

Art Practice/Art Pedagogy

Slide 1A - *Mother Superette*

Slide 1B - *Rainbow Pickett*

My pedagogical methods have always been closely linked with my art practice dating back to the early seventies when I went to Fresno to set up the first feminist art program at the university there. My motives for doing this were multiple. After going through graduate school at UCLA and after nearly 10 years of working as an artist in the intensely male-dominated LA art scene, I had systematically excised any female-centered content from my work in order to be taken seriously - as can be seen in the transition from the work on the left to that on the right. Despite the fact that I had had some success as an artist, I wanted to find a way back to my own subject matter and style. I was tired of 'male drag', i.e. trying to make art as if I were a man.

Slide 2A - Judy Chicago and the California Girls

Slide 2B - Cuntleaders

Another reason for setting up this program - which was extremely radical at the time - was that it was evident that many more women were entering art school than were emerging into or succeeding at professional art careers, something which - happily - has changed considerably since then. The third reason for going to Fresno was that I needed to be away from Los Angeles and the pressures of the art scene in order to formulate what was a vision of not only a new pedagogical methodology but also, a new art practice, one which might best be described as content based, a near heretical approach at a time when modernism and formalism prevailed.

Slide 3A - *Womanhouse* catalog

Slide 3B - *Cock and Cunt* play

After an intense year in Fresno, I was invited to bring my program to Cal-Arts, which was just being established. The most dramatic expression of my pioneering program was *Womanhouse*, the first female-centered installation to appear, created by students in the program along with several local women artists, all of whom worked under my guidance as well as that of my team-teacher, artist Miriam Schapiro. Central to the creation of *Womanhouse* was a process I describe as content search, something for which I had started using performance in Fresno, having

discovered that my students - all women - seemed comfortable with simple performance techniques, probably because performance is basic to the social construction of femininity.

Slide 4A - Women's Building brochure

Slide 4B - Feminist Studio Workshop group session

Before the first half of my two year contract had elapsed, I became unhappy at Cal-Arts for a variety of reasons. With art historian Arlene Raven and designer Sheila De Bretteville, I established an independent school, the Feminist Studio Workshop, situated in a new institution, the Women's Building, which brought together numerous feminist art organizations, businesses and galleries. The pedagogical principles I was developing were fundamental to both the methods used in the Feminist Studio Workshop and the organization of the building - i.e. going around the circle, a process that I continue to use in my teaching and even at dinner parties, having discovered that this process promotes deep listening, discovery and growth as well as personal empowerment. Moreover, it is an effective tool in building both group support and organization.

Slide 5A - Thursday nite at *Dinner Party* studio

Slide 5B - *The Dinner Party*

Despite the fact that the Feminist Studio Workshop and the Women's Building were flourishing, I left, something I'm not proud of as I left my colleagues holding the bag. However, when I said earlier that my pedagogical and art practice were inexorably connected, it was in part because I now recognize that the primary reason I stopped teaching then was that I had succeeded in finding my way back to my own content through helping my students find theirs. However, I definitely brought my developing pedagogical methods to the organization of *The Dinner Party*, which completely occupied me from 1974 until 1980.

Slide 6A - *Birth* performance from *Womanhouse*, 1971

Slide 6B - Birth workshop at Feminist Art Institute, NY., 1980

Even after *The Dinner Party*, my earlier teaching experiences continued to affect my art practice. Several of the *Womanhouse* performances had focused on the subject of birth, a subject I also dealt with in the runner back for *Mary Wollstonecraft* in *The Dinner Party* (she died from childbed fever several months after having given birth to her daughter Mary who later became known as Mary Shelley, wife of the poet and author of Frankenstein.) At that time, I decided that

I would take up the subject of birth once I'd finished *The Dinner Party*. My growing interest in this subject was intensified by my discovery that - at that time - there were few images of birth (other than the sanitized depictions of the birth of Christ) in Western art.

Between the time I left teaching in 1974 to my recent return - in 1999 - I continued to do lectures, seminars and workshops around the country, as demonstrated in the slide on the right, which documents one of the works produced in a workshop I did in 1980 at the Feminist Art Institute in New York which focused on the subject of birth. Again, my teaching and my artmaking were intertwined.

Slide 7A - *Birth Project* book

Slide 7B - *Birth Project* review

The *Birth Project* occupied me from 1980 - 85 and involved working with 150 needleworkers around America and even as far away as New Zealand. By then, I had improved many of my methods, which I used to structure the project, especially the reviews I held throughout the course of the project to regularly monitor the development of the 100 painted and needleworked images that comprise the *Birth Project*.

