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## Editorial, August 1997

### **The more things change, the more they stay the same or Plus ça change...**

An all-woman shortlist was recently announced for one of the largest artists' prize in Britain, the Turner prize (1997). The prize of £20,000 to living artist under the age of 50 'for an outstanding exhibition or other presentation of their work in the 12 months preceding May 30 1997', is sponsored by the Tate Gallery, who administer the Turner bequest and house the large collection of Turner's works at the Clore Gallery, and Channel 4, (a UK TV channel). The prize and the shortlist subject of much gossip and speculation in British art world circles. This is the first time all of the four candidates shortlisted have been women. Last year, however, there was an all-male shortlist.

Is this equality or (sexist) difference at work? Are women really to be judged as a class of their own! Is this the accommodation of the reality of women's increasing visibility in the art market? Or the tokenisation - the defusion of a threat - by the withdrawal of their work into separate scale of judgement?

The judges this year are Nick Serota, Director of the Tate Gallery; Penelope Curtis, Curator, Henry Moore Institute; Marina Vaizey, art critic and writer; Lars Nittve, Director of the Louisiana Museum, Humlebaek, Denmark, and Jack Wendler, Patron of the New Art & publisher of the art magazine Art Monthly.

Prior to 1997, the only woman to win the Turner prize has been Rachel Whiteread - who recently won honours for her work at this year's Venice Biennale. Notable women artists have been nominated to the shortlist :- Helen Chadwick (1987), Fiona Rae (1991), Alison Wilding (1992), Hannah Collins (1993) and Rachel Whiteread (1991 and 1993), Shirozeh Houshiary (1994) and Mona Hatoum (1995).

This year's nominees are Christine Borland, Angela Bulloch, Cornelia Parker & Gillian Wearing.

### **A Little History.....**

Since the Turner prize was started in the 1980's, all the other winners and the majority of those on the shortlist have been men. This is not from an absent of talent amongst British women artists. The sub-text of those nominated to the Turner prize shortlist has much to do with competition between the leading art dealers and the value-judgements made about a national versus international reputation amongst the individual artists.

### **Previous Winners and their dealers**

1984 Malcolm Morley	Anthony D'Offay
1985 Howard Hodgkin	Knoedler
1986 Gilbert & George	Anthony D'Offay
1987 Richard Deacon	Lisson
1988 Tony Cragg	Lisson
1989 Richard Long	Anthony D'Offay
1990 prize suspended for a year, while refinanced and rules changed	
1991 Anish Kapoor	Lisson
1992 Grenville Davey	Lisson
1993 Rachel Whiteread	Anthony D'Offay
1994 Anthony Gormley	White Cube
1995 Damien Hirst	White Cube
1996 Douglas Gordon	Lisson

Clearly, there is a long way to go before any kind of equity is achieved ! But one should not underestimate the help that the auspices of a powerful gallery, sharp public-relations skills and the impact of calculated and carefully judged timing of shows around May (when the selection takes place) can have on one's chances of nomination and winning.

An after-thought : One of my friends in order to cheer herself up regularly rehearses her acceptance speech for the Turner prize. Can we really say women's work is increasingly valued when Damian Hirst commented in his acceptance speech that his best production in the previous year was the birth of his first child ?

If you have information on similar patterns of institutionalised discrimination, please send them to the editor : [k.deepwell@ukonline.co.uk](mailto:k.deepwell@ukonline.co.uk)

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# Bitch Mutant Manifesto

## VNS MATRIX

The atomic wind catches your wings and you are propelled backwards into the future, an entity time travelling through the late C20th, a space case, an alien angel maybe, looking down the deep throat of a million catastrophes.

screenflash of a millionmillion conscious machines  
burns brilliant  
users caught in the static blitz of carrier fire  
unseeing the download that scribbles on their burntout retinas  
seize in postreal epileptic bliss  
eat code and die

Sucked in, down through a vortex of banality. You have just missed the twentieth century. You are on the brink of the millenium - which one - what does it matter? It's the cross dissolve that's captivating. The hot contagion of millenia fever fuses retro with futro, catapulting bodies with organs into technotopia . . . where code dictates pleasure and satisfies desire.

Pretty pretty applets adorn my throat. I am strings of binary. I am pure artifice. Read only my memories. Upload me into your pornographic imagination. Write me. Identity explodes in multiple morphingsand infiltrates the system at root.



## **SUCK MY CODE**

Subject X says transcendence lies at the limit of worlds, where now and now, here and elsewhere, text and membrane impact.

Where truth evaporates Where nothing is certain There are no maps The limit is NO CARRIER , the sudden shock of no contact, reaching out to touch [someone] but the skin is cold...

The limit is permission denied, vision doubled, and flesh necrotic.

Command line error

Heavy eyelids fold over my pupils, like curtains of lead. Hot ice kisses my synapses with an (ec)static rush. My system is nervous, neurons screaming - spiralling towards the singularity. Floating in ether, my body implodes.

I become the FIRE.

Flame me if you dare.

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# DocumentaX, Kassel 1997

## **N.Paradoxa Review**

Documenta X : Curator : Catherine David.

Documenta Artists : Vito Acconci, Robert Adams, Pawel Althamer, Archigram (Ron Herron), Archizoom Associati (Andrea Branzi), Art & Language, Aya & Gal Middle East, Oladélé Ajiboyé Bamgboyé, Lothar Baumgarten, Catherine Beaugrand, Joachim Blank/Karl Heinz Jeron, Marcel Broodthaers, Heath Bunting, Charles Burnett, Jean Marc Bustamante, Lygia Clark, James Coleman, Collective (La Ciutat de la Gent), Stephen Craig, Joseph Crandall, Stan Douglas, Walker Evans, Öyvind Falhström, Harun Farocki, Fischli & Weiss, Peter Friedl, Holger Friese, Liam Gillick, Heiner Goebbels, Dorothee Golz, Dan Graham, Hervé Graumann, Toni Grand, Johan Grimonprez, Ulrike Grossarth, Hans Haacke, Raymond Hains, Richard Hamilton, Richard Hamilton/ecke bonk, Siobhán Hapaska, Michal Heiman, Jörg Herold, Christine Hill, Carsten Höller/Rosemarie Trockel, Christine & Irene Hohenbüchler, Edgar Honetschläger, Felix S. Huber/Philip Pocock/Florian Wenz/Udo Noll, Hybrid Workspace, jodi (Joan Heemskerk/Dirk Paesmans), Mike Kelley, Mike Kelley/Tony Oursler, William Kentridge, Martin Kippenberger, Joachim Koester, Aglaia Konrad, Peter Kogler, Rem Koolhaas, Hans-Werner Kroesinger, Suzanne Lafont, Sigalit Landau, Maria Lassnig, Jan Lauwers, Antonia Lerch, Helen Levitt, Chris Marker, Kerry James Marshall, Christoph Marthaler/Anna Viebrock, Gordon Matta-Clark, Steve McQueen, Yana Milev, Mariella Mosler, Jean-Luc Mouléne, Reinhard Mucha, Christian Philipp Müller, Matt Mullican, Antoni Muntadas, Matthew Ngui, Carsten Nicolai, Olaf Nicolai, Stanislas Nordey, Hélio Oiticica, Gabriel Orozco, Adam Page, Marc Pataut, Raoul Peck, Marko Peljhan, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Lari Pittman, Emilio Prini, Stefan Pucher, David Reeb, Gerhard Richter, Liisa Roberts, Anne-Marie

Schneider, Jean-Louis Schoellkopf, Thomas Schütte, Michael Simon, Abderrahmane Sissako, Alison & Peter Smithson, Alexander Sokurow, Nancy Spero, Gob Squad, Cave of Memory, Meg Stuart, Slaven Tolj, Erik Steinbrecher, Tunga, Uri Tzaig, Danielle Vallert Kleiner, Ed van der Elskén, Aldo van Eyck, Marijke van Warmerdam, Carl Michael von Hausswolff, Martin Walde, Jeff Wall, Lois Weinberger, Franz West, Garry Winogrand, Eva Wohlegemuth/Andreas Baumann, Penny Yassour, Andrea Zittel, Heimo Zobernig.30/c.107.

Speakers, 100 Days at *Documenta X*: Ackbar Abbasm, Giorgio Agamben, Sadik J. Al-Azm, Ariella Azoulay, Etienne Baliabar, Carlos Basualdo, Fethi Benslama, Ulrich Bielefeld, Azmi Bishara, Stefano Boeri, Ginevra Bompiani, Collete Braeckman, Andrea Branzi, Charles Burnett, Ery Camara, Yan Ciret, Jef Cornelis, Mike Davis, Clementine Deliss, Diedrich Diederichsen, Corinne Diserens, Manfred Eicher, Okwui Enwezor, Nuruddin Farah, Harun Farocki, Michel Feher, Alexander Garcia Duttmann, Armand Gatti, Peter Gente, Susan George, Edouard Glissant, Ulrike Grossarth, Serge Gruzinski, Andreas Huyssen, Alain Joxe, Francois Jullien, Thomas W. Keenan, Mike Kelley, Rem Koolhaas, Phillipe Lacoue-Labarthe, Simon Lamuniere, Antonia Lerch, Yang Lian, Laurence Louppe, Geert Lovinck, Chris Marker, Rashid Masharawi, Paulo Mendes da Rocha, Masao Miyoshi, Tierno Monenembo, Carlos Monsivais, Valentin Yves Mudimbe, Jean-Luc Nancy, Stanislas Nordey, Michael Oppitz, Christos Papoulias, Raoul Peck, Marco Peljhan, Claus Philipp, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Philip Pocock, Suely Rolnik, Raoul Ruiz, Mikhail Ryklin, Edward W. Said, Saskia Sassen, Walter Seitter, Vandana Shiva, Wolf Singer, Abderrahmane Sissako, Edward Soja, Alexander Sokurow, Wole Soyinka, Gayatri Spivak, Ritsaert ten Cate, Johan van der Keuken, Maerbak Vatchagaev, Jeff Wall, Lois Weinberger, Francois Zourabichvili. 13/100

## **A Brief Analysis of the Women Artists Shown in Documenta X**

**Curator** : Catherine David b.1954

30 women artists represented amongst c. 107 projects.

Women Artists, whose work represented historical examples within the framework of *Documenta X*.

date of birth & country, current place of living/working, if different

Alison Smithson & Peter Smithson, working since 1950s, UK

Lygia Clark 1920-1988, b. Belo Horizonte, d. Rio de Janeiro

Maria Lassnig b.1919 Kappel, lives Vienna

Helen Levitt b.1913, Bensonhurst, lives New York.

Nancy Spero b.1926 Cleveland, Ohio, lives New York

### **Contemporary Women Artists selected:-**

date of birth & country, current place of living/working, if different

Catherine Beaugrand b.1953, Marzingarbe, lives Paris  
Dorothee Golz b.1960 Mulheim/Ruhr  
Ulrike Grossarth b.1952 Oberhausen, lives Berlin  
Siobhán Hapaska b.1965, Belfast, lives London  
Christine Hill b.1968, Binghampton, New York, lives Berlin  
Christine & Irene Hohenbüchler b.1964 Vienna, live Berlin/Vienna  
Aglaia Konrad b.1960, Slazburg, lives Brussels  
Suzanne Lafont b.1949, Nimes, lives Paris  
Sigalit Landau b.1969 Jerusalem  
Antonia Lerch \* in Mainz, lives Berlin  
Yana Milev b.1964, Leipzig, lives Berlin  
Mariella Mosler b.1962 Oldenburg, lives Hamburg  
Liisa Roberts b.1969 Paris, lives New York  
Anne-Marie Schneider b.1962 Chauny, lives Paris  
Meg Stuart b.1965 New Orleans, lives Brussels  
Danielle Vallert Kleiner b.1958 Paris  
Marijke van Warmerdam b.1959 Amstel, Holland, lives Amsterdamsdam  
Penny Yassour b.1950 Israel, lives Kibbutz Ein Harod Ihud  
Andrea Zittel b.1965 Escondido, California, lives New York.

