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The Feminist Revision of Art History

A woman's body not only means the physical home, but also the mental and emotional source of male creative activity.

David Smith, Sculptor

JORGE LUIS MARZO

In 1987, the *Guerrilla Girls*, an anonymous group of women artists, set up a poster entitled *The Advantages of Being a Woman Artist* throughout various locations of the Soho district of Manhattan. Through this process the group, which sees itself as the conscience of the art world, revealed through an ambivalent strategy the circumstances and assumptions that seem to be inherent to the creative, formative and receptive processes of the great majority of women artists.

By means of a play on words in which assertions about the presumed *advantages* of being a *woman* artist provide a blatantly ironic façade for the dispossession suffered by the woman artist in the art world (and in the accompanying socio-cultural environment when she faces her career) *Guerrilla Girls* prompted a rich critical reading raw enough to elicit an active response. In the poster's listing of the *positive* aspects of being a woman artist, one reads: «To work without the pressure to succeed»; «To have a way out of the art world, thanks to moonlighting»; «To have the

A portrait of Georgia O'Keeffe,
by Alfred Stieglitz.



choice between a career in art and becoming a mother»; «Not to have to deal with being labelled a genius»; etc.

The subtlety and richness of this advertisement-denunciation was not limited to a critique of the real situation in which female artists have to work, however. It also represents, together with other recent signs given by American woman artists in the '80s, a new way of approaching the feminist discourse and, above all, a radically new attitude, when dealing with the place of this discourse within society. The thrust of the poster's accusation is aimed beyond a strict

feminist debate, and is directed toward the centre of the cultural discourse in the widest sense. It suggests that precisely that which is denied to women is itself criticizable and susceptible to the forces of a new revision, which is more global and committed than any other hitherto seen. *Guerrilla Girls* criticize the *establishment*, the existence of paradigms—like genius, success, labelling—and the appropriations which art, always from the male perspective, has made from art. All that which is criticized by the woman artist, relates not only to *sexual identity*, but to issues

that can be shared by male artists.

One therefore observes how one part of the feminist perspective claims and recovers its idiosyncratic—if not guildlike—condition, inasmuch as this implies a specific contribution to thinking about culture. However, one also sees that this contribution does not imply a co-option within the currently prevailing value system in the artistic context; rather, it involves an active participation in the critical development of this context according to the artist Mary Kelly, as she has pointed out in reference to her celebrated work *Post-Partum Document*

(1973-79): «there isn't an isolated theoretical discourse that is going to offer up an explanation of all the different social relationships or every model of politics.»

There is not only one feminism, just as there is not only one culture, whatever the political powers that be might claim. Perhaps more clearly than any other critical stream, the feminist debate, particularly in North America, today reflects the need to not only defend those visions that are *different* from the traditional historical ones, but also to direct them to the central intellectual arena, with a view to enriching and broadening it, and creating or re-creating new perspectives. Thus the Guerrilla Girls' self-appointment as «the conscience of the art world». And thus also the comment of art historian, Anna C. Chave: «It is a way of amplifying and furthering an effort, an effort to denaturalize language, to denaturalize vision, to make people more sensitive to the way all modes of representation construct us as subjects, and the possibilities of intervening in modes of representation in order to achieve different ends, that isn't something that feminists have some kind of monopoly on, nor should they want to. ... It is paradoxical but the fact is that feminist discourse, which used to be a discourse about the margins is very much and quickly moving towards the centre of intellectual discourse for very good, very humbling reasons.» (1)

The various feminist analyses seem to be directed toward this centre of discourse and within these new parameters. This, because they deal with a field which has exerted a strong, culturally arbitrary influence —most of the time unconsciously— when defining the Western world's creative heritage: art history.

What are the most common adjectives and nouns that appear in the notes of any Art History student? Object, model, power, vigorous line, brush —Renoir said he painted with his fore-skin-density, liberating energy, dripping,

the control of form, etc. All terms that seem to have been the exclusive property of those who were artists, that is, of male artists. On the other hand, the women, whose place in the world of art took the form of the canonical, elevated, and sublime representation of their image as a *generative source* —note the quotation that opens this article— have been characterized historically by their hosting or *handling* of the artists' *salons*, their changes to ornamentation, decoration or fashion: art directed more at satisfying daily habits than projecting a profound and intense critical intellectual capability.

