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# Weekend

The New York Times

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 1986

## A Chance to Find If Art of Women Is a Special Art

By JENNIFER DUNNING

**I**S there such a thing as "women's art"? Is art created by women distinctive by virtue of its style or technique, its size or subject? The best way to explore the issue is by looking at art made by women. And this weekend, at the start of Women's History Month, art lovers and philosophers will have that opportunity, in exhibitions of works by women on view at some 60 galleries and public spaces throughout Manhattan.

A good place to begin is the Clocktower, with three exhibitions put together by the Women's Caucus for Art, a national organization of women artists and art historians. The caucus has also compiled a list of 77 current shows by women artists, featured on its poster, which is on view at Clocktower.

You might first visit "Progressions: Cultural Legacy," a tribute to pioneering black women artists and their descendants. Photographs of these pioneers and their work, begin-

ning with Annie E. Walker, a 19th-century painter and student of Thomas Eakins, recognize painting and sculpture created in the 19th century by women whose names were never known or have largely been forgotten. A different sort of reality stares out at the viewer with "Now You Have Touched the Women," a boldly conceived quilt by Faith Ringgold. Like "Sojourner: To Cross the Seas and Live in a Land of Strangers," a caucus exhibition at the Aaron Davis Hall at City College, "Progressions" celebrates Black History Month, which ends today.

"Letters" is an absorbing exhibition of work in all media that uses a wide range of forms of communication, from Braille configurations to letters and faded clippings. The art is small-scaled but intensely evocative. Typical is "The Flowers of My Grandmother's Death Have Freed Us All," a work on paper by Tee A. Corinne that is a narrative miniature that abstracts universes. Judy van Wagner and Carol Davis are the curators.

The work declares itself more loudly, for the most part, in "Costumes, Masks and Disguises." Joan Killion's delicate "kimono" pieces hang in one corner. Fran Hodes, Stephanie Rauschenbusch and Hedy O'Beil are the curators. (For information on the Clocktower shows and five other caucus exhibitions, see the box on page C28. Posters with details of other women's shows are on display at most of the spaces. Information: 772-9408.)

These shows offer material for thought on past and present views of art by women. It has been said that women create small, delicate, figurative art in pastel, that they are good at portraits, usually of children and women, as well as still lifes and occasional gardens in full bloom, that their work is



"Self Portrait" (detail), triptych by Stephanie Douglas, in "Sojourner" exhibition at City College's Aaron Davis Hall.

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seldom humorous, and that it deals most in personal history.

Yes, contemporary feminists have responded, art by women may have a strong intuitive streak, a concern with authenticity of emotion and everyday life experience, and a strong involvement of the artist with her subject matter. There is a good deal of sexual imagery and ritual in art by women. Women artists may consciously incorporate such "womanly" elements as needlework in their art today. And the work is often fragmented, though not necessarily small.

#### Variety of Intimate Themes

"Art doesn't have to be huge to be of monumental importance," says Nancy Fried, who was a speaker at the caucus's national conference earlier this month in New York City. Miss Fried's small, peopled clay rooms, fired in her kitchen stove, will be seen in March at the Kathryn Markel Gallery. But intimate, domestic themes can be peculiarly threatening. Ann Chwatsky, another speaker at the conference, was surprised at the hostility that greeted an exhibition of her sensitive and unsentimental photographs of pregnant women. "How could you let a child see this?" one visitor wrote in the gallery guest book.

There is a reason for the traditional view of art by women, Annie Shaver-Crandell, president of the caucus, says. "Women were kept out of art schools until the 19th century," she said. "Their fragile little selves were not supposed to be subjected to the sight of nude male models. Women had to find, on their own, women artists who'd take on a student, or they had to be born into a family of artists who would teach them. So women tended to specialize in still lifes and portraiture, things you could learn without having to go to art school."