### **Couples / collaborative projects in *Documenta X* where one partner is female**

Aya & Gal Middle East (collaboration for last 5 years, based in Jerusalem)  
Carsten Höller/Rosemarie Trockel(b.1952, Koln)  
jodi (Joan Heemskerk(b.1968, Netherlands, lives Barcelona)/Dirk Paesmans)  
Christoph Marthaler/Anna Viebrock(b.1951, Germany, incl. Berlin & Hamburg)  
Alison & Peter Smithson  
Eva Wohlegemuth(b.1955, Austria, lives Vienna)/Andreas Baumann

### **Analysis by Age**

Sigalit Landau, Liisa Roberts, Christine Hill and Joan Heemskerk are the youngest amongst these artists by 3 years.

The majority of the contemporary artists (twelve) are born 1958-1965  
Seven women slightly older amongst the contemporary group are all born between 1948-1955: Penny Yassour, Suzanne Lafont, Ulrike Grossarth, Catherine Beaugrand, Anna Viebrock, Rosemarie Trockel, Eva Wohlegemuth

### **Analysis by Country of Work**

With two exceptions, the majority of women artists selected for *Documenta X*

live and work in either New York, Jerusalem or European cities (namely, Lygia Clark and Penny Yassour). Largest group amongst these women are those working in Berlin (6). Combined with those working in Germany, 9 women currently live and work in Germany. Second largest group come from Paris (4), then Israel (3) - two of these from Jerusalem, Vienna (3) , New York (3), Brussels (2) , London (2) with single representatives working in Rio de Janeiro, Barcelona and Holland.

Of all these women artists, Suzanne Lafont was also included in Documenta IX curated by Jan Hoet, which was notorious for its under-representation of women. In Documenta IX , there were 186 artists whose work was selected and shown, of these only 24 were women (13%). Namely, Marina Abramovic, Dara Birnbaum, Louise Bourgeois, Marie-Jose Burki, Silvie & Cherif Defraoui, Marlene Dumas, Rose Finn-Kelcey, Vera Frenkel, Angela Grauerholz, Rebecca Horn, Roni Horn, Suzanne Lafont, Zoe Leonard, Ingeborg Luscher, Marisa Merz, Liliano Moro, Christa Naher, Cady Noland, Susan Rothenberg, Maria Serebriakova, Mariella Simoni, Pat Steir.

The under-representation of women in *Documenta IX* sparked a protest from Uta Meta Bauer, Tina Geissler and Sandra Hastenteufel called *Information Service*. A documentation project / archive on contemporary women artists presented as a gallery installation at the Martin Schmitz Gallery in 1992. (see Sabeth Buchmann 'Information Service: Info-Work' *October* 71 Winter 1995 pp.103-108). There was also an alternative Documenta *MISS-ING* 34 rooms in the Scheunenviertel, East Berlin in 1992 which profiled women's work , 70 women from 18 countries, as a similar form of protest (see L Green 'Another Documenta' *Women's Art Magazine* No.48 Sept/Oct 1992).

*Documenta X* offered very few examples of women as historical precedents for the trends explored in Poetics/Politics. Instead the curators confined presented largely women artists from two distinct and much younger generations and from a distinctly European base. Women from Asia, Australia & the Pacific Rim, Canada, Africa or Latin America (with the exception of Lygia Clark) were notorious by their absence. Through these means the curatorial team neatly circumvented the impact of feminism in the visual arts, surely a dominant problematic for the modern emergence of poetics and politics. In spite of this, they nevertheless succeeded in raising the representation of women over the notional 15% threshold (current in many contemporary art exhibitions) to 35%.

In some respects, given the history of *Documenta*, a remarkable achievement !

While Catherine David was very clear that her intention in *Documenta X* was not to provide either a survey or a representative cross-section of trends in contemporary visual arts, nevertheless her selection should be assessed against the themes and ideas she offered as guidelines in this exhibition. *Documenta X* had the first woman curator of any *Documenta*. The press' general attitude towards Catherine David as the curator however has been marked by a remarkable degree of (sexist)

hostility with many accusations and complaints about her personal attitude and behaviour at press conferences. *Documenta X* has nevertheless appeared to be very popular with the gallery-going public attracting a larger number of visitors than ever and the press itself registering to attend the event in phenomenal numbers. 1,500 attended the press days at the opening event and a further 500+ were expected to visit after the doors had opened to the public.

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# Autobiographical Patterns

**Janis Jefferies**

This essay received an Honorable Mention, in the 1996 Surface Design Association (California) Critical Writing Competition. It is reproduced from the *Surface Design Journal*, Summer 1997 edition by kind permission of the author.

When a female signature is assigned to authorship, autobiography, within the literary histories in the West, has been named paradoxically both as a mainstream writing genre and positioned as marginal practice. Traditional opinions on autobiography usually have been grounded within the idea of the 'I' of self-identity as reflective self-presence and discussed within the terms set by the Cartesian subject: a universal, singular self - linked with the thinking, rational subject of eternal human nature. Historically this has been codified as male. For women, autobiographical spaces have been profoundly fraught with tension, since the struggles to be the subject both of and in our own writing and speaking discourse incur problematic gendered readings. By challenging the universality of self-identity, women have culturally been identified as 'Other' : exotic, unruly, irrational, uncivilised, and different to the male norm. These classifications established a hierarchy of naming as well as binary oppositions ; this has had the effect of both legitimising the potential of a female speaking subject as 'other' to the limits of cultural practice and at the same time, has fixed a conception of autobiography as the feminine, natural self-portrait par excellence.<sup>1</sup>

In another register, the coalescence between women and textiles has produced a fixity of identity in the West, which has named but not always has expanded or moved beyond a single definition of both terms.<sup>2</sup> This essay is concerned with this double

paradox and ways in which I could begin to situate the self, subjectivity, and the plurality of contemporary textile practice as mobile entities that transgress the old borders and boundaries of certitude and knowledge.

What is the cultural significance of the embodiment of this double dislocation and fixity: woman / autobiography and woman / textiles? Could Rosemarie Trockel's 1988 machine knitted abstract of Descartes' '*Cogito, ergo sum*' (I think, therefore I am) be considered as a signpost out of this double-bind and claustrophobic restriction? Does it not parody the Cartesian subject referred to earlier? I speculate that the mimicking of the *pure* canvas of Kandinsky is played off in two ways. First, it is mimicked by knitting and second, by reinscribing the shaky signature of the hand stitched, handwritten feminine 'I' which transgresses its smooth surface of production. This idea of transgression which ruptures both the formal properties of a discipline and the *proper* place of a gendered subject is profoundly disturbing and unsettling to the body politic. Do Mike Kelly's failed power fantasies of dirty, messy, soft toys trash and transgress traditional forms of heroic media that include ideas of appropriate masculinity and false notions of domesticity? For me, each of these works speak through an "autographies" of hybridity, encompassing both the textual configurations of subjectivity in language and the potential performative role of practices which deploy textile processes and 'stuff' in disturbing and unstable forms.

As Jeanne Perreault has remarked, one way in which autographies differs from autobiography is that it is not necessarily concerned with the process or unfolding of life events as reflective self-presence. Rather, autographies make the writing itself an aspect of selfhood through which the writer experiences and brings into being the possibility of playful, even wicked, self-invention.<sup>3</sup> Fictional manifestations may go beyond representation of the self, just as contemporary cultural practices may transgress the very naming of their gendered categorisation to produce an infinite undecidable set of contestations. These manifestations of 'throwing-out-of-joint' disrupt any notion of stable and definable subject or genre and lurk at the very margins of mobile, fluid identities and subjectivities. Perhaps I/you/we in the West can speak with some confidence about women's achievements in general both in autobiographical writing and textiles. I would argue, however, that each category remains provisional as a tentative grammar of transformations and differences. I believe that these are the new possibilities of both disciplines - of writing and textiles in an ongoing relationship which provides an eclectically errant and culturally disruptive range of practices within an expanded field of cultural terms and definitions.

In earlier decades, the linking of the metaphors of pen and needle are retold and recalled in a fragment of Elaine Showalter's own autobiographical anecdote which denotes, for me, a hidden meaning behind the text and textile which forms the very intertextuality of its pages. A women's language is evoked as a social document of female experience. Piecing and writing are analogous to the process of quilt making which '...corresponds to the writing process, on the level of the word, the sentence,

the structure of the story or novel and these images, motifs or symbols that unify a fictional story'.<sup>4</sup> As Showalter reminds me in a further essay, a number of women's 19th century texts discuss the problem of reading a quilt, of deciphering the language of pieces like pages in an album.<sup>5</sup>

A century later, Lucy Lippard's oft-quoted observation that 'the quilt has become the prime visual metaphor for women's lives, women's culture' provided a situated knowledge for a version of feminist art practice that now may be seen as universalising female experience.<sup>6</sup> Whereas the 'I' of the signature of Showalter is absent inside 'Piecing and Writing', it is always paradoxically present in the writing as a controlling author of the text. Does Showalter not insist on a common ground between women's lives, women's writing and the reader/viewer who brings appropriate feminine sensibility to narratives that any woman might know (my italics)? However, this apparent coherence of the narrative and homogenisation of experience is acknowledged and also mourned by Showalter as one who has 'exaggerated the importance of women's culture' in order to find 'a literature of our own.'

To create a separate canon of women's writing through historical orientation and the specific characteristics of language, genre and influence is comparable to material counterparts in Lippard's search for a female aesthetic and Judy Chicago's revival of feminine crafts in *The Dinner Party*. Are we ruining our eyes, Showalter asks, in finishing a female heritage that may have become a museum piece? Who is included in the 'we' here? Is this a nostalgic reminiscence for the past or a disturbance to the certainty of knowledge in an early feminist's traditional faith of the liberating effects of identity politics and women's rights?

Rereading these texts in the late nineties provides another train of speculation insofar as the decentered structure of a woman's text and textile fragment is refigured in the processes of *écriture féminine*. In the *verbal quilt* of (an) other feminist text, Rachel Blau DuPlessis argues that there is an appeal to the voice of the female body which speaks of itself as subject as: non-hierarchical... breaking hierarchical structures, making an even display of elements over the surface with no climatic movement, having the materials organised into many centres.<sup>7</sup> As practiced by Hélène Cixous, *écriture féminine* becomes impossible to theorise. Cixous describes this practice of 'writing from and of the body,' as 'feminine' in two senses. First, that it is potentially available to both sexes; second, that the new relations between the subject and "other" can be negotiated once the *feminine* subject position refuses fear and assimilation of the other's difference.<sup>8</sup> This way of writing does not claim unmediated access to the body since the body is figured metaphorically and anti-naturalistically to create fictions of the self. Although, for the French writer and theorist Luce Irigaray, the conditions that moments of subjectivity signal the 'irrational feminine' as an enabling force within the symbolic order of language, Julia Kristeva provides a reading of the *feminine* which is not reducible to its verbal translation or biological naming.<sup>9</sup> A critical use of the self of the *feminine* and of



textile materials and processes act as metaphoric signs of autobiographical patterns within cultural practice.

While I would not wish to remove women out of history, economics, class or race, to *write* the body may allow for a construction of the *feminine* against a fixing of identity within categories that deny the complexities of subjectivity and creative, gendered contradictions. As in the examples of work produced by Rosemarie Trockel and Mike Kelley, gendered contradictions encoded critically in the hybridisation of textiles are disturbing and troubling to viewers.

Reflections on self, on writing, on textiles are unsettling. When 'I' reflects on 'I', what do I imagine it to be? Perhaps 'I' will only know myself when another is there? Is the 'I' that makes a piece of the work the same 'I' that will write its interpretation? How 'I' move will be in relation to others and to the other in myself, as a subject-in-process tracking the psychoanalytic terrain of Jacques Lacan and Julia Kristeva.

The production of the subject, and the abandonment of the unitary subject position required by the mastery of phallic language, permits us to adopt a number of positions simultaneously. This also is primarily a question of positionality in language which does not faithfully represent the already extant life. For many contemporary practitioners like Trockel and Kelley, who mobilise critical ideas in relation to their studio practices, this positionality is indexed by placing subjectivity in process, where meanings and readings are staged, played off and multiplied. Therefore, a will towards the discursive and the reformulation of experience has consequences for the subjectivities of both women and men.

