



Jane Grabhorn at work at her press. Photograph courtesy Arion Press.

BOOKS IN A NEW LANGUAGE

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In 1973, two events occurred that changed the landscape of creativity for many women writers and artists across America. On their separate surfaces these events did not appear to be connected, but their accidental convergence has had a signal impact on the way many women intersect with art and art making, the implications of which are still unfolding. The more profound of these events was the establishment of the first independent feminist art education program in the country. The Feminist Studio Workshop was founded in Los Angeles by an artist, a graphic designer, and an art historian, each of whom was evangelical about the messages of feminism. This program, and the building subsequently chosen to house it, “were created by women to end the isolation and silence experienced by women and encourage a sense of community and caring within our shared culture. Through the exhibition of the accomplishments and contributions of women, the future potential of women individually and collectively can be recognized.”¹

The repetition of the word *women* was not accidental at a time when women were consistently referred to as girls no matter what their age; equally deliberate was the emphasis in this statement on the *exhibition* of women’s accomplishments and contributions, as opposed to the undertaking of the work itself. This mission statement implicitly acknowledged that women were already accomplishing work that was eminently worthy of attention; what was needed now was broad cultural recognition for what they were doing.

Across the country in March of the same year, Moore College of Art in Philadelphia opened an exhibition entitled simply "Artists Books." The exhibition itself contained work not by women but by the important, predictable male artists of the day (David Hockney, Robert Motherwell, Dieter Roth, Jim Dine, John Cage, and the Los Angeles Pop artist Ed Ruscha, whose work is often credited with initiating contemporary artists' bookmaking). Moore College's curator, Diane Perry Vanderlip, coined the term for the title that would help to define a "new" art movement, one with deep roots in the avant-garde. Vanderlip's criterion for what was to be included in "Artists Books" was deceptively simple: "... [I]f the artist conceived his work as a book, I ... generally accepted his position."² The breadth of this definition allowed the exhibition to expand to more than two hundred and fifty works.

For the fledging students at the Feminist Studio Workshop, who were exploring the parameters of both form and content in art as adaptable to fit a new feminist consciousness, the artist's book became a logical extension of that exploration. These women had stories to tell. What better platform than books for these private stories to move into the public arena of exhibition and publishing?

New Beginnings at the Woman's Building: One Story

As one of the first group of women to travel to Los Angeles in the fall of 1973 to become part of the Feminist Studio Workshop at the newly organized Woman's Building, Susan Elizabeth King joined a cohort of thirty women, ages twenty-two to fifty, who left their homes or academic institutions to relocate in an environment of feminist artists, designers, writers, and critics. King and two of her colleagues at New Mexico State University (NMSU), where King was finishing her MA in ceramics, had, in the spirit of art historian Linda Nochlin and many women artists in the early seventies, begun to question the invisibility of women in the art world. Through the auspices of a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, King and her sister students invited the artist Judy Chicago to visit the university as a guest artist. Chicago, who was in the process of traveling the country to proselytize on behalf of the Feminist Studio Workshop, accepted the invitation.

Chicago's pioneering work with the emergent issues of feminist art began in the Feminist Art Program, which she founded in 1970 at Fresno State College (California) and relocated a year later to the California Institute for the Arts (CalArts). At CalArts, Chicago was joined in her endeavor by the painter and fiber artist Miriam Schapiro, whose husband was teaching at CalArts when Chicago arrived there. Located amongst the strips of Hamburger Hamlets, big-box stores, and amusement parks just outside of Los Angeles, CalArts had been incorporated only ten years earlier. With funding from the Disney brothers, Walt and Roy, CalArts was (and is) dedicated to a nontraditional curriculum in visual and performing arts. Even this setting, however, did not sufficiently support Chicago's feminist vision.

After two years there, Chicago left to begin a brand new program, which she intended to develop from the ground up with her CalArts colleagues Sheila Levrant de Bretteville, who had founded the Women's Design Program at CalArts the same year that Chicago and Schapiro had joined the faculty, and the art historian and critic Arlene Raven. The three women came together to establish a space where their vision for a truly alternative education in feminist art theory and practice could be realized. A chance discovery by a student, described by Chicago in her autobiography, led them to name the space the Woman's Building in honor of the 1893 building of the same name at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, which was demolished after the fair.³

Meanwhile, Chicago's fortuitous visit to NMSU resulted in King and several of her colleagues examining not just the backstory, but also the very direction of their art. While working in the glaze room, they hatched plans to attend the new workshop that Chicago had so enthusiastically brought to their attention. In the summer of 1973, three of them packed up their belongings and their newly earned MAs and drove to Los Angeles. They arrived in time to help sheetrock the rented space of the Chouinard building at 743 S. Grandview and re-christen it the Woman's Building for its official opening in November.

(Chicago left the staff in 1974 to work on her monumental installation *The Dinner Party*. When the Chouinard building was sold in 1975, the Woman's Building founders began major fundraising efforts toward finding and renovating another building. Supporters such as Lily Tomlin, Meg Christian, and Holly Near helped to raise money for the renovation of a derelict building on Spring Street near a diverse triangle of the as-yet-unrenovated Union Station, Chinatown, and Olvera Street in downtown Los Angeles.)

The Feminist Studio Workshop

The core of the Woman's Building philosophy was housed in the Feminist Studio Workshop. Here the feminist principles that the three founders had evolved in their various teaching practices were to find fruition in a fully developed program of education in the visual and performing arts, design, and creative writing. The goals of the program were not modest. At its most basic in terms of art making, the three women intended to attract women who would go on to share responsibility in "push[ing] the boundaries of the notion of 'new form for new content'.... Since we planned to work out of a content base, which would allow the fusing of emotion and idea, we intended to ask women to think about all the possible ways they might express their subject matter and then help them learn whatever techniques were necessary for the realization of their ideas."⁴

In an interview with the art historian Lucy Lippard, Chicago describes the programs she founded at Fresno and CalArts as "the first step in building an alternate art community."⁵ She goes on to describe the Woman's Building as a locus for

“education, exhibition, criticism, documentation of feminist values.” Later in the interview, Chicago tells Lippard that it was the Woman’s Building structure, as it existed outside the mainstream, that had allowed her to “transform [her] circumstances into subject matter,” to use her personal circumstances to “reveal the whole nature of the human condition,” the fundamental building block, to Chicago, of great art.⁶ Ten years after the Feminist Studio Workshop opened its doors, de Bretteville wrote that the goal of feminist design education, along with design practice itself, should be nothing less than to provoke an “alternative vision of the world” that would strive to “transform the dominant culture” and allow women to be equally participant in every aspect of life.⁷

The Feminist Studio Workshop’s initial classes in design met in Sheila de Bretteville’s house off the Hollywood Freeway. There the students began to explore with de Bretteville a larger context for art making, one that incorporated de Bretteville’s ideas about communication beyond the “loft, gallery and museum-going elite, when we make our communications using mass media technology.”⁸ In these sessions de Bretteville presented her version of the separated and hierarchical worlds of fine art and graphic design. In her words:

[A]n artist traditionally speaks to a narrowly defined audience (other artists, collectors. . . .) The result is often an incestuous and elitist atmosphere for the arts. The designer, on the other hand, reaches a broad audience and speaks a common language. . . . The limitation of design is that the designer represents the voice and image of the firm she works for and very seldom feels any personal connection to what she creates.⁹

For Susan King, de Bretteville was reinforcing a lesson she had learned earlier in an important book for her, *Finding One’s Way with Clay*: in art making, taste and style are not enough.¹⁰ King began to understand in these early lessons that her relocation to California was simply one small step in a process whose goal was nothing less than the redesign of her entire life.

The Origins of Bookmaking at the Woman’s Building

Chicago and de Bretteville worked from very different approaches to their professional practices, but their joint concerns about helping women find new ways of merging form and content in their art making led many of their students to an interest in the book form. While Chicago’s artwork did not directly involve books as a form, her paintings and drawings did sometimes include text, and the direction of works such as *The Dinner Party* was pointing toward the narrative. De Bretteville’s interest in books and publishing was much more direct although, again, she did not herself make or publish books (or in fact publish much writing of any sort). Throughout her career as a graphic

designer she has had a pronounced interest in typography; among many other professional commissions, she was for a time a designer at the *Los Angeles Times*.

De Bretteville also positioned her work in feminist design education at the intersection of the private and public spheres of women’s lives. Just as feminist activists in the nineteenth century recognized the importance of moving “women’s work” into the public arena of speaking and lecturing, writing and publishing, and employment outside the home, de Bretteville and many of the newly voiced feminists in the burgeoning second-wave movement recognized the vital need for women to come out from behind their shells of private invisibility into the public light. For de Bretteville, this move into the public sphere was a social necessity: “Once a woman is able to locate and articulate a connection to the public world, she is able to feel more responsible and caring toward it.”¹¹ De Bretteville chose the Women’s Graphic Center as the appropriate program in which this connection could be made. The stated goal of the program was clear on this issue: “It is the intention of the Women’s Graphic Center to provide the education, equipment and support necessary for women to make the bridge from the personal to the public world.”¹² At the Women’s Graphic Center the bridge would be built largely through the production and publication of books.