Biological differences may find expression in the work of male and female artists. And social conditions — including the historical underrepresentation of art by women in art history texts and in exhibitions — do affect form and content. A weekend survey of art by women might also include "The Guerrilla Girls Hits List," an activist poster in the window of Printed Matter, at 7 Lispenard Street, that acknowledges those who do write about and exhibit art by women. "I think younger women artists haven't noticed that things have slipped back since the women's movement in the 1970's," Carol Grape, a sculptor and caucus member, says. "More galleries were showing women's art five years ago. They figure they've done their bit. We have to do ours."



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Photographic work by Francesca Woodman, on exhibit through March 14 at the Hunter College Art Gallery on Lexington Avenue and the southwest corner of 68th Street, yields another statement of those conditions, both in the almost cheekily assured execution and the harrowing intensity of its images of women and rooms. (The gallery is open Monday through Saturday from 1 to 6 P.M.)

One aim of the caucus is to publicize art created by women. Neglected, such art has lacked a larger, historical context. And therefore, it has sometimes been dismissed or, just as blindly, celebrated for a superior virtue. The work on view this weekend suggests a context and a past.

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Landscapes that look beyond the garden are the subject of a number of exhibitions. "Patterns of Nature," a group show organized by the Women in the Arts Foundation, is on view through March 12 at the Arsenal Gallery, Central Park at Fifth Avenue and 64th Street. (Monday through Friday from 9 to 4:30.) At Jeffrey Hoffeld and Company, 1020 Madison Avenue at 79th Street, there are serenely macrocosmic views of Italy, New Mexico, New York and Cape Cod by Helen Miranda Wilson, through tomorrow (today from 9:30 to 5:30 and tomorrow from 10 to 5:30). And



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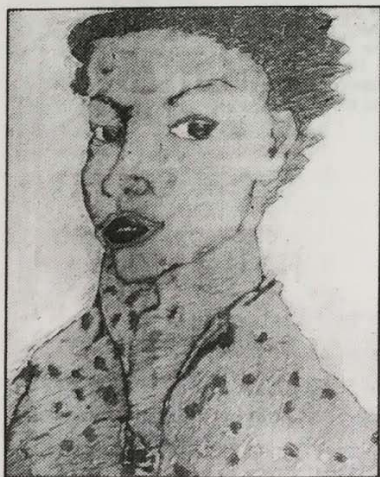
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46-01 21st Street  
Long Island City, NY 11101  
718 784-2084

Alanna Heiss  
President and Executive Director

Please also include in your listings:

Three Group Exhibitions organized by the Woman's  
Caucus for Art

February 10 through March 15, 1986  
at The Clocktower  
108 Leonard St.  
New York, NY 10013  
Hours: 12-6, Thursday through Sunday.

Costumes, Masks, and Disguises, curators: Fran  
Hodes and Hedy O'Beil; Letters, curator: Judy Van  
Wagner; Progressions: Cultural Legacy, curators:  
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Photographs of the great early pioneers — one of them a pupil of Thomas Eakins — reveal human beings of majestic potential, and their successors in one domain or another show just how much black women have added to the sum of American painting. Coupled with a large group show downstairs called "Costumes, Masks and Disguises," "Progressions" is a genuine contribution to our understanding of its subject. (Both shows through March 15.)

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Karen Gunderson looks upward in a show of her skyscapes at the Fischbach Gallery, 24 West 57th Street, through March 26. (Monday through Saturday, 10 to 5:30.)

For evidence of the wit that may be found in art by women, stops are in order at "The Male Nude: Women Regard Men," at the Hudson Center, 105 Hudson Street, through tomorrow, and at the Ruth Siegel Gallery, 24 West 57th Street, where large, intensely colored and amusingly stylized works in several media by Mimi Gross are on view through March 8. (The Hudson Center is open Tuesday through Saturday, noon to 6, the Siegel Gallery Tuesday through Saturday from 10 to 6.)