A critical use of self, of the *feminine* and of textile materials and processes, combine together as metaphoric signs of new autobiographical or *autographic* patterns with cultural practice. Together they operate as a lived tension between the 'I' and other, the life of the text and textile and the terrain of the lived.

One of my favourite examples from writing is Carolyn Steedman's *Landscape of a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives* in which Steedman's story of the *eye* and that of another 'I', the Usher of her mother's story, allows me, as a reader, to be involved in the places where what has already happened is reworked to give events meaning. Steedman tells of her mother wearing the *New Look* coat/dress of gabardine which fell into pleats from the waist at her back. On one level this is a literal image since throughout the narrative it figures as a very real and constantly present thing. Yet, it also projects an image of desire as the *New Look* of her dreams: a common fantasy for white working-class women in postwar Britain. In Steedman's story, the coat/dress has a dual function which not only refers to a specific moment of postwar Britain but also acts as a personal structure of feeling. This coat/dress is both an image and a product which represents several fragments of an autobiography written as 'bits and pieces from which the psychological selfhood is made'.<sup>10</sup>

Autobiographical references abound in the textile installation, *We Knitted Braids for Her*, and explode in the many different voices and guises of identity that are

played with by the Austrian twins, Christine and Irene Hohenbuchler, with their sister Heidemarie. In their first UK exhibition held at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London in 1995, language, texts and textiles are interwoven to probe the conditions of subjectivity and autobiography in complex webs or chains of knitting, dream diaries and woven bundles of cloth.<sup>11</sup>

Here, the position of textiles as a language is enmeshed, in my view, with the processes of *écriture féminine*. Textiles, as material processes and stuff, are literally abundant both in the installation and figured as a metaphor in a narrative flow of writing and speaking inseparable from the *feminine* as it meanders between 'I' and 'other.'

In May 1996, Tracey Emin opened *The Tracey Emin Museum* for a month-long living autobiography to encourage people to tell their own life stories that normally they would not disclose. In *Hotel International* from the *MinkyMankys* show in London in 1993 and in Tracey Emin *Everyone I Ever Slept With, 1963-1995* (Tent, mixed media, 1996), reassembled in her living museum, a tent is covered with patterned fabrics made out of all her old clothes and old household fabrics. And yet, a comforting environment is denied with a hundred names of past lovers and friends, stories of abortion, suicide attempts and debt. While quilting and embroidery techniques are employed, Emin's gigantic patchwork adorned tent refuses the first wave of a woman's celebratory experience, cited earlier through the example of Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party*. Ideas of home and household fabrics are frequently inscribed in those earlier herstories that Elaine Showalter so meticulously recorded.

Picture-puzzle scraps of dislocated and fragmentary lives created a unified pattern, as in the overall texture of the quilt. But below these surfaces, as I know, the 'monstrous feminine' resides: a place of sexual energy which is both dangerous and pleasurable, angry and 'chaotic This is not the 'feminine' designated subject-position of patience and prudence, nurture and nature. As Tracey Emin explains in an interview with Anita Chaudhuri, 'It's boring to say that confronting these experiences and making beautiful things out them is something of a therapy for me... it's something much darker than that'.<sup>12</sup>

I would argue that the repetition of unified patterns of experience pieced and patched into a coherent, overall whole are broken by a new wave of *bad* girl (and boy) scenarios of Tracey Emin and the Hohenbuchler sisters.<sup>13</sup> In my view, their work ruptures the verbal and visual narratives of stereotyped femininity and autobiography to produce an autographies of hybridity. Stereotyped patterns of masculinity continue to be transgressed. For example, Neil Macinnis relates his experiences in a recent interview with Margo Mensing: 'Both the domain of textiles and sexuality are informed by the conditions of habituated practice. Cultural artefacts and social interaction facilitate a meaningful history of use through sensory experience located first in the body rather than the mind'.<sup>14</sup> If Macinnis' use of Rococo French silks correlates with an immersion into gay culture and queer

theory, then the *Home Boys* described in James Levine's essay of the same title critique ideas of any essential femininity or masculinity.<sup>15</sup> Frequently, staging the home is reworked through Freudian and Kleinian theories of childhood. I enter through a restaged *home* of cots, beds, mattresses, drapes, curtains, stuffed toys and chairs, mats, and rugs which exceed their enigmatic forms, signifying future dysfunctional autobiographical patterns.

The domestic, hybridised objects of the *English* artists, Christopher Lee and Darren Caird, Perminder Kaur and Nina Saunders, continue to disrupt familiar territories of place as rhetorical investigations of escape and fixed identity.<sup>16</sup> The questions as to who we are in terms of autobiography can be replaced by what we are as the self is understood as a moving line or thread that takes us toward becoming other than that which we may think we know we arrive. As these hybridised objects recede into a different sense of place, so the subject is destabilised: both the maker and viewer risk their status as knowing complete subjects with calculable, gendered subjectivities neatly intact.

In conclusion, the unpacking of certitude, manifested in the works referenced throughout this essay, become further metaphors for transience, transgression and the received models of selfhood in which possibilities of *autography* are yet to be fully rehearsed. This would include my own tentative excursions into invented identities as played in exhibitions like *Pretext: Heteronymms*.<sup>17</sup>

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## Notes

1. Janis Jefferies 'Autobiographies, Subjectivities, Selves,' in Juliet Steyn (ed) *Act 1: Writing Art*, Pluto Press, 1995. Additionally, James Olney (ed.) *Autobiography: Essays, Theoretical and Critical* (Princeton University Press, 1980), and Sidonie Smith *Subjectivity. Identity and The Body: Women's Autobiographical Practices in the Twentieth Century* (Indiana University Press, 1993) provide useful, gendered accounts of this areas
2. Janis Jefferies 'Text and Textiles: Weaving Across the Borderlines' in Katy Deepwell (ed) *New Feminist Art Criticism* (Manchester University Press, 1995) pp. 164-173
3. Jeanne Perreault, *Writing Selves: Contemporary Feminist Autography* (University of Minnesota Press, 1995). In her critique of autobiography Jeanne proposes that "autographics" is a kind of writing which evokes and suggests the flexible process of both autos and graphia. She proposes that although an unwieldy generic term, "autographics" can just about encompass the complexities of contemporary texts which index the conventions of autobiography but resist the monadic by

bringing into being a "self" which the writer names as "I"

4. Elaine Showalter 'Piecing and Writing' in Nancy K Miller *The Poetics of Gender* (Columbia University Press, 1986) pp. 222-247
5. Elaine Showalter, "Common Threads" in *Sister's Choice: Tradition and Change in American Women's Writing* (Oxford University Press Paperback, 1994) pp.145-175
6. Lucy Lippard 'Up, Down and Across: A New Frame for New Quilts' in Charlotte Robinson (ed.) *The Artist and the Quilt* (New York, Knopf Press 1983) p.18
7. Rachel Blau DuPlessis *The Pink Guitar: Writing as Feminist Practice* (New York: Routledge, 1990)
8. Helene Cixous *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing (Minnesota University Press, Minneapolis, 1986) and Susan Sellars, Helene Cixous *Authorship, Autobiography and Love* (London Polity Press, 1996).
9. For example, Luce Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1993) and Julia Kristeva *Desire in Language. A Semiotic approach to literature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980)
10. Carolyn Steedman *Landscape of a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives* (London: Virago, 1986) p. 21
11. Janis Jefferies "Text, Textile, Sex and Sexuality" in *Women 's Art Magazine* no. 68 (UK) pp.5-10
12. Tracey Emin, interview with Anita Chaudhuri in *The Guardian* newspaper (London) (24th January 1996).
13. *Bad Girls* derives from the title of an exhibition held at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, UK in 1993 and included the work of among other English, Irish and American women artists, the late Helen Chadwick. This exhibition was a smaller version of a larger one held in New York in 1992 which also included the work of men. It was an exhibition that proposed gender transgression in terms of traditional definitions of masculinity and femininity. While Tracey Emin was not represented in either show, her work nonetheless refers to an activity of practice which consciously deals with transgressing the boundaries of the proper name to produce a more, raw, improvisational approach to making. Process rather than end result and deliberately low-tech methods are employed. See also Neville Wakefield 's catalogue essay in *Brilliant: New Art from London!* for Walker Art Gallery, Minneapolis, USA 22nd October-7 January 1 1995/96.
14. Margo Mensing 'Electronic Textiles: New Possibilities' in *Fiberarts* (Summer 1996) p.45. See also Neil MacLinnis' contributing essays to the preconference publication (October 1995, Montreal, Textiles Sismographes and the postconference publication, *A Textile Identity* (Le Conseil des Arts : Textiles do Quebec, Canada), March/April 1995 and January 1996 respectively.
15. James Levine 'Home Boys' *Artforum* (October 1991) pp.101-105
16. Christopher Lee graduated from Goldsmiths College, University of London, UK with an MA in Textiles (studio practice and critical theory) in 1994; Darren Caird graduated from Goldsmiths College, University of London with a BA in Textiles in 1996; Perminder Kaur's exhibition. *Cold Comfort*, was held at the Ikon Gallery, Birmingham and Mead Gallery, Coventry, UK in May/June 1996; and Nina Saunders exhibition *Familiar Territories*, was held at the Ferens Art Gallery, Hull, from November 1994- January 1996. For an interesting discussion around illusions of home against which a range of hybrid and illusory objects subvert the familiar and gendered categorization, see Nancy Spector 'Homeward-Bound' *Parkett* (Zurich ) (1991) pp. 80-89
17. *Pretext: Heteronyms* was the title of an exhibition which took place in Clink Street studios,

London, UK during November/December 1995. I participated under a different identity and practice from which 'I' would normally be known. A catalogue, with an introduction by Juliet Steyn is available through Rear Window publications.

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## From Plants to Politics The Particular History of A Saskatchewan Tapestry in commemoration of Kate Waterhouse & Margreet van Walsem

**Ann Newdigate**

‘Another year, another party’ wrote Kate Waterhouse in 1979 on her 80th birthday in the copy she gave me of the second edition of her book *Saskatchewan Dyes: a personal adventure with plants and colours*. Thirteen years later she asked me to have all her dyed fleece, when she moved to a care home in Kerrobert, leaving her little home in Craik where she had experimented with dye plants such as madder and woad - the dye that made the ancient Britons blue.

Kate Waterhouse, whose pioneering spirit in the crafts won her a lifetime membership of the Saskatchewan Craft Council, was as much a scientist as an artist. She not only investigated dye plants from the prairie, sending away for seeds to cultivate, but always kept meticulous notes concerning the mordants or water source she had used, the time of year that the plants were harvested, and other particular circumstances that would make it possible for her and others to replicate the results. After her book went into a second printing she received a Governor General's medal for her research and writing. The fleece she gave me was classified according to its provenance and the conditions for dyeing accompanied each bag. The following is but one example of the hundreds of Kate's informative notes:

‘This is pre-mordanted alum wool, set in a spent umbilicaria dyepot. It's Sask. so you can use it. Thought it would make the display brighter. This alum mordanted wool opens up a new trend of thought and possibilities’.

Until her husband George's death, Kate had farmed and eventually nursed him, reading a book a day to him after he lost his eyesight. She was 62 when he died and she then decided to complete an English grammar course that was left over from her primary education. She was never a quitter, but fortunately for us the adult education

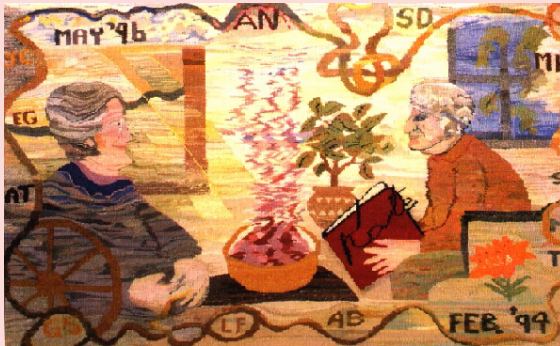


Photo above left: Kate Waterhouse by Ann Newdigate. Two photos of work on the tapestry. Above, detail of *Another Year, Another Party*: Saskatchewan Community Tapestry.

officer in Regina suggested that she would enjoy doing a weaving course more than English grammar. And Kate sure had a great capacity for enjoyment, so she took the advice. However since no further courses were available she then wrote away for information, bought books, experimented, travelled if necessary to study, and all this led to a speciality that took her personal adventures with plants and colours into the public realm. In turn she gave many workshops herself.