Books and publishing were very much in the foreground of second-wave feminism. Feminist publishing was seen as a critical antidote to the silencing women had experienced in the realm of mainstream trade and academic publishing. One early entry, *Women and Their Bodies* (continuously in print since 1970 as *Our Bodies, Ourselves*) provided an important model for the newly essential dissemination of information and narrative about gendered issues. Throughout the early seventies, feminist presses were popping up all over the country, from Cambridge, Massachusetts (Alice James Books) to Oakland, California (Diana Press, an offshoot of the Women’s Press Collective). Many published mainly or exclusively poetry, but there were titles as well in oral history, social and cultural issues, political analysis, and the recovered works of earlier generations of women, some of whom, like Anaïs Nin, who was still very much alive but working on her diaries in some obscurity, suddenly found themselves in the enviable position of having become icons to the young women coming of age in the movement.

Nin was in many ways the perfect embodiment of a revered elder (a description she would probably not have appreciated) to the young women at the Woman’s Building seeking role models for their new found ways of writing. She had come of age in her native Paris at the latter edge of the avant-garde movement there. Like many of her female colleagues during that time, Nin was unable to find a publisher for her poems and surrealist novels; and like them, she turned to self-publishing as a temporary solution to seeing her work in print. Her self-promotion included being photographed, sitting down with her legs discreetly crossed, hand setting type for a book of her own poetry. By the early seventies, Nin, now a naturalized American citizen



Ed Ruscha, *Every Building on the Sunset Strip*, 1966. Photographic book, black offset paper folded and glued, 7.1" x 5.6" x .04" (closed dimensions). © Ed Ruscha. Courtesy Gagosian Gallery.

and revered for the candor in her voluminous diaries (which would eventually run to eleven published volumes), was living in Los Angeles. Through her connection with Judy Chicago, Nin conducted private tutoring sessions in her Hollywood home for some writers associated with the Feminist Studio Workshop, even holding a book signing at the Woman's Building for one of the diaries just before her death in 1977 at the age of seventy-four. Susan King describes the arrival of Nin at the 1973 opening of the Woman's Building this way: "The sea of people parted as she floated up the patio staircase."¹³

Concurrent with this fired-up passion for seeing women's work into print, if not entirely into distribution (many of these presses would come painfully and, finally, terminally face-to-face with the economic difficulties of their missions by the late seventies) another movement centered on books was developing, this one in the arena of Conceptual art. While the origins of contemporary artists' books are as contested as their definitive descriptors, the synchronicity of the Moore College of Art exhibition and the founding of the Woman's Building and particularly the Women's Graphic Center does provide a tantalizing space for dialogue between the form of one and the goals of the other.

Well before the Moore College exhibition, Lippard, whose work would go on to have an important bearing on the reception of artists' books, brought these early book forms forward through her writing on dematerialization as a foundation of Conceptual art practice. Although the idea of a dematerialized art object has been questioned often since its first appearance in print, Lippard coined the term with her colleague John

Chandler to trace not only the development of what they refer to as ultra-Conceptual art, but also to describe work in which, as Lippard puts it, there is a denial of expected identity. In Lippard's view the book work of artists such as Sol LeWitt and in particular Ed Ruscha represented the ideal ultra-dematerialized art as objects that were inexpensive, endlessly reproducible, conceptual in content, and above all were able to be distributed completely outside the mainstream gallery world. Lippard went on to co-found the New York artists' book collective Printed Matter in 1976, which opened a retail shop in New York while also acting as a publisher and distributor of artists' books. Although she would shortly repudiate her early enthusiasm for these books, at least in their potential for revolutionizing the mainstream art system (Lippard initially envisioned these books replacing thrillers and bodice rippers on supermarket checkout lines), the idea was by then taking hold that artists' books provided an alternative pathway for the creative voice as "instruments for extension to a far broader public..."¹⁴

Early Influences: One Story Continued

For Susan King, the increasingly public profile of the new feminist presses and their products would have certainly been a part of the ongoing conversation at the Women's Graphic Center. Two events in particular became central for King during this early period of the Women's Graphic Center. Both revolved around Helen Alm, the Women's Graphic Center's first director: the acquisition of a small commercial letterpress shop, and an afternoon class that remains vivid in King's memory.

Alm bought the contents of a small letterpress shop that was going out of business for the Chouinard Building site in 1974. Included in the purchase was a ten-by-fifteen-inch Chandler & Price platen press and some metal Melior type. The C&P, a venerable mid-sized press of a style known affectionately as a clamshell because of the way it opens and closes to accept and release the hand-fed paper, became the cornerstone of the letterpress studio. The excited students at Feminist Studio Workshop voted on a second metal typeface to augment the Melior, choosing Bruce Rogers's elegant Centaur from the catalog of the Los Angeles Type Founders.

The second event took place during Alm's design class. On that bright Friday in the courtyard of Chouinard, Alm showed the gathered students several examples of artists' books and other work from her own library and from the collection of de Bretteville. Two groups of books immediately resonated with King: Ed Ruscha's and Jane Grabhorn's.

Ruscha's work with books began in 1966 with what would become the icon of conceptual artists' books, *Every Building on the Sunset Strip*. The book unfolded into a long accordion that mimicked Sunset Boulevard in Hollywood and displayed photographically literally every building that lined the street in a flattened perspective that resembled the maps of the stars' homes sold on the street corner in Beverly Hills. Intentionally unpretentious, the book was produced in an open edition in defiance of

the idea of the singular or limited artworks available through the gallery system or the fine press publisher. Ruscha claimed in one of his infrequent interviews that he was not interested in the book form per se, but in the lack of preciousness inherent in the idea of the multiple. This statement seems somewhat disingenuous given the narrative content of several of his books, particularly his graphic novels or the classic *Royal Road Test* (1967), in which Ruscha and some of his friends describe a trip to the Nevada desert where, while moving at a high speed, they tossed a Royal typewriter out the car window, then went back to document the results, photographing the remains as they lay scattered along the roadside.

While Ruscha was already a staple in any discussion of artists' bookmaking by the time Susan King and her sister students began to address this form, Jane Grabhorn was unknown outside of a small and elite group of West Coast aficionados of fine printing. The wife of the well-known printer Robert Grabhorn, whose work with his brother Edwin in San Francisco's Grabhorn Press was legendary, Jane had toiled at the composing bank of the press since its establishment in 1919. Somewhat later she also ran her own publishing house, Colt Press. Exasperated at times with the exacting nature of fine printing, Jane Grabhorn demanded her own means of production away from the Grabhorns' elegant machines; Robert purchased her a tabletop letterpress with the brand name Jumbo. This press became the namesake for Jane's irreverent commentaries on fine printing and its perfectionist demands: "Don't be tied down like dunces and fools/To quads ems picas and man-made rules./In this kind of trif-eling, let the male wallow,/For women the freedom of wind and of swallow."¹⁵ King fell in love on the spot with Jane's brand of idiosyncratic printing. The combination of freeform, highly individual content and tightly controlled and skillful craft provided King with a model for moving her own work into the book form.

Alm had exhibited an interest in artists' books while a printmaker at Cal [University of California, Berkeley] and adopted the "mass production technology"¹⁶ of offset printing during her tenure there. A representative book is *Revealed to Me* (1972). The ten-page book is comb-bound and offset-printed in black ink in a nearly square, oversized (ten-by-eleven-inch) format. *Revealed to Me* offers a compelling look at the way in which some icons of Western art might be reinterpreted through an individual sensibility. In the first image, the central grouping, a Renaissance family at the table, is presented as oblivious to the chaotic figures that surround the table. A gnome, a dwarf in heavy makeup, and a Glen Baxter figure in twenties swim attire appear to be partaking of the meal; a snake sleeps on the table and a small dog pulls at the tablecloth. In the next collage, the scale is interrupted and a pointing finger directs the viewer to events outside the window. From that point the collaged elements become increasingly chaotic and iconographic; religious and political symbology take hold, and the viewer is left to interpret and deconstruct the various meanings imbedded in the pages. Most intriguingly, Alm herself catalogs these images in a three-page index in which the



Helen Alm, *Revealed to Me*, 1974. Artist's book. Photograph courtesy Susan E. King.

various bits of imagery are separated and pictured singly inside small, square boxes, suggesting that the viewer might engage in a game of locating the disconnected images (the snake, a telephone, metal tubing, a lamb cinched around its middle and dangling from an armature) in the complex collages. In a subsequent description of the book, Alm gives very little interpretation, writing only, "I allow images that interest me to take on a symbolic interpretation..."¹⁷

These three models—the dematerialized work of Ruscha, the irreverent doggerel of Grabhorn, and the subverted iconography of Alm—offered diverse influences for King. But she had also begun developing content for her work through the process, new to her, of autobiographical writing. The writing, another strong component of the Feminist Studio Workshop, was taught under the auspices of the Women Writers Program, led initially by the poet Deena Metzger. Metzger, who sometimes also taught classes in her living room, drew on novelists such as Marge Piercy and Doris Lessing, whose *Martha Quest* series had electrified many newly formed women's groups throughout the seventies. By 1978, the poets whose inspiration drove the writing workshops included Adrienne Rich, Susan Griffin, Diane di Prima, Honor Moore, and the work of the four women who were teaching the workshops: Eloise Klein Healy, Martha Lifson, Holly Prado, and Metzger.

