utilized

[98] Robert R. Pincus, "Jennifer Bartlett, a Mid-Career View," *San Diego Union*, February 16, 1986, E-1.
[99] Deborah Eisenberg, *Jennifer Bartlett: Air, 24 Hours* (New York: Harry N. Abrams,1994), 17.

some signature formal elements including the grid, painted dots and expressive brush strokes along with the figural motifs of house, water and garden. She even embedded a mathematical system that symbolized specific minutes or seconds of the represented hour in each painting.

These paintings were not only remarkable for their formal creativity. They were loaded with a myriad of meaning, symbolism and metaphor that invited the viewer to enter and examine the world these paintings create. Each piece functioned as a sort of snapshot of an ordinary moment suspended in time for the viewer to scrutinize. As in the majority of Bartlett's paintings, the human form was absent, yet the human presence was palpable within each depicted scene.[100] Viewers could easily recognize and empathize with the various phases and objects (shower, money, telephones, bedding, clothing, books) represented throughout the day. On closer inspection, the details within the paintings revealed some of the more intimate aspects of Bartlett's personal life. For example, there are several indicators that alluded to the presence of a child, reminding us of Bartlett's status as a mother.[101] Many of the paintings included images of toys, dolls, drawings or small snapshots of Bartlett's daughter, Alice. We were even reminded of her previous abortion by the headline of the *New York Post* depicted in the *Eleven a.m.* painting (figure 19). Shortly after the completion of *Air, 24 Hours*, Bartlett stated that the most important tools an artist has is their perceptions of lived

[100] Ibid.
[101] Bartlett remarried in 1983 and gave birth to her daughter, Alice in 1985 at the age of 45.

experience, and the connection others feel through an artist's interpretation of that experience.[102]

Bartlett attained a great deal of success as an artist despite her reluctance to conform to mainstream predilections. *Rhapsody* gained her instant notoriety for her achievements in 1976, and she managed to retain her status as a prominent artist in the following years. Her work is included among the collections of several renowned museums such as the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum in New York, the Smithsonian Institute in Washington D.C. and many others. Her paintings have also been entered into the collections of several international establishments like the Tate Gallery in London and the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. She has also received an international commission for the Volvo Corporate Headquarters in Gothenberg, Sweeden. Bartlett still lives in New York and works as a painter. Dots, grids, houses and symbolic imagery that characterized her early career are still present in her current work.

The varied elements within Bartlett's work illustrate her ability to absorb the strikingly different influences that were prevalent in the early years of her career. Her paintings incorporate a wide variety of attributes including the abstraction of modernist paintings, the figural and common objects of pop, the mathematical systems of conceptualism, and the narrative and personal content of feminism. This ability to combine seemingly contradictory features gave her work connections to prominent

[102] Deborah Eisenberg, *Jennifer Bartlett: Air, 24 Hours,* 163.

styles and movements while simultaneously excluding her from belonging to any. She created intricate and restrictive systems to protect herself against the sexist attitudes of the art world. As these protective systems became unnecessary, she relaxed the rules and allowed her art to define herself as an individual. The result was a continuing body of work that reflects the changing artistic environment of her early years as well as her individual ingenuity as an artist.

CONCLUSION

When this generation of women were educated and trained as artists, the accepted standards of artistic practices underwent drastic alterations, including changes in value judgments regarding high and low art, the use of new materials and techniques, and the educational systems within American institutions. The artists and scholars within the feminist art movement were major proponents of these changes, as were many of the women artists who worked in pop. Their efforts gained women the opportunity to reclaim female experience as a valid form of artistic content. The inclusion of female perspectives and unconventional media allowed for a great deal of personal and expressive freedom for women artists within the movement and for those who chose to distance themselves from feminist art.

The desire to avoid the sexual bias against women was so prevalent during the decade of the 1960s that it led the women artists discussed above to continue their outward dissociation with political and social commentary. The work of feminist artists during the 1970s made it a primary goal to target these subjects in a very public way. It was their desire to draw attention to women's issues rather than hide them as unsuitable topics. This was a welcome opportunity for feminist artists, but others found it much more difficult to accept this adjustment. Their training and initial exposure to the modernist system engrained in them the idea of female inferiority. Such ideas were not easily discarded by those who were not willing to face the risk of being categorized

based on their gender. Such notions were extremely distasteful to many of these artists who sought acceptance amongst their male counterparts as equals.