What an honour to be given this very special material, but what a responsibility I was also given by being made custodian of such an important part of this amazing woman's work. Furthermore, to do this responsibility justice, the fleece still had to go through the transformation from amorphous, sensuous colour into tight skeins of useable yarn through the labour intensive process of hand carding and spinning. That in itself would then only be a beginning, and there would still have to be many decisions about what to do with it in order to give it the cultural value and form that it deserved.

For about a year I pondered and explored solutions, had sleepless nights, and finally devised a plan with Annabel Taylor, who runs the weaving program at the Woodlands campus of the Saskatchewan Institute of Science and Technology (SIAS) in Prince Albert eighty miles north of Saskatoon, where I live. She had been entrusted with our friend, Margreet van Walsem's equally special yarn after her untimely death. In 1971, when, at the Summer School of the Arts at Fort San, I had suggested to Kate that she put her knowledge of native Saskatchewan plants into a book, she had said that she would do so if I would help her. It was Margreet van Walsem, who was there too, who provided the additional encouragement for Kate.

Margreet van Walsem, whose own contribution to the discipline, and to the arts in general had been considerable, supported the venture in every way, and was responsible for invaluable assistance from the pulp mill in Prince Albert. She had studied theology in Holland before coming to Saskatchewan, and like Kate, starting a second career later in life in the arts. She had learned weaving in the authentic Navajo tradition from Anton Scerbinc of Castlegar, and quickly received a commission to do a major work, *Palaver*, for the Center of the Arts in Regina. When she moved to Prince Albert she saw the need for a support group in the arts, and promptly invited some people, whose work she respected, to participate in a weekly workshop that she voluntarily ran in her own studio. Annabel Taylor was one of the group who went on to make significant contributions through their own work. What Margreet taught was absolute professionalism. She had a way of laughing - not unkind - that allowed you to know you might rethink something you had done or not done. She demonstrated that, within the pleasure and sensuousness of the medium, resided a very serious and time-honoured pursuit. She had, after all, lived through the dark days of Holland during the second world war.

So Annabel and I invited the Prince Albert Weavers and Spinners Guild to participate in transforming the dyed yarn and fleece into a community tapestry honouring the professionalism and knowledge of these two women whose lives had been so different, but whose values were so similar. Happily the Guild agreed, and after Annabel and I had treated the fleece for possible moth infestation, it was parcelled out, and we all spun up a fair amount. The tapestry was to be made in the weaving studio at the SIAS Woodlands campus with participation of students in the program.

On a night in February, 1994, when the temperature was about -35<sup>°C</sup>, the project started to actually take shape when about twenty people met at the home of Therese Gaudet for a potluck feast. Later Therese consistently did regular weaving on the tapestry to keep it moving forward. At the feast I showed slides of Kate, Margreet, and their work to demonstrate their intelligent and professional approach to a textile medium often associated only with hobbyist practices. To prepare for the designing of the tapestry, I gave everyone a 7" x 11" sheet of strong acid free paper and we brought these back to SIAS the next morning with an image conveying our choice



of iconography for inclusion in the collaborative cartoon. I also brought books with ancient and contemporary images to inspire technical or symbolic solutions.

Working from all these sources, we developed a scaled cartoon in which everyone added their chosen element. This was satisfactorily resolved by the end of the day and, in addition there was also a good firm warp on the loom. The latter had encountered some inevitable tension problems that come from multiple different hands, but these were marvelously dealt with by Jill Couch, who had gained her expertise in New Zealand before coming to Canada. She only participated on that one occasion, but her contribution was most timely. Simultaneously some member of the Guild (who are not tapestry makers) lent their skills to carding and spinning more of Kate's fleece, to ensure an ample supply of material.

Finally the actual process of weaving could begin. Annabel then co-ordinated weekly sessions in which students, Guild member, and a few others met regularly to work on the tapestry. These sessions were preceded by discussions interpreting the cartoon, and often changes were made to the very spontaneous original images, for technical or aesthetic reasons. I went up to Prince Albert to participate in the actual weaving whenever I could. After each weaving session there was a group assessment of the success or otherwise of the day's work. These critiques, tempered by Annabel's quiet humour, ensured the quality of structure and design that were at risk from the range of skills involved. Criticism was democratic, with no hard feeling when some part of a woven contribution was taken out and re-done by someone else. "Too blue" I was told, for example, on a subsequent visit, but everyone could respect the collaborative and exacting interactions that resulted in the remarkable achievement of *Another Year, Another Party*.

It is important to look at the particular history that lay between the Idea of this community tapestry and the culminating cutting-off Celebration. Two years after the cartoon was drawn up the finished tapestry was graciously cut off from the loom by the Minister responsible for cultural affairs in Saskatchewan. The Honourable Carol Teichrob, who is recognised in the arts community for her support and understanding of the difficulties confronting the primary cultural producers, flew from Regina to Prince Albert to perform the ceremonious cutting-off of *Another Year, Another Party*, in a tradition that dates from Medieval times.

The particular histories, whereby any community tapestry materialises, are probably as varied as the people who have worked on them around the world. In this case there was no institution, benefactor, patron, or funding to dictate the imagery. Instead the imagery and construction developed compatibly, spontaneously, and pragmatically, out of a group collaborative negotiation by those willing to donate their time and diverse skills to doing the various aspects necessary for realisation of the work. This history, honouring the achievements and vision of Margreet van Walsem and Kate Waterhouse, has been documented by Shirley Spidla, who also wove on the tapestry, when she visited Prince Albert with me to regularly record the various stages of the work from beginning to end.

In March 1995 when the weaving of the tapestry was about two-thirds complete, Shirley Spidla and I visited Kate Waterhouse at the care home in Kerrobert, to report to her on the happy fate of her fleece, and to record some of her thoughts and experiences with her work and life in general. We found her looking beautiful and reading at the time *Briarpatch*, *MacLeans magazine* and *On the Take* by Stevie Cameron. A committed social democrat, Kate believed strongly in the power of co-operation. Although the tapestry was not yet quite complete at the time, she had the assurance that it would be, and that the enterprise to which she had committed the last valuable third of her life would not be forgotten. She died three months later in June at the age of 96. And at the end of the millenium, a tapestry - the real thing done in a Medieval process which basically has never changed - proclaims that many small gestures can constitute a continuum of public experience and knowledge that lives on beyond our various individual lives.

Because of Kate's and Margreet's acute awareness of the important role of politics in daily life and the arts, it was fitting that so important a personage as the Minister of Municipal affairs should have agreed to complete the chain of this community tapestry. *Another Year, Another Party* had begun, not simply when Kate Waterhouse gave me her yarn, or when Margreet invited Annabel Taylor to her weekly investigations into the possibilities for textile arts, nor perhaps at the potluck feast at Therese Gaudet's home, or even when we workshopped the cartoon in a northern Saskatchewan town, but possibly at the beginning of time when the art of weaving was discovered to be an integral part of the fabric of society.

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## Reading in Detail : An Analysis of the work of Ndidi Dike Nnadiyekwe

**Katy Deepwell**

*Ndidi Dike Nnadiyekwe was born in London. She went to secondary school in Onitsha, Nigeria before attending the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (1976-1984). Her work has been shown in many exhibitions in Nigeria, USA, and Europe including 'Nigerian Contemporary Art: A Female Perspective' (USA: Illinois, Ragdale Foundation, Lake Forest, October 1992); Seven Stories About Modern Art in Africa (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 1995); Eight African Women Artists (Liverpool, June 1993, London 181 Gallery). 'Nigeriana' (Nigerian High Commission, Ghana, 1990). In 1989 her work was included in the Havana Biennial exhibition in Cuba. She has taken part in several artists' workshops including one in 1989 organised by the Goethe Institute and Yaba College of Technology, Lagos and in 1995 a workshop for the Africa '95 festival in the UK at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park.*

'Dike pays fleeting attention to the indigenous art traditions of Africa, as though leafing through a vast volume of African cultural history: images do not stay long enough to make any lasting impression. She is drawn to the culture and art of Africa, yet she is distanced from it to the extent that she enjoys her freedom to take as much from the vast resources as her spirit wills. Consequently her sculptures merely suggest their cultural provenance, making no claim to particulars.' Chika Okeke'

Chika Okeke's reading of Ndidi Dike's work in the *Seven Stories About Modern Art in Africa* exhibition catalogue of 1995 highlights the much-debated tension between the modern and the traditional in contemporary Nigerian art as well as the politics of 'National Synthesis' developed by the Zaria Arts Society in Nigeria. Dike's wood panels are in this reading situated as a successful synthesis in which 'objects

from Akan, fulani and Igbo material cultures fuse together to create something tellingly African, dispassionately contemporary (there is also an unmistakable presence of uli, nsibidi and akwete motifs and designs in her work).<sup>2</sup> Okeke highlights the critical relation to traditional art forms which is characteristic of Dike's work and its modernity, while also suggesting that this different relationship may be the result of a different lived experience. How can we characterise this experience, as African, as specifically Nigerian, as a woman, as an artist?

In *Nka : Journal of Contemporary African Art* in 1995, Salah Hassan offers a useful framework for understanding 'The Modernist Experience in African Art' an article subtitled 'Visual Expressions of the Self and Cross-cultural Aesthetics'.<sup>3</sup> Hassan argues for an intertextual, dialogic approach to reveal social relations of intellectual production working at several different temporal, spatial and historical levels. While Hassan's article makes clear the number of different strategies adopted by the modern African artist in the renegotiation of the traditional and the modern and the extended dialogue with Western centers of modernism and modernist practice, he points also to the asymmetrical privileging of the West's preoccupation with a monologue between a presumed cultural self and an ethnographic 'other'.<sup>4</sup>

Taking on board Hassan's ideas and developing them from a Western feminist perspective, it is possible to position Dike's work in a new set of comparisons with the formal strategies across painting/relief/sculpture of the American modernist sculptor Louise Nevelson. The aim of the comparison is not to reinstate the binary opposition Hassan rightly criticises but to show how the comparison may enhance and develop an understanding of the particularity of each artist. Separated by nearly half a century in age, working in two different countries, America and Nigeria, the differences between these two artists superficially could not be greater.

What initially unites Nevelson and Dike are a number of formal strategies in their work. For both artists, their primary medium is wood, carved and assembled in panel forms, Dike's panelled reliefs and Nevelson's famous *Walls*. They both produce single works as part of larger series and both use found objects in their work, though Dike's work is less dependent on this than Nevelson's. Both artists' sculptures/reliefs rely on both accumulation of detail, 'multi-layered' textures and a strong tactile sense (These two features take on a very specific meaning in relation to the idea of 'reading in detail' (Naomi Schor) below and a case can easily be made that their work involves concepts of the feminine as identified by French writers like H. Cixous and L. Irigaray<sup>5</sup>). In order to compare the two artists in this way, a high degree of formalistic abstraction is needed: a position which overlooks all details even though the really interesting argument is only to be found in the accumulation of details. If one reads the detail, it is here that the differences between their projects lie and the contrast becomes most apparent between a Western modernist, born in Russia who lived and worked in America and a modern African artist, born in England who lives and works in Nigeria.

Although both artists deliberately restrict their palettes to a minimum number of colours: Nevelson to black, gold and white, Dike to the traditional uli colours - red, yellow ochre, white, earth hues and additional blues. Rather than relying on method in which the colour unifies and the piece works through shadows produced by architectural scale installation and lighting which is Nevelson's strategy, Dike only occasionally enhances the multiple types of natural wood she uses with inks, the stain generally highlights the basic colour of the wood. Dike's choice of woods also seeks to provide a continuity between old and new : Indonesian rosewood, elm, spotted beech, cedar, copperfoil, iroko, pirana, camwood and pinewood, whereas no such discrimination was made by Nevelson who painted the walls to hide the range of different, often scrap, woods she used.