From the late '60s on, a desire to remove some of the old-established, conservative features of the art historiographic method begins to make inroads into American universities. Feminist criticism embarks upon a rigorous effort to recover figures that had been forgotten, silenced by society and by a history inherited from this society. Nevertheless, and despite the positive and necessary nature of the revisionist strategy, since the mid-'70s, this re-reading of history reveals a new purpose. It is no longer only a matter of uncovering those *papered over* by a male culture, but also of going beyond this, to point to the conditions which allowed a particular type of society to engage in this *cover-up* and, above all, to expand on our knowledge of the art of a period from a feminine perspective, which not only intends to claim some distant, lost spaces, but also to provide complementary thinking on art that has been considered *eminent* to this day. In effect, to illuminate the forgotten, while helping to explain our past.

The fact that Guerrilla Girls list as one of the *advantages* the «inclusion in revised versions of the history of art» and «the fact that anything a woman does is classified as feminine», is a symptom of what we are trying to express. Our intellectual circles continue to believe that a woman's art does not belong to the cultural universe, but to a system of closed and private relations, that is even

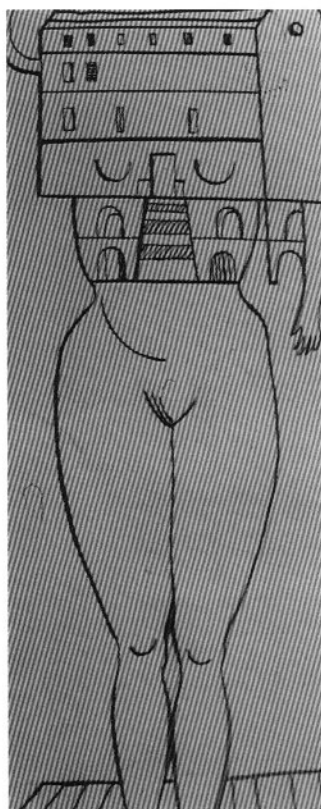
romantically *privileged*. The critique made by the New York group, which is only one example among many, when referring to art history revisions, is directed not so much to the importance or necessity of this process, but to the need to articulate and generate discourses and movements, with a view to stimulating a debate on the social structure of art, so as to avoid any future revised readings from a strict and misunderstood feminist perspective.

Of course, all this is taking place in New York, in American academic centres and in some places in Europe, but what about Spain? There is no mystery in the fact that the great majority of students in our History and Geography faculties are women. One might want to ask why this is so, and why the feminist discourse hardly exists at all, given the nature of the student body. Neither the faculty nor the students are at all aware of the string of vacuous formalisms, social stereotypes, or simply outright lies on the history of art that they are fed in university lecture halls. The precarious economic situation, the lack of critical communication amongst the faculty members —and the resulting provincialism—, the paralysis of the doctoral thesis system, and the absolute non-existence of any continuous relationship between the publishing world and the sparse university criticism —and I mean criticism, not simply the rewriting of the same book over and over— are so endemic that to many they no longer represent a catastrophic description of reality, but simply a daily reality which is rendered unworrisome by its very pervasiveness.

Apart from a few timely and enriching initiatives, there is no sign that more favourable winds have been detected in Spain's worlds of art criticism and exhibition curatorship, where there is the possibility of a true cultural debate —even if only within the context of market forces. A glance at the facts on the few exhibitions considered *serious*, confirms this: *Informalism in Catalonia* (Centre d'Art Sta. Mónica, Barcelona,

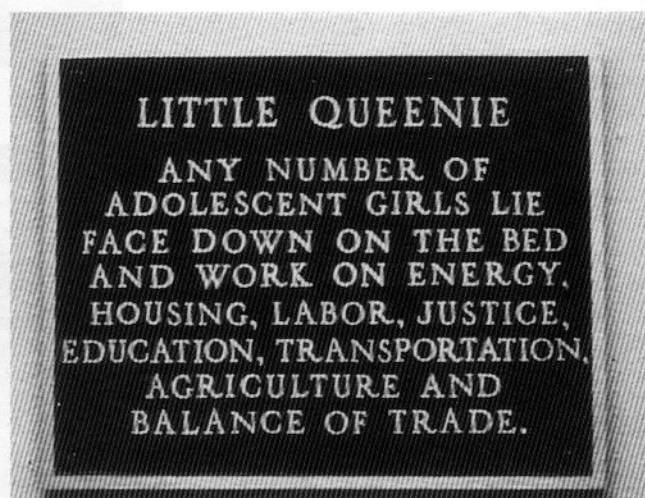
1990): one woman out of a total of 25 artists; *The Vanguard of Catalan Sculpture* (*Idem*, 1989): of 41 artists, one woman; the 1989 Barcelona Biennial, dedicated to the promotion of young artists: of 137 artists, 38 women. A very revealing case is that of the contemporary art collection of the Fundación Caja de Pensions, which is considered the most important in the country: of the 41 artists in its international collection, there are only two women; while in its Spanish collection of 109 artists, there are 20 women. However, of the six members of the acquisition advisory committee two are women, which does not correspond to the number of works produced by women and acquired by the organization. This type of situation raises the question as to whether the women who hold positions of power are willing to correct this disequilibrium. And finally, in ARCO'90, in which 938 artists were represented, only 111 women were included; that is, 12 % of the total.