Artists like Haworth, Drexler and Strider were represented in popular galleries and institutions alongside some of the most renowned names of the day. They were very much an active part of the contemporary art scene, yet their names are virtually never mentioned in art history survey texts. Even texts that specifically focus on the history and impact of pop art seldom mention any women alongside those male names we have come to know as progenitors of the movement. These women have been ignored in part due to their subversive inclusion of personal and gendered topics in an art form generally characterized by its coolness and disinterestedness. Such descriptions have come to characterize a movement that was by no means a uniform group, nor did it adhere to a certain set of rules. Thus, the women of the pop era have been unfairly excluded or briefly mentioned only as points of contrast to the work of mainstream male artists.[103]

The same can be said for Murray and Bartlett, who achieved a great deal of fame and critical acclamation for their work beginning in the 1970s, but are generally not included in art history survey texts. Their work did not fit neatly into established categories, nor did it correspond with feminist art practices. In a way, their efforts to protect themselves from associations with other women artists furthered their exclusion. They achieved a level acceptance and approval from their peers, but in more

[103] Kalliopi Minioudaki, "Pop's Ladies and Bad Girls: Axell, Pauline Boty and Rosalyn Drexler," *Oxford Art Journal* 30, no. 3 (2007): 404.

recent years, their work has become less studied and written about than many others who were more closely aligned to feminist ideals. Even compendiums that focus on women artists only mention their work briefly. Ironically, those women who did use more explicit female imagery like Judy Chicago, Carolee Schneemann and Nancy Spiro are frequently featured in more recent art history texts.

Despite their predominant absence from the art historical canon, the research and study of these women artists is an important factor in attaining a more comprehensive understanding of this art historical era. Their careers were undeniably shaped by the transformations that were occurring. As practicing artists, they became integral members of the artistic environment, influencing each other as well as their peers. In studying their work, we are given a perspective of artistic practices that fall outside the parameters of recognized movements. Especially in the instances of Murray and Bartlett, their techniques reflect the artistic environments in which their work was created. They chose to combine many elements of their contemporary art scene into their work rather than adhering to one easily categorized style. They show us a distinctive combination of expressive freedom and self-restriction. The amalgamations of changing ideas and conservative representation within their work reveal their connections to both the traditional past and the shifting attitudes toward women as professional artists.

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Figure 1. Marjorie Strider, *Green Tryptich*, 1963, acrylic paint, laminated pine on masonite panels, 105 x 72 in. plus extensions, Collection of Michael T. Chutko.

Figure 2. Jann Haworth, *Mae West Dressing Table*, 1965, mixed media, 28 ¼ x 22 ½ x 25 in., Pallant House Collection.

Figure 3. Jann Haworth and Peter Blake, Album Cover for *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, 1967, mixed media photograph, 12 ½ x 12 ½ in, collection of Mayor Gallery, London.

Figure 4. Martha Rosler, *Cleaning the Drapes*, 1967-72, photomontage, 20 x 24 in., courtesy of the artist and Mitchell-Innes & Nash.

Figure 5. Rosalyn Drexler, *Marilyn Pursued by Death*, 1963, acrylic over paper collage on canvas, 50 x 40 in., courtesy of the artist and Pace Gallery.

Figure 6. Elizabeth Murray, *Night Empire*, 1967-68, oil on canvas, 51 ½ x 48 ¼ in., collection of Arthur and Susan Murray Resnick.