Slide 8A - Entry wall, *Holocaust Project*

Slide 8B - JC doing research

By 1985, when my new husband, photographer Donald Woodman, and I began work on the *Holocaust Project* - which occupied us for eight years - I had honed an approach to both private and collaborative artmaking that began with research whose goal was to become informed about a subject before making art about it.

Slide 9A - Research team, *Dinner Party* studio

Slide 9B - *Childbirth in America*, from the *Birth Project*

The roots of this approach date back to the Fresno program when I was involved in self-guided research into what was the then almost unknown history of women. I included my students in this search as we together examined women's literature and began to assemble a slide library of women's art. And of course, research provided the underpinnings of almost all of the visual imagery in *The Dinner Party*.

The *Birth Project* also involved extensive research. In fact, because of the dearth of

iconography on the subject of birth, I had to build my imagery on research, witness and testimony, incorporating this material into the images, the accompanying documentation and also, into large installations like *Childbirth in America* in which didactic and visual materials are entirely merged.

Slide 10A - *Rainbow Shabbat*

Slide 10B - Installation view, *Resolutions : A Stitch in Time*

The *Holocaust Project*, which followed the *Birth Project*, concludes with *Rainbow Shabbat*, a monumental stained glass installation that presents a vision of an alternative future, one that embodies the Jewish concept of “tikkun olam”, the healing and repairing of the world. After eight years spent in the darkness of the Holocaust, Donald and I decided to end our exhibition with an image of hope, an impulse which also helped to shape my next collaborative project, *Resolutions: A Stitch in Time*, a series of painted and needleworked images that subvert both the tradition of needlework and that of proverbs, which one scholar described as society’s glue in that the passing down of proverbs is one way in which values are perpetuated.

Slide 11A - Installation view, *Find It In Your Heart*

Slide 11B - Envisioning the Future logo

Resolutions reinterprets traditional proverbs for a diverse, multi-cultural world. Its concluding image is an ambiguously gendered, full-scale, carved, painted and needleworked wooden figure upon whose spiral base is inscribed the phrase *Find It In Your Heart* in 22 languages. It was perhaps my ongoing interest in formulating alternative images for the future that contributed to my interest in undertaking the project, *Envisioning the Future*.

Slide 12A - Celebration of IU Exhibition opening

Slide 12B - Installation view, *SINSation* exhibit, IU Museum, 1999

I’ve now briefly outlined some of the ways in which the needs and focus of my art practice informed the development of my pedagogy; now let me focus more closely upon my methodology. As I mentioned, between 1974 - when I left formal teaching - until 1999 - when I began doing one-semester residencies at universities around the country, my relationship to academia was that of a gadfly, i.e. dropping in for a day or two and making as much trouble as I could, then getting out of Dodge as quickly as possible.

However, by the early nineties, I began to hear disturbing reports from young women who

complained that they were experiencing many of the same problems that had first led me to Fresno in the early seventies; a lack of female role models, an absence of information about women's art and history and also, little progress in terms of a more content-oriented curriculum. One reason curriculum is crucial is that - at the end of the nineteenth or even into the twentieth century - when women first gained the right to university education, little or no thought was given to the fact that the curriculum focused almost entirely on what men had done, thought and taught.

Thus, women's new-found educational freedom ended up allowing us to study what men had accomplished, inadvertently transmitting the notion that what women had done was not worthy of comparable study. This same bias still pervades university art education with art history classes primarily focused on men's art and studio classes organized around male rather than female skills - think, how many sculpture classes emphasize welding rather than crochet or trapunto quilting even when the preponderance of students are female?

Also, even though there are many more female art faculty now, too few of either they or their male colleagues are sufficiently familiar with the history of women's art, usually looking at the work of their female students against the background of male art history. One consequence of this is that women's nascent impulses are often not adequately recognized and nurtured. (As one male art professor abashedly put it, "I found myself urging my female students to create work with 'more thrust'").

Moreover, although it is not always true that there is a gender difference in artmaking habits, I have found that generally, women are more stimulated into imagemaking by a focus on content while men seem more motivated by an interest in materials or purely formal concerns. Of course, privileging form over content is one reason why there is so much formally interesting but ultimately, boring and irrelevant contemporary art.