On the other hand, while the U.S. and Canadian pavilions in the last (1990) Valencia Biennial consisted of works by two highly committed women artists, Jenny Holzer and Geneviève Cadieux, Spain presented a complete homage to the institution of marriage through Antoni Miralda's *Honeymoon Project*. Obviously, this is not to say that there were no women represented—and could now be recovered—in the Spanish art of the fifties and sixties. The main problem is that many of the historical exhibition, apart from not being based on genuine research, do not ask why a certain perspective has triumphed. Implicit is the naive belief that the same thing happens in all historical and geographical contexts, and that the woman is simply *displaced*, when the truth is that she is displaced in a particular way and due to specific and verifiable circumstances. On the other hand, I shall not of course get into a discussion on the eternal national panacea for the «idiosyncratic *machismo* of Spanish culture»: an afterthought that changes nothing, and categorizes women



«Femme Maison» (1945-1947),
Louise Bourgeois.

Untitled, from the series
«Survival» by Jenny Holzer.



artists as heroines, not artists.

It is undeniable that a revision of our art history is called for loudly and clearly. An artistic heritage such as Spain's cannot remain fettered by the same old grandiloquent approach to the succession of creative mechanisms throughout history. Perhaps more so than any other society in the world, the concept of *genius* has been used in Spain to avoid facing up to a true critical revision of the social and working conditions within which art is produced and spread.

Undoubtedly, one of the exemplary cases of revision, recovery or re-reading of the formation and spreading of a type of art in a given society undertaken by historians through the use of feminist methods is that of the American Abstract Expressionism movement in the early post-war period.

Although this is not the place to go into details of that period, it is necessary to raise a few of its themes, given the impact they had on the approach of the feminist analyses.

Abstract Expressionism is generally considered to be the first great modern artistic movement to have been created in the United States, independently of the *decrepit* European influences. This fact, clearly transcendental for subsequent

artistic development, together with all the inherent social, aesthetic, critical, and other implications, has raised the artistic output of that period to mythical status. Figures like Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Robert Motherwell, Wilhem de Kooning, Clifford Still, Barnett Newman, etc., are considered the fathers and *mothers* of American art, and are venerated as such. All of post-war American art history, the museums (with MOMA heading the list), magazines, etc., have done little other than praise these heroes and congratulate themselves on having rescued the torch of modernity from the of the Europeans moribund hands who, in their agony, have held on to their pride.

For the figure of the post-war American artist and critic—embodied in the person of Clement Greenberg, who comes close to the ones we know today—a truly moral act was called for to defend liberty against the *collectivist* threats which hovered over the planet in the aftermath of the war. It was crucial that the radically powerful and vigorous practice of art be developed; one which got rid of all weaknesses of the spirit as well as unproductive doubt. What was needed was a virile and dominant figure who would stand firm against the new consumer society and be responsible for

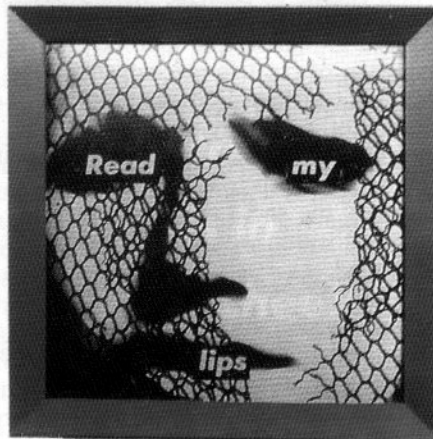
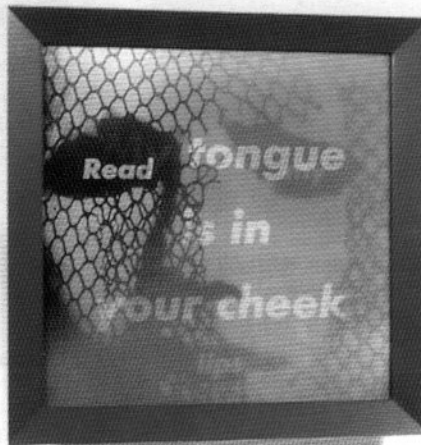
upholding the integrity of freedom. A free expression which could only be conceived within the context of the most solid individualism —the most outrageous ego—that could both vent the fears of a new science which offers strategists the worst of nightmares, while accommodating the new chorus of voices that proclaimed the new *universal* freedom, bathed in the light of the young and virtuous American nation.