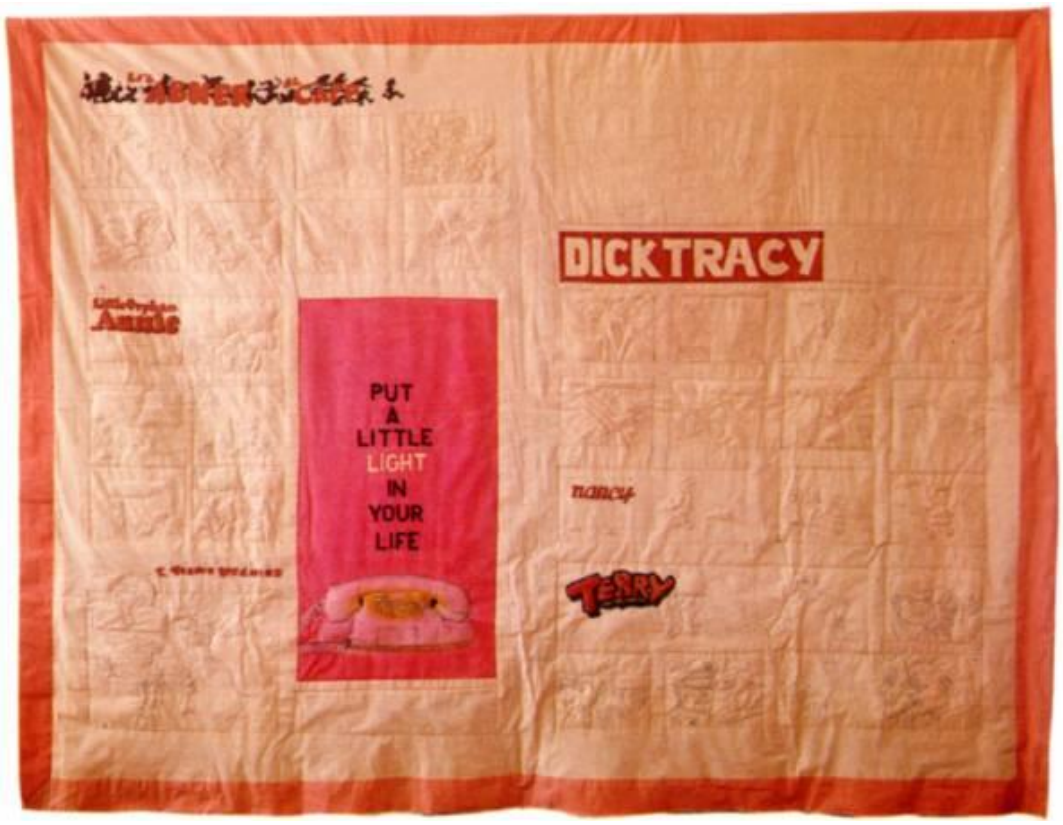

Figure 7. Jann Haworth, *L.A. Times Bedspread II*, 1965, embroidered, quilted cloth, 78 x 100 in., formerly collection of Alan Power.

Figure 8. Elizabeth Murray, *Madame Cezanne in Rocking Chair*, 1972, oil on canvas, 35 ¼ x 35 ½ in., collection of Katy Homans and Patterson Sims.

Figure 9. Elizabeth Murray, *Beer Glass at Noon*, 1971, oil on canvas, 16 ½ x 12 ¼ in., collection of Jennifer Bartlett.

Figure 10. Elizabeth Murray, *Breaking*, 1980, oil on 2 canvases, 108 x 108 in., collection of Paul and Camille Oliver-Hoffmann.

Figure 11. Elizabeth Murray, *Join*, 1980, oil on 2 canvases, 133 x 120 in., Collection of Bank of America.

Figure 12. Elizabeth Murray, *Beam*, 1982, oil on 4 canvases, 110 x 77 in., Museum of Modern Art, New York.

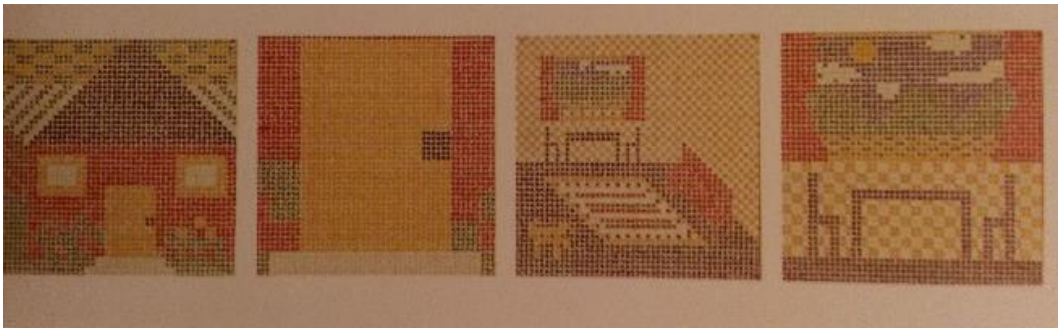

Figure 13. Jennifer Bartlett, *House* (detail), 1970, enamel over grid silkscreened onto baked enamel on 61 steel plates, 90 x 259 in., private collection.

Figure 14. Jennifer Bartlett, *Rhapsody* (detail), 1976, enamel over grid silkscreened onto baked enamel on 987 steel plates, 90 in. x 153 ft., collection of Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Figure 15. Jennifer Bartlett, *Falcon Avenue, Seaside Walk, Dwight Street, Jarvis Street, Greene Street*, 1976, enamel over grid silkscreened onto baked enamel on 80 steel plates, 51 x 259 in., collection of Whitney Museum of American Art.

Figure 16. Jennifer Bartlett, *At the Lake*, 1979, enamel over grid silkscreened onto baked enamel on 45 steel plates and oil on 2 canvases, 77 x 188 in., Saatchi collection, London.

