

Introduction
Arncliffe

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Bristol.

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This exhibition was part of the original project for Women's Images of Men. We had always intended to include women working in Video, P. e Inst. (Difficulties with name - mixed media, 3rd Area, live work, time based work -

This last eventually gave us our title "About Time" - Time being the one element that was common to all the work). I was aware that many women working from a feminist perspective had chosen to use time-based material. As this has always been my own position, I was keen to include a representation of this work in the show. There were also a number of women artists who, altho' not avowed feminists had a particular awareness that reflected many of the issues raised by the women's movement. As we were anxious for the show to be inclusive of as many points of view as possible, we invited Rose Garrard to join myself and Sandy Nave in the selection of what was now a separate exhibition of Video, P. e Inst. This separation came about thro' the realisation that I of M was not an appropriate theme for time-based work - Very few women were dealing

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directly with the subject of men. Feminists had been more concerned with tackling the difficult problem of female representation in art - trying to re-appropriate distorted ~~res of women~~ - to create positive self-images that were more in keeping with their experience of themselves as women. Performers were having to tackle the problem very directly. How does one avoid the stereotype of the "woman as spectacle" the artiste, the stripper, the singer, the actress, the burlesque queen. Some would even go so far as to say that Performance like strip-tease is, for women, a form of prostitution. In the face of these and many other problems, few women were dealing directly with male imagery. Men had appeared mostly as symbols, implying a patriarchal presence. Individual men were sometimes referred to but they were rarely central to the work. Of course they often existed on their own right as male performers or collaborators within a particular piece - So we decided to open out the theme to include work that: (quote) "indicated the artist's awareness of a woman's particular experience within the patriarchy" (explain quote) We did not look for work proclaiming a particular party line - very few proposals actually did - we were looking for evidence of the awareness that suggested the artist recognised that being a woman was relevant to the way in which she produced her work and the way in which it was seen. Given that specification, we selected a very diverse exhibition which demonstrates the wide range of form, content and subject matter that constitutes women's work in Performance, Video & Installation.

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There are a number of questions that can be raised and indeed have been raised in the context of this show. First of all, why a woman's exhibition? Surely after 10 years of the women's movement, we don't need to labour the point about discrimination? And secondly - what contribution, if any, can women artists make that their male counterparts can't? In answer to the first question - the obvious point to make is that the point about discrimination (sadly) still has to be made. Women's art has been and continues to be relatively speaking invisible. Women artists still work in comparative isolation. They have to fight for recognition as students at college (where there are still only a small minority of women teaching) (cuts) role models. Women are under-represented in major exhibitions and they don't receive the kind of funding that male artists enjoy. The perennial excuse for the exclusion of women from these exhibitions is that there are no women in evidence in the galleries - Or at least none of any recognisable merit. Ignoring for the moment the issue of quality - i.e. who determines what recognisable merit is? I will simply say that in the light of the recent exhibitions of women's art in London galleries and grant-aiding bodies will be hard put to justify any continued neglect of women artists. However, it seems that the battle is not so easily won - This year there were 670 applicants to the Arts Council for major awards, and out of these not one woman was short-listed. It is perhaps worth repeating the now famous remark that one of the panel members made when challenged with this fact - "women, he said, do not have the depth to be artists" - So the position for women artists does not appear to have changed much in the last 10 yrs and so the point must indeed be made again & again until women are properly subsidised and fairly represented at every level of the art establishment.

"no women until protest made - so I included Mary Kelli, & Alex Hunter"

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III (B) (e Arnolfini)

It is very much to the ICA's credit that they recognised that ^{how overdue these} exhibitions ^{are} ~~were long overdue~~. I sincerely hope that there will be many more projects of this kind so that women artists will at last be given space and time they deserve.

There are many feminists who question the whole idea of showing in galleries. They see these institutions as male dominated, elitist, and primarily involved in producing fodder for a capitalist art market. Such an environment could only distort and compromise their work. They prefer instead to work outside the gallery system in alternative spaces or in the community where they can reach a wider audience. In fact, many of the women in this show have, in the past, taken their work beyond

the galleries. I think we are all aware of the pressures ^{with which} contradictions we have to deal with when working in a gallery context, and some of the artists have quite consciously incorporated the issue into their work. My own feeling is that the problem has to be tackled from both ends.

Alternatives should certainly be developed to challenge the present system - but the system itself must be pressured into recognising and accommodating the particular approach of women artists. What we learn in alternative spaces can inform the work we do within the system. We should develop a dual strategy which will effectively prevent the continued marginalisation of women's art.

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the alternative is what we learn in alternative spaces can inform

In fact some would go so far as to say that this peripheral position may offer us greater insights into a system that we can only infiltrate in a highly negotiated fashion

As regards the contribution that women artists can make - how that differs from a male contribution - there are a number of women who now point out the dangers of constantly focussing on the differences between men & women. This, they say, can help to perpetuate the biological determinism that has served to oppress us for so long. The only real difference between men and women lies in the ^{different} separate social positions they occupy. They would consider the idea of a female sensibility being at the core of women's experience to be a myth - it is what society makes of us, nothing more and nothing less. I would certainly agree that our social position is a major factor in determining what we experience as being "female" and that will be reflected in our work.

It is my belief that a woman's physical life gives her access to a whole range of experiences and sensations that are not shared by men. ^{These stem from} aspects of sexuality, menstruation, childbirth & menopause. Such experiences may indeed be distorted and devalued by a dominant ideology, but their raw material most certainly does exist. I feel we must be careful not to confuse the social meaning of these functions with the functions themselves. To do so can lead to another form of repression & a new taboo - two women in the UK have focussed on women's biology - Susan Heller in her 10 months (pregs) and Judith Higg water into wine on mens. So, to my mind, women artists do indeed have something different to offer - a new vision from unamed experience - a sensibility that has been dictated & suppressed by taboo, habitual prejudice

10 mins

British Painting - 1974 - 106 m. 16 w.
 Condition of sculpt. 1975 - 36 m. 4 w.
 Contemp. Brit Art. 1977 - 32 m. 1 w.
 John H's selection 1980 - 32 m. 2 w.
 Women's Annual - ? 1978
 Next show British art
 "Un certain art Anglais"

Adrian Piper
on racism?