Thus, a new hero figure appears in the historical arena: the rebellious painter, furiously individualistic —or anarchical, like Barnett Newman— but conscious of himself as a crucible of a wide range of desires produced in the shadows of the liberal society. But a figure who, because of his drive to incorporate plurality, the sense of a *shared destiny*, in his discourse, avoided or concealed a whole series of options or standards that were foreign to him: «Abstract Expressionists —and I don't think they thought of themselves as white heterosexual men; I think they just thought of themselves as humans but felt that they would be able to absorb everything that a woman felt, everything that a Native American felt, everything that a Black American felt, a Chinese American felt, and they would be able to express it adequately.

... And that is not the same thing as letting all these other identities speak for themselves. What happened was that when these other identities did try to speak for themselves, when a black person did a painting, when a woman like Louise Bourgeois did a sculpture, it was not well received.

... That viewpoint can look at the rest of the world, but it can't really speak for it. So that the whole critical and gallery and museum apparatus was set up to see things from "this" viewpoint.» (2)

Meanwhile, the cultural situation of women began to take form in terms of a strict social definition. After the war and the temporary incorporation of women into the arms industry work force, a new culture of the home developed as a result



«Read my lips», by Barbara Kruger, 1986.

of the establishment of the consumer society. This revolved around a healthy home and a happy family, in which the role of the woman is given a *higher ranking*. With the appearance of electrical appliances and of the home technology, the wife takes over the family's economic reins, thus projecting an image of control over this all-so-important domain in the new American socio-cultural context. Furthermore, this control is not related only to the role of wife, but also to that of mother. In 1945 and 1946, birth promotion campaigns are launched, that would later result in the *baby-boom generation*, and which was to be reflected in the large university population in the '60s. As early as the '30s, Hollywood was already making films for housewives which dealt with the issues of domestic life, the family, motherhood, self-sacrifice and romance: «In the postwar period women were supposed to want to get back into the home, they wanted them out of the factories. And women themselves didn't protest too much. It was very much under the surface. And the same with the ethnic-racial situation. It was a very universalizing time, and people who didn't fit that universal norm, and people who were being co-opted were unable to make their voices heard. I think that what happened was the kind of thing that Gayatri Spivak talks about; I think that they were so thoroughly internally colonized, and their minds were colonized, that it was very hard for them to think of any way to subvert their position.» (3)

In order to understand the tenuous situation faced by women artists following the war, amidst the brouhaha created by the appearance of Jackson Pollock and others, reference has to be made to a socio-cultural fact that permanently marked the introduction of certain artists into the New York artistic community. An obvious example of this is found in the work of Lee Krasner.

In 1935, within the spirit of President Roosevelt's New Deal, the U.S.



*Painters of the
New York
School, 1951.*

Administration created the Work Progress Administration, or the WPA, with the purpose of countering unemployment through grants and the awarding of public works. The Fine Arts Federal Bureau, a section of the WPA, was mandated to fund works of public art, at a time when the private market for modern American art was precarious. Around 1939, in an environment of impending world crisis and of the beginnings of anti-communist psychosis, the WPA began cutting back on its funding and crossing a large number of artists off its lists. Many artists withdrew voluntarily, rather than participate in propaganda poster programmes. In 1943, the WPA was closed down.

Lee Krasner (1908-1984) had been one of the first artists, together with others, such as Louise Nevelson, Isabel Bishop, and Alice Neel, to receive funding assistance from the Fine Arts Federal Bureau. A survey undertaken by the government in 1935, shortly after the establishment of the Bureau, showed that, among the artists receiving assistance, approximately 41 % were women, which indicates the importance of this sort of support for the development of women artists at that time. (4)