King, who came to the Feminist Studio Workshop as a visual artist, remembers that the concept of using one's own stories for artmaking was strongly promoted beginning in 1974, the second year of the program and the year that would come to mark King's own beginning as a writer. Like many women across the country during this period, King and her sister students at the Feminist Studio Workshop were struggling to find their own voices on a range of levels. For King, the autobiographical writing was the most difficult aspect of the workshop.

One of the first book projects that King undertook was a diazo print project, *Dark & Bloody Ground* (1978). The diazo project, proposed by de Bretteville for an eight-session workshop, was to result in a group of printed broadsides meant for "posting, distribution and exhibition."¹⁸ The diazo print was not an arbitrary choice. De Bretteville, whose awareness of this process was likely promoted by her husband, architect Peter de Bretteville, understood diazo to be an economical method for the production of multiples. De Bretteville further prescribed red-print rather than blue-print, both as way of calling attention to itself and because of the red/read homonym that would be implicit in the final work. The projects were meant to reflect both of these spellings, and the assignment sheet listed several meanings for each word in order to help define the project's intention: read, to derive means from; red, any of the various colors resembling blood. (Interestingly, the assignment did not acknowledge another characteristic of diazo printing, its inherently ephemeral nature.)

King's work took the suggestion of blood literally in both its title and its content. She did not, however, adhere to the suggested broadside form. The piece instead

became a small book, folded into a concertina. Text completely dominated the work, obviously a major change for a ceramist; the visual aspect was limited to the white type reversed out of the blood-red background. The content was an autobiographical memory of a journey from Los Angeles back to King's hometown in Kentucky. (The dark and bloody ground in the title is the Native American designation for it.) In this work, King established several themes that would continue to resonate in her books: the importance of place, the pull of family, the search for identity as an artist, the importance of materiality to the development of her ideas. King's work as an artist's bookmaker had begun.

King would go on to work with the foundations of this project in many of her subsequent works. In 1977, she produced another diazo print book, this one in blue-print, titled *Pacific Legend*. The band that wraps around the covers refers to this book as, "A mapping of a year's mythology. A personal journey with images." This dual description appears to suggest the dual voices—one public, multiplied, audienced, the second private, reflective, a mirror of the personal—that de Bretteville stressed in her teaching. *Pacific Legend* introduced this duality, and repeated the material experiment of the red/read print assignment, including this time its implicit ephemerality.

Critical evaluation of the work King and her colleagues undertook was not a particular aim of the program, which was intensely engaged in a way to help women "gain confidence in the possibility of expressing personal reality in . . . the public world."¹⁹ This lack of the standard expectation for critique and judgment left women free to explore their own voices in a largely non-judgmental environment. In King's words, the general thrust of instruction was toward, "being kind to people who were making things."²⁰ Clearly, this operating principle melded well with de Bretteville's concept of the feminist designer as needing to critique "the elements of our culture that demean women" while encouraging "strength, grace and warmth."²¹

Consciousness-Raising and the "Great Art" Construct

With the publication in 1971 of Linda Nochlin's essay, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?," the landscape of art history began to develop the contours of the feminine. Nochlin's essay outlines a feminist analysis for contextualizing the concept of "greatness" within the sociological and institutional frameworks of the culture rather than relying on the traditional idea of a god-granted or inherently gifted personage, a construct that had always privileged the white male in Western culture. At the same time, Nochlin takes exception to two aspects of what she characterizes as contemporary feminist practice with regard to an examination of the history and practice of art. First, she states that feminists were attempting to reconstitute minor women artists as "great" artists using the same (male) criteria that had always been in place. Second and more unsettling is the "mistaken" feminist concept about what constitutes art, attributing to feminism the "naïve idea that art is the direct, personal expression of

individual emotional experience, a translation of personal life into visual terms.”²²

There is some ambiguity in the position of the Feminist Studio Workshop with regard to these positions in the many early statements explaining its founding. Certainly one major aim of the Woman's Building was to acknowledge, according to de Bretteville, the fundamental importance of “reviv[ing] names and faces, plans and actions from history,” in order to “create a future from expanded resources.”²³ Raven called the Woman's Building “an act against the historical erasure of women's art and an acknowledgement of the heritage we were beginning to recover.”²⁴ There is no particular claim to the inherent greatness of the women whose names were being reclaimed in this recovery; in fact Nochlin's essay and her other writing, with its lists and critiques of “lost” women artists, helped to define the territory. Chicago referred to Nochlin's essay in *Through the Flower* not for its theoretical stance but for its historical examples of strong women artists.²⁵

The “naïve idea” that art is the movement of personal experience into visual mediums could on the other hand be seen as central to the creative philosophy of the Feminist Studio Workshop. In *Through the Flower*, Chicago discusses the work of the women in her class at Fresno State: “Theirs was content-oriented art. Although I never instructed them to make any particular kind of work, I had encouraged them to use the content of their lives as the basis of their art and that had stimulated the production of a lot of work.”²⁶ De Bretteville's mission statement for the Women's Design Program at CalArts states, “Starting with ourselves, we have used our own experiences as appropriate subject matter.”²⁷ The dynamic that supported the development of content in the art of the “fusing of emotion and idea,” as the original goal stated, was the method being repeatedly tested and developed throughout second-wave feminism: consciousness-raising.

Consciousness-raising was a fundamental element of the various feminist art and education programs developed by Chicago and her colleagues at every venue in which they operated. There are numerous references to consciousness-raising in *Through the Flower*, whose index lists ten citations, several spanning ten to twenty pages, with related subjects ranging from “alternative female art community” to performance. Consciousness-raising was at the root of nearly all training at the Feminist Studio Workshop. In one undated schedule of classes for a fall term at Feminist Studio Workshop (possibly 1978), consciousness-raising sessions appear in three separate weekly time slots. Monday afternoons were partially dedicated to “C-R on Political Issues,” conducted by the CalArts student turned Feminist Studio Workshop faculty member Suzanne Lacy. On Fridays the entire morning was given over to consciousness-raising groups, in this case leaderless and “democratic.” And on Sunday morning the Natalie Barney Collective held three hours of consciousness-raising along with its meeting.²⁸

When de Bretteville set up The Women's Graphic Center Program at the

Woman's Building in 1973 to train women in the technical processes of offset printing and publishing, she used “modified” consciousness-raising during the group discussions that anchored the Sunday workshops. Although the specific nature of modified consciousness-raising is not clarified in the course syllabus connected with these workshops, the discussion format is described as one of “support, criticism, suggestions response to problems [*sic*], possibilities, similarities and [di]fferences.”²⁹ For Chicago at Fresno State, modified consciousness-raising had a specific intended outcome: “I didn't know about classical consciousness-raising then. Instead we did a kind of modified consciousness-raising, which combined the expressing of common experiences with my trying to help the women understand the implications of those experiences in order to change their behavior patterns.”³⁰

This forthright intent toward implementing a “new” paradigm for women's lives as expressed by Chicago in the early seventies—in which her role seems based on the patriarchal therapeutic models of the time—appears to find refinement as the Feminist Studio Workshop developed its ideas about the purposes of feminist education. Descriptions of de Bretteville's Sunday critiques in the Women's Graphic Center Program are filled with nouns and phrases such as discussion, get-together, support, suggestions, response to problems, often avoiding the word “criticism,” or putting it last in a string of words, in an implicit acknowledgement of its problematized connotation. A critique becomes a “discussion with an effort to locate contradictions and consistencies in our responses to the materials.”³¹

Ruth Iskin, whose practice as a feminist art historian led her to an early leadership role at the Feminist Studio Workshop, declares in an interview, “Feminist education assists women in developing their full potential while developing new form and content in art, form and content which are related to their experiences and lives as women and to feminism.”³²

A 1977 booklet by the British independent art historian Mary Michaels suggests that the initial enthusiasm for an unmediated platform for this new form and content combination might have been mitigated by the quality of some of the products of this exploration. Michaels, in her insightful and well-written pamphlet on her experience with the second annual, ten-day-long, summer Feminist Education Workshop held at the Spring Street Woman's Building, briefly explained Chicago's teaching methodology at this time: “Judy worked with us on visual art: tackling the problem of how to get women making images out of their sense of themselves, rather than a culturally imposed idea of ‘Art’; and then, of helping to develop those images into something that would have a wider validity and resonance—art.”³³

Later Michaels paraphrases Chicago in the context of an evening critique at the Feminist Education Workshop: “You mustn't pretend it's art when it isn't, but you have to find ways of combining critical acuity with human support.”³⁴

For Susan King, the complex overlay of production workshops, consciousness-

raising, writing, and her own background in visual, three-dimensional art making, underpinned by the positive support of her teachers, mentors, and peers, led to a commitment to the juxtaposition of form and content in increasingly experimental and individualistic books.

