

# STATEMENTS BY LESBIAN ARTISTS

A LESBIAN SHOW

January 21 to February 11, 1978

An exhibition of visual art, performances and readings by lesbian artists at 112 Workshop, Inc.



## A LESBIAN SHOW

There exists little documentation of the lives and work of lesbian visual artists, and contemporary lesbian artists are not visible or acknowledged in the art world or the lesbian feminist community. In the spring of 1977 I wrote a proposal for an exhibition of lesbian art to the 112 Workshop, an informal "alternate space" that often functions as a gallery. The proposal was accepted - they would provide a public space, and I would take responsibility for co-ordinating the exhibition. I began to work with Betsy Damon who developed and co-ordinated a series of events and performances and with Amy Sillman who designed the poster and announcement for the exhibition. Tina Murch assisted us and documented the exhibition and events as part of her course work at Skidmore College. We received a grant from the Lesbian Lifespace Project to print the poster and announcement.

A Lesbian Show is the result of many studio visits and discussions with lesbian artists. Although my original concept had included plans of having the show travel to art and nonart situations in different cities with lesbians from that area adding their work, lack of money limited who could be included in the exhibition and the out reach of the show itself. There were no funds available for transporting and insuring work. Because of physical space limitations I decided that this would not be an "open show", but that I would try to see as much work as possible before deciding. I had no preconceived ideas about what lesbian art should look like, nor limitations of style, media, or content. The work did not need to be overtly lesbian in content. I decided to trust the work and let it speak for itself. Choosing to be in this exhibition is a serious decision and commitment for each woman. Because of the attitudes in this society towards lesbians, there were some women who felt that they could not participate, and some were forced to withdraw. I feel that the exhibition indicates the diversity of work being made by lesbians today. If any one quality reoccurs it is an integrity and honesty between the artist and her work. x

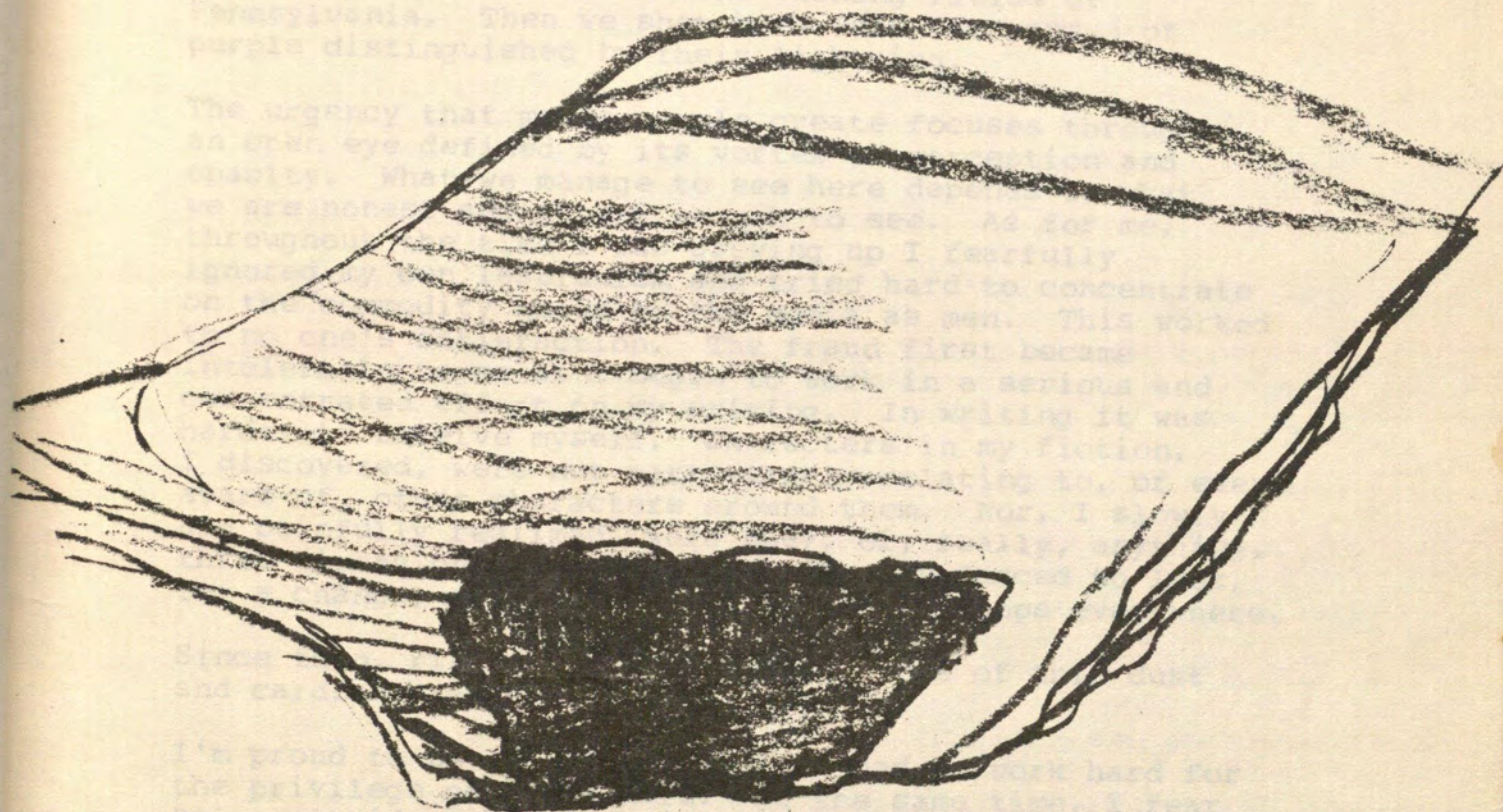
A Lesbian Show is not definitive, nor should it be the only exhibition of work by lesbians. I am sure that a lot of fine work is missing, for there are many women whose work I am not familiar with (an obvious limitation and loss is the absence of work by third world lesbians). Hopefully, this exhibition will begin to dissolve the isolation of lesbians artists as well as give visibility to the work. This is one of the first times that lesbian verbal and visual images will be presented together in the same space. This book includes individual statements by those women in the exhibition and those who will read or perform in this special context. The statements reflect the range of esthetics and politics in the work itself.