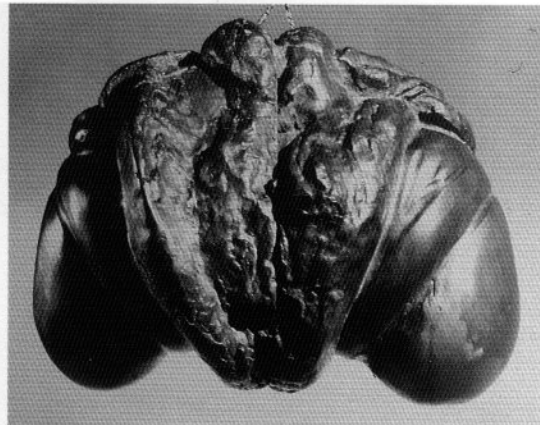
Krasner, as well as the many other women artists, took part in competitions for murals and public buildings, which were always awarded through an anonymous process, in which the work was never signed. This implied a certain, at times minimal, degree, of control over the possibility of awards being given on the basis of the competitor's colour or sex, and resulted in a broad range of proposals, which otherwise—as evidenced later—would have been almost impossible. Another feature of this system of financial assistance should not be overlooked: the supported work always fit within the WPA's objective of promoting a certain type of social art—remember that this took place in the midst of the Depression. This was taken advantage of by a number of artists, both male and female, to explore the realities of



Portrait of Frida Kahlo by Lola Alvarez Bravo.



«Janus Fleuri»
by Louise
Bourgeois, 1968.



Portrait of Louise Bourgeois
by Robert Mapplethorpe, 1982.



unemployment and daily life during the crisis; always, of course, under the *watchful* government eye.

Once the war was over, however, Krasner's career, like that of her colleagues, had to face the problems of emerging from a protectionist cover and confront the reality of the private market, with its own rules. This new reality represented a true brake on the aspirations to equality of a great number of women artists. The market was imbued with conservative notions of the artist's *image*—this, when, in 1944, the WPA studios were closed and the works of a number of artists from the '30s were sold off at bargain prices— and it was not about to recognize unquestioningly those connected with federal projects, when there was a new perception developing under the light of radical individualism among certain gallery owners, critics and artists: «While the artist's target used to be the masses, thanks to the WPA, now, in the context of the recent growth of the open private art market, the elite has taken on that role. Upon recovering his alienation, the artist has discarded his anonymity.» (5)

Krasner, who had an extraordinarily independent streak, embodies the predicament of women in the post-war art world like few others. After having studied at the High School of Art Major and at the National Academy of Design, she joined Hans Hoffman's studio in 1937, since she was already interested in the aesthetic principles of John Graham, who advocated *working from within*, without a model and through individual and unconscious gestures. While the first *New York School* called for grandiose themes of the sublime and tragic, Krasner attracted little attention with her nature generative studies, drawn in part from European patterns of composition and finish.

However, in 1941, a crucial event for her career takes place in Krasner's life: she meets Jackson Pollock, and they are married four years later. After meeting the figure who was to become

Laurie Simmons, cibachrome.

the greatest painter of the new America, she abandons the nature theme and returns to automatism. «Her gradual transformation of the figure into abstraction occurred in the context of an intense personal struggle to define herself as an artist and to establish her "otherness" from Pollock...» (6). Slowly, Krasner distances herself from her old approaches, based on European cubism and, in 1945—the year of her wedding—she destroys all her previous work except for *Image Surfacing* (1945). Marcia E. Vetrocq has pointed out that Krasner had no sense of self-preservation and was extremely self-critical; thus, she not only destroyed particular works, but also whole periods that displeased her (7).

Jackson Pollock, in turn, paints *Number One* in 1948, the very year that Clement Greenberg declares that the virile American art is the most advanced in the world. The New York School becomes stronger. Lee Krasner finds herself under overwhelming pressure because of Pollock's success and her interest in taking part in all aspects of the movement as an individual, separate from her mate. In 1949, Krasner and Pollock exhibit in a group show at Sidney Janis entitled, *Man and Wife*: «The very title of the exhibition organized women's productions into a subsidiary, socially defined category» (8). «As the popular image of the '50s artist became debased into that of a brawling, boozing, suicidal, male cartoon hero, Krasner had little choice but to play Lois Lane to Pollock's Superman» (9). After the death of the alcoholic Pollock in a car crash in 1956, Krasner starts to produce hybrid anthropomorphic forms in which the projection of feelings of guilt and painful loss seem to be hidden.