Women and the Printing Arts

King and other emergent artist bookmakers shared an interest in an audience for their work; that audience would presumably be situated outside the mainstream and chauvinistic gallery system. As evidenced in the 1975 catalog *Women and the Printing Arts*,³⁵ the books being produced through the Feminist Studio Workshop and the Women's Graphic Center focused on serial scheme and a strong connection to the literary. They embodied, by their very nature as feminist documents, or even as documents created and produced by women, the denial of expected identity that underlay Lippard's theory. The catalog also served as an implicit critique of the failure of mainstream publishing to make public enough women's voices.³⁶

Women and the Printing Arts cataloged the exhibition of twenty-five women and one collective whose work was shown in a 1975 exhibition of the same name at the Woman's Building. The exhibition was not limited to women working at the Woman's Building: about half (thirteen women plus the Helaine Victoria Press collective) were from the Los Angeles area, with the rest spread across the country. (The furthest away geographically was Ann Williams in Glover, Vermont.) The catalog was produced as a series of cards, like those of a hard-copy (non-digital) library catalog, held together by a metal ring. Books, posters, and cards were exhibited, but books dominated; in all there are twenty-two books among the twenty-six participants. The catalog offers only written descriptions of the work, not images, and emphasizes three aspects of each piece: production techniques, the fact that they are produced in editions, and the implied presence of an audience.

The absence of photographs in the catalog is justified in a statement following the introduction which says that the "modesty" of scale, color, and size of the works coupled with their complexity of organization (i.e., books) meant that little would be communicated through photography of the individual pieces. While it is possible that the absence of photographs was primarily due to the technical difficulties of including them in this early attempt at a catalog, the apparent lack of focus on the visual aspects of the work is explained by de Bretteville in her introduction, in which she strongly privileges production, distribution, and the idea of invited response, speaking of "activity" rather than creativity. De Bretteville writes of "mass produced personal statements," and asks each catalog contributor to comment, in the brief participant statements, on both the production and distribution methods she has employed, as opposed to the content of the work itself.³⁷

This emphasis on production is consistent with de Bretteville's role as a

graphic designer, in line with the often-pronounced disparity between the "high" art of the visual arts and "low" art of design. In general de Bretteville rejected the "elitist" gallery system in favor of the grittier populist methods of the designer, who by definition must work for an audience of consumers. In her Women's Graphic Center classes, de Bretteville asked her students to consider the "implications" as well as the similarities and differences of working with, for example, handmade objects, handset type, or photographic images in fine art or vernacular traditions, always in the context of these questions: "What do you want to make, what do you want the receiver to experience, what processes do you intend to use and why, how many do you intend to make, what materials do you intend to use and why?"³⁸ At the root of these questions is a focus on the tangible products of the makers as opposed to the conceptual foundations of the work being undertaken. In the Graphic Center course description there is no question that asks: What do you want to say? Instead, the focus is on the works' reception. On page one of the same syllabus, de Bretteville expresses her goals for the course this way: "What is being communicated, who is the audience, what is of value to you, to society, in the work?"³⁹

Of course, the Feminist Studio Workshop, which would have had students in common with the Women's Graphic Center, was focused on supporting women in the pursuit of their own voices. In addition to the several weekly consciousness-raising sessions, the fall term (1978?) schedule of classes includes two to three hour sessions on *Our Work and Our Lives*, *Feeling to Form* (co-taught by de Bretteville and Jane Rosenzweig), and two writing workshops directed by Deena Metzger, one of which took place in Metzger's living room. Still, a comprehensive evaluation of the various education programs issued in February 1980 states in a critique of the Feminist Studio Workshop that the program would benefit from "decreased emphasis on process for its own sake and increased emphasis on process related to creating art."⁴⁰

The emphasis on audience and the concomitant repudiation of the traditional workings of mainstream art parallel Lippard's views. In 1977, Lippard wrote an appreciation of women's artists' books for *Chrysalis*, the feminist periodical that was not coincidentally published out of the Woman's Building, with de Bretteville as both editorial board member and designer. The essay, which notes both *Women and the Printing Arts* and its 1977 sequel, about which more will be said later, also includes in the post-script an explicit critique and a somewhat guarded concern about the content of some of the books being produced by women:

The feminist art movement has evolved from talking to oneself... to talking about oneself...and is now becoming increasingly concerned with talking to an economically broader-based audience without losing the intimacy of the personal/communicative mode natural to women.

While the form of artists' books, posters, and postcards is ideally suited to this evolution, their content is too rarely formulated with these ends in mind. Most feminist artists tend to be torn between expressing themselves as strongly as they can and making that expression accessible to others. It is a conflict that will not readily be solved as long as there is an art world and an avant-garde. Yet the notion of feminist art carries within it, by definition, a profound concern for other women.⁴¹

The Pioneering Presence of Cindy Marsh

One of the exhibitors in *Women and the Printing Arts* was Cynthia Marsh. An early de Bretteville recruit, Cindy Marsh came to the Woman's Building from a bifurcated background of art and technology, making her an ideal candidate for de Bretteville's vision. Marsh was raised in the Boston area, where she took advantage of the ambience of Harvard Square to experience alternative art and music in the sixties. After her schooling at, interestingly, Moore College of Art in Philadelphia, a women's college, and at Rochester Institute of Technology, where her MFA studies emphasized the technical aspects of both fine art and offset lithography, Marsh moved to Los Angeles because, she claims, she wanted to meet one of her art heroes, the ubiquitous Ed Ruscha.⁴²

According to Marsh, de Bretteville dropped by Marsh's Hollywood apartment one day and invited her to join a new organization, the Women's Graphic Center, which had received some grant money to pay an offset printer. Marsh wandered down to the Chouinard Building the next day to look at the facility and ended up taking the job, despite some hesitations, because she needed a place to do her own work. Marsh's hesitation partially revolved around the issue of sexual orientation. Marsh, a heterosexual who took her boyfriend with her to inspect the new space, wanted to be certain she would be accepted into the community. Marsh's concerns were echoed by many women approaching the Woman's Building. Heterosexuals were uncertain of their reception in a community that, in supporting gender separation, might also, some surmised, be interested in promoting lesbian separatism. Lesbians (bisexuality and transgendering were hardly considered at this time) who had spent their lives experiencing overt prejudice wanted the assurance of a safe space for both their work and their personal actions. These conflicting tensions continued to require dialogue throughout the life of the Woman's Building.

Marsh stayed to teach at the Women's Graphic Center, where she quickly became a co-director with de Bretteville and Alm, as well as at the Feminist Studio Workshop. Her six-hour class at the Women's Graphic Center focused on offset printing techniques, which she taught on the AB Dick, a duplicator-type offset press that was compact and relatively simple to learn for Marsh's students, many of whom nonetheless did not master its operation, preferring the more direct and accessible

THE SPORTING LIFE 1975



Fat Heart Publications

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

WOMEN'S COMMUNITY PRESS

Cynthia Marsh, *The Sporting Life* 1975. Offset, silkscreen and letterpress. Fat Heart Publications, printed at the Women's Graphic Center, six pages, edition of 50 copies. © Cynthia Marsh.

technique of letterpress. Marsh often worked on the larger offset press, the RotoPrint, which could feed an eighteen-by-twenty-four-inch sheet of paper. Marsh described this press as an “albatross,” a designation that did not prevent her from subsequently buying it from the Woman’s Building and “dragging” it home to her studio.

In addition to her innovative use of the commercial technology of offset, Marsh incorporated a variety of media into her own work, including letterpress and silkscreen. Her education and creative sensibility made her the perfect teacher and role model at the Woman’s Building. Her highly individualized combination of art and design coupled with her understanding of both the commercial use of and the creative potential for current technologies (offset printing had supplanted letterpress as a commercial technology in the sixties) meant that she embodied the Woman’s Building ideal of combining fine art and commercial production methods in the service of an audience. Marsh noted this idiosyncratic combination of interests early on in her work. At Rochester Institute of Technology, critiques of her work, “tended to come down to, ‘Well, is this a print or are you selling something?’” Lippard described her work at the Women’s Graphic Center as a group of prints that “comment on the joys of printing and the consumer life, like an esthetically satisfying mail order catalogue.”⁴³

These works, labeled by Marsh in the *Women and the Printing Arts* catalog as books, were in fact large-format suites of prints. *The Sporting Life 1975* is representative. The nine, ten-by-twelve-inch sheets, printed on heavy card stock, combine photography with the reproduction of found objects such as a band-aid, a wood screw, button earrings, and jars of enamel paint that might be used for painting airplane models. All are placed in seemingly random order and juxtaposed with photographs of page spreads from open books. The images are offset printed in both black and white and color, and there are silkscreen additions, including on one print a ring from a coffee mug. There are no explanations for the various images, whose presentation resembles a sparsely designed mail-order catalog whose clientele comes from Tristan Tzara’s mailing list.

