

- Rogers, Maria (1976), "The Batignolles Group: Creators of Impressionism." In *The Sociology of Art and Literature: A Reader*. Milton C. Albrecht, James H. Barnett & Mason Griff, eds. New York: Praeger Pub.
- Rushkoff, Douglas (1996), *Playing with the Future: How Kid' Culture Can Teach Us to Thrive in an Age of Chaos*. New York: HarperCollins, Pub.
- Steiner, Wendy (1995) *The Scandal of Pleasure: Art in an Age of Fundamentalism*. Chicago & London: University of Chicago.
- Sherry Turkle (1995) *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Weiler, Kathleen (1996) "Myths of Paulo Freire," *Educational Theory* 46 (3) (Summer, 1996).
- Welsch, Wolfgang (1990) *Ästhetisches Denken*. Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam.
- Wernick, Andrew (1991) *Promotional Culture: Advertising Ideology and Symbolic Expression*. London, Newbury Park, New Delhi; Sage Publications.
- White, Harrison and White, Cynthia (1965) *Canvases and Careers: Institutional Changes in French Painting*. New York: John Wiley and Sons. Inc.
- Zizek, Slavoj (1997) *The Plague of Fantasies*. London and New York: Verso.

SUGAR AND SPICE AND EVERYTHING: REFLECTIONS ON A FEMINIST AESTHETIC¹

DEBORAH SMITH-SHANK

Over the past 25 years, feminist art, art criticism, and action have allowed insights into the work of women artists. Because culture imposes an assumed unity on a diversity of codes and has a naturalizing function, it makes the status quo appear as given and enduring. Feminist artwork disrupts common cultural assumptions by purposefully calling into question the arbitrariness of cultural sign systems. It brings into the conversation those cultural signs which are routinely unexamined and forces a look. This article is about feminist artwork, feminist context(s), and my own development as a woman, artist, teacher, and participant in the communities which effected my development.

Remember the Cinderella story? The one where the wicked stepsisters cut off their toes and heels to fit into the small slipper so that they might have the chance to marry the prince and live happily ever after? What's wrong with this picture? For over 25 years, feminist artists have been trying to address generally unexamined cultural codes which liminally and subliminally restrict the bodies, activities, and behavior of girls and women. According to Raven (1988), "Artists who address gender and society today are no longer compelled by the perfect feminine fit. A large body of work examines the construction of the small shoe (the social body) on the one hand, and the dismembered foot (the physical body) on the other" (p. 228).

Communities construct the social body, i.e., culture, through signs. The arbitrary nature of culture is never apparent until people are exposed to sign systems which depart from their own. By its very nature, culture imposes an assumed unity on a diversity of codes and has a naturalizing function that makes the constructed unity appear as given and enduring. Feminist artwork purposefully calls into question the nature of sign systems and into conversation routinely unexamined cultural signs.

Making artwork is an activity of encoding signs. Understanding art is the process of reasoning from culture to sign and back again. It is through this reasoning process that new cultures are created. Uneasiness occurs when expectations are disrupted and new beliefs, new cultures are created to ease the discomfort. Feminist artwork explodes comfortable assumptions and forces into consciousness the conflict between what we know as women and girls, and what the social body has told us is true. Feminist artwork is a response to patriarchal culture by women responding to circumstances in their own and other women's lives.

In this article I will reflect on my emergence and development as a feminist artist and educator within a patriarchal culture which offered me no history of women artists, which devalued crafts and belittled artwork and artists whose work lent itself to contextualization. This was/is a culture in which small was not good (unless it was a woman's body size), big was good (unless it was womanly feet), and huge was wonderful (you don't make art to fit on living room walls).

WHAT ARE LITTLE GIRLS MADE OF?

I prided myself on being a "tomboy." I didn't want to hang around with the girls and play dolls. I was active, ripped my clothes climbing trees, and painted with mud all over sidewalks. I resisted "appropriate behavior." At the same time, I desperately wanted the approval of my parents, teachers, and peers. I also wanted to be