In the context of recent analyses of the period, Krasner's work has not only revealed a great artistic talent, but also provided material on the encounter between the two artists with respect to the psychological issues related to male and female creativity. In fact, Pollock seems to embody those features, such as



spontaneity and irrationality, usually attributed to women, while Krasner's discourse is more objective, reasoned and logical with respect to automatism, which partly refutes standard psychosexual interpretations. Recent studies have also provided substantial innovations with respect to the *calligraphic* (script) difference between the two, and to the *gender* interpretation, which predominated in post-war American society: «There is a way of talking about Pollock's work, the dominant way, as a kind of phallic practice, where he is ejaculating in this mad orgiastic experience of creating these pictures. No matter what Krasner did, no matter how much she was pouring paint, Krasner could never occupy that position by virtue of her sex». (10)

It was only in 1978, in the show entitled, *Abstract Expressionism: The Formative Years*, held in New York's Whitney Museum, that Krasner was first included in a retrospective on American Abstract Expressionism. (11)

Were women excluded from the avant-garde project, or was the modern project perhaps built, inherently and unconsciously, in such a manner that made their participation impossible?

Because of its direct implications for the myth of the avant-garde hero and the development of modernism, this question has created a great deal of expectation in recent American feminist formulations on art. It seems that when laying the foundations for a revolutionary debate on society the whole modern movement, though fragmented, did not seem to face the importance of sexual identity and its repercussions. Francis Picabia used to say that the woman is an animated machine; the surrealists were notoriously sexist. In the Futurist Manifesto one reads: «We want to glorify war—the only cleansing act in the world—, militarism, patriotism, the anarchists' destructive acts, beautiful ideas that kill, and the contempt for women. We want to destroy the museums, the booksellers, battle moralism, feminism, and all those



«Untitled», 1989, Cindy Sherman.

opportunistic and utilitarian acts of cowardliness». Havelock Ellis, Freud's disciple, believed that «This painting is so good you'd never know it was done by a woman» (12); and Clement Greenberg referred to art which he considered decorative as effeminate.

Under these conditions, women's chances of artistic integration or participation were extremely limited. The feminine, echoing Freud and Jung, was equated with the unconscious, as natural energy as opposed to the male's culture, as the irrational as opposed to the masculine logic. «So that made it pretty tough for an artist who seemed to the rest of society to have its identity constructed the way Freud constructed the female unconscious». (13)

Georgia O'Keeffe (1887-1986) provides us with one of the most obvious examples of the stereotyping of the feminine, and of the response of the art world to art created by women, which was not classified as art, but as *women's art* (14), said Paul Rosenfeld. References to O'Keeffe's work as being *intuitive*, because she was a woman, or passionate and intimate, are reflected in the following review published in the *New York Times*: «She reveals woman as an elemental being, one that is closer to the earth than men, and suffers pain with ecstatic passion and enjoys love with a delight beyond good and evil.»

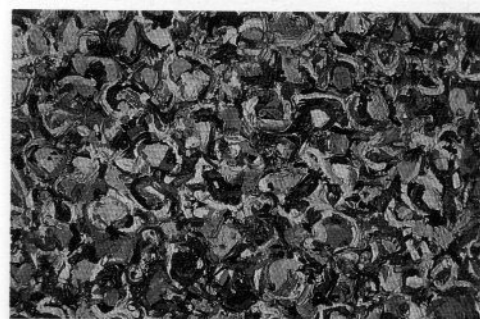
O'Keeffe used forms derived or extracted from nature. Strongly influenced by transcendental natural life, in her work she focused on the impossibility of using conventional language to explain emotional states, be they of sentiment or thought. The images she produced of New York during the '20s present a cold and massive perspective compared to the visual structure of the organization of nature, the most powerful images of which we find in the various flower series she painted over the course of her life.

In 1916, Alfred Stieglitz, photographer, editor, gallery owner, and the person who introduced Dada to the

United States, decides to exhibit some of her drawings. She refuses, but Stieglitz manages to persuade her, and becomes her dealer and later her husband. Alfred Stieglitz was to say: «Georgia O'Keeffe is probably what they will be calling in a few years a B. F. (Before Freud) since all her inhibitions seem to have been removed before the Freudian recommendations were preached upon this side of the Atlantic. She became free without the aid of Freud. But she had aid. There was another who took the place of Freud... It is of course Alfred Stieglitz...» (15)

Georgia O'Keeffe was in a way urged to enlarge her *gender* work, and thus push it commercially, as well as to strengthen her image as an *extraordinary woman* who produced art, as one might suspect from Stieglitz's declaration. The painter, who didn't want to work in New York and thus moved to the vast New Mexico landscapes, was not regarded as an independent and solid artist, but as a symbol of what women could express through painting. It was not until 1970, on the occasion of the Whitney Museum retrospective, that her pictorial contribution—which adumbrated the *colour fields* of abstract expressionists such as Clifford Still, Ellsworth Kelly and Barnett Newman—was gauged with any seriousness.