Harmony Hammond



HIS SHOW FRIGHTENS ME.

Barbara Asch





BARBARA BARACKS:1/15/78

When I was ten or eleven I had the dangerous luck to be a passenger in a misguided airplane which flew through the eye of a hurricane, Hurricane Donna, I recall. The center was quiet, the sun shining from a perfect sky, and I could look down the thousand-foot wall of clouds to the wet and shining fields of Pennsylvania. Then we shot back into the masses of purple distinguished by their lightning.

The urgency that makes people create focuses through an open eye defined by its vortex of perception and opacity. What we manage to see here depends on what we are honest and strong enough to see. As for me, throughout the time I was growing up I fearfully ignored my own lesbianism and tried hard to concentrate on the commodity known to the media as men. This worked to no one's satisfaction. The fraud first became intolerable to me as I began to work in a serious and concentrated effort on my writing. In writing it was harder to deceive myself. Characters in my fiction, I discovered, were not particularly relating to, or even aware of, other characters around them. Nor, I slowly and painfully realized, were they, or, really, anything, three-dimensional to me. I was finally forced to look, for a change, at my own life. Cardboard props everywhere.

Since then, rising winds have blown some of this dust and cardboard away.

I'm proud to be in this show; I've had to work hard for the privilege of being here. At the same time, I fear being considered solely as a lesbian artist or any other category, however accurate, in which the adjective shadows over the artist. Will I turn into the token lesbian in the anthology, at the reading, on the panel, a person about whom people will feel disappointed if she doesn't write and speak on "her" subject? I think isolation causes that situation, and the fear of that situation. By the time this show is over I hope to share the absence of isolation, and enjoy the dangerous luck which has put us in this gallery together.



# Excerpt from the Process of My work . . .

MAUREEN BRADY  
January, 1978

Lenore was the best butcher they'd ever had in that A.&P. She was fast, neat, efficient, clean, reliable and courteous to customers. Besides the fact

that she had it in her to be these ways, she made sure she worked her job fast, neat, efficient, clean, reliable and courteous because she couldn't stand

people being shit on and this way nobody ~~was~~ <sup>had anything on her</sup> messed around with her. Produce

was a mess and Peters damn well knew he could go on over there when he wanted to be a bastard. <sup>This has to go back to Lenore - good butcher. Peter's is in the way!</sup> (Still) they had never gotten around to getting her a butcher's

apron the right size. This one fit around her waist twice and ended up being

tied in the front. <sup>Furthermore</sup> she had to tie a knot in the loop that went around her neck, otherwise the bib would've started at her waist. The apron reminded

her of home, of when she'd still been living there and wearing Angie's hand-me-downs. They'd both always been skinny, <sup>not useful</sup> all right, but Angie <sup>had been</sup> was extra long waisted and Lenore <sup>had</sup> spent her whole life with a belt marking her middle. Even

way back in first grade she could remember the waists of the dresses falling on

her hips, her pulling them back up under the belt until they were in the right

place. That left her with God damn tucks around her ribs where it should have been flat. <sup>Lenore's relationship to narrator? what is it?</sup> Jesus, how she had hated those tucks, how she would have liked to

rip those dresses to ribbons. It <sup>had been?</sup> was even worse when her breasts had started

to grow. Even though they never grew very big they were there but you couldn't

tell with <sup>them - again - think about narrative relationship?</sup> ~~the~~ tucks just below them. Made it look like they were in the wrong place.

When Lenore had complained to Peters about the apron, he'd said, "Ain't many lady butchers, you're probably bout the only one. They don't make 'em for no one small as you."

"Yeah," Lenore had said. "Well if they'd make 'em, there'd probably be more lady butchers."



men speaking women speaking to speaking women

Ancestors

Betsy Damon

speaking women speaking to women speaking



# Bearly Facts

new  
lash



.. A LESBIAN SHOW 112 GREENE ST NYC

.. VULNERABILITY, FEARS, ISOLATION  
VANISH

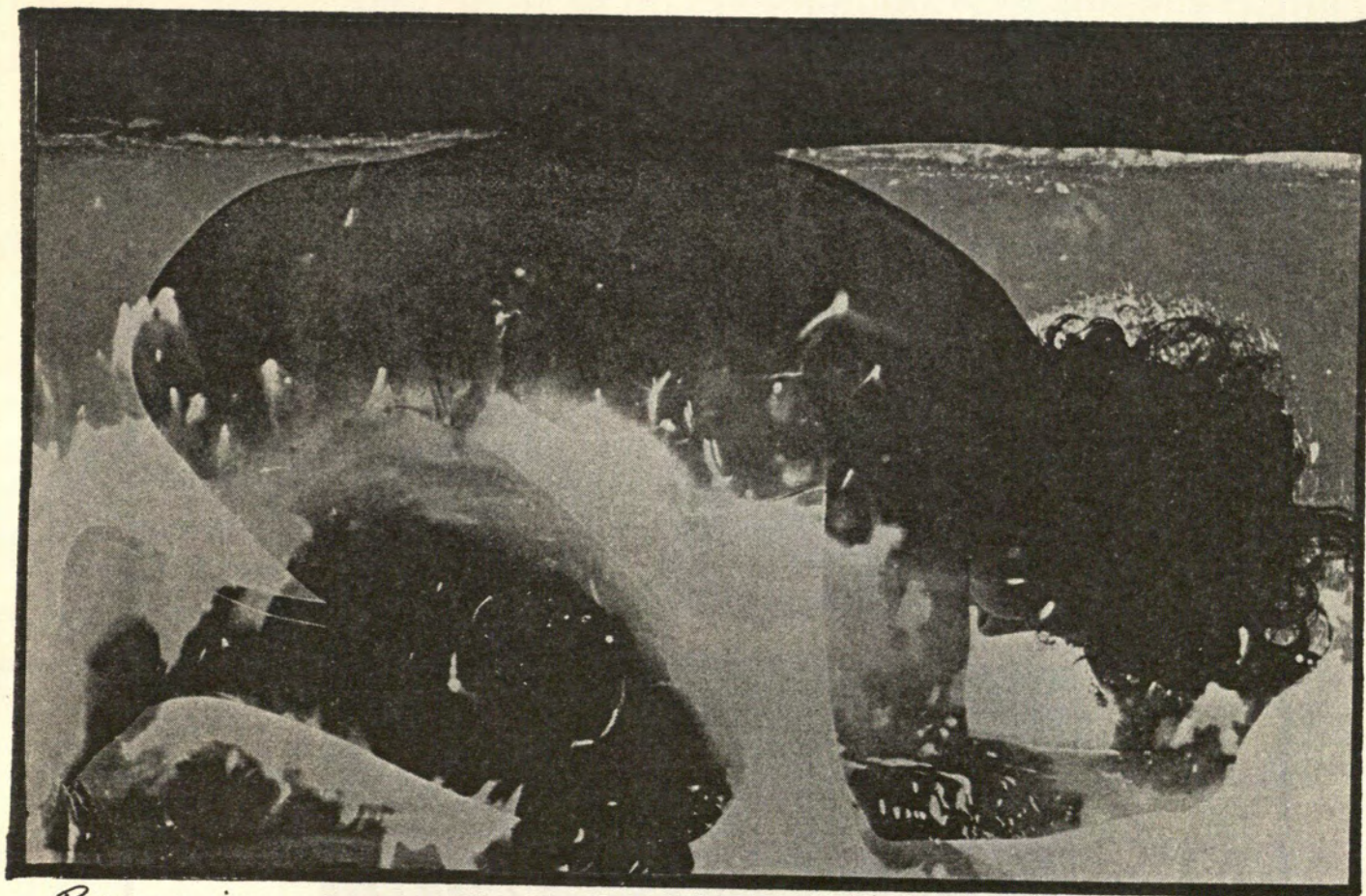
.. SECURITY CREATES PRIORITY ..