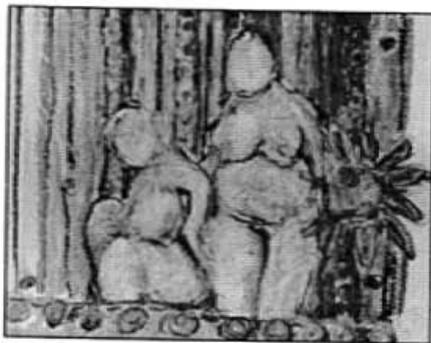


Figure 1

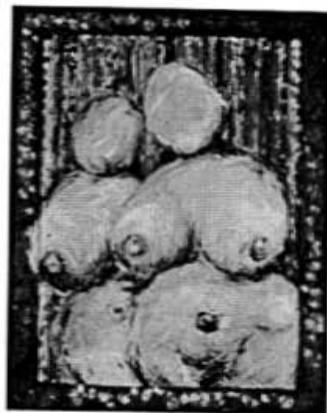


Figure 2

Cinderella, but I had hugely big feet. I hated that story. My hero was the genius artist, Picasso. He painted his life, relationships, and emotions and, as far as I could see, he didn't have to explain anything to anybody. Of course, he lived in France and partied with all of the right people, as well as making his artwork. He used a variety of styles and media. He was a very sensual fellow (even though he was actually very small) and I wanted to paint and be like him. Was I confused? Oh, yes! How could a Midwestern middle-class girl find happiness as Picasso when the Cinderella story kept going through her head?

WHAT ARE LITTLE GIRLS MADE OF?

Think of five geniuses. How many women are on your list? Christine Battersby (1989) traces the idea of "genius" through history and makes a serious case for genius being conceptually linked to maleness. Genius was linked to seminal fluid which was linked to creation. Andrew Gemant, in his book *The Nature of the Genius* (1961) rationalized that most gifted women aren't really women. "Eminent women scientists are nearly always plain or have definitely masculine features. They are actually half men, physically and mentally, their primary sexual organs happening to be female" (p. 114-15). Of course, women artists and scientists really want to be whole men. Karen Horney (1978) sarcastically points out that there is "scarcely any character trait in woman which is not assumed to have an essential root in penis-envy" (p. 247). The Guerrilla Girls² are much more direct: "You don't need a penis to be a genius."

WHAT ARE LITTLE GIRLS MADE OF?

Modernism was in full swing as I made my way through professional art training and the formalist critiques of this period created a safety net for me. I did not have to explain my artwork except through the elements and principles of art. I think I tried once, but with negative feedback, I am a very quick study. While I learned technique, theory, and the (male) history of art, my passions remained hidden. I did not discuss the feelings, desires, emotional storms, and stories that found a home in my artwork. Formalism, the dispassionate list-making form of criticism, allows detachment and objectivity which is safe. My studio professors (all men) and male peers never asked me to contextualize my artwork, thank goodness. It would have been too embarrassing. My responses would have been unladylike.

SUGAR AND SPICE

I *could* and did talk about my artwork with girl friends. They were like me. They wanted to know the stories. They wanted to talk about life. About sex. About our changing situations within the world of relationships. I was not afraid to tell them about my artwork. When they laughed, it was with me, not at me. They did not expect the art to stand alone without the stories as my professors did, without context. My girl friends' responses to my stories and to my artwork validated me and my way of being in the world. We were alike and I was okay, even if I was too emotional, too passionate, and too unconventional.

I went to see the performance artist, Laurie Anderson twice in the past year, and she was unladylike both times. She made weird noises, stuck things in her mouth while talking at the same time, and told personal stories. She has taken Picasso's place as my role model and genius artist, along with a host of other "bad girls" (see Tucker & Tanner, 1994).

People learn to communicate within their own communities and cultures. When they feel marginalized by more powerful communities, people will inevitably respond, even if it is with their silence. Our roots are within dominant culture. This is where we learn to speak, where we are socialized, and where we learn to be gendered subjects with the ability to communicate (Wolff, 1990). Traditionally, when women have spoken and been heard, it has been with and to each other and especially within the same race and class. Outside our own comfort zones of communication, we have been taught silence (Tucker, 1994). Nobody believes it now, but I really was so reluctant to talk in school that sometimes I held my hand over my mouth just to keep it shut. I learned to be quiet through culture, but it was again through the transforming culture of feminist thought and the community who listened, that my voice returned.