Nevertheless, O'Keeffe in turn seemed very interested in getting a public for her work. She herself once remarked that she had switched from water-colour to oil because she wanted her work seen (16). She was particularly concerned about not being the woman who once in a while engaged in artistic *labour*; she wanted to be integrated, and participate in the artistic debates. She once said: «I am going to paint what I see, what a flower is to me, but I'm going to paint large and people will be surprised by how long they spend looking at my painting. I'll even get the busy New Yorkers to stop and see what I see in flowers.» (17) Later, New Yorkers were to identify with the direct attacks of the expressionists of



Top, Lee Krasner and Jackson Pollock in *The Springs, Long Island, 1950*. Below, an oil painting by Lee Krasner.

the *School*, and not with the work of a *subtle and delicate* artist. And much later, in 1986, shortly after O'Keeffe's death, the whole country would follow with keen interest the family feud over her legacy, worth between \$45 and \$60 million. (18)

In 1938, Louise Bourgeois (Paris, 1911) moves to New York. After having studied mathematics, philosophy, calculus and geometry at the Sorbonne, and having studied art intensely since 1936, the solitary and eccentric Bourgeois arrives in a city, whose artistic community was beginning its quest for its identity—separate from the European tradition—which would eventually develop into the so-called *New York School*.

How was a woman, who produced female figures whose torsos and heads were replaced by houses with small windows, going to become part of a world obsessed by the need to develop a hegemony, a fortress, a *coherent expression*, to confront the «unconscious and inconsistent imports» of the surrealists?

Bourgeois, who was socially and politically committed—and in 1949 was investigated, together with Duchamp and Ozenfant, by the Un-American Activities Committee—embodies all those misunderstandings and prejudices which American society attributed to artists from an old and decrepit Europe, discredited as a bastion of modern verity.



Left, a portrait of Georgia O'Keeffe, 1918, by Alfred Stieglitz. Above, «Evening Star», water colour by Georgia O'Keeffe, 1918.



A portrait of Leonora Carrington, 1956, by Kati Horna.

A blatant example of this is found in Clement Greenberg's comment on the Paris of 1939: «I have met all the intellectuals around here —referring to Breton, Camus, Simone de Beauvoir, etc., and they're all a bunch of complainers.» (19)

Bourgeois' first work in New York, in which the iconographic metaphors of domesticity imposed on the female psyche play a key role in the discourse, are not understood by the critics: «Although Bourgeois pointed to the home as a place of conflict for the woman artist, critics read the paintings as affirming a "natural" identification between women and home.» (20) Her works, which are loaded with an intense and organic personal charge, are understood as paradigms of precisely that which was not wanted in that explosive time in the New York artistic community. It wants an expression that, while personal and individual, would be able to transmit communicability and universality; a sort of globalizing message, capable of going beyond the creator's own idiosyncrasies. Therefore, those works that explored issues of narrow personal reference do not fit in with this heated period's search for a high degree of open representation.

The sculptural works that Bourgeois was to produce in the '60s, with their sexual iconographic connotations —or better, as Bourgeois herself said pre-sexual connotations— also did not elicit much interest outside private circles. These themes were considered to be inherent to particular psychological and even psychoanalytical segments: «Bourgeois' sculpture was interpreted as being *confessional*, as a direct expression of the artist's psychological state. The sculpture is thus totally absorbed by and subordinated to the artist's intimate feelings. The work loses its character and, therefore, the fact that it might include new linguistic possibilities is never considered.» (21) The literalness of the formal references to sexuality is received, in turn, as «a lack of integration in her work as a whole», as the critic and



SCHMERZ IST AUCH EINE LUST

«Pain is also a pleasure», by Marie-Jo Lafontaine.

historian William Rubin put it. The artist, however, has said that she is in fact so inhibited, that the eroticism is entirely unconscious (22). But what was the definition of *intimacy* or *universality* among the American art circles of the '40s and '50s, that in many ways would last to this day? From the perspective of American modernity, was the *intimate*, psychological discourse of a woman the same as that of a man? Why was the *socially conciliating* individualism of Pollock at odds with the *asocially conciliating* individual that was Bourgeois?