.. OUR INVESTMENT IS  
TO OUR ART AND OURSELVES ..

Gandy De Gando

.. BEARIE ..





*Becoming*

1976

Although there is a lesbian consciousness of women based women who relate to each other emotionally, spiritually and sexually, it is important that we constantly redefine who we are. A positive way to explore who we are is through our art.

Photo by Laimute E. Druskis



HELLO SOHO



JESSICA FALSTEIN



This image shows a blank, aged, cream-colored page. It features two horizontal lines: a solid black line near the top and a dashed black line near the bottom. A small, dark, irregular mark is visible on the page, located between the two lines, slightly to the right of the center. The paper has a slightly textured appearance and some minor discoloration consistent with age.

10-17-44

...as well as the view outside of window, the scene in

100

... a large group shows (the bigger the better) par-

... or who is to make contact with the work at all.

---

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



As a woman, I have been an observer. I see the history of art and most recent art through outsiders eyes. I haven't felt a part of the painting tradition enough either to want to rebel against it or to be gravely concerned with its future. The strongest influences on my life and consequently my work were my mother and my aunt, both painters. They made little money off their work and were barely able to survive as artists at all, hardly the people accused of making exploitive painting. They both had a great respect for a painting tradition they were clearly not a part of, yet it was the most meaningful thing in their lives. I inherited their love of painting - but not their legacy of self-hatred and helplessness. In recent times, the main influences on my work have been Matisse, Picasso and Cezanne; as well as the view outside my window, the sounds in my studio, my past, any change in the quality of my life.

Louise Fishman

I am for any art shows that give people who do not often have a chance to show their work, a chance to show it.

I find large group shows (the bigger the better) particularly interesting as they place the greatest demands on the viewer. By eliminating a dependable historical, subject or style context, the viewer is forced to fall back on merely looking if he or she is to make contact with the work at all.

Dona Nelson

Mayme June



MAINE TURNPIKE

and the sky  
opened its flaming lips  
to admit me  
singing

like a long red hearth  
the low down  
blazing

overwhich  
glowed  
something

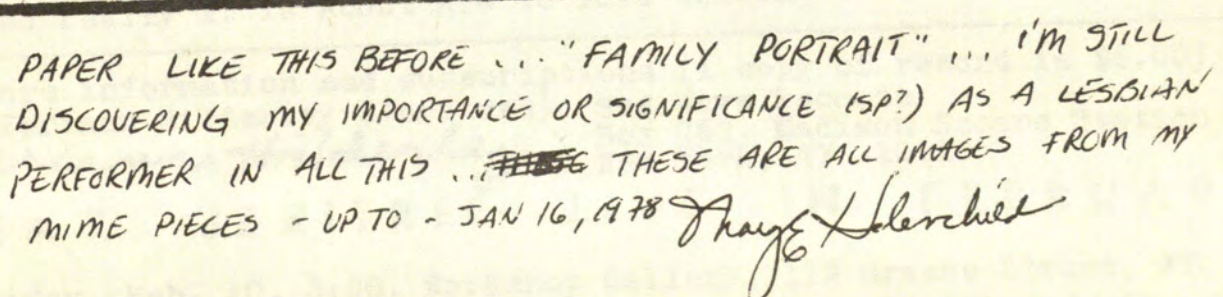
.....Roberta Gould



ings and sculpture. Sometimes I  
make drawings. Sometimes I  
write. I do not have  
enough time. I do a lot of  
work. Work for money. Poli-  
tical work. Mothering.  
There is not enough time  
to make all the paintings  
I want to do. I need  
time. Time for  
continuous  
low. To read  
thoughts, and  
them visually  
in an inter-  
lesbian is  
my art making  
do not understand.  
I am afraid  
not simply the  
Content + the deepest meaning has  
never been confined to an image. More  
likely its own approach to making art  
its function for us. Whatever the con-  
text, its more  
complex mo- OVAL BRAID more  
we imagine. I know Harmony Hammond



FRAGILE



PAPER LIKE THIS BEFORE ... "FAMILY PORTRAIT" ... I'M STILL  
DISCOVERING MY IMPORTANCE OR SIGNIFICANCE (SP?) AS A LESBIAN  
PERFORMER IN ALL THIS ... ~~THESE~~ THESE ARE ALL IMAGES FROM MY  
MIME PIECES - UP TO - JAN 16, 1978 *Thayne Lenchild*





Presents

## HOUSE OF MANY COLORS

by JERITREE

For a practical statement about my art, I want to tell you I am Producing a record of my music to make it more accessible and to use the creative aspects of the recording process which enable me to accompany my singing with the various instruments I play. The name of the record is House Of Many Colors and will be released at the end of 2/78 on my own Sea Wave Record Company label. I have been raising funds for the cost through loans, small donations and subscriptions.