In 1999, I was invited to facilitate a project class at IU Bloomington with a plan for an exhibition at the end of the semester in the I.M. Pei designed university art museum. The class was open to students and working artists of both genders but only women signed up - with the exception of one male theater graduate student who (although not in the project class) organized a group of theater majors into a performance group to present re-interpretations of some of the *Womanhouse* performances as well as developing other pieces about more contemporary

concerns. By the way, the title of the exhibition was a pun on the “Sensation” show at the Brooklyn Museum which had caused Mayor Guiliani such indigestion that same Fall. Also, you might have noticed that I used the term ‘facilitate’ rather than ‘teach’, something to which I’ll come back.

Slide 13A - “SinSation” exhibition, installation view

Slide 13B - “ ” “

Here are two installations shots of the exhibition which was created by 11 participants from the age of 20 - 60 in one semester.

Slide 14A - From Theory to Practice (Entry wall)

Slide 14B - Duke critique

In 2000, I was invited to teach a class at Duke which, surprisingly, has a very limited studio arts program. In fact, as you can see from the slide on the right, I had to conduct critiques in a seminar room, which was not exactly conducive to either making or discussing art (the students all worked at home or in the inadequate art building). Rick Powell - a renowned African-American art historian and then the chairman of the Art and Art history department - had asked me to guide my students through an exploration of three of the subjects I myself had explored: women’s history, birth and the Holocaust. However, because Duke’s studio art department is so meager, I never expected an exhibition to emerge.

Slide 15A - Duke exhibition; women’s history

Slide 15B - Duke exhibition; birth

But the students were so excited about what they had produced in both text-based and visual art forms that they wanted to mount an exhibit. And this time, there were a few male students in the class for whom my pedagogical methods seemed to work just fine. In the seventies, I had focused entirely on women’s art education and I was extremely interested in discovering whether my pedagogical methods would work as well for men.

Slide 16A - Holocaust work (featuring Jewish star)

Slide 16B - “ ” “

Sometime later, one of my male students - who collaborated with a female student on the work on the left - wrote me to say that my class was the best he had taken at Duke, which, given

the high standards of that university, was praise indeed. Also, he had begun the semester completely baffled by some of the comments of the female students and ended the course having been greatly educated by the process of listening to what the women had to say.

Slide 17A - Poster for “At Home” project

Slide 17B - Participants in front of the house

In 2001, I had the opportunity to further explore the question of whether art pedagogical methods rooted in feminist values were potentially applicable to men as well as women when Donald and I were invited to team-teach for one semester at Western Kentucky University in Bowling Green.

Slide 18A - TTF Summer Workshop, early 90's

Slide 18B - “At Home” group doing content search

2001 was exactly 30 years after *Womanhouse* and Donald and I were invited to re-visit the subject of the home - which has particular resonance to people in Kentucky, many of whom who have an extremely strong sense of place - but this time, with both male and female students. Both Donald and I were committed to applying the principles I'd been using throughout the years, in particular, the practice of ‘going around the circle’ and it was fascinating to discover that this was as effective with the men as it had always been with the women. However, I think it is important to add the caveat that the men were in the minority in the group, which I believe is essential for alternative methods to work. When men are dominant, groups usually fall back upon a model of dominance, that is, competition in which the strongest - if not always the wisest - voice prevails.

Slide 19A - “Nurturant Kitchen”, *Womanhouse*

Slide 19B - “Kitchen as Heart of the Home”, *At Home*

Because so many issues have remained unresolved for women - despite the repeated insistence that we live in a ‘post-feminist’ world - a great deal of the work made by the women resonated with many of the same themes and concerns as in *Womanhouse*. For example, nurturance was the subject in the kitchens of both *Womanhouse* and *At Home*.

Slide 20A - "Sheet Closet", *Womanhouse*

Slide 20B - "Abuse Closet", *At Home*

And oppression was the subject of closets in both installations though with different focuses, in the case of *Womanhouse*, the oppression of what used to be called female role and is now referred to as the construct of femininity; and in *At Home*, a more violent form of oppression, i.e. domestic violence.

Slide 21A - "Menstruation Bathroom", *Womanhouse*

Slide 21B - "Eating Disorder Bathroom", *At Home*

The "Eating Disorder Bathroom" in the *At Home* project addressed a common problem among women but was in no way as radical as the earlier "Menstruation Bathroom" from *Womanhouse*, perhaps because the twenty-first century is proving to be far less radical than the sixties and seventies of the earlier century.

I do not have time to discuss the "At Home" project in any greater depth; moreover, I want to return to the issue of gender as it was expressed in the art. In contrast to most of the work by the women - which, however interesting, opened up little new territory, some of the male students introduced entirely new subject matter, for example, murderous sibling rivalry, confusion about pornography and the taboos surrounding feminine pursuits, all of which were explored in the "Adolescent Bedroom", the slide on the left. And even though the subject of rape has been the focus of a considerable amount of feminist art over the last thirty years, there was a new twist in the "Rape Garage", the rape of a man by a woman, something Donald and I had never even seen discussed much less expressed in art.