Both artists repeatedly use a circle motif as symbolic not just of the sun, a circle/cycle of life, but also *ch'i* (a unifying breath, spirit), though again to very different ends and in the context of a different vocabulary of motifs. Dike's carved circle - the only motif to frequently cross the panels of her compositions - acts as visual focus to both unify the work, but also to introduce a spiritual dimension: Igbo cosmology. Nevelson frequently fragments the circle across the box forms which make up her walls and very occasionally she separates the circle out, highlighting its significance as a moon or sun form by hanging these separate forms above the entrance to her installations.

Nevelson did exploit the *ethnographic Other* in her work, with a particular interest in Mayan forms, and developed a personal collection of African masks between the 1930's and 1960s. Her interest in totems (both Mayan and African) was mediated by the Modernist gaze of Picasso and of Henry Moore, and she became familiar with these ideas through her friendships with Diego Riviera, Wolfgang Paalen and through the latter with Surrealism. If one remains locked in this paradigm, Dike's work can only appear as an *ethnographic Other* ; bearing the recognisable signs of *traditional* African motifs and carved forms. As Hassan points out, underlying this dichotomy is another of Western individualism versus perceptions of communally-centred activity in which:

'The *other* is perceived here as static, non-changing and ahistorical [practices arising from the traditional village African], while the 'self' is viewed as universal, dynamic, changing and historical' [the archetype of Western Modernist practice].<sup>6</sup>

However, this binary opposition is plainly false for the purposes of such a comparison, given Dike's practice and her location as a contemporary artist in Nigeria. The particulars here are again important as Dike's use of African imagery and symbols are not used to develop either a private symbolic vocabulary [much argued for in the case of key Modernists], nor are they available to be read in a straightforward iconographic way. Their particularity is important as a set of floating signifiers which announce a critical project towards a disappearing *traditional* culture. Dike describes her technique as 'mobile mixed media'. Her sculptures are

composite: assemblages of different but mainly African woods, frequently she adds to the panels, beads, mirrors or items from the Ijele masquerade, for example, Agbagho Mmuo, in which the nuances and the characteristics of female behaviour are displayed by men. Again, the contrast with Nevelson is revealing; for Nevelson, the found object, off-cuts of wood, broken chairs, random pieces of machine-tooled wood were incorporated into a larger whole in such a way as to lose their original identity and become a form within the greater single whole of the sculpture. In this, Nevelson followed a transformative Surrealist aesthetic which valued the 'found' object and chance selection. In Dike's work, such as 'Traditional Igbo Women Mirrorholders' part of the 'Diminishing Culture' series the mirrors are placed, almost in a procession, across the top section of the panelled piece. They remain objects to be perceived in themselves but are also drawn into a relationship with the horizontally carved sections beneath and the heavily worked circle which lies beneath the one on the far right.

How each artist uses the accumulation of detail across the surfaces of the walls/panels is also important. Nevelson built her walls as a structure of boxes, often with strong verticals, but using a varying set of abstract motifs, generated by found and assembled pieces. In Dike's work, strong vertical designs generally predominate. The motifs and patterns which accumulate across the panels emphasise a multiplicity of textures and different intensities between burnt carving and flat surfaces, in which, as the artist suggests, the working of the surface is designed to 'bring the flat piece of wood to life'. Incorporated into her reliefs are drawing motifs from the tradition of wood-carvings, textile patterns, uli motifs, - lizard, tortoise - derived from Igbo folk tales, Nsibide symbols from southeastern Nigeria - pictograms and Kalabashi burnt engravings as in her two pieces 'Offering for a Child' or 'Ndigbo Regalia' (a part of the traditional Igbo chieftaincy attire). In the choice of wood-carving, they bear an echo of the carving techniques of Igbo doors. Unlike these doors, the irregular panels do not conform to a uniformity in shape or overall design.

Chika Okeke draws a brief but interesting comparison in his discussion above with the work of El Anatsui, a teacher at Nsukka in the mid-seventies where Dike also studied, and Onobrakpeya's mixed media installations - an artist who like Dike, also moved from painting to 3-D media. Anatsui considered that 'modern art...can claim no legitimacy if it is not based on one's originary art traditions and culture, from which vantage it can then seek to appropriate suitable foreign ideas or techniques. It is the awareness of these historical realities by contemporary African peoples that could engender the necessary collective re-affirmation.'<sup>7</sup>

Anatsui's work also explores the history of Africa and the present Otherisation of Africa through assembled panels, carving, and pictographs from a range of African symbolic forms: nsibidi, Bamun, Njoya, Bolange, uli and adinkya. However, Dike's work, as Okeke acknowledges is far from fundamentalist, nor is it an argument concerning nationalism. Dike's works are a critical re-engagement with traditional forms, a search for a new identity, from the perspective of the modern African artist.

Hassan's article also usefully distinguishes the contemporary and the traditional by the specific historical-cultural location of its emergence in a formal education system, nationalistic cultural resurgence and systems of patronage and exhibition practices. Hassan highlights the movement towards a 'culturally rooted, self-conscious and 'African' aesthetic expression' in the modern African artist's search for new tropes of self-expression and new forms of synthesis between Western and traditional African influences: 'Rejecting the homogenizing effect of Western cultural imperialism, especially its neo-primitivising and exoticizing tendencies, African artists have repositioned themselves as creators of an autonomous global art.'<sup>8</sup>

While I agree with Hassan's argument via James Clifford for a new understanding of 'authenticity' to be 'reconceived as hybrid creative activity in a local present-becoming future' and that 'Non-Western cultural and artistic works are implicated by an interconnecting cultural system without necessarily being swamped by it'.<sup>9</sup> The production of authenticity has all too often been salvaged iconographically in art criticism as an argument for specific local character, a recognisable 'African-ness' in an international art market, rather than a more critical project concerning representation and the identification of presences/absences. Debates about postmodernism in the visual arts confusingly speak about both the importance of the local AND the critical deconstructive project of contemporary art defined in relationship to the employment of *floating signifiers* from diverse cultures.<sup>10</sup> However, hybridity in postmodern debates has frequently been asserted as an autonomous value without necessarily implying any critical reading or political stand. While it may add weight to claims for the recognition of an autonomous African art in the postmodern international mainstream, particularly where post-colonial debates are taken on board, debates around postmodernism are manifestly in need of distinguishing critically between works with a political cultural-critical edge and those which all too cynically gesture towards a seemingly radical look of hybrid *awareness*.

I would argue for productive engagement as opposed to relativity, since works are not always seen in their local context but increasingly positioned in an international frame and thus move in and out of many divergent contexts and different kinds of spaces. The exhibition space, the framing of the temporary show, the magazine and newspaper reportage, the catalogue all provide an endless layering and proliferation of meaning, framing and reframing the reading of the work.

Naomi Schor's discussion of the problematic detail is useful here, especially her discussion of Lukacs' use of particularity, or *specialty*, as a means to challenge Western aesthetics.<sup>11</sup> She argues that Lukacs reread Hegel's tripartite division of Aesthetics into the universal (the Ideal, determination of art); particularity (the arts as spatio-temporally different); and individuality (the socio-historical factors involved in the actual works of art with real examples). The centrality of the concept

of *particularity* in Lukacs is useful, as Schor describes it, for the way in which it acts as the middle or meeting point in which the forces generating a work of art are reconciled :

'There is then...a movement going from speciality to universality (and back), and at the same time, a movement going from speciality to individuality (and back) ; in both cases, it is the movement towards speciality that brings the process to closure.'<sup>12</sup>

These distinctions exist again only at the level of analysis but they do provide another point of departure from the contrast of universal and individual (a debate which modernism has laid exclusive claim to). For, as Lukacs also stresses: 'The relationship of particularity to individuality consists in an eternal process of cancellation(*Aufhebung*), wherein the moment of preservation (*Aufbewahrung*) is in a certain sense more strongly emphasized.'<sup>13</sup>

The detail, Schor argues, can manifest both presence and absence; it can act as a marker or operate as a trace of a trace. The detail does not simply authenticate, it can also negate, marking absence not just presence. Dike's works in the 'Diminishing Culture' series and related works are a form of history read through symptoms; marking as much the recognition of loss and of things which are negated through the production of presence. While it is not possible to 'exit' the Modernist paradigm neither is it fixed in oppositional binaries which permanently and automatically privilege one form or modality above another. This is not to deny the asymmetry, unevenness or power and privileges accrued to certain individuals and denied others only to argue that it is possible to unfix the values behind such binary oppositions.

Parallels between Nevelson and Dike are also revealing in terms of their positioning as both modernist artists and women. Laurie Wilson begins her iconographic analysis of Nevelson's work with the comment that 'many critics have either vigorously rejected any search for meaning, or have surrounded the work with vague metaphorical remarks about the mysterious worlds of dawn and dusk'<sup>14</sup>: allying the feminine with nature, and with closed and interior worlds. Misunderstanding, stereotyping and a lack of scholarship have surrounded the work of many Modernist women, even in the West. In Wilson's reading of Nevelson's oeuvre, three themes emerge as central ; royalty, marriage and death. These are read through the life and personality of the artist. Priority, however, is always accorded to individual autobiography which locate the production of the work as primarily personal responses to life experiences. Individualism is usually stressed rather than experiments with language, aesthetic preoccupations or a specific synthesis of social practices and ideas. Nevelson was unusual amongst her New York male and female contemporaries in developing a strongly abstract practice in sculpture.

Dike is similarly unusual amongst her own contemporaries in her adoption of carving as her media and this again underlines her critical relation to existing references and symbols. Traditionally Igbo doors have been carved by men even though uli wall painting is a female tradition with a developed vocabulary of abstract



motifs drawn from nature. The use of uli motifs in the work of many male painters associated with the Zaria Art Society and others trained at Nsukka might equally provide an interesting model of the appropriation of a female-produced form by male artists and another inflection of the synthesis of traditional and model. This is not a straightforward gendered role-reversal of forms because of the sex of the artist. However, Dike also appears interested in developing and exploring a female perspective within her critical appropriations but not in confining her work to female-orientated themes. The circle suggests a unifying perspective but it equally spatially acknowledges itself as a unique standpoint in the picture plane.

This is an edited version of an article in *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art*, Fall 1996.

This version appeared in an exhibition catalogue of Ndidi Dike Nnadike's work at the Chevron Gallery, Lagos in May/June 1997

Katy Deepwell has edited a collection of new essays on *Art Criticism and Africa* (Saffron Books, September 1997). Essays from Egypt, Europe, Zimbabwe, Nigeria and South Africa by Olabisi Silva, Everlyn Nicodemus, Fatma Ismail, John Picton, Olu Oguibe, Geroge Shire, Ola Oloidi, Colin Richards, David Koloane, Murray McCartney, Tony Mhonda and Barbara Murray. Enquiries and copies @ £12, email EasternArt@compuserve.com

## Notes

1. Chika Okeke in *Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa* exhibition catalogue, London: Whitechapel Art Gallery 27 Sept-26 November 1995, Malmö, 27 Jan-17 March, and Solomon R. Guggenheim, New York, mid-June-mid-September. p.69.
2. *ibid.*
3. Salah Hassan 'The Modernist Experience in African Art: Visual Expressions of the Self and Cross-cultural Aesthetics' *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art* Spring/Summer 1995 p.32
4. Hassan *ibid.*, p.32 & p.31
5. Naomi Schor *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* (Routledge, 1989).  
for references to Cixous and Irigaray see E. Marks and I. de Courtivron *New French Feminisms* (U.K.: Harvester, 1981) and M. Whitford *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine* (Routledge, 1991)
6. Hassan *op.cit.* p.31.
7. Okeke *op.cit.* p.58.
8. Hassan *op.cit.* p.31.
9. *ibid.*, p.32.
10. see C. Jencks *A Postmodern Reader* (Academie Editions, 1991)
11. Schor *op.cit.* p.62.