The recent retrospective exhibition of Bourgeois' work, organized by the Frankfurt Kunstverein and shown at the Tàpies Foundation in Barcelona, allows one to ascertain how much Bourgeois' resistant—though fragile—language is able to contribute, and to *unite* the internal elements of feeling with the external aspects of a form to be perceived. The image of the sexualized forms of the French artist suggest a type of *shock* in the presence of a creator, who is vertiginous in her manner of communicating on the basis of her *shared intimacy*, in a society where this intimacy seemed only to be expressed in logical terms: «We are confronted with the intense reaction of a woman to the world of the *logos*, heterosexual and repressive, which prevailed in American art circles during the '40s and '50s, and led to her art being claimed by numerous feminist groups in the '70s.» (23)

A *shock* which, because of its calm impact, uncovers the fallacy of believing that art created by women is women's art, while art created by men is simply art. In the same vein, we could add another *advantage* of being a woman artist to the *catalogue of advantages* produced by the Guerrilla Girls: «To be sure that any critique made of a woman's art work will be a feminist critique.» ■

(1) Words of Anna C. Chave; J. L. Marzo; J. Swarz, «Entrevista a Anna C. Chave», *La Vanguardia*, «Revisión de la crítica americana», series Feb.-Mar. 1991.

(2) Ann Gibson; Swarz, Marzo, «Entrevista a Ann Gibson», *idem*.

(3) Gibson, *op. cit.*

(4) Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art and Society*, Thomas and Hudson, London, 1990, p. 297.

(5) Serge Guilbaut, *Cómo Nueva York robó la idea de arte moderno*, Mondadori, Madrid, 1990, p. 68.

(6) Chadwick, *op. cit.*, p. 300.

(7) Marcia E. Vetrocq, «An independent task: Lee Krasner», *Art in America*, New York, May 1984, n.º 5, p. 141.

(8) Chadwick, *op. cit.*, p. 306.

(9) Vetrocq, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

(10) Anna C. Chave, *op. cit.*

(11) Georgia O'Keeffe, in Marcia J. Wade, «The world according to Georgia O'Keeffe», *Horizon*, Oct. 1987, p. 22.

(12) Chadwick, *op. cit.*, p. 302.

(13) Ann Gibson, *op. cit.*

(14) Paul Rosenfeld, 1924.

(15) These quotations are Chadwick's, pp. 284-286.

(16) Kenneth Baker, «The world in a drop of water», *Artforum*, New York, Dec. 1985, pp. 56-59.

(17) Kevin Power, «William Carlos Williams y los pintores», *Poesía*, Ministerio de Cultura, Madrid, summer 1982, n.º 15, p. 15.

(18) See Andrew Decker, «The battle over Georgia O'Keeffe's multimillion-dollar legacy», *Artnews*, New York, April 1987.

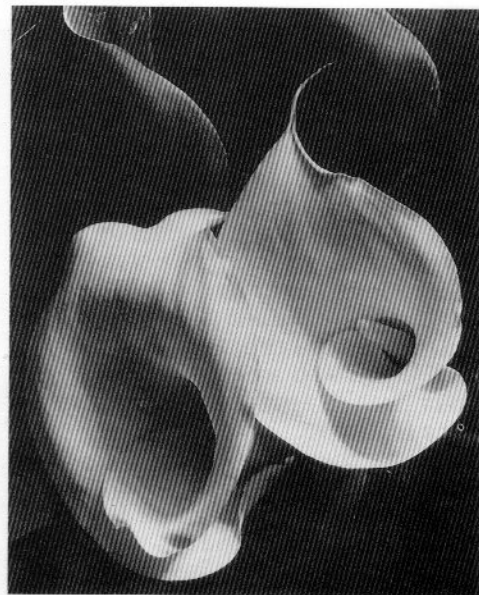
(19) Serge Guilbaut in, J. Swarz, J. L. Marzo, «Entrevista a Serge Guilbaut. El revisionismo de la New Left», *La Vanguardia*, 13-11-1990, pp. 1013.

(20) Chadwick, p. 303.

(21) Manuel Borja-Villel, «Louise Bourgeois: l'Escultura com a transgressió», Catálogo exposición Bourgeois, Fundació A. Tàpies, Barcelona, Nov. 90-Jan. 91, p. 10.

(22) Dorothy Selberling, «The female view of erotica», *New York Magazine*, 11-2-1974.

(23) M. Borja-Villel, *op. cit.*, p. 10.



«Two callas», Imogen Cunningham, 1929.

THE ADVANTAGES OF BEING A WOMAN ARTIST:

Working without the pressure of success.

Not having to be in shows with men.

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Not being stuck in a tenured teaching position.

Seeing your ideas live on in the work of others.

Having the opportunity to choose between career and motherhood.

Not having to choke on those big cigars or paint in Italian suits.

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Being included in revised versions of art history.

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GUERRILLA GIRLS

CONSCIENCE OF THE ART WORLD

«The advantages
of being a woman
artist», a Guerrilla
Girls poster, New
York, 1987.