These suites have the undeniable characteristics of an artists’ book in concept and content (strongly thematic in a randomly-built sequence); the obviously multiple prints resemble largish book pages in form and substrate (inexpensive commercial paper rather than photographic or printmaking paper). One in particular, a two-sided, black-and-white piece that has on one side a photograph of a vintage John D. MacDonald paperback opened out to show both covers and on the other captures a random page spread from the same novel, both set at slightly rakish angles, seems to capture the essence of the conceptualized, dematerialized object, a clearly Postmodern form. Marsh saw the objects in *The Sporting Life* as remnants of the “visual noise” of the year in which she printed them.⁴⁴

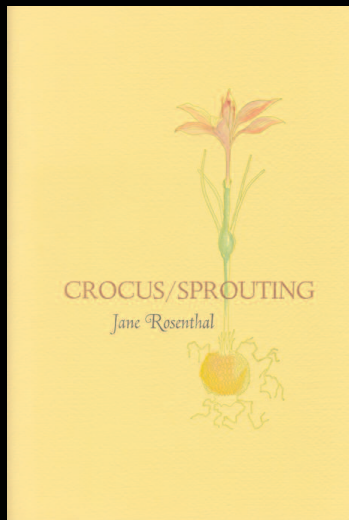
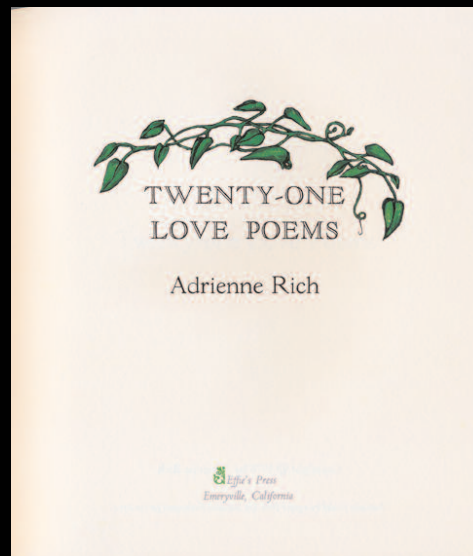
Marsh lists among these influences the artists Dieter Roth and of course Ruscha (whom she did meet), along with the work of Something Else Press, particularly

Allan Kaprow, and other Fluxus artists. Stephen Bury describes Something Else Press as creating an “ennoblement of the ephemeral.” Marsh’s captured representations of everyday objects were another form of ennobling the ephemeral, one that she made her own in these idiosyncratic collections.

The Northern California Connection

While King was developing her highly distinctive voice in the burgeoning field of artist bookmakers, she cemented her connection with the Woman’s Building by moving from a position of founding student to that of studio director for the Women’s Graphic Center. King traveled between her apartment, which fronted the Venice boardwalk, and downtown Los Angeles in her aging Volkswagen bug, often accompanied by one of the many visiting artists and printers that she and the other leaders in the Women’s Graphic Center brought in for teaching, lecturing, and curating. King continued to develop the letterpress studio, building on the initial donations of type and equipment and issuing invitations to visiting artists and printers, many from the San Francisco Bay Area. These women were attracted to the energy and focus of the Woman’s Building, an entity without parallel in Northern California, which had instead a preponderance of male, literary, fine-press printers working separately in their shops filled with metal type and letterpresses, and a long and illustrious history but little collective energy. These Northern California women welcomed the opportunity to be in a community that teaching at the Woman’s Building offered. In turn, they brought newly minted letterpress production experience, often gleaned via casual instruction from veteran printers such as Adrian Wilson, Alfred Kennedy, and Clifford Burke, to their Southern California sisters.

At the Woman’s Building these two groups of women, the feminist artist/publishers in Southern California and the feminist writer/printers in the north, met to exchange ideas and, more immediately, production skills. Bonnie Carpenter, of Effie’s Press in Berkeley, and Jaime Robles and I, of Five Trees Press, conducted weekend workshops in letterpress production methods, which both presses were using exclusively to produce their small-edition chapbooks. The work at Five Trees and particularly at Effie’s was largely poetry by women and was printed in standard chapbook style, either minus illustrations other than title page decoration or accompanied by relief prints. Robles undertook most of the illustrations for those books at Five Trees Press, including H.D.’s *The Poet & The Dancer* (1975), one of the earliest of H.D.’s works to be resuscitated in a legitimate, non-pirated edition, as well as for *Crocus/Sprouting* (1974), the first book issued by Five Trees, with poetry by Jane Rosenthal and design and printing by Cheryl Miller. At Effie’s, located in a warehouse in Emeryville, an industrial town tucked between Berkeley, Oakland, and the calm waters of the San Francisco Bay, Carpenter used hand-set Goudy types to print her poetry chapbooks by writers including Adrienne Rich (*Twenty-One Love Poems* [1977]) and Mary Mackey.



Clockwise from top-left **Adrienne Rich, author, Bonnie Carpenter, publisher, artist, book designer and printer, *Twenty-one Love Poems*, 1976.** Letterpress and woodcut graphic, Effe's Press: Emeryville. © Bonnie L. Carpenter.

Mary Mackey, author, Bonnie L. Carpenter, publisher, artist, book designer and printer, *One Night Stand*, 1976. Letterpress and woodcut graphic, Effe's Press: Emeryville. © Bonnie L. Carpenter.

Jane Rosenthal, author, Cheryl Miller, printer, Jaime Robles, illustrator, *Crocus/Sprouting*, 1974. Five Trees Press: San Francisco. Photograph courtesy Kathleen Walkup.

Clockwise from top **Kenneth Davids, author, Betsy Davids and James Petrillo, cover design, *The Softness on the Other Side of the Hole*, 1976.** Oakland: Rebis Press. © Kenneth Davids.

Betsy Davids and Ed Moore, authors, Betsy Davids, title page design, *Double Rising Eyelids Rolling Blue*, 1972. Letterpress book, 10" x 8 1/4". Berkeley: Rebis Press. © Betsy Davids and Ed Moore.

Johanna Drucker, illustrator, *As No Storm or the Any Port Party Test*, 1975. Letterpress. Berkeley: Rebis Press. © Johanna Drucker.



Mackey's book, *One Night Stand* (1976), is a rich admixture of traditional typography and cream-colored paper encased in a dazzling, orange, glossy Kromecoat cover; on the title page the words *One Night Stand* are encircled by an IUD. The first poem begins, "You were a four-star fuck." The book, printed by Carpenter in an edition of five hundred copies, sold for \$4.

Two other women whose work was often more hybridized (literary and visual, in approximately equal parts) also traveled from Berkeley to Los Angeles to teach at the Women's Graphic Center. Betsy Davids of Rebis Press and Frances Butler of Poltroon Press, along with their respective press partners Jim Petrillo and Alastair Johnston, used the medium of letterpress to generate both text and relief images in their books. Rebis Press often stressed collaboration in its editioned works. Davids, a writer and Renaissance scholar, worked with other writers such as Ed Moore, an ex-student from Davids's English classes at California College of Arts and Crafts (CCAC, now California College of the Arts), on Rebis's first book, *Double Rising Eyelids Rolling Blue*, and with Carole Peel on *Her Her, Her & Her, Her vs. Her, Her-Her*, a large-format portfolio of poems published in an edition of 150 in 1974. Other early publishing efforts included the re-issue of Kenneth Davids's erotic novel, *The Softness on the Other Side of the Hole* (1976), originally published by Grove Press, and *As No Storm or the Any Port Party* (1975), with words and images by Johanna Drucker, a student in Betsy Davids's very first class at CCAC. These last two books—one printed on brown paper-bag stock and bound in thick plywood boards, the other bound in canvas with a spine lashed in thick rope—are indicative of Rebis's experiments with the material form of the book. Although Davids would later say that all of Rebis Press's nontraditional bindings were a product of her reluctance to learn the conventions of hand bookbinding, the books bore implicit references to both earlier *livres d'artistes* and to Conceptual artworks of the sixties.

Poltroon's publications, beginning with its founding in 1975, also challenged materiality, but in this case the work drew more heavily on the tradition of the British artists' book movement and its practitioners, such as the environmental artist Ian Hamilton Finlay and the works of Coracle Press. Butler's contributions to the press were most often visual, beginning with the large-scale chapbook *Confracti Mundi Rudera* (1975), written by both partners and illustrated using black-and-white, often pointillist images. Butler was experimenting throughout this time with very large format photo-engravings, using film prepared in her basement studio and printed on the Vandercook proof press using a free-form inking style. The resultant posters were introduced at the Women's Graphic Center, where Butler traveled at one point as often as twice a month to teach. At the Woman's Building, Butler's contact with Cindy Marsh, whose intelligence as an artist Butler found very impressive, resulted in a sense of shared goals of, in Butler's words, "awaking interest in what were soon to be superannated industrial techniques as viable creative tools."⁴⁵ Like Marsh, Butler taught skills in the various aspects of offset pre-printing, such as the use of the process camera. At

the time, these skills were helping to move artists with access to the equipment toward freedom of production.