12. *ibid.*

13. *ibid.*

14. Laurie Wilson 'Bride of the Black Moon' *Arts Magazine* May 1980 p.140

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*n.paradoxa* : Issue No.4 , August 1997

## N.Paradoxa interview with Gisela Breitling

### **Katy Deepwell**

*Gisela Breitling is a feminist artist and art historian (b.1939) who lives and works in Berlin. She is a founder of Das Verborgene Museum (the Hidden Museum) in Berlin. In this interview with Katy Deepwell, she discusses her work on a number of different exhibition projects in Berlin and her writing since 1980.*

**Katy Deepwell: Could I begin by asking what were the themes and issues raised in your first book, *Die Spuren des Schiffs in den Wellen - eine autobiographische Suche nach den Frauen in der Kunstgeschichte (1980)*?**

**Gisela Breitling:** I wrote this book as a basic course for understanding the position of women in art and art history. I was trying to write an accessible book in which the experiences of one woman could be used to reflect debates about women as both viewers/consumers of art and as makers. In Germany, the women's movement began in the seventies without any real discussion of aesthetics - the art world was not well-represented in these discussions - which were more political or sociological. Women artists in Germany at the point, when I started these reflections, were often accused of being infected by middle-class (bourgeois) values by women who followed a Marxist or even a psychoanalytical line of thought. I wanted to highlight the work of women artists because I had gone through my own training in art without any connection with women artists. Sometimes, I had asked myself whether it was even normal for a woman to make art. If I saw a woman artist, I felt she must be an exception. I had in mind the question, is it possible to make art as a woman? I wanted to develop an art historical basis for my own biography - my real life.

It had also been very strange for me to discover that there were women artists often in very badly written books with anti-feminist authors, for example, Hans Hildebrandt's *Die Frau Als Kunstlerin* (Berlin 1928). Other books of male writers, like Ernst Guhl's (1858) *Die Frauen in der Kunstgeschichte* or Ludwig Hirsch (1907) *Die Frau in der Bildenden Kunst* discuss women artists but they always imply that they are not very important. This was both strange and hurtful. I wanted to write about not only that there were women artists but also to explain why they were not there.

In my second book *Das Verborgene Eros* I develop this form of analysis through a discussion of Werner Hofmann's *Zeichen und Gestalt - die Malerei des 20Jahrhunderts* (1957), a Fischer 'tascherbuch' a popular basic art history book, in which of the 252 named artists discussed, there appear only 5 women. Of these 5 artists, however, only Sophie Taueber-Arp's work is discussed. The other example I used was *Grauzonen-Farbwelten Kunst und Zeitbilder, 1945-1955*, a 1983 Akademie der Kunst exhibition catalogue. In this publication, of the 627 names in the index only 26 women are listed. Of these 26 names, 4 are popular singers, 1 is an art critic, Carola Giedion-Welcker, 2 are designers, 3 are gallery-owners, and another name in the index is referred to in the text in the following way "mein Lippenstift ist nicht kussecht, aber dafür von Elsa Schiapparelli in shocking-pink"! Of the women remaining, 9 are women artists but only 3 have work reproduced in the catalogue. The conclusion drawn is that women artists are again always below the middle-level of male artists and the singling out of one woman, in this case Brigitte Matchinsky-Denninghoff, bears no correlation to the power of other women. It is 'beleibigkeit', almost coincidental. I wanted to explain why repeatedly in these selections, there was a great ignorance against women.

### **Katy Deepwell: When did you start your researches in 1972 or 1974?**

**Gisela Breitling:** My first texts were written very early. I made a summary of these arguments in 1975 but I did not like it. I was disappointed at how difficult it was to read. I stopped the project. I had no publisher then. Then I went to Italy and I had in my luggage two books, Linda Nochlin's *Women Artists 1550-1950* and Karen Petersen and JJ. Wilson's *Women Artists: Recognition and Reappraisal*. I didn't know what I would do in Italy but I had a list of names of artists to research and started my research in archives in Rome by beginning to go through the hand-written catalogues of artists for evidence of work by women artists.

Then I went to the Alinari photoarchive in Rome and bought every photo with a woman's name attached but this was a very confusing exercise as there were photos of works by women as well as works of women. I began to write again but was still searching for an adequate language for this subject.

I wrote a short text about how I felt when I was in an exhibition and this was the

beginning. Only when I began to use the word 'I' could I start. I was approached by a publisher to make a front cover for a novel by a woman of the former DDR, Jutta Bartus and the idea for my book was developed through conversations with this publisher.

The book is written as an autobiography but it is not 'I' but a subject who confronts herself with all the arguments about women's art. So, in this manner, I found a readable form for this material. This is a book which students can easily read but also the public because of this 'I' which people can identify with and because there are many episodes in which both men and women meet together and discuss art.

**Katy Deepwell: Can you give an example of how the subject 'I' works in your book?**

**Gisela Breitling:** The painter 'I' meets a colleague and discusses the situation of art and then as she walks home she reflect on the conversation. Later on, she visits the same artist again. He is much better established, he is married and his surroundings are much more beautiful. He lives in a beautiful flat, with his finely made works on the walls and his wife comes in and serves them tea and bread. At their first meeting he was living in disorder, he was drunk and his work was chaotic. During their second meeting, other colleagues come to his flat with their girlfriends and in this discussion it is as if the women present didn't exist - there is only the discussion between men. And she feels as though she didn't exist anymore, she couldn't speak, she feels stupid, incompetent and not an artist. So she was very depressed going home. Although this event never happened in this form in my life it is a summary of many examples like this and I know many women who have had similar experiences.

In another example, she discusses feminist politics and attitudes to the female body with a group of female friends. When they leave, she cleans the house and thinks about what they have said. At that time she has her period and has to change her sanitary towel while she is thinking over the significance of the conversation, she starts to reflect on some of the 1970s exhibitions of work with used sanitary towels.

This is how I tried to bring together events in everyday life and what is said about this life. I made these episodes with 'I' not so abstract and combined this with some more abstract passages in the text.

**Katy Deepwell: And in terms of the recovery of women artists, this book is it also a history of other women's lives?**

**Gisela Breitling:** Yes, in a few places. I had one episode where in a group of students, we go to the Louvre and look at the two paintings by women on display. One is by Elizabeth Vigee Le Brun. What is the significance of this? Why are these two in the collection? And why are so many women's paintings not there? This is not

a question about masterpieces. Women's situation in the past is then discussed. I then ask how did women learn? Where did they learn? And what did they learn both as artists & viewers?

**Katy Deepwell: How was your book received in 1980? Was it a success in Germany?**

**Gisela Breitling:** In terms of attention, yes, it was a success and to some extent in sales. Half of the first edition did not appear because of printing errors. The editor of the press then sold the book to Fischer to produce a pocket edition of it. It has been on the market for ten years and sold 10,000 copies. It was bought by many women, particularly by female art and art history students, and given by women to other women. There were a lot of reviews of this book in the press and now it is out of print.

**Katy Deepwell: What were you doing between 1980 when you published your first book and 1986 when you began Das Verborgene Museum?**

**Gisela Breitling:** To write *Die Spuren des Schiffs in den Wellen* was very important for me as I needed to speak about the problems I had as a painter - being inside the art world and not being there. I had always felt in public like a consumer or an art recipient but not an artist. So, after writing the book, I had more power to concentrate on painting. I had always written small things, a diary, poetry, letters and things, I never took seriously. They were often thrown away or kept secretly.

**Katy Deepwell : And then after 1980?**

**Gisela Breitling:** I wrote in newspapers and for books following up my ideas about women artists' work.

**Katy Deepwell: What other books were available in Germany which looked at these questions in feminist art history in 1980?**

**Gisela Breitling:** When I published my book, Germaine Greer's *The Obstacle Race* was published in translation in Germany and this was taken up as important as basic information about women artists. Then some smaller books about art performances and happenings and feminist aesthetics were published and then there was Sylvia Bovenschen's two volumes called *Die Imaginierte Weiblichkeit* (1979).

Edith Krull who lived in East Berlin was working on her book *Kunst von Frauen* (1984) and had great difficulties finding a publisher for her book and it became available just before the project Das Verborgene Museum began researching the first catalogue on works of women artists in Berlin collections. We were able to use

Krull's research and made contact with her because we wanted to publish information about works by women artists in the collections of East Berlin. However, because of the political situation then, it was not possible for us, as West Berliners, to research work in East Berlin art collections and it remained an unfinished part of our project. We wanted to continue the research after 1987 when the funding for the first project came to an end but were unable to do so.

**Katy Deepwell: You told me earlier that your first book had a relationship to your work for Das Verborgene Museum. How did your work develop through the 1980's in relation to the founding of Das Verborgene Museum?**

**Gisela Breitling:** When I published my book, I was not thinking of developing any other projects on women and art. The initiative began when Evelyn Kuwertz, a woman painter, asked me if I would collaborate on a woman artists' project. I did not really want to make a women artists' show as there had already been several women artists' exhibitions. I did have the idea to make an analysis of the work of women artists in the collections of Berlin because of my first book and the questions it raised. I wanted to have a more historical dimension because until now the lack of historical basis or the lack of a visible presence of women in museums is a major problem. This is why I proposed a research project into the public collections of Berlin because I wanted to reconstruct the art history by women starting where I lived and with what was to hand.

1986 was the 750th Anniversary of the City of Berlin, and we had the opportunity to present this as a historical project to the Berlin government as something which represented 750 years of Berlin and a valuable project because women are not well recorded in the city's history. It took us two years of work to raise the funding for this project.

**Katy Deepwell: How many people worked on this first Das Verborgene Museum project, which resulted in an exhibition and a catalogue?**

**Gisela Breitling:** When we began the research, I wrote a proposal and then Evelyn Kuwertz and I worked to establish the project. We had to have a 'protecting institution' so we approached the Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende der Kunst which was then ten years old. In order to convince them, we had to educate them and to do this we gave them reading lists of feminist literature: Linda Nochlin, Germaine Greer, K.Petersen and J.J.Wilson, Kate Millett, Simone de Beauvoir. We had to make them competent in order that they could understand what we were trying to do. Once we had achieved this, we needed a specialist crew of women art historians - so we formed a group of ten women, each with specific research contracts.

We added a contemporary part to our project as the Neue Gesellschaft in their

structure did not work with historical themes. As we worked on this project, we also thought about women artists whose works were not in the museums. The contemporary part of the exhibition acted as new suggestions for public collections.

The project received a lot of criticism from feminists here because Evelyn Kuwertz and I showed our own works in the exhibition. The criticism from women was awful and they even said we had arranged this whole exhibition to present ourselves. We had discussed our inclusion in the show with the group, which included art historians who had also been members on other juries (selection panels for exhibitions) and we had agreed the selection together. I was very offended by these criticisms because when one edits a book and collects texts from many authors, one is allowed to publish one's own texts amongst them. Men collect together other men around them and organise an exhibition project and being artists, they do not exclude themselves. This criticism from women insists upon modesty amongst women. I have to take the consequences of my choices as a curator but am I also obliged to defend myself if I include myself as an artist in those shows?

**Katy Deepwell: Did you feel such criticism ignored all the other questions you were raising ?**

**Gisela Breitling:** What was interesting for me, was that the further away people came to see the exhibition - from France, from Italy, from Britain - they were very impressed. They found the catalogue very useful as a source for information which does not exist in any other context as these are discussions of only Berlin collections. In this respect, it was a very important project and the catalogue remains from it. This was the main idea - to make an intervention in history - which will remain. Most of the other cultural anniversary projects of this time had only the actual importance of a one day event. They did not leave behind such records. This project was really something which helps women research other women artists. Then in 1986 we founded the working group of Das Verborgene Museum as a not-for-profit arts organisation with a gallery and we made our first exhibition in 1987 of Louise Rösler.

**Katy Deepwell: How is it that out of this much bigger project your working group came to focus on the 1920s and 1930s?**

**Gisela Breitling:** There were two reasons. When we founded our group after the first exhibition, we wanted to show the full biographical life of women artists. With Louise Rösler we could show a part of the work from her exhibition in the 1930's which was closed by the Nazis and the other works by her up to the present. With the next exhibition, our idea changed. We decided to focus on the group of women who had entered the academy for the first time in the 1920s and then as we researched



we learnt that it was because of the political situation with the Nazi's that their careers were stopped. This became a symbol for us of why women were not well-known and often forgotten. The struggle of women's attempt to enter the art academies had finished and just at the moment when they should be enjoying the fruits of their labours the political situation meant that they did not arrive in the art world because of the Nazis. Some were forbidden to paint. Unlike the younger generations of women who could fight for themselves and promote themselves to galleries, these older women could not and did not. The men of this generation have been rehabilitated but not the women. Therefore we felt this period - the lost generation - was very important. It is also the historical point at which modernism realised a new aesthetic and made a step outside the shadow of the 19th century. The 19th century has cast a long dark shadow which goes through the whole of the twentieth century. Nazi politics remains one of the darkest points in this shadow.