This statement is a request for you to subscribe to the record now. The music, recorded and mixed by Marilyn Ries of Wise Women Enterprises, is unique and exciting. I have done all the singing, instrumentation, composing and arranging and worked with Marilyn on the mixing, as the music combines a weaving of set structure and improvization.

### Side One:

Sea Wave - 9 minutes - with voice, 2 marimba parts, cello, drums, guitar, cymbal, I create a whole image feeling of the sea and the rocking motion of the waves as a setting for the song which sings of my connection and love of the ocean.

Song of Vision and Creation - 11 minutes - with 2 marimba parts, wood flutes, cello, steel drum, and voice I create a kind of tender lullaby which is filled with images of creating, images of the work women have done through all time.

### Side Two:

House of Many Colors - 14 minutes - a complex song-composition woven from two voice parts, marimba, cello, hand-drums, steel drum, guitar. I sing of living in a house of many colors where I play the many colors of the flowers and sing the motion of words. I transform the feeling of being all alone to being all one with myself, the creative female body-spirit, and the universe of moon, sun, stars, earth, which is my house. This is a meditational healing chant song, which I also call Symphony of Little Sprouts, for it feels like a joyous bursting forth of new life and new beginnings.

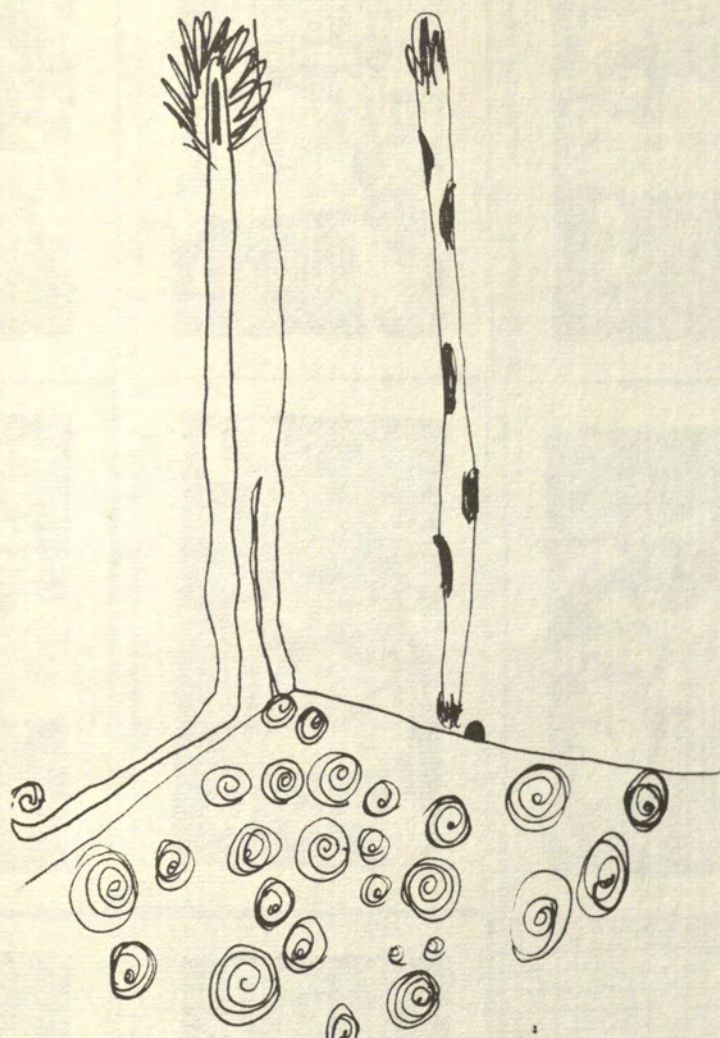
Through Your Blue Veil - 6 minutes - marimba and voice sing the story of healing oneself upon the loss-separation of a loved one. Yet, it is a song about realizing my own wholeness as distinct from another, so really it is about how to love oneself as well as another.

For more information and subscriptions (1 copy of record is \$6.00) address  
Jerriann Hilderley (Jeritree): Sea Wave Records  
*Jerriann Hilderley* Box 762, Madison Square Station  
New York, NY 10010

### HEAR JERITREE LIVE IN FEBRUARY

Friday, Feb. 10, 8:00, Workshop Gallery, 112 Greene Street, NYC  
Saturday, Feb. 25, 9:00, Women's Coffeehouse, 54 7th Ave. So., NYC  
(Music from this new recording will be played)





a room i'm afraid to go in

a headful of fears about  
celebrating lesbian creativity

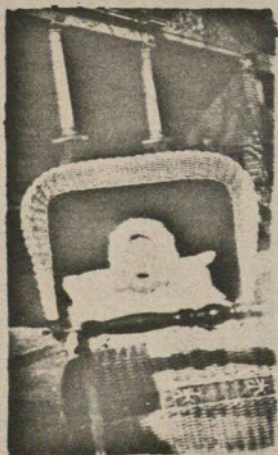
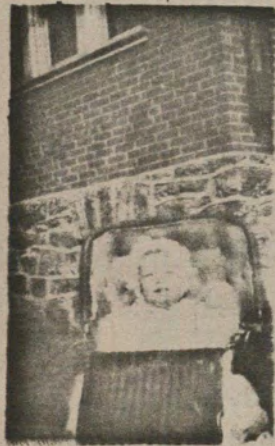
Maryann King





THESE ARE  
IMAGES FOUND  
IN A SHOP.  
MY FILMS  
WERE FOUND  
WITH A  
CAMERA.  
LOOK AROUND -  
IMAGES EVERYWHERE.

