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Historiography/Feminisms/Strategies

Dori G. Lemeh

In response to the question how will the early feminist art histories be revisited? which was put forward by our panel chair Hilary Robinson, I have to say that the words written by Norma Broude and Mary Garrard in the introduction to their book *The Power of Feminist Art* became the focus of my brief paper. In unison these women reminded us that:

‘Feminist art’s revolutionary lessons have been so successfully assimilated into contemporary artistic practices that its own history as well as the histories of many feminist artists organisations and publications that helped to generate this work seemed in imminent danger of being forgotten and lost’

Forgotten and lost - wouldn’t that be a tragedy? Wouldn’t it be a historical atrocity, if those unknown and unsung women, who laid everything on the line securing the future for this and the next generation of women was not recognized? Through extraordinary forms of protest, those incredible women brought all of us forth where some of us now rest comfortably today. Wouldn’t that be a great loss if their contributions, for whatever reason, were not recognized?

Yes, I believe most of us, if not all of us, would agree that to overlook, exclude, limit or ignore, even the smallest contribution to our collective history would be to misrepresent or deny our unsung solidarity. This brings me to a particular point, on which I am certain we can all agree, which is our feminist focus appears askew when within the context of feminist historiography, the historical contributions made by African-American women and other women of color are not to-date fully recognized and/or acknowledged.

I do have to say that to some degree the presence of black women and a few black

women's organisations as well as the presence of our sisters of colour as contributors to the cause of women's rights is well documented within the collected essays of *The Power of Feminist Art* and other writings of equally great importance. However, we still have a ways to go in order to integrate the collective efforts made by women of color, who assisted in transforming the feminist movement.

After speaking with several women of color attending this conference about the feminist movement, each in turn remarked that it is their belief that they have become the "Other" within the feminist movement. These same individuals expressed that this otherness is connected to a power struggle, which is encouraging disunity and fracturing within the group to occur and consequently splinter groups emerge. Whether this difference is socially, economically or racially motivated, I agree with author Audre Lorde, who said, 'our future survival is predicated on our ability to relate with/in equality. As women we must root out internalized patterns of oppression within ourselves, if we are to move beyond the most superficial aspects of social change. Now we must recognize differences among women who are equals, neither inferior nor superior and we must find ways to use these differences to enrich our ambitions and collective struggles.'

The future of the feminist art movement depends as Lorde says, on 'the ability of all women to identify and develop new definitions of power and new patterns of relating across differences.'

Audre Lorde quotes from Audre Lorde *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (California: The Crossing Press, 1984).

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