**Katy Deepwell: Did none of this generation manage to re-establish their career in the 1950s?**

**Gisela Breitling:** Some of them tried to do so. There were some successful photographers from this period yet Das Verborgene Museum still organised their first one-woman shows.

Louise Rösler, for example, managed to achieve a certain reputation, very much with small paintings, beautiful paintings, experiments with colours etc. Her reputation, however, is not adequate for what she did. She had a big exhibition at the Haus am Wandsee in Berlin which opened after her death but when she was alive she had helped to organise the exhibition at Das Verborgene Museum in 1987.

Lidy von Lützwitz, who died in 1996, continued all her life to carve wooden sculptures. When she and Louise Rösler were young they made some objects which suggested ideas they continued to develop through their lives. This is not always the case. The Expressionist painter, Else Lohmann, for example, produced work for ten years and then she stopped. This is not only a woman's problem but one common amongst male artists of this generation.

Many of the women Das Verborgene Museum has exhibited were outsiders. They had exhibitions but this was not enough to become well-known as an artist. It is absolutely necessary to write about these works to make them more accessible.

**Katy Deepwell: So do you see the role of Das Verborgene Museum as consolidating women's achievements - bringing them back into view - offering opportunities to reassess and critique their works?**

**Gisela Breitling:** Yes, and also to interest museums in acquiring works. And we had some success with the Marianne Bresslauer photo-exhibition. This was also

shown in the Nationalgalerie but in all the press coverage no one spoke about the fact that one year before Das Verborgene Museum had shown this work - not even the journalist who spoke at our vernissage (opening).

**Katy Deepwell: Do you feel Das Verborgene Museum (the hidden museum) is subjected to the same process of marginalisation as the women you have shown ?**

**Gisela Breitling:** In this case, it was interesting that a male critic in the Tagesspiegel (Berlin) wrote about the fact that it is irritating that no one wrote about this earlier exhibition at Das Verborgene Museum.

**Katy Deepwell: How has Das Verborgene Museum come to work with the Gedok in your gallery?**

**Gisela Breitling:** This is for economic reasons. We couldn't produce as a group one exhibition after another. It was beyond our possibilities. We made a sub-contract with the Senator für Kulturelle Angelegenheiten. The Gedok hold talks and organises exhibitions at our gallery in Schluterstrasse. They also run other programmes of readings, exhibitions and discussions elsewhere as it is an inter-disciplinary group.

**Katy Deepwell: What was the relationship between Das Verborgene Museum and Carola Muysers's exhibition & research project *Profession Ohne Tradition* in 1992?**

**Gisela Breitling:** In 1986 Karoline Müller published a major compilation about women in the arts in Berlin, *Zür Physiologie der Bildenden Kunst*, and she collaborated with Carola Muysers. Karoline Müller was also curator at the Verein der Berliner Künstlerinnen and this is another association for women artists founded in 1867. And it was the 125 years from the beginning of this group that the exhibition traces. They founded a painting school in the 19th century at which, among others, Paula Modersohn-Becker studied as she was not allowed to go to the normal academy of arts. Karoline Müller wanted to bring more attention to this group and reanimate it. When the idea for this anniversary exhibition came up, I was consulted and then the collaboration grew from there. I had the opportunity to write a text for the catalogue. I wrote a fictional story, 'Porträt der Anna Charlotte Netthlinger' about the painting of a portrait by a woman artist, and I showed my work. Many of the artists which das Verborgene Museum had researched were members of der Verein der Berliner Künstlerinnen.

Researchers interested in the Archive from *Profession Ohne Tradition* and Das Verborgene Museum can find details on n.paradoxa's Women's Art Organisations

Gisela Breitling has recently completed a large mural project for the tower of the St Matthaus-Kirche, Kulturforum an der Philharmonie, Berlin.

Gisela Breitling's publications include:-

*Die Spuren des Schiffs in den Wellen - eine autobiographische Suche nach den Frauen in der Kunstgeschichte* (Berlin: 208 S.,1980)

*Das Verborgene Museum - Dokumentation der Kunst von Frauen in Berliner Offentkichen Sammlungen* (Berlin,1987)

*Der Verborgene Eros = Weiblichkeit und Mannlichkeit im Zerrspiegel der Kunste* (Frankfurt: Aufsätze,1990)

Gisela Breitling has contributed to many of the exhibition catalogues of Das Verborgene Museum and to C.Muyser (ed) *Profession Ohne Tradition* (Berlin: Martin-Gropius-Bau,1992); Gisela Ecker's *Feminist Aesthetics* (London: Women's Press,1987) and Karoline Muller (ed) *Zur Physiologie der Bildenden Kunst* (Berlin, 1987)

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## Diary of an Ageing Art Slut from London, the Montmartre of the Millennium

**April 1997**

**Monday, April**

Met C. from college at the Hayward to take in the sculpture show there. It is about objects in sculpture or something of that nature. I think they mean non-figurative but I'm not too sure about that even. It was very patchy. Some pieces were so awful that if I was the artist I wouldn't have let it out of the studio. Anthony Gormley's piece looked like a giant bronze turd. In fact I probably wouldn't have noticed it if I hadn't knocked my head when I bumped into it. Its one of the weirdest curated shows I've seen in a long time. Still there were a few little stunners in it. But I get fed up of the same old names recurring over and over again. There must be more than they same old dozen or so artists in Britain churning out work.

If I can manage to see good exciting work being done in and around the studios how come people like curators who get paid to do research use the same old names all the time. The other thing I've noticed is that curators leap at the opportunity to show work from abroad as it usually entails a free trip to that particular country. C. said that I should shut up and just keep making the good work that I do. But as I pointed out to her 'Its got to get out the studio door and be seen by people!' After all as artists we are communicators. We then went to our favourite cake shop in Soho afterwards and ate some wonderful cakes with our tea.

**Friday, May 10th**

Missed an opening at Book Works last night. Went instead to a resident's meeting regarding residential parking. Now that is a sign of age. But... I am constantly being

woken by commuters who start parking at 5:30 some mornings and I am fed up of having confrontations with them in my nightie.

Last week went to the opening at Chisenhale of Gillian Wearing's new commissioned piece. She is a YBA. A Young British Artist. They are all the rage now. It is very hard to hold conversations in the dark and in such a din. In the bar area where you could see people I met my friends Dav. and Andy who had not been to many openings before and certainly not such avant-garde ones as this.... at least that's what they called it. They have just started collecting art and find going to openings rather exciting. They asked how you could pick out the artists from the collectors or curators. I told them that the artists try to look like they all came from run-down inner city estates and only ate bread and marge and drank loads of tea and couldn't afford new clothes. The YBA all dress in sportswear. I pointed out one trendy photographer who has also shaved his head to accent his street cred.

Later I got cornered by a sculptor who was very intense indeed. He seemed to think that everything he said was very important. Maybe it was but it seemed like rather bland to me. His wife was very serious and wore a rather well ingrained frown. G. said later that she was a very professional woman. I had to think about that statement for a while. Perhaps that's why my career isn't as good as it could be. Em said it was more likely because probably I didn't have a very professional woman promoting me. Anyways, I am too old to be discovered! Em also told me that I don't work in exciting enough materials and my work is too nice to look at. I was about to hang up the phone on her when I remembered she has had her leg in a cast for ten weeks and has put on a lot of weight. Perhaps she is a little pissed off with everything.

### **May 26th**

It's that time of year again! The final Fine Art Degree shows as well as the Foundation Art shows and the BTEC Diploma in Art shows and the-mature-students-I-have-been-teaching-final-A-level-Art-Exam show and my-seventeen-year-olds-GNVQ-in-Art final assessment show and my first-year-Fine-Art-Degree students final assessments show. In other words complete and utter exhaustion time. All my ex-students send me invites as well as phone me in hope of the chance that I might be able to pass on any work. HA!HA!

To top it all off I am going to a 50th birthday party every second weekend. This babyboom generation is determined to party whether it kills them or not. There remain nine more years of partying! I was listening to the world service the other day and 'according-to-statistics' in Canada there has been a baby boomer reaching 50 since 12 o'clock midnight 1996 at the rate of one every 6.7 seconds. How depressing! What the hell did our parents generation do for ten years after the last war? Bonk themselves into exhaustion! The mind boggles ONE EVERY SIX POINT SEVEN SECONDS. The implications are depressing. What with all of them living longer and women outliving men I am going to have to do some serious thinking about taking on a few toy boys. Can a man of seventy be a toy boy? I suppose its all relative!

Some very good Openings lined up for the first week in June!

### **May 28th**

I am very tired and need to go to the Studio to pick up a framed piece of work so that when an old friend who now works for the Arts Council comes to dinner, they will see my newest work. The bastard is reluctant to visit the studio but I will get her there if it kills me....I need to take down S.'s work that I swapped last year for a piece of mine.

### **May 30th**

Chaos reigns in our house. Toilet finally moved upstairs but no door. Bit embarrassing when T. the old friend from the Arts Council came over for dinner. Nearest and I went out doors to take the air at the appropriate moment.....

Anyway I met her at the Cathy De Monchaux show at the Whitechapel Gallery. Everybody from the East End was there as it was one of us. Saw her sister and asked after my cat. This is because my cat is her cat's daughter and the niece of Cathy's cat. In fact I would think that most of the cats of the East End artists are related.

The show is something else! I have never seen so many people in one place with either complete or partial body tattoos peeping out of their clothing. There was bits of exposed bodies pierced and most were swathed in leather. That must have taken some dedication as it was a very hot venue. Maybe it was all part of the sex and death over tones that are so prevalent in her work???? I found it rather hard to concentrate on the work between meeting old friends and viewing the odd bits of metal work protruding out of various parts of people's bodies.

You certainly get different types of crowds at different types of shows because upstairs was a rather lovely show of erotic Indian miniatures about Bhudda's amorous adventures which was attended by British Museum type academics and paper conservators. Altogether it was a very bizarre crowd milling about as such diverse tribes don't usually mix especially in the bar area. Also I never G. there. I wonder where she was? Perhaps the newest boyfriend has suddenly reappeared after a very long and silent absence?? I shall phone her tomorrow.

### **June 9th ....I think**

I should have gone to my step aerobics class at college but as I am not teaching there this week and it would have meant extra money - for the class and fares, I missed it. I am on an economy drive as I am off to Istanbul for a short residency and then off to see the parents in Canada. They have sent me half the fare already but it has seemed to be absorbed into the great abyss that is my overdraft. So it is off to the antiques shop to sell some of my vintage clothing from the 1920s and 1930s and 1940s and fifties ... in other words all my little treasures!!!!

This last little while has been so fraught what with all the end of year shows of ex students and openings where I have to show my face. I am well and truly knackered. There are some very important openings in the East End that G. and I must make. These are important not just because one must do them but I haven't seen much off

G. lately. Everybody has a very good friend who goes through a very rough patch with the old boy-friend. Well G. just has the rough. Basically she never gets to the point where the boy friend gets to be an old one ! I said to her that she seemed always to get the same bloke but with different packaging. She gave me one of those looks that the Ministry of Defence should patent - you know total annihilation in one nano second. However I have learnt to ignore them over the years as it is not the first time such a statement has been uttered on my part nor such a look given on hers and vice versa. That's what friendship is about. But I have to admit that this last relationship has been particularly fraught with all sorts of complications most of which I just let go over my head. I confess I rather blanked out as I have not only heard it all before but I am too tired to offer any comment as I'm in such a state of total exhaustion these days.

You see not only is it the end of the year with all the normal hoo-ha going on but nearest and dearest has finally, after fourteen years of strong hinting and direct nagging, moved the bathroom upstairs into the third bedroom. Typically once he begins something there is no stopping him and this bathroom is now a state of art shrine to all things bathroom. We not only have a walk in shower but marble flooring with mahogany trim and little dauphins holding up glass shelving. All the work he has done on redesigning other homes and buildings over the years has produced a wealth of little architrave details and surplus materials that he has stored away in his store room near his office. I knew that we had a garden shed that is filled with such surprises but I never knew that he had a secret store across London in his office where he has squirreled away all sorts of matter. What else has he got in there one asks oneself ?