SUSAN KLECKNER  
1/78









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# SECRET SONG

How can I tell you I've been  
stealing. Stole from you.  
Hid memories in my skin  
of what we did, we do.

Your mouth, my sibling mouth  
were printing histories  
of children without milk,  
predictions of a drought

and long winters in exile—  
my poems all the heat, my smile  
a code for hurt, a lie  
I told you, learning how to spy.

How can I tell you I've been  
spying. Looked at you  
as you lay sleeping, blue  
jacket by my bed, sin

our dead religion—there's no sin  
but shame, shame, for shame  
I touched you; from your skin  
I stole my photo, papers, name.

POST DUE!

This account has no doubt, escaped  
your notice. Will you favor us with a  
settlement during the next few days.

course with a...  
used as a vehicle for making  
day lives. Painting and writing  
reflects particular female experience  
to demystify the process of art-making.  
lead and visiting artists will show slides. Poetry and  
urnal assignments will be made to encourage each woman to keep  
nd visual record of her personal experience.

476 2  
Fuel and gas adjustment factor  
Electric Gas .3864

charges  
185  
factor  
.1603

YOUR PAYMENTS ARE NOT BEING RECEIVED ON TIME.

UNLESS PAYMENT IS RECEIVED PROMPTLY, WE WILL  
REQUIRE A DEPOSIT EQUAL TO THE MONTHLY

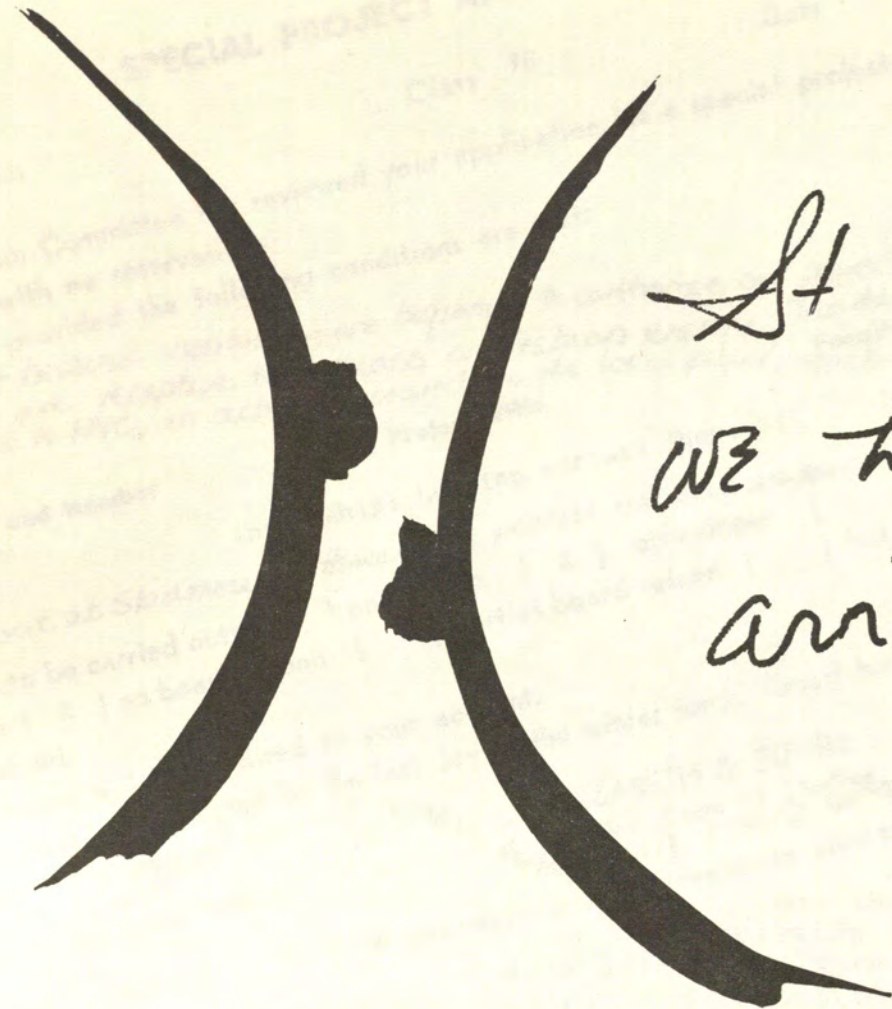
I'd like to see you again. Let's  
try to plan a get together soon!  
Send me some poems any time!!

Joan - I thought you might  
like to see this one  
Talia

color  
aces from  
esent,  
red, in  
diaries  
their  
to keep

the fact we  
id this is ju  
not all the  
and I had you  
ther her too  
far as neithe  
of things we  
a gay/straight  
cree about it  
ery careful no  
wasn't that.  
None of the wo  
women poets?  
work on on-  
then meet  
group as  
and that  
together  
de this  
to the  
money  
of the  
st





It seems  
we have  
arrived

Last fall I gave an exhibition of drawings entitled The Lesbian Body. Since my premier drawing show a few months before had been much criticized in the press, I was anxious to push myself, do something better, take more risks, produce something both more difficult and more dangerous. So I took a big step. I started writing in my pictures, writing my life in fact. My loves, my relationships, the stuff of everyday between lovers, whoever they be. With me they were women; a great deal ended up depending on that. And after the furor against Sita, it occurred to me, since the drawings were of women I loved and was talking to in the words I wrote, to borrow my friend Monique Wittig's title and name the show The Lesbian Body. By now it seemed natural to be outrageous.

I had no idea how outrageous I was. Not one critic reviewed the exhibition, not a single line of print registered its existence. The media (nevermind the art establishment)- but just the curious media who usually attended my sculpture shows bemused by art and expecting 'news' from a political firebrand --stayed away in droves. Publicly, it was as if the event had never occurred. Privately, women came, found their lives in the pictures too, even bought them. Their emotional support has kept me going ever since. But it was clear to me then that one couldn't go it alone. And so my gratitude and delight to be now among these many sisters.