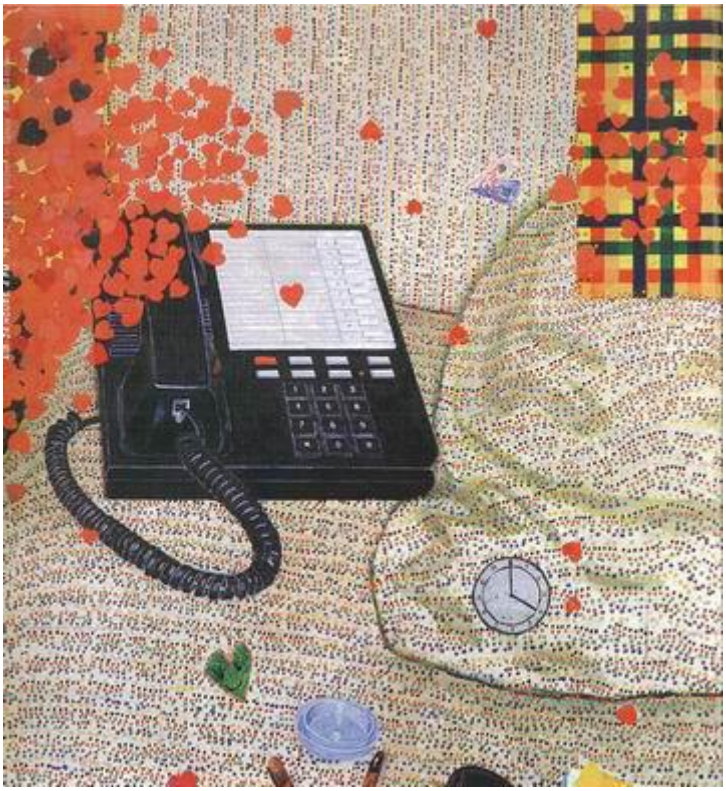

Figure 17. Jennifer Bartlett, *Air: 24 Hours, Four p.m.*, 1991-92, oil on canvas, 7 x 7 ft., collection of Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.

Figure 18. Jennifer Bartlett, *Air: 24 Hours, Eight p.m.*, 1991-92, oil on canvas, 7 x 7 ft., collection Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.

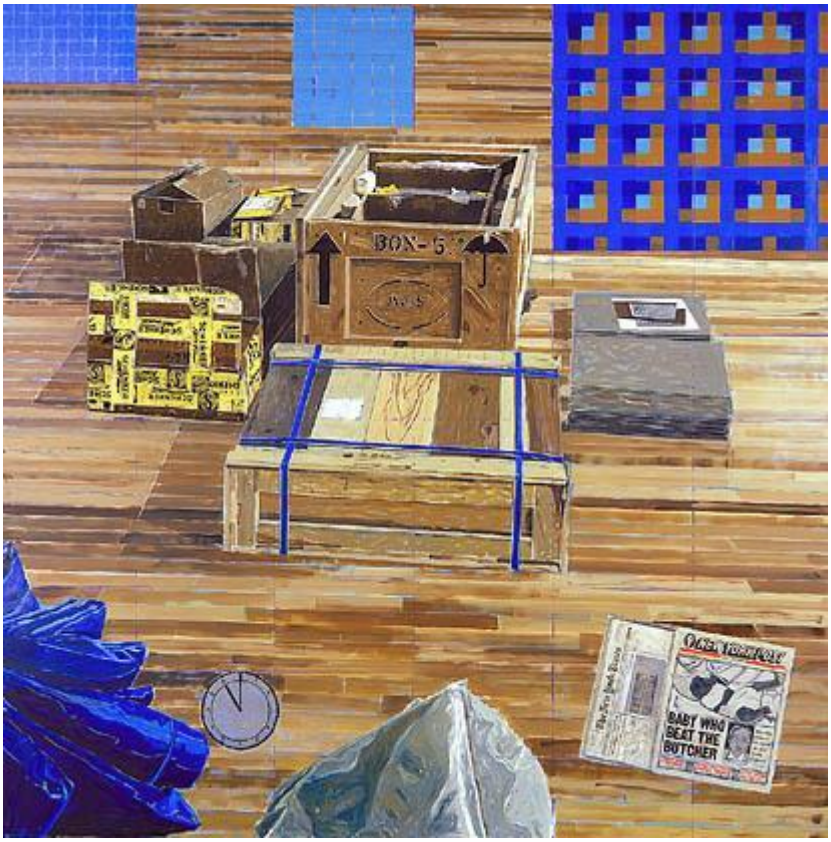

Figure 19. Jennifer Bartlett, *Air: 24 Hours, Eleven a.m.*, 1991-92, oil on canvas, 7 x 7 ft., collection Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.

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