This new bathroom has completely transformed our lives. We now have showers together and buy all sorts of wonderful shower products. We read with great enthusiasm magazines and articles on refurbishing and fixtures and fittings. I found myself passing over the art magazines section in Dillons book store and picking up a copy of Elle Decoration !!!! I put it down quickly in case any of my friends saw me and thought I was too pretentious. However I liked the muted colours that are fashionable this season in interiors and I think I will use similar colours in my latest series of monoprints.

### **June 9th**

I realised that I did get my dates wrong and it is now really the 9th. Last week went like this .....Monday - start of 20 hr. practical exam for the mature students on the A level art course. Monday evening the private view of the Slade post graduate courses where I saw my friend Jim. We had a quick mawph mawph on each cheek then I had to hurry off as I saw B. who I want to squeeze some teaching out of next term. Briefly hail a word before I got cornered by his mate R. who I thought had gone off the booze but obviously was back on it. However it turned out to be quite interesting as he

told me some gossip that was very revealing and probably wouldn't have passed on if sober. It was the very last piece in a puzzle that S. and I were pondering about just last week in Brighton as to the future plans of a pain-in-the-neck male colleague. Tuesday - was so late in getting back from Brighton that I decided to give the SLAG a miss. A very important show that had the likes of Tracy Emins and the Wilson twins and Gillian Wearing in it but as I had a huge shopping bag of groceries from the deli I decided that fighting the pretentious art crowd with groceries might result in some damaged works of art or some very bruised artists. Beside it turned out to be a good decision as on Wednesday, while I was invigilating the exam one of the Fashion tutors came in with a free ticket to the Royal College of Art Fashion Show at the Round House. Well...one could not say no, could one? And Thursday night was another opening at another Dept of Fine Art in London. Now that did turn out to be something of an evening. Not only did I meet my usual contacts from there and the graduating students who I had taught in their first year and whose work looked really, really great but also the Head of painting who was slurring his words with the External moderator. Most of the staff were, as usual, drunk out of their tiny minds. After being told that I was lying by the visiting moderator- when I related the story of how one of his ex Students had managed to put a fist through a painting of mine at my private view three years previous, I decided to leave. Even though the incident made a national newspaper and a citizen's arrest was made by a leading TV soap star he had somehow not heard of it. Probably because he was either too drunk to remember or that some how his staff had managed to kept the event secret from him. G. told me later that he had tried to have an exhibition at the same gallery but the curator M. turned him down.

Once again my prejudices were more than confirmed that the department is still a bastion of misogyny and frustrated failed artists who hate anyone daring to take a chance and try to live off their work. Perhaps it wasn't such a bad thing that I don't have permanent work in an University Art Department surrounded by such bile and frustration. I hope he can get the wine stain out of his white suit from the bottle of cheap red plonk I poured over it.

The week rounded itself off with an opening at the Chisenhale of some rather quirky photographs that ranged from small pies of cute puppies to giant size formats of men holding stiff cocks. P. turned up and went around going 'hum hum hum I don't see the common thread.'

I gave him the catalogue to read the artist's statement . 'Ah, now I can make sense of it all' he exclaimed. Which was better than me because I thought it was all rather obscure. But as he later pointed out 'The meaning isn't profound, sweetie. Its just a collection of his fav snaps.' So much for deep and meaningful art!

I had a brief chat to the artist's agent, Somebody I knew from ages ago, who emoted on about collectors being insatiable for something new when I caught sight of G. hounding around in a minuscule 'Schaperelli - pink' dress. She leapt up to me and insisted I must come back to the party afterwards at the artist's loft. I declined



having had a very long week and a heavy period . So I said I would see her around.' Like later tomorrow morning you mean' she said. I had forgotten she was going to crash out in the spare bedroom after the party ." Be warned ! ' I told her ' There's no door on the bathroom" hoping to put her off. With that settled I staggered home. But just before I crawled into bed she dropped by on the way to the party to change, get a spare key and borrow some money for taxi fares !!

## **Part 2: June 1997**

### **June 30th**

It never rains but it pours and I mean pours. It has rained so much the snails in the garden are the size of small cows. It's late at night. I have finally finished marking all the papers and sent them off in the post. I am off to Turkey for two weeks on Tuesday. How I look forward to being able to make my own work done without interruptions from people and the constant twittering of mobile phones. The kitchen is now completely demolished. Nearest and dearest has become a complete manic about renovation. Needless to say we reach states of communication breakdown...often. I have yet to pack.....

### **July 3**

I have made it to my accommodation in Istanbul despite the taxi driver leaving half my luggage behind until he turned back to retrieve it after me yelling and screaming and going purple in the back seat of his car - not an auspicious start to the proceedings. I should have taken it as an omen! What a place 'Half a modern city with familiar things like phone booths(don't work) cars(too many and too fast). modern buildings(nothing special) and beggars,(just like London) But with extras like squatty toilets (yuck) and undrinkable tap water (which shuts down for a few hours every now and then like in the middle of my shower!) and smog and everywhere the face of Ataturk benign and serious looks out at you. But worst of all everybody and I mean everybody has a mobile phone!

The accommodation is rather basic and comes with a pet cockroach but is right on the Bosphorus with a view to die for. In fact so right on the Bosphorus is it that if we aren't woken at dawn by a mullah sounding like he is being strangled, the early enthusiastic tour boats will succeed. These crafts range from fishing boats cashing in on the tourist season to the mighty professional crafts blearing their knowledge in four or five languages complete with Turkish pop songs. I reckon that I average two hours sleep between the last river boat and courting couples and the first gargling mullah at dawn.

It's a funny sort of West meets East sort of place with water and telephones irregularly *going down*. The modern Turks as far as I can make out love to do several things and preferably all at once. That is : drive a car, talk on the mobile telephone and smoke. This last occupation happens during eating, drinking and every other

time that it is possible to stuff a cigarette in the gob. The mobile telephone has become a plague. I don't know where I got the idea that I would escape the twittering of the ubiquitous electronic accessory. Though for a city that is expanding out of control at an alarming rate it is relatively litter free and because the dog is not as popular as the cat as a national pet - very little dog dirt unlike London!!!

### **Sunday July 6th**

We have spent a day sight-seeing ! I am exhausted. It is so hot, I think - not too sure on this point - as it could be my hot sweats. I am still not completely recovered from a bout of food poisoning. Two of the artists didn't come on the little tour as either their stomachs or bowels haven't stopped moving. Friday was a wash out for me. I managed to bring up the meal from the poshest restaurant in Istanbul. I can't remember Friday except the constant going back and forth to the loo. The next day I had a day of half sleep with Turkish music wafting in and out from the tour boats. At least I won't gain any weight on this trip. Of course silly me forgot a pile of important things beside the phone. Things like diarrhoea piles , mosquito lotion, a sun hat and my medicine for hot sweats. We all have become addicted to some sort of pills that the American artist brought over. They work as quick as a cork.

When I telephoned nearest and dearest , he was a bit hysterical about the fact that he couldn't get through to me either by 'phone or fax. The only people who can are those with mobile phones. I think the incident at the Air Turk office made him apprehensive about my journey. I admit going through an air locked vestibule with two time delayed doors with a heavy security presence in a completely empty office and having to talk to the travel agent through bullet proof glass was perhaps cause for alarm . He also found the complete lack of details regarding the workshop and accommodation - a bit worrying. I found out later someone was meant to send me all the relevant information but forgot. But everything else has worked out extremely well.

The organisers are making the most of every photo-opportunity possible to gain more patrons for the arts...I am becoming quite blasé about being filmed and photographed. Taking a tip from Linda E. from an article I read in Vogue where she said she makes sure the paparazzi only snap her good side..I tried to solicit all honest opinions out of the other artist sharing my studio what was my best side but the Macedonians command of English at the early stages of the workshop ran from *hello* to *Supa*. Later via another artist who translated from English to German to a second artist who relayed the German to them ,I could talk about my cat Mable and I learnt from them about bats for some reason.

But our hosts are very hospitable and warm and generous. Turks love to eat and drink tea and eat and talk and smoke and talk and play music and smoke some more and talk and eat a bit more and have an incredibly high tolerance to noise. Walkman earphones are very popular with the foreign artists... It's inconvenient that the water

is unfit to drink and the power goes down every now and then and that there are so many cars that there is a pale brown film over the city and that the streets corners have litters of children begging and that the Bosphorus is so polluted that mussels are unfit to eat but all the country really wants is to become part of the EC. Personally I think its going to take a while... One artist said how strange it was to see women swathed head to toe in cloth except for their eyes. Actually I thought it was just like the East End.

### **July 14 th**

A quick entry before we go off for the farewell dinner. It actually has been rather amazing being part of a group of artists from all over the world. Discussions have been interesting if not rather bizarre with language skills being so diverse. There are some artists from the former Eastern bloc and the former Yugoslavia who speak no English but do speak some French or German. I can only speak English and just remember my French but know no Slavic dialects and no German. One artist speaks only French. Still some artists speak only Turkish or Turkish and German and there are two individuals who speak German and French and English but to varying degrees of success in each. I now know what 'bat' is in Slovenian and various Turkish phrases for passing food and taxis fares as well as *Good Morning* and *Thank-you* in German, various Slavic dialects and not to mention Romanian and Kurdish. Deep dialectical discussions on art have wiped everybody out. Its just too exhausting trying to think in one language and translate it into another one or two without losing the gist of the conversation some how. So when somebody wants to share a moment about another artists work that they like , a picture or illustration is produced and comments like 'Andy Warhol very good, Supa' are followed by serious nods and smiles. Not surprisingly having discussions in three and four languages has defeated most of us and resulting in some pretty strange conversations. What we ended up doing is singing songs from our different cultures at the end of meals instead of attempting after dinner chit chat - sort of an international Karioke !!! I sang Home on the Range and Ilkley Moor Bar Tat. I didn't ever know that I knew them.

I have got a fair amount of work done, sort of. Even though I ripped up two canvasses and sat for two days just watching the boats on the Bosphorus. What is comforting or terrifying depending on how you see it is that artists everywhere have the same problems with studios dealers, rent and surviving. There is never enough money and always the demands of family and jobs .Depressing really.

I don't know how I could have forgotten what it was like travelling in the Middle East. How could I forget the smell of dirty men's foot that hits your nose when you approach a huge pulpit Mosque. Mind you it was twenty five years ago that I last did it...The Romanian artist dreams of mashed potatoes and stews. She told me this in a confessional moment. I dread to think what state the house is in with the renovation of the kitchen still not complete. Do I want to go home I ask myself ?

## July 20th

Picture this. Me in the Istanbul airport at the ticket counter ripping my suitcase apart to rid myself of extra weight and going manic in the process. So goodbye went a lot of clothes. Magic! I immediately lost eleven kilos which made me only four kilos over...The ticket rep could have let it go by but as I had so bad mouthed her she wasn't going to do so and I was not going to dump my Turkish tiles !!! There is a pile of underwear and shoes in a waste bin in Istanbul International Airport terminal building for someone so inclined. Mind you they would have to take size 5 shoe. I now can go buy more new clobber without a trace of guilt. As if I ever had any, but it was a good workshop and I even met a Turk who didn't smoke !!!

Near and dear has become totally manic without my calming influence. The first night home he talked of tearing out the work done so far so he can redesign and start again as he wasn't so convinced he had got the perfect solutions to the kitchen layout.

The cat has had to be put on one tranquilliser. I am exhausted from cleaning and sorting out of all the mess. There was an inch of sawdust over everything. I was sitting on my own last night having sent near and dear out to the country to play golf for several days to restore his equilibrium and my sanity when my mother called . "You said you would phone when you got back and you didn't ? I was so worried you might have been abducted into some harem or something." In your dreams, mother!

It is too late to stop the renovations. How could I have forgotten what we went through fourteen years ago when we bought the house as a derelict dump ? !? Worse still what is happening to my memory !!!

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