Women and the Printing Arts Redux

Freedom of production would be meaningful only in the context of freedom of expression. Although production aspects are strongly privileged over content in the second *Women and the Printing Arts* catalog, published in 1977, the titles of some of the pieces hint at the direction toward personal revelation and discovery that many of the women were heading. Among the most important of these works was Suzanne Lacy's *Rape Book*. Lacy created the first iteration of this book in 1972 while working with Chicago and de Bretteville at CalArts. Lacy left Fresno State in 1969, where she was earning a master's degree in psychology, to follow Chicago there. At CalArts, Lacy encountered Allan Kaprow, who along with John Baldessari was helping to define the philosophy and direction of this new institution. The joint influences of Chicago, the feminist artist for whom the personal was political, and Kaprow, the apolitical conceptualist for whom art was life, led Lacy to a politically based commitment to public art that primarily took the form of performance. The subject of rape was an early and compelling one for Lacy, who co-developed *Ablutions* as a performance piece in 1972. Lacy, Chicago, and two colleagues presented the work to an audience of artists in the Venice studio of one of Chicago's friends. Lacy says of this performance: "It was the first piece I know of that was about rape. . . . For us, going public to the art world was a big step."⁴⁶

Rape Book (1976), a landmark artists' book, effectively combined the personal, political and material into an offset-printed, editioned work of forty-four pages. Lacy initially printed 300 copies, but from the beginning she acknowledged the book's potential for a wider audience by indicating that she would accept orders for subsequent printings.⁴⁷ Lacy's artist's statement in *Women and the Printing Arts* was short and straightforward: "Propaganda is more accessible [sic] in mass production." Her description of *Rape Book*, which is considerably more informative, articulates issues about its form—its book-ness—in terms not often discussed in any context during this time period:

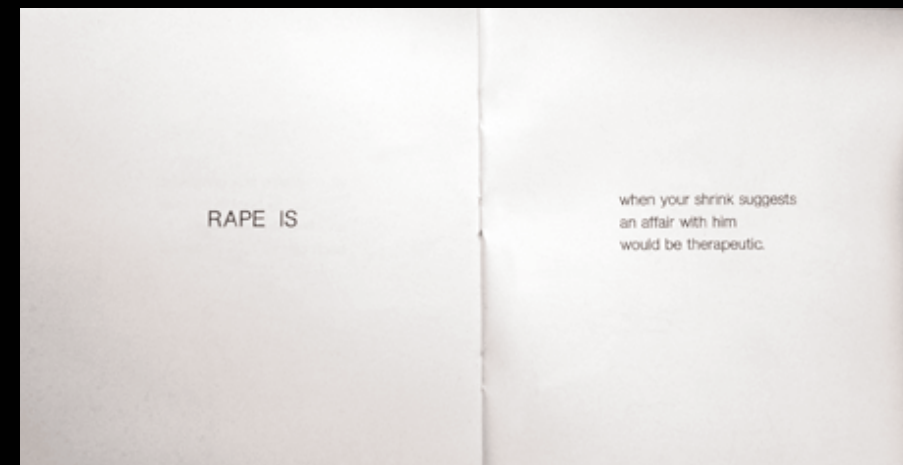
I see the book as an analogy for a woman who is in unity with herself when alone. The glossy white pages are her life—clean, untainted by assumptions and perceptions of women. The intrusions are the black type, the constant recurring experiences which are forcibly placed in the center of each page, in the same way they intrude deeply into a woman's life. I want the reader to enter the book, enter forcibly, enter into a woman's perception, and realize the ways in which women are raped, both psychically and physically.⁴⁸

Lacy created this sense of forcible entry into the book by sealing each copy closed with a large red sticker on which the word RAPE was printed, so that the reader had to tear open the sticker—to violate the book—in order to enter it. Once inside the pages, the reader would encounter definitions of rape that challenged the conventional ideas of the term.

The 1977 version of *Women and the Printing Arts* had a more direct intention than the earlier version. This second iteration was developed as a distribution catalog as opposed to being primarily an exhibition one. In several ways the second catalog reflects an obvious growth and sophistication. First, no fewer than twelve women are listed as members of the collective that produced it, including the two signatories to the first catalog, Helen Alm (now Helen Alm Roth) and Sheila de Bretteville. Cindy Marsh was not part of the collective, but is listed as a “supporter”; Susan King appears for the first time. Second, the catalog bears a copyright notice, in the name of the collective; the first catalog contained no such notice. Third, the catalog indicates the critical support of the Women’s Graphic Center and therefore by default of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). The NEA at this time was an important contributor to many fledgling small press endeavors across the country, including the many women’s presses that emerged during the seventies and early eighties. Finally, and perhaps most importantly for the usefulness of the catalog as a distribution tool, each of the works represented was displayed this time in a black-and-white photo that was printed to bleed off all four sides of the five-by-seven-inch cards; evidently the modesty and complexity of the works were no longer seen as barriers to their visual depiction.

In this second catalog somewhat fewer women and presses were represented (twenty-two as opposed to twenty-six in the first version). Perhaps not surprisingly, the geographic spread is much smaller: only five women were from outside the Los Angeles area (of those none were from the San Francisco Bay Area). Seven women (Alm Roth, de Bretteville, Lacy, Marsh, Carol Bankerd, Vaughan Rachel [Kaprow], and Rachel Youdelman) had work in both catalogs.

If geography was not playing as big a part, books were. Of the twenty-eight works included in the catalog, sixteen were described as books, with another three works arguably able to be included in this category.⁴⁹ Nearly all of the work in the catalog is reproduced by offset printing, an indication of the persistence of production emphasis and the public voice of the multiple. Interestingly, the production methods of the women most closely associated with the Woman’s Building—King, Marsh, Lacy, Alm Roth—are the most complex. Of these, King is the only one to use letterpress (in this case in combination with offset in the book *Passport*); Lacy is the only artist who uses the designation “limited edition” for her work, the book *Falling Apart*, which is hand-typed and hand-bound in an edition of twenty. Also in this catalog, Lacy’s *Rape Book* had acquired the more direct and personal title *Rape Is*; this time her print run was 1,000 copies. (The price, \$5, remained unchanged.)



Top: *Women and the Printing Arts, catalog (2nd edition, illus.)*, 1977. Printed at Women’s Graphic Center, Los Angeles. Woman’s Building Image Archive, Otis College of Art and Design.

Bottom: *Suzanne Lacy, Rape Is*, 1972. Offset printed book with silk-screened cover, Los Angeles. © Suzanne Lacy.

Physical Entity to Spiritual Experience

In 1984 Susan King left as studio director of the Women's Graphic Center. In the interim she had moved from her Venice apartment, with its voyeuristic picture window allowing an uninterrupted view of the skaters, beach bums, and tourists on the beach boardwalk, to the relative seclusion of West Los Angeles, just off Pico Boulevard. Here, behind a modest bungalow, King settled into a two-story, architecturally designed studio with two letterpresses, some metal type, and room for the occasional apprentice. That year she published *I Spent the Summer in Paris* with grants from both the NEA and the New York State Council on the Arts; the book was printed at Visual Studies Workshop in Rochester, New York. This book represents an important conjunction of elements—textual, visual, structural, and material—that would define King's work as an artist's bookmaker. The *Paris* of the title is actually two places: Paris, France, where King traveled for rest and inspiration in the summer of 1983, and Paris, Kentucky, her childhood home, where she returned after her trip to France. King juxtaposes the stories of these two places, with their entirely disparate geographies, into a unified work about her art and her influences. The translucent papers and the intricate, accordion-fold binding create further layers of text and meaning in a mere seven double-folded pages.

When King decided to leave the Woman's Building, eleven years after her arrival there, to pursue her career as a professional artist, she left behind a significant legacy of students who acknowledged the influence she had on their work as artists and as printers. One of these women, Bonnie Thompson Norman, stayed on to take over the studio directorship of the Women's Graphic Center. Thompson discovered her interest in fine printing while working for several years at a Los Angeles bookseller. There she met the highly respected proprietors of the Plantin Press, Saul and Lillian Marks, whose elegant, letterpress, limited edition books were exemplars of the style and craftsmanship of the private presses. To learn this craft, Norman went to the Woman's Building in 1980 to study with King, an experience she later described as "an exciting turning point."⁵⁰ In 1991, when the Woman's Building closed, Norman moved the entire letterpress studio to a converted dance studio at the Armory Center for the Arts in Pasadena.

While Norman's interest continued to reside in the area of limited edition publishing, she also recognized the necessity of teaching younger generations the value of books and bookmaking. She designed courses for children in this satisfying medium, as well as finding time to teach women in prison and to create classes in bookmaking for the developmentally disabled. Her classes at the Women's Graphic Center included, in addition to the letterpress printing classes for which she had been trained by King and others, related craft classes such as suminagashi paper marbling and the making of several types of book structures.