So, what form will this new vision take? It seems to me that it will take as many forms as there are women artists working - A multiplicity of means for a multiplicity of ends - This season of women's shows in London has been ample evidence that no one form, no one subject constitutes women's art - There is a great tendency to want to categorise, rationalise women's art into a "movement" that has a beginning a middle and presumably an end. It is true that we can pick out certain tendencies, certain images or processes which recur in the work, but we must be careful that in attempting to chart or define the work, we do not, in fact reduce it and inhibit its growth.

However, I would like to suggest - with caution, that there is a correlation between women's art that is informed by feminism and the traditional role of Performance and related media. Women's art (in the last 20 years or so), has been diverse, open-ended and open minded. It has challenged any easy definition we might make by constantly changing and renewing itself. Performance art has been equally

unwilling to conform to our expectations. It has been used by radical artists since the early days of Dada & Surrealism in order to attack the conventions of art as well as ^{as} social conventions and entrenched political beliefs. It has been used to denounce sexism, racism, capitalism, commercialism and imperialism. Feminists in particular have used Performance to make

Anti-linear progress -
rather a process of
osmosis -
one by one

Suzanne Lacey
Jesley Labowitz

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In this country an example would be the Redwin the Night
marches which were torchlit processions that ^{who} ^{that}
protested against pornography. ^{more} An individual example would
be Hannah Stear Litany for. Performance has always
maintained a formal independence by freely drawing
from the disciplines of drama, film, music, dance,
ritual and magic, as well as the traditions of
painting and sculpture - Women's art has also
proclaimed the value of a healthy eclecticism. It has
introduced many traditional women's skills into P. that
we until recently not been considered the proper concern
of art - I refer to those activities that have,
along with women, been relegated to the private or
domestic sphere - weaving, sewing, cooking,
story-telling, game playing, making-up, etc.
Bobby Baker in this exhibition is a good example
of an artist who re-examines "domestic-science"
in an art context. One aspect of her work touches
on an issue which has been of concern to many
artists - In producing a time-based work that
leaves no residue, the performer defies the art
market's demand for a saleable commodity -
Altho' it must be said that the remnants of certain
famous performance "are" now being avidly
collected, and these items fetch high prices on
the art market (Buy Bobby Baker's work - (date -)
makes it doubly difficult for the art market to
recoup her artistic output - She produces meals
& female occupation which holds virtually no market
value in this society. Every housewife cooks food.
It is either eaten or it's rotting - either way it is impermanent
and impossible to preserve for posterity - One might
follow this train of thought a little and remember

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eg. there we have many examples
 of this in the show
family relationships
 Me -
Enid Knox, Ireland
~~was~~ myself - up to a point
 relationship to mother -
Rose Girard memories of
 childhood -
 - altho'
 R. not via Jews

Me?
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that in the past women's art, when it was
 shown, was rarely considered to be of any great
 value by either critics or art historians.
 (Feminist art historians - Rosi Parker & Griselda
 Pollock "old mistresses women" art ideology)
 (Also Lynn's historical perspective in catalogue)
 For me, the single most important development
 that has emerged from feminists' involvement in art
 has been the validation of autobiography as
 material for art. Performance has always trodden
 a precarious path between life and art, and
 women artists have been able to confidently
 include material from their own lives by the
 use of a single crucial principle - "The Personal
 is Political". This has been a tenet of the women's
 movement for many years. It is based on the idea
 that patriarchal ideology shapes every aspect
 of our lives - Or as Sally Potter puts it in
 her introduction to the catalogue "ideology is not merely
 reflected, but produced in the context of the
 family and in personal relations". Therefore an
 analysis of our personal relations, of our particular
 history will reveal the structures and strictures
 of patriarchy. We would also consider that
 since the real experience of women has had virtually
 no cultural existence in this society, the act
 of making visible that which is unnamed, and
 outlawed is in itself a political act.
 I do not subscribe to the belief that
 an unrestrained "flow" of female experience
 is automatically of universal value - Like anything
 else it must be used as the basis for a rigorous analysis
 which links it to the wider politics of the women's
 movement.

We must do this without losing touch with our own particular psychological investment in the work. It is this very direct ^{personal} involvement which, to my mind, gives the work life. A spark of subjectivity is one of the elements which will encourage a real involvement on the part of the audience.

In using autobiographical material we must be careful to consider the art context we have chosen to work in - It carries with it a set of meanings established by an art history, and is affected by the current roles played by art, artists and women in this society. (refer you to Sally's art. in cat - she covers these problems ^{clearly & thoroughly})

Finally, I would like to suggest that the relatively short history of performance constitutes an added attraction for women artists. Painting & Sculpture carry with them such a weight of male tradition that some of us feel unreasonably constrained working in that field - Women have always been a part of the performance tradition. In the early days of Dada & Surrealism they tended to appear as the female element in male works - altho' their true role may well have been more central - In the 1960s, coinciding with the emergence of feminism - women adopted time-based work as a vital and immediate vehicle for their ideas

- Women continue to widen the scope of the medicine to incorporate the breadth and diversity of their interests - their contributions will extend well beyond the present exhibition into a future that can only benefit from the proper recognition of their work -

In this intro touched briefly issues

many more emerge

course 10 days

1 day conf -

bring questions ?