Kate Millett



# SPECIAL PROJECT APPROVAL

Kristina Murch

Class 78

Date 11/8/77



Faculty Curriculum Committee has reviewed your application for a special project and it has been approved: ( X ) with no reservations

provided: ( ) provided the following conditions are met:  
 Just because institutions are beginning to authorize our projects doesn't mean they are receptive to lesbians or lesbian energy. The day before I left to come to NYC, an article appeared in the local paper, reaching all my relatives and

Faculty Supervisor  
 Ms. McDaniel

Department and Number

Project Title  
 Internship: Lesbian Artists Show, NYC

EN 99

Your project is to be carried out: ( ) on campus ( X ) off-campus ( ) full refund (cf. Prospectus)

Amount of refund: ( ) no board refund ( ) partial board refund ( ) full refund (cf. Prospectus)

The above amount will be credited to your account.  
 Your project must be completed by the last day of the winter term. Good luck. ☺

ELIZABETH B. SUHRE  
 Acting Dean of Studies

638236A  
 MURCH KRISTINA MARIE  
 ID99  
 SPECIAL PROJECT

5. Do you have any reservations concerning this project? (Project Supervisor)  
 I am vitally interested in the use of the gallery and show daily lesbian culture. I feel that this working to shape, with your faculty sponsor, a collective feminist event.

Judith McDaniel  
 (Women's Studies Independent)

(Chairman of Project Supervisor's Department)

On-site supervisor evaluation  
 Coordinator: Harmony Hammond, artist  
 Examination of "gay" groups now my\*  
 If "Other" please specify: I will photograph works involved in the process of the show in the gallery. I will keep a daily journal of my personal process in this intensive involvement with other women who are political culture-creators. When I return to Skidmore I will put on a public slide presentation, and talk about the process and my personal experience.

(Describe in several sentences what academic criteria you believe should be used in judging the success of your project.):  
 This project is a unique experience integral to my self-determined women's studies major. My area of concentration within my major is lesbian poetry and lesbian culture. This gallery experience will allow me to utilize my skills and knowledge in both visual art and feminist studies, and provide me with the opportunity to make contact with the lives and work of contemporary lesbian artists.

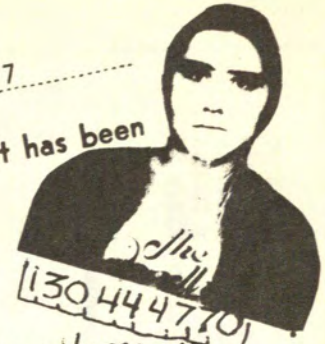


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Kristina Murch

Class 78

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Department and Number

EN 99

Project Title: Internship: Lesbian Artists Show, NYC

Your project is to be carried out: ( X ) on campus ( ) off-campus

You qualify for ( X ) no board refund ( ) partial board refund ( ) full refund (cf. Prospectus)

Amount of refund: The above amount will be credited to your account. Your project must be completed by the last day of the winter term. Good luck. #

638236A MURCH KRISTINA MARIE ID99 SPECIAL PROJECT

ELIZABETH B. SUHRE Acting Dean of Studies

Judith McDaniel (Women's Studies Independent)

(Chairman of Project Supervisor's Department)

On-site supervisor evaluation Coordinator: Harmony Hammond, artist Performance or if I had been involved in "gay" groups Now my\* Scholarship may be dropped, and I am negotiating with a lawyer. If "Other" please specify: I will photograph works involved in the act show as well as performances, panels, and readings that occur process of the show in the gallery. I will keep a daily journal my personal process in this intensive involvement with other v who are political culture-creators. When I return to Skidmore put on a public slide presentation, and talk about the process personal experience.

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Through the above activities and responsibilities, she will familiarize herself with the lives and work of contemporary lesbian artists.



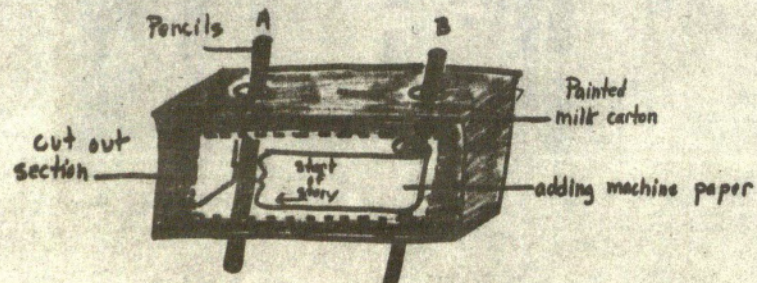
A crankie is a homemade storytelling device very much like a paper T.V. It gets its name from a scroll of paper that is cranked from left to right pulling the pictures, words, shapes and forms painted on it across the screen.

The first crankie I ever saw was made by a friend of mine to portray an antiwar story. I was surprised by the way the simple drawings conveyed her story so effectively. Then I began to think about this ingenious device--and some of its possible uses for teaching and learning, for political organizing and communication. I have been using crankies in my theatre workshops for nine years and have also found them to be a good device for expressing one's own feelings and sharing them with others.

The first crankie I ever made was based on one such expression of feeling: the incident that forced me to shave my legs in the eighth grade. As I drew, my feelings of pain and sadness were spontaneously and effectively transformed into colors and shapes. Because the paper was on a continuous roll, the end of one picture became the beginning of the next; that is, the same figure could be in two situations--at the right in one and at the left in the other. Below are ways to make crankies and crankie frames.

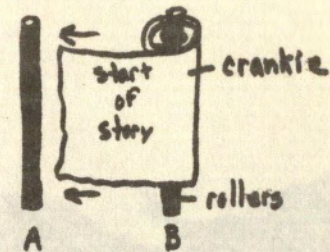
*Sue C. Perlmut*

Milk-Carton Crankie Frame



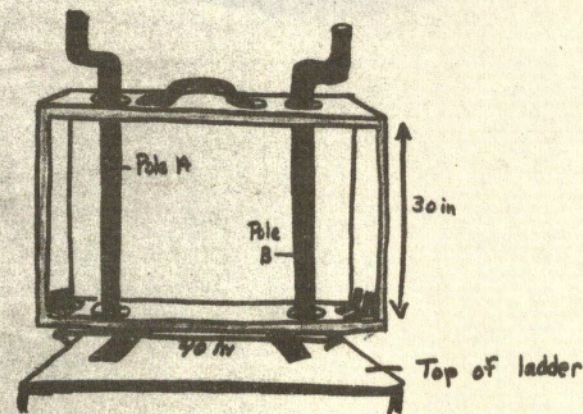
A painted milk carton with the front cut out and with pencils for turners makes a good frame for an adding-machine paper crankie.