A largely post-movement survey of art in many media is on view in "The Heroic Female, Images of Power," presented at the Ceres Gallery, 91 Franklin Street, through tomorrow, as a fund-raiser for the New York Feminist Art Institute. Of special interest here are Louise Bourgeois's "Femme Maison" and Suzanne Resnik's teasing "Crystal Changing Device with Operator's Manual." (Tuesday through Saturday noon to 6.)

If one closed the weekend with a tour through "the new," that tour might include a sculpture exhibition of allusive organic forms in wood by Ellen Driscoll, at the Paulo Salvador Gallery, 216 East 10th Street, through Sunday (noon to 6), or "Vital Space," a wide-ranging group show at the Mokotoff, 735 East Ninth Street, that runs through March 16. (Wednesday through Sunday, 1 to 6.)

And a last stop might be at the Kamikaze Klub, 531 West 19th Street (227-2108 or 807-0838). On view there is work by such artists as Yvonne Jacquette, Joyce Kozlov, Miriam Schapiro and Nancy Spero. Most of the work sells for under \$1,000, with proceeds to go to Heresies, the feminist journal of politics and the arts.

Is there a women's art? The issue may never be settled. But this is an excellent weekend to explore the evidence.

### *A Listing of Some Special Exhibitions in the City*

"Letters," "Costumes, Masks and Disguises" and "Progressions: Cultural Legacy" are on view through March 15 at the Clocktower, 108 Leonard Street, east of Broadway. Hours: Thursday through Sunday, noon to 6 P.M.

"Sojourner: To Cross the Seas and Live in a Land of Strangers" is on view through March 8 at the

Aaron Davis Hall at City College, West 134th Street at Convent Avenue. Hours: Monday through Friday, 9 to 6, and before performances.

"The Transforming Landscape" is on view through Sunday at the Henry Street Settlement, 466 Grand Street at Pitt Street. Hours: Through Sunday, 10 to 6.

"Mirrored Images" is on view through March 7 at Merrill Hall,

New York University, 90 Trinity Place. Hours: Monday through Friday, 8 to 10.

"Women's Labors" is on view through today at Gallery 1199, 310 West 43d Street. Hours: 11 to 6.

"The Artist and the Spiritual Quest" is on view through March 4 at the Open Center, 83 Spring Street. Monday through Friday 11 to 10, Saturday, 11 to 9 and Sunday 11 to 7.

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VOICE FEBRUARY 4, 1986

## THE CLOCKTOWER FEB 13 - MAR 15

### **COSTUMES, MASKS, and DISGUISES**

curators:

Fran Hodes, Hedy O'Beil, Stephanie Rauschenbusch

### **LETTERS**

curators:

Carol Davis and Judy Van Wagner

### **PROGRESSIONS: A CULTURAL LEGACY**

curators:

Emma Amos, Vivian Browne, Julia Hotten

organized by the

Women's Caucus for Art/New York Chapter

open studio

AME GILBERT

OPENING: THURS FEB 13, 7-9PM

GALLERY HOURS: THURS-SUN 12-6PM

SPECIAL PREVIEW: FEB 11 and 12, 12-6PM

108 Leonard Street, NYC, 13th floor  
Five blocks south of Canal, between Bway and Lafayette.  
Take elevator to 12th floor, walk up one flight.  
For further information call (212) 233-1096

The Clocktower's facility is owned by the City of New York and its programs are supported in part by generous contributions from The Department of Cultural Affairs. The Clocktower, The Institute for Art and Urban Resources, Inc., is a non-profit center for contemporary art committed to the presentation of a broad range of artistic activities.



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Karen Gunderson looks upward in a show of her skyscapes at the Fischbach Gallery, 24 West 57th Street, through March 26. (Monday through Saturday, 10 to 5:30.)