Slide 22A - "Adolescent Bedroom"

Slide 22B - "Rape Garage"

Slide 23A: Detail, "Rape Garage"

Slide 23B: Detail, "Rape Garage" showing Josh's story

The "Rape Garage" was created by three women and one man. Two of the women had themselves been raped, another's sister had been raped and the young man pictured here, who divulged the fact of having been raped by a woman, recounted how he had experienced the type of disbelief that women first encountered when they began to challenge the idea that the

appropriate response to attempted rape was to 'relax and enjoy it'. Despite this, he had the courage to put his photograph up on a wall of pictures of rape victims.

Slide 24A: Installation, Religion, "Prejudice Basement", Clay Smith

Slide 24B: Installation, Racism, "Prejudice Basement"

Another subject, directly tied to the location of the *At Home* project was that of prejudice, tackled in an ambitious installation in the basement by Clay Smith, a talented sculpture major who is now in graduate school. The entire space was filled with the type of packing boxes one would often find in a basement except that - in addition to containing the ordinary contents of such a storage area - the family secrets were also buried there, in particular, their prejudice, on the left, religious prejudice and on the right, deep in the back of the basement, Southern racism.

Slide 25A: Pomona Arts Colony

Slide 25B: ETF Participants Photo

It is with the background that I have been sketching that I approached the "Envisioning the Future" project, which took place in the fall of 2003 in Pomona, California and is now on exhibit at twelve different sites in what is called the Inland Empire (which includes Pomona). As in the *At Home* project, there were both students and practicing artists involved though the ratio was far different. In Bowling Green, most of the participants were students while in Pomona, almost three-quarters of the participants were working artists from all over southern California.

Donald and I were both invited to facilitate this project, which was supported by a public/private partnership that included Cal Poly, Pomona along with other universities, businesses, organizations and individuals. In Kentucky, Donald and I had team-taught for the first time which gave us the opportunity to discover that we not only collaborate well (for example, in the *Holocaust Project*); we also team-teach easily, in part because we have very different - and complimentary - areas of skills. Also, teaching together allows us not to have to suffer long separations and the always vexing problem of who gets the cats.

Slide 26A - Facilitator training

Slide 26B - Process exhibition, Millard Sheets Gallery

“Envisioning the Future” began as a gleam in Cheryl Bookout’s eye in early 2001 (Cheryl is featured in the video documentary that is part of a show about the process of the project at the Millard Sheets Gallery (slide on right)). It was her vision for there to be a large, collaborative, community-based project in the Pomona Arts Colony. However, this time - instead of working directly with the participants, Donald and I were asked to training a team of facilitators who would then work with small groups of 6 - 8 participants. You notice I again used the word ‘facilitator’, something I have not discussed yet even though it is how I have always seen my role as teacher.

Earlier, I referred to what happens when men are dominant in a group; this structure of dominance might be said to be what characterizes the patriarchal paradigm, be that the dominance of men over women, whites over blacks, humans over animals or teachers over students. Challenging this structure of dominance is what feminism is all about. And even before the word came into common usage, I understood the principles. When I was in college, I used to chafe under the oppressiveness of too many male professors who stood in the front of the room and dominated the classroom, leaving little breathing space for anyone else, much less the possibility of his discovering who his students were or what they might be interested in learning about the subject at hand (not always what the professor had decided we needed to hear).

In reaction, when I began to teach, the first thing I wanted to do was to find out who my students actually were, thus the evolution of ‘going around in the circle’ in order to make space for every person in the room to speak. Early on I discovered something remarkable; the loudest voices didn’t always have the most - or the best - to say. In fact, it was sometimes the quietest and least assertive person who provided the greatest insights, something I never forgot.

Also, I instinctively rebelled against the idea that - as teacher - I was supposed to provide for every student’s needs, perhaps because of what I discussed earlier; that is, that my art practice was always paramount to me and I didn’t want to exhaust myself and leave nothing for my studio life. Or maybe it was because - as a woman - I hadn’t been socialized into the role of ‘provider’. But even if it was selfishness that was my motivation, it led me to a pedagogical method that is

less draining for me and more empowering for my students.

But could my methods be translated for others? Donald had picked them up easily but then, Donald and I have very similar values. Was it possible for us to train facilitators and then guide them as they worked with their groups? This was one question we brought to the “Envisioning the Future” project, which involved over seventy students and practicing artists as well as dozens of others playing a variety of support roles.