Crankie Without a Frame



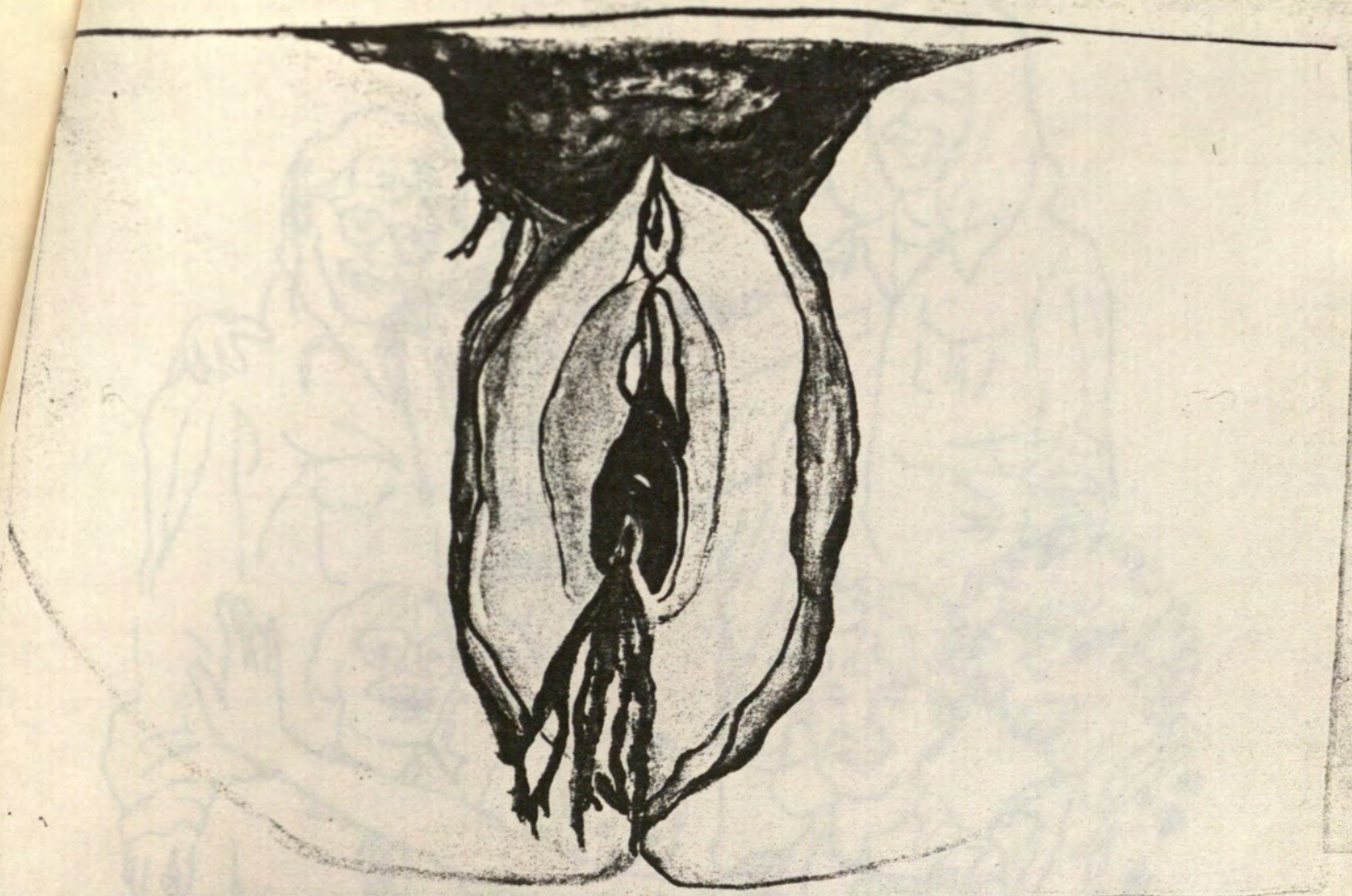
An adequate margin should be left at both ends of the story to allow for tape and leverage. Attach the end of the story to pole B and roll back to the beginning. Then attach the front end to pole A.

Wooden Crankie Frame



The size of the crankie is usually determined by the width of the paper roll. The wooden frame should be at least 2 inches higher than the width of the paper roll. To attach the paper to this frame, wind the end of the story around a cardboard tube and roll back to the beginning, attaching the beginning to pole A. Slip pole B through the cardboard tube.





FLAVIA RANDO  
1975-1976 UNTITLED SERIES  
OIL ON CANVAS

JUNE 1976 PAINTINGS REMOVED FROM  
LESBIAN ART COLLECTIVE SHOW AT  
MOTHER COURAGE RESTAURANT:  
"VULGAR," "OPPORTUNISTIC."

JUNE 1976 PAINTINGS SHOWN AT  
WOMEN'S COFFEE HOUSE.  
COMMUNITY IS SUPPORTIVE.

DECEMBER 1977 PAINTINGS REMOVED  
FROM SHOW AT WOMANBOOKS:  
"TOO DIFFICULT TO LIVE WITH,"  
"VIOLENT,"  
"STREET GANGS ARE HARASSING US."  
COMMENT SHEET: "PLEASE CONTINUE."





Gale Russo,  
mime





MORGAN SANDERS was born in Salt Lake City, Utah, in 1934. Since then she has been interesting everybody with her exceptional art work. She has had ten one-woman shows in the East and West, and been in numerous invitational exhibits, the most recent (Jan. '78) being "Eye and Mind: Some Conceptual Trends in Recent Representational Painting," at Green Mountain Gallery, N.Y.