Norman's teaching in turn influenced a young designer named Katherine Ng,

who in many ways represents the transitional point of the Women's Graphic Center from physical entity to spiritual influence. Ng first made contact with the Woman's Building in the latter eighties through a class taught there by artist and poet Karen Holden, who was supported in her teaching by a year-long California Arts Council grant. The class, *Poetry & Bookmaking*, continued the trajectory of study begun by de Bretteville and her colleagues in its combination of writing and visual art. Although most of Holden's students were interested in the writing, Ng, who was studying advertising design at Los Angeles City College, came for the bookmaking. She stayed on after the formal conclusion of Holden's class to rent studio time at the Women's Graphic Center and, incidentally, to continue her poetry studies with Holden. Even this informal class unintentionally followed a Women's Graphic Center tradition by meeting in Holden's living room in Venice.

In 1991, Ng, by now a printmaking student at California State University, Northridge, was studying book art there under the tutelage of none other than Cindy Marsh. Marsh became an important teacher and mentor to Ng, encouraging her to "write dialogues and write from the heart" and "debuting" her at "Book Fair: Celebrating Women Who Make Books" at Mills College in November 1994.⁵¹ Continuing her interest in bookmaking, Ng took several workshops in artists' bookmaking as well as at least one book structure workshop from Norman while she was still at the Spring Street Woman's Building. Through her work with Marsh and Norman, Ng gained proficiency on the letterpresses at both the Woman's Building and at Cal State Northridge. This skill allowed her access to the Woman's Building studio, which by the late eighties was run as a public access studio; Ng was one of several women and men who paid a monthly fee to work on their own projects there. To complete the circle of influences, Marsh introduced Ng to Susan King, who accepted Ng as an apprentice at her West Los Angeles studio.

Ng received support from both Marsh and King for her autobiographical artist's books, in which she explores her identity from various perspectives as an "Asian woman, a manic-depressive, a lesbian." In *Banana Yellow*, Ng writes brief anecdotal stories with titles like "Identity," "Short," "Stereotype," and "ABC" (American Born Chinese) to describe her encounters as a Chinese-American with mainstream American culture. In the first story, Ng describes one particularly poignant moment on her first day of kindergarten when she wanders around the classroom looking for her name, which she hadn't understood was now Katherine and not, as she was called at home, Mui-Mui.

Banana Yellow's presentation, a trapezoid book suggestive of takeout Chinese food containers, emphasizes Ng's ongoing interest in both writing and origami. The latter originally led her to sculptural book forms such as the diamond fold books of Anna Wolfe, the pop-up structures of Beth Thielsen, and the work of Carol Barton, whose book *Tunnel Map* Ng found particularly compelling. The bookbinder Daniel



Katherine Ng, author/artist, *Banana Yellow*, 1991. Artist book. © Katherine Ng.

Kelm's use of metal and wire as hinges helped inspire *Banana Yellow's* wire loop binding and handle.

Given the circle of teachers and mentors with whom Ng has worked, her replacement of Bonnie Thompson Norman as studio director at the Armory Center seemed destined. In this position she introduced many students to the field of book art. In particular Ng, who earned a secondary art education credential in 1998 and an MA in Art Education from Northridge in 2001, instructed elementary and high school teachers in ways to incorporate bookmaking into their classrooms. She also oversaw the letterpress studio there, and in that capacity explained to her classes the provenance of the equipment. Ng and the other artists and teachers who used the mirror-lined, former dance studio did their printing beneath the banner that hung at the Woman's Building. This is a copy of the image for the catalog of the first Woman's Building in turn-of-the-twentieth century Chicago; it shows a painting by the nineteenth century artist Madeleine Lemaire. This symbol of the shared mission of the edifices, but more importantly, the ongoing work accomplished by the women at these spaces, was a

constant reminder to Ng of the most powerful legacy she carried with her from the Woman's Building: the sense of community that she gained there.

Book Art Moves into the Academy

Ng's work as a teacher took place outside the academic setting, just as did the teaching at the Woman's Building. The Armory is one of a small but growing number of centers that either incorporate book art into their curriculum or are founded as community centers for book art. The latter include the Center for Book Arts in New York (which is well past its twenty-fifth anniversary), the Minnesota Center for Book Arts in Minneapolis (founded in 1983), and the San Francisco Center for the Book (founded in 1996). Centers for book art are appearing all over the country, from Massachusetts to New Mexico to Florida.

Academic institutions, some of which had traditionally housed private publishing presses, began to expand into book art programs in the late seventies. In California, two of the most long-standing programs are housed at women's colleges. In Southern California, the Scripps College Press continues an active program of student-involved publishing that has been under the direction of Kitty Maryatt since 1986. (Susan King preceded Maryatt at Scripps.) Each semester students in Maryatt's publishing class collaborate on a theme-based book that explores a topic chosen by Maryatt. The resulting books, produced in small editions, are distributed primarily to a standing group of collectors.

An early book from this class, published in 1987, included four students—Rosalind Hopkins, Sarah Knetzer, Sherry J. Perrault, and Suzanne Rybak—who interviewed eighteen women in book art for *Los Angeles Women Letterpress Printers*. Of these women, seven claimed connections with the Woman's Building, including the artists Vida Hackman and Susan King, and some women King trained, including Robin Price and Marion Baker, who had been a student with King in the Feminist Studio Workshop. There is even a third-generation connection: Nancy Turner studied with King's student Bonnie Thompson Norman. (The seventh woman with Woman's Building connections is Jaime Robles, who was a teacher there.) Although the range of work represented by these women is broad and their influences multiple, they can claim a common connection through the foregrounding of strong production values, the use of letterpress as a reproductive method, a shared appreciation for the edition or multiple book, and the potential for a layered confluence of texts. As Price says in *Los Angeles Women Letterpress Printers*, "I hate one-line art. I like the layering of information." Price, a 1984 graduate of Pomona College who studied typography under Christie Bertelson at Scripps, also had an apprenticeship with King; she calls it her "most cherished job experience."⁵²

Like Scripps, Mills College, in the San Francisco Bay Area, has a contemporary program that has grown from the legacy of an earlier institutional private press. At Mills a librarian and Mills alumna, Rosalind Keep, established the Eucalyptus Press in

her campus home, now demolished, in about 1930, primarily to publish manuscripts connected to the college. Following a moribund period after Keep's death in 1961, the Mills program was revitalized through course offerings in letterpress printing and binding. Artists such as Claire Van Vliet, a Vermont printer and MacArthur Fellow with California roots, and Hedi Kyle, a binder and conservator living at that time in New York, taught workshops at Mills that had far-reaching influence. King, always generous to a fault in her teaching, gave several workshops to Mills students on her innovative techniques, some based on Kyle's structures. More important, however, were King's critiques of student work. At these King insisted on depth and complexity in the simplest of projects, declining in particular to support the "one-line" book, as anathema to her as to her apprentice Price.

King's books continue to inspire a new generation of students at Mills and elsewhere across the country. The combination of her own creative content, innovative book structures and use of contemporary materials provide models for students in creating their own artists' books. Many students choose to write their own texts as a basis for their books in an unconscious echo of the FSW's focus on individual writing. Although these texts do not always rely on the direct, personal experiences that anchored the writing at the FSW, much of today's academic book art teaching uses some form of the fundamental pedagogical construct of FSW: Working from a content base that encourages the fusion of emotion and idea, asking students to explore the broadest range of possibilities for their subject matter, and teaching them the specific techniques they need to fulfill their vision.