My male and female students learn about women artists. They learn about hidden-stream women artists who have lovingly embellished their homes with quilts, clothing, weaving, and pottery. They learn about mainstream women artists who have found their voices, and dead women artists who have been revived through the efforts of feminist art historians and critics. "In the visual arts, the process of finding a voice extending beyond the woman-to-woman domestic sphere [is evident in works by] Nancy Spero, Faith Ringgold, Mary Kelly, Adrian Piper, Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kruger and many others"

(Tucker and Tanner, 1994, p. 18). These women artists use both visual and linguistic symbol systems to talk about "aging, racism, reproductive rights, motherhood, physical and sexual abuse, standards of beauty, and control of language itself" (Tucker and Tanner, 1994, p. 18). These issues are not sugar and spice. They problematize "appropriate behavior" for women artists in a polite society. These artists wave their big feet in the air without apology, hoping to destabilize culture. These women are uncontrollable, irrational, and sexual, and they pose a political threat to the social status quo (Tucker & Tanner, 1994). The structure of any culture is in trouble when its members start to question their basic assumptions. Feminist artists engage in symbol-laden conversations about unreflected assumptions.

In spite of my early training, or possibly because of it, I don't want to make art about anything other than my own elaborately storied experiences. My life as a girl, woman, mother, and recently, my cronish tendencies enter my artwork without invitation, and are welcomed. However, I never considered my work in this context until recently. One wintery afternoon my students asked to see slides of my artwork, and since I had been critiquing theirs, I thought it would be fair to let them critique mine. I brought a fully loaded slide carousel to class and showed them my work in chronological order, accompanied by off-the-cuff running commentary. As I narrated the context of each piece, I started listening to myself, and it dawned on me that every one of my drawings and paintings are contextualized self-portraits, even when I am not present in the picture. The absent signs are sometimes the most powerful.

AND ALL THAT'S NICE, NICE, NICE

I was in my 30s before I could call myself an artist in spite of having already participated in all of the artist rituals including art exhibits, artist statements, interviews, and of course, as a teacher, sharing with students the habits, tools, and practices of my profession. As women art students, we learned that important artists are usually men who work large and use expensive materials to make things that have no practical function (Park, 1997). Feminist artwork is about agency and about being heard. It is about finding non-hierarchic alternatives to patriarchy; it is about making art for personal growth and political insurrection. It is about participating in the construction of culture: a culture where women can have role models, women can make art, and name themselves artists if they want. I want this for my students.

Until recently, most mainstream texts about art history ignored the art of women. Even now, when women are included, they fit the patriarchal model of an artist and for the most part, adopted and approved texts leave out traditional women's arts. While it is possible to model ourselves after Picasso, culture has told us that, as women, we're supposed to be the objects of art, not the creators. Woman's supposed inferiority and consequent invisibility in the artistic realm has been rationalized as a deficiency in judgment, wit, reason, skill, talent and psychic (and bodily) heat by people such as Degas, Jung, Kant, and Rousseau among others (Battersby, 1989). When women do manage to break through multiple practical, cultural, and social barriers and actually make art, their achievements may be overlooked or dismissed without serious consideration because patriarchal ideology invariably associates cultural achievements with the activities of men (Slatkin, 1995).

THAT'S WHAT LITTLE GIRLS ARE MADE OF

The orderly, neat, small, female body is a signifier of an orderly social hierarchy. The works of feminist artists serve as bricks in the construction of a culture which is not necessarily orderly. In this construction women and girls do not have to be self-conscious, quiet, or defensive about their deviant artwork or their deviant bodies. Feminist artworks resist "appropriate behavior" and appropriate subject matter. If pollution is a symbolic system, these artists pollute the artworld with female bodies, orifices, birthing images, irony, and anger. The social hierarchy of feminist cultures is not orderly or neat. Artist Mary Riley (Wolff, 1990) argues: "The body operates as a symbol of society across cultures, and the rituals, rules, and boundaries concerning bodily behavior can be understood as the functioning of social rules and hierarchies. In some cultures, bodily refuse (excreta, blood, tears, hair, nail clippings) has magical, and dangerous qualities. In its marginality, in the way in which it traverses the boundaries of the body, it comes to represent particular threats and powers, which ultimately symbolize social boundaries, transgressions, and threats" (p. 122).

Cinderella's sisters were caught in a culture which denied them the luxury of their transgressive big-footed bodies. I didn't want to be like them, although in my mind, I knew I was more like them than Cinderella, and sometimes this made me cry. I am still more like the stepsisters, but I don't cry too often about this anymore. According to

Tucker and Tanner (1994) women who defy the medias' image of ideal womanhood, and have no interest in having their body "crippled, mutilated, bound or surgically altered" (p. 35) or who don't dress and make-up to attract men, undermine society's standards. Consequently, they are considered "politically dangerous rather than simply aesthetically dissident" (p. 35). I like this mental image.