SHE is also a poet. She was one of the founders of the original Women's Poetry Collective and read with them at N.Y.U. and elsewhere. She is included in We Become New (Bantam; Ruby & Ivorson, eds.), We Are All Lesbians, and other publications. She has found Feminism challenging, painful, attractive, difficult, rewarding, boring, and in any case, necessary. Almost everything about patriarchal capitalist society makes her unbearably angry. She is an Angry Woman par excellence.



HOWEVER, Morgan Sanders loves animals, people, nature, and God --not always in that order. It is uncommon for anyone to admit to loving God these days, but Morgan Sanders is unable not to say she loves God, even though His actions sometimes enrage and frustrate and sorrow her. She is attempting to do His work, although it exposes her to criticism from Feminists who object to calling God "Him." She can't help calling Him that, since that's what He says He is to Her. To Her? That's correct, Her Holiness, Morgan Sanders, Avatar of God.



AS an Avatar, Ms. Sanders has visions, powers, exquisite suffering, and does one hell of a lot of work, mostly about old ladies, children, young men, and animals. She is a nutrition expert, a consultant on sexual problems, and an all-around sympathetic listener. An idealist, she attempts to do everything for everybody. This is exhausting and limits her time for poetry and painting. Would you like to help her? Do you need help? Call anytime (see Manhattan directory), 24 hrs. a day. Avatars are always available. Almost. Avatars are only 70% Divine, the other 30 % being mere Human, so God says. Please keep that limitation in mind.

P.S. GOD HIMSELF says, "Lesbianism, Sexual Freedom, and Feminist Actions are full of power for the good of this World." And Morgan Sanders says this sonnet is to a Goddess who is a friend of Hers. She hopes you enjoy it.



Diana, your lithe body stripes my sight  
with moonlight as you run through trees  
gleaming with beasts' eyes, dappled with hate;  
men chasing futile in the distance.  
Let dogs tear them to bits! Let Gods  
greet you as you walk among them, shy, greater  
than they. Let my mind's vision  
see what's forbidden: your beauty naked  
as you bathe in woods long lost to us.  
Let me by magic change myself: a doe  
deep-eyed who watches, following through streams  
and stones, your pet, dazzled with love, insatiable,  
who trembles when you raise your bow  
to shoot fierce arrows at poor creatures' hearts.



--Morgan Sanders



Get out of your **rise** reveal  
**TELL YOU**  
**WE WILL.**

Rough and Ready

MY NAME IS ELLEN TURNER. MY PATRIARCHAL FATHERS NAME WAS LATZ. SEW I WAS CALLED ELLEN LATZ 4 MANY YRS. I AM 29 YRS. OLD. I WAS BROUGHT UP MIDDLE CLASS. I AM WHITE. BROUGHT UP BY MY PARENTS 2 B AN "ARTIST". I WAS MARRIED 2 X'S. HAD 2 BOYS. GAVE 1 UP. THE OTHER ONE DIED. I HAVE A BFA DEGREE. YAWN. CAME OUT AS A DYKE 5 YRS. AGO. RITE NOW, I AM A SEMI-RETIRED ♀ INDEPENDENT ACTIVIST. I DRAW. I MAKE "CONCRETE POETRY". "CONCRETE POETRY" IS USING WORDS WITHIN VISUAL ART. I TRANSFER POLITICAL STATEMENTS + POEMS WITCH I RITE INTO WALL HANGINGS USING VARIOUS MATERIALS. I AM NOW PRODUCING THEM AS PRINTED MATTER 2 DISTRIBUTE TO WOMYN LOCALLY + HOPEFULLY ACROSS THE CUNTREE. - 1978 - E.T. She's busy

She's dancing her own way Liberated!

Natural approach

Other Bites of the Apple  
Farewell to old habits  
action-getting

for lovers who are also friends  
COME ON STRONG

Strategy

THIS IS  
THE END OF  
THE GAME



## SELF-PORTRAIT WITH PEONIES and Wall Writings

This piece is dedicated to  
Susan who gave me the peonies  
to Aleda who gave me the paper  
and to Linda.

SELF-PORTRAIT WITH PEONIES and Wall Writings is part of a larger work called PERSONAL PIECE, composed of three self-portraits and 35 columns of wall writings. It is a record of my growth and development over a year, 1975-76. It began when I started SELF-PORTRAIT WITH PEONIES. An abstract painter for 15 years, I had only painted a few (unsuccessful) self-portraits in my life, and never one while standing naked and looking into a mirror. It was a big departure for me.

Without my being totally aware of it, this painting was an attempt to see myself; to see who I was, to see what being a woman meant and what it meant to have a woman's body. Only later did I make the connection that I started the painting roughly 6 months after beginning my first relationship with a woman so I was probably also trying to understand what being a lesbian meant to me.

As I worked on the painting, I had moments of sheer exhilaration and joy, and times when all the negative feelings about myself that I had carried with me all my life came up. I began painting the negative words on large sheets of paper and hanging them up all over the walls of my studio. It was a battle to see myself clearly in the mirror when in the grip of these negative feelings and I would find I was painting myself "fat, slovenly, dirty", etc. I knew these feelings were often irrational but I needed to experience them in order to then exorcise them. The painting of the lists and hanging them up on the walls became a ritual exorcism for me. It is interesting to me that many of the words on my lists are almost Victorian, probably coming from my mother, my childhood, and my early reading. Words like "slovenly, lascivious, lewd and wanton". Then there are lists of all my fears and anxieties. A change came when I began to record my needs. Starting with the passive needs, "I need to be loved, admired", etc. I progressed to the stronger, "I need to love, to admire". Then the lists began to show my feelings of strength and making progress until finally I was able to write the strong and positive things I found in myself. "I am beautiful, strong, loving, wise."

It was an exciting and sometimes painful time of self-examination and growth. It was the women's movement and being part of a community of women that gave me the courage to try and see myself honestly and the strength to look at, examine and finally exorcise the negative feelings and stereotypes I had carried with me all my life. And it was my relationship with a woman which showed me I had come a long way in accepting myself as a woman, as a person, in that I could love another woman.

Jane Washburn