For evidence of the wit that may be found in art by women, stops are in order at "The Male Nude: Women Regard Men," at the Hudson Center, 105 Hudson Street, through tomorrow, and at the Ruth Siegel Gallery, 24 West 57th Street, where large, intensely colored and amusingly stylized works in several media by Mimi Gross are on view through March 8. (The Hudson Center is open Tuesday through Saturday, noon to 6, the Siegel Gallery Tuesday through Saturday from 10 to 6.)

A largely post-movement survey of art in many media is on view in "The Heroic Female, Images of Power," presented at the Ceres Gallery, 91 Franklin Street, through tomorrow, as a fund-raiser for the New York Feminist Art Institute. Of special interest here are Louise Bourgeois's "Femme Maison" and Suzanne Resnik's teasing "Crystal Changing Device with Operator's Manual." (Tuesday through Saturday noon to 6.)

If one closed the weekend with a tour through "the new," that tour might include a sculpture exhibition of allusive organic forms in wood by Ellen Driscoll, at the Paulo Salvador Gallery, 216 East 10th Street, through Sunday (noon to 6), or "Vital Space," a wide-ranging group show at the Mokotoff, 735 East Ninth Street, that runs through March 16. (Wednesday through Sunday, 1 to 6.)

And a last stop might be at the Kamikaze Klub, 531 West 19th Street (227-2108 or 807-0838). On view there is work by such artists as Yvonne Jacquette, Joyce Kozlov, Miriam Schapiro and Nancy Spero. Most of the work sells for under \$1,000, with proceeds to go to Heresies, the feminist journal of politics and the arts.

Is there a women's art? The issue may never be settled. But this is an excellent weekend to explore the evidence.

## A Listing of Some Special Exhibitions in the City

"Letters," "Costumes, Masks and Disguises" and "Progressions: Cultural Legacy" are on view through March 15 at the Clocktower, 108 Leonard Street, east of Broadway. Hours: Thursday through Sunday, noon to 6 P.M.

1986  
"Sojourner: To Cross the Seas and Live in a Land of Strangers" is on view through March 8 at the

Aaron Davis Hall at City College, West 134th Street at Convent Avenue. Hours: Monday through Friday, 9 to 6, and before performances.

"The Transforming Landscape" is on view through Sunday at the Henry Street Settlement, 466 Grand Street at Pitt Street. Hours: Through Sunday, 10 to 6.

"Mirrored Images" is on view through March 7 at Merrill Hall,

New York University, 90 Trinity Place. Hours: Monday through Friday, 8 to 10.

"Women's Labors" is on view through today at Gallery 1199, 310 West 43d Street. Hours: 11 to 6.

"The Artist and the Spiritual Quest" is on view through March 4 at the Open Center, 83 Spring Street. Monday through Friday 11 to 10, Saturday, 11 to 9 and Sunday 11 to 7.



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VOICE FEBRUARY 4, 1986

## THE CLOCKTOWER FEB 13 - MAR 15

### **COSTUMES, MASKS, and DISGUISES**

curators:  
Fran Hodes, Hedy O'Beil, Stephanie Rauschenbusch

### **LETTERS**

curators:  
Carol Davis and Judy Van Wagner

### **PROGRESSIONS: A CULTURAL LEGACY**

curators:  
Emma Amos, Vivian Browne, Julia Hotten

organized by the  
Women's Caucus for Art/New York Chapter

open studio  
AME GILBERT

OPENING: THURS FEB 13, 7-9PM

GALLERY HOURS: THURS-SUN 12-6PM

SPECIAL PREVIEW: FEB 11 and 12, 12-6PM

108 Leonard Street, NYC, 13th floor  
Five blocks south of Canal, between 8 way and Lafayette.  
Take elevator to 12th floor, walk up one flight.  
For further information call (212) 233-1096

The Clocktower's facility is owned by the City of New York and its programs are supported in part by generous contributions from The Department of Cultural Affairs. The Clocktower, The Institute for Art and Urban Resources, Inc., is a non-profit center for contemporary art committed to the presentation of a broad range of artistic activities.