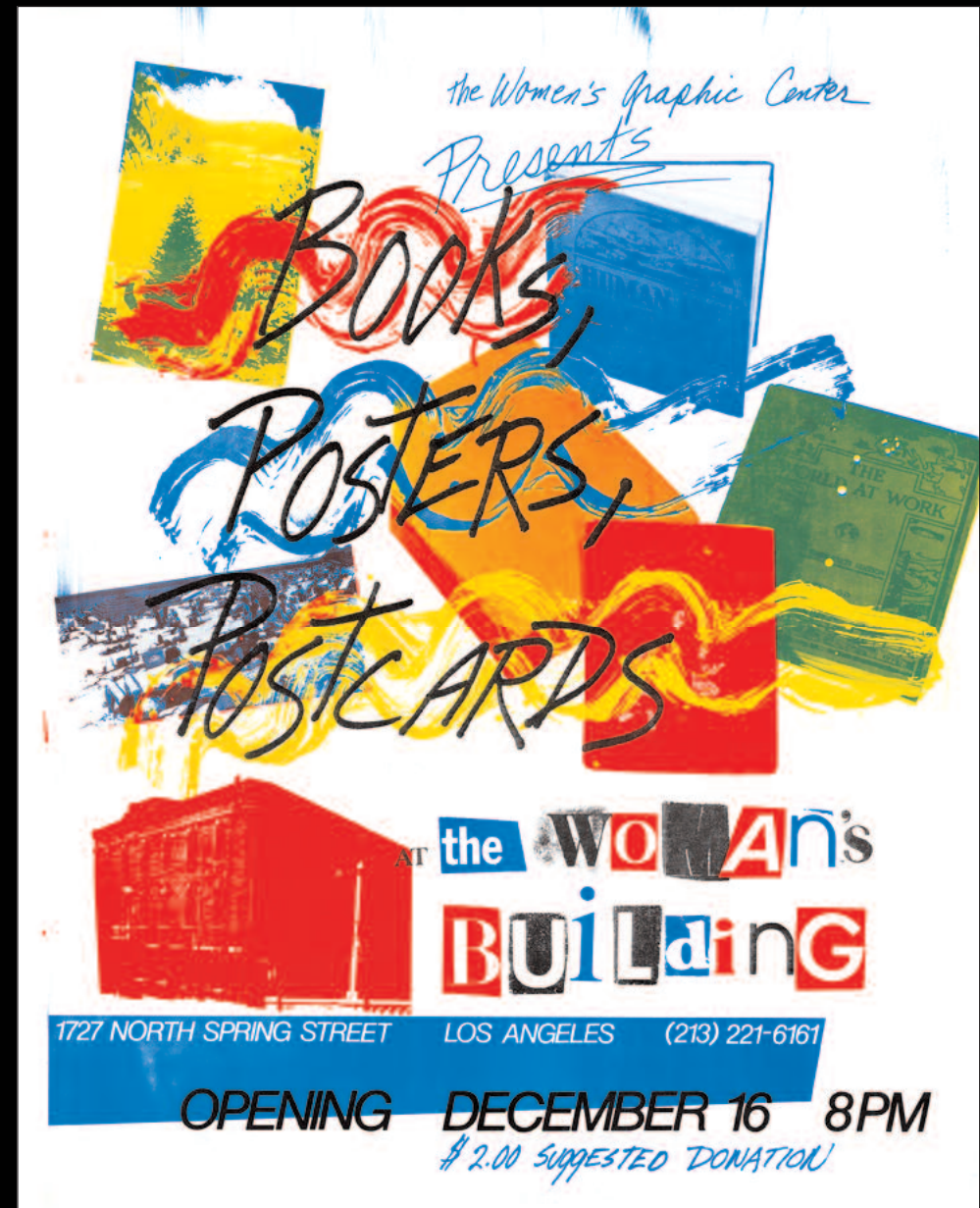
At Mills College the integration of individual creative writing with the form of the artist's book has led to the first MFA in Book Art & Creative Writing Program in the country. Students are challenged to explore and expand their writing within the framework of the artists' book, the latest iteration of new form for new content.

At Mills and in the rest of the graduate and undergraduate book art programs that are proliferating across the country,⁵³ the support for individual work, the acknowledgement of the place of editions in art practice, and the use of a variety of mark-making and production methodologies combine to create an environment of exploration and process that is as critical to the making of books today as it was to Chicago, de Bretteville, and Raven when they adopted their revolutionary vision.

Notes

1. "Introduction to the Woman's Building," Woman's Building archive, n.d. [1980], Collection, Archives of Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institute, Washington, D.C.
2. Diane Perry Vanderlip, "Foreword," *Artists Books* (Philadelphia: Moore College of Art, 1973), 5. As quoted in Stefan Klima, *Artists Books: A Critical Survey of the Literature*, (New York: Granary Books, 1998), 12.
3. Judy Chicago, *Through the Flower: My Struggle as a Feminist Artist* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 150.
4. *Ibid.*, 194–95.
5. Lucy Lippard, *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art* (New York: Dutton, 1976), 218.
6. *Ibid.*, 220.
7. Sheila Levrant de Bretteville, "Feminist Design," *Space and Society/Spazio e Società* 33 (1986).
8. Feminist Studio Workshop brochure, spring 1973.
9. Women's Graphic Center program description, n.d. Woman's Building Collection, Smithsonian Institute.
10. Paulus Berensohn, *Finding One's Way with Clay: Pinched Pottery and the Color of Clay* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1972).
11. Sheila Levrant de Bretteville, Women's Graphic Center program description, n.d. [1978?], 1.
12. *Ibid.*, 2.
13. Susan King, email correspondence with the author, September 15, 2004.
14. Lucy Lippard, "The Artist's Book Goes Public," in Joan Lyons, ed., *Artists' Books: A Critical Anthology and Sourcebook* (Rochester, NY: Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1985).
15. Jane Grabhorn's Typographic Laboratory, *A Typographic Discourse for the Distaff Side of Printing: A Book by Ladies* (San Francisco: Jumbo Press, 1937).
16. Helen Alm, personal statement, *Women and the Printing Arts*, Sheila de Bretteville and Helen Alm, eds. (Los Angeles: Woman's Building, 1975), n.d.
17. *Ibid.*
18. Feminist Studio Workshop handout, n.d. [1975].
19. Undated draft of a program description by de Bretteville, probably 1978.
20. Susan E. King, phone interview with the author, July 15, 2001.
21. De Bretteville, "A Definition of Feminist Design," February 1982. Published in the Women's Graphic Center newsletter, summer 1982.
22. Linda Nochlin, "Why Are There No Great Women Artists?" in *Woman in Sexist Society: Studies in Power and Powerlessness*, Vivian Gornick and Barbara K. Moran, eds. (New York: Basic Books, 1971), 483.
23. De Bretteville, "A Definition of Feminist Design," 98.
24. Arlene Raven, quoted on Woman's Building website: www.womansbuilding.org.
25. Chicago, *Flower*, 149.
26. *Ibid.*, 90.
27. De Bretteville, *icographic* 6 (1973): 8.
28. The Feminist Studio Workshop held a punishing schedule of classes and meetings six days a week, with only Saturdays off. Each day began at 9:00 or 10:00 a.m. and, except for an early dismissal on Friday afternoons, scheduled its last meeting or class session was at 7:00 p.m., ending around 10:00 p.m.
29. The Women's Graphic Center program schedule, 3. Courtesy Susan E. King.
30. Chicago, *Flower*, 75.

31. The Women's Graphic Center program schedule, 1
32. "Institutions of Women's Culture: Interview with Ruth Iskin," in *Women's Culture: The Women's Renaissance of the Seventies*, Gayle Kimball, ed. (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1981), 289.
33. Mary Michaels, *Learning to Be There: An Account of a Feminist Education Workshop at the Woman's Building*, Los Angeles Worcester, England: Sea Cow Press, 1977, 13.
34. *Ibid.*, 18.
35. De Bretteville and Alm, *Women and the Printing Arts*.
36. In 1975 the Feminist Studio Workshop and the Woman's Building were, like second-wave feminism itself, just becoming aware of their own lack of sensitivity to the concerns of women of color or even white working-class women. The participants in *Women and the Printing Arts* looked very much like the students in the Feminist Studio Workshop or, in fact, like the participants in nearly any march or demonstration under the leadership of the women's liberation movement: white and middle class.
37. De Bretteville and Alm, *Women and the Printing Arts*. The 1977 catalog of the same name acknowledges a debt to the original catalog while explaining that the second iteration was organized by a collective whose intent was to promote sales through the individual artists. This second catalog, also organized as cards held together with a metal ring, includes a photo of each of the works, which are described on the back of the card.
38. De Bretteville, general schedule for Women's Graphic Center Program class sessions, n.d. [1975-76?], 3.
39. *Ibid.*, 1
40. Feminist Education Graphic Project, February 10, 1980, 9.
41. Lucy Lippard, "Surprises: An Anthological Introduction to Some Women Artists' Books," *Chrysalis* 5 (1977): 84.
42. Cynthia Marsh, interviewed by the author via email, August 6, 2001.
43. Lippard, "Surprises," 80.
44. Marsh, email interview.
45. Frances Butler, email communication with the author, June 30, 2001.
46. Suzanne Lacy in conversation with Betty Ann Brown in *Expanding Circles: Women, Art & Community*, Betty Ann Brown, ed. (New York: Midmarch Arts Press, 1996), 164.
47. Suzanne Lacy, artist's statement in *Women and the Printing Arts*, 1975.
48. Lacy, *Women and the Printing Arts*.
49. Susan E. King's *Letter Portfolio* would by any standard be included in the category of artists' books; Cindy Marsh's portfolio *Lifestyle 1976* is very similar in structure to her other portfolios, identified by her as books. Bea Nettles's *Mountain Dream Tarot*, a suite of 78 boxed cards, would be considered a random-sequence artist's book multiple (the edition ran to 800 decks, a prodigious undertaking).
50. Bonnie Thompson Norman, interviewed by Rosalind Hopkins, in *Los Angeles Women Letterpress Printers*, Hopkins, Sarah Knetzer, Sherry J. Perrault, and Suzanne Rybak, eds. (Claremont, CA: Scripps College Press, 1987), 18.
51. Katherine Ng, interviewed by the author via email, July 13, 2001.
52. Hopkins, Knetzer, Perrault, and Rybak, 6.
53. There are currently six graduate programs in book art in the U.S.: University of Alabama Tuscaloosa, University of the Arts in Philadelphia, Columbia College Chicago, University of Iowa, Corcoran College of Art + Design, and the Mills College program.



Cynthia Marsh, *Books, Posters, Postcards—by Women*, 1978.
Poster announcement, 17 1/2" x 22 1/2". © Cynthia Marsh.

Nancy Angelo and Jerri Allyn, L.A. Women's Video Center, 1976. Photograph by Sheila Ruth. Woman's Building Image Archive, Otis College of Art and Design.