THAT'S WHAT LITTLE GIRLS ARE MADE OF

The stages of a woman's life, according to old tradition, are Maiden, Mother, and Crone. My artwork reflects these changes within my own life. When I was a child, all along the basement walls, Mermaids swam into communities of dolphins, and I was safe with my water friends. When I was a maiden, I painted maidens, and Disney cartoons. As a student, I did whatever I hoped would bring a good grade. As a pregnant woman, all my female figures were rounded and breasts were everywhere within lush and fertile landscapes. After my daughters were born, I connected their lives to mine in my drawings and paintings. When they were young my paintings were sweet; when they were teenagers, less so. When I am angry, my violent emotions scream to me out of my colors. Changing life, changing bodies, changing relationships enter my artwork, and I have been fortunate to have found a voice to examine the development of my thoughts and artwork through the vehicle of feminist art criticism.

"Crone" is a self-consciously ugly word. In my most recent artwork, I attempt to reclaim the word because it fits the best right now, and I am really tired of struggling into shoes that are too small.

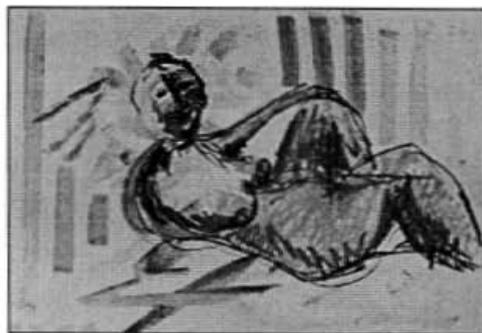


Figure 3

REFERENCES

- Battersby, C. (1989). *Gender and genius: Towards a feminist aesthetics*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Frueh, J. (1988). Towards a feminist theory of art criticism. In A. Raven, C. L. Langer, and J. Frueh (Eds.). *Feminist art criticism: An Anthology*. NY: HarperCollins.
- Gemant, A. (1961). *The nature of the genius*. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.
- Horney, K. (1978). Feminine psychology. In M.B. Mahowald (Ed.). *Philosophy of woman: An anthology of classic to current concepts*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc. Park, C.S. (1997).
- Park, C.S. (1997). Learning from what women learn in the studio class. In G. Collins & R. Sandell (Eds.). *Gender issues in art education: Content, contexts, and strategies*. Reston, VA: The National Art Education Association.
- Parker, R. and Pollock G. (1981). *Old mistresses: Women, art and ideology*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.
- Raven, A. (1988). The last essay on feminist criticism. In A. Raven, C. Langer, & J. Frueh (Eds.). *Feminist art a criticism: An anthology*. New York: HarperCollins, 227-238.
- Witzling, M.R. (Ed.). (1994). *Voicing today's visions: Writings by contemporary women artists*. New York: Universe.

FOOTNOTES

¹ "What are little girls made of? What are little girls made of?
Sugar and spice, and all that's nice. That's what little girls are made of.
What are little boys made of? What are little boys made of?
Snips and snails and puppy dog tails. That's what little boys are made of."

I know there must be a reference (Mother Goose maybe) for this folk rhyme, but I can't find it.
This rhyme is an insidious and structural part of my culture, my community, and my cognition.

² See the Guerilla Girls' Web Page: <http://www.voyagerco.com/gg/>

ROOTS/ROUTES AS ARTERIAL CONNECTIONS FOR ART EDUCATORS: ADVOCATING FOR ABORIGINAL CULTURES

RITA L. IRWIN

Arterial and life connections for art educators. Arteries are muscular vessels carrying blood away from the heart to every part of the body, eventually bringing the blood back to the heart before venturing out again. Metaphorically, these pathways locate the heart as a home from which travel extends, repeatedly, expectantly as life itself. Symbolically, arterial connections pulsate with the notion of art, expressing art through life through art. To many peoples, and particularly Aboriginal peoples¹, art translated as cultural performance is found in the very pathways and bloodlines of their geographies and histories. However, these arterial connections are available to all of us, especially art educators, as we come to recognize our own pathways and bloodlines. Sharing stories of lives, cultural roots and routed experiences, illustrates complex identity building in the late twentieth century. In this article I talk about a trip to a Paiwan aboriginal community in southern Taiwan and what I learned from/with these people. I hope this portrayal encourages others to reflect on their travel experiences in ways that may help to make classroom art experiences socioculturally diverse and politically engaged.

During my career as an art educator I have taught in three Canadian provinces, spent several months teaching in