Slide 27A- Installation view, Photo show, Millard Sheets

Slide 27B - Installation view, Facilitator training

The organization of the project took several years. Early in 2003, applications for facilitators and participants were made available; we received over 30 applications for the 9 facilitator positions and hundreds of applications from all over southern California for the available participant slots. By the spring, all the selections were made and reading materials and a bibliography assembled and distributed. We required that everyone prepare themselves for the project by reading theoretical and critical essays along with material about the state of the world and also, do some investigation of previous art on the subject of the future. As I often say, the fastest way to create unoriginal art is to be ignorant of what others have done before you.

In September of last year, the project began with two weekends of lectures - you see here some of our distinguished presenters - the British art writer Edward Lucie-Smith and the social historian Paul Von Blum, also, Connie Butler, a curator at LAMOCA who did a talk about her upcoming survey of the history of Feminist art. In addition to scholars, art historians, critics and curators, there were also many presentations by artists.

Slide 28A - Matt Jackson and Digital media group

Slide 28B - William Catling and Sculpture group

The project groups began meeting on September 22nd - pictured here are two groups; Matt Jackson and members of the Digital media group and William Catling with some of the Sculpture people. In the one week-long facilitator training (too short a time we discovered), Donald and I had gone through the steps we were asking each facilitator to move through with their groups, using the circular format I’ve previously discussed for self-presentations, reading discussions and then, content search, helping each person identify their subject matter and focus,

then guiding them towards the most appropriate media to express their particular content.

Slide 29A- Photo Installation, Millard Sheets Gallery

Slide 29B- Installation view, DW's *Harbinger of Which Future?*

As time is short, I cannot go into detail about these processes. Just let me say that different facilitators had differing degrees of success in implementing them. The most challenging moment in the project seemed to take place at the point where everyone - both participants and facilitators - had identified what they wanted to create. It was then that the role of the facilitators had to change. In addition to having to factor in their own creative needs in order to make work themselves (something we had not planned for), they also had to move from a focus on empowering and supporting the participants to mixing support with clear guidance. Because we had such a short time to train the facilitators, we were unable to adequately address this challenge; suffice it to say that this transition was difficult for some of the facilitators.

Originally, neither Donald nor I had planned on showing nor had we imagined that the facilitators would exhibit. But the process we put the facilitators through during the training week stimulated some of them so much that they felt impelled to create art and wanted to show with their groups in part, I believe, as a way of demonstrating that - in addition to their roles as facilitators - they were practicing artists. Eventually, everyone exhibited together. In the slide on the left, you see an installation view of the photo group's exhibit and on the right, a group of images Donald created during our time in the Inland Empire exploring the vast divide between 'haves' and 'have-nots' in a series titled *Harbingers of Which Future?*

Slide 30A: JC working with Painting group

Slide 30B: Installation, Painting exhibition

Throughout the course of the project, Donald's and my role involved working closely with Cheryl on the overall coordination of the myriad of details involved in such a large and complex undertaking while also helping to guide the groups and keep them focused. We were extremely fortunate that my old friend Dextra Frankel - an exceedingly experienced exhibition designer - volunteered to coordinate all of the exhibitions, particularly once the project expanded to include multiple sites and many different spaces. In addition to working with their respective facilitators, Donald and/or me to clarify and realize their artmaking goals, each participant then had to work

with Dextra to translate their concepts into a specific exhibition space. What I am describing is what I sometimes call ‘going from the ideal to the real’, a process that is fundamental to professional art practice, i.e. navigating the limits of time, space and money.

Slide 31A - Apocalyptic photo installation

Slide 31B - *Rainbow Shabbat*

I am going to end with these two slides even though I have only been able to give you a brief view of the 12 exhibitions and many performances that comprise “Envisioning the Future”. Our goal from the beginning was to help participants create a wide array of images imagining the future - although there were many funny, personal and touching works, there were also a number of bleak ones as well, for example, this image on the left, an apocalyptic view of a time when all life will come to an end, the consequence of our century long fascination with weaponry.

When I saw how much of the work was bleak, I was very glad that I had decided to install my large stained-glass work, *Rainbow Shabbat*, which offers a hopeful vision of a world united, seated at the Jewish Friday night Shabbat dinner, an image of what is known as *tikkun olam*, the healing and repairing of the world. After all, who of us knows what the future will be? Exploring that was the purpose of our project; to me, art is about discovery and in my art practice and my pedagogy, I have tried to implement that point of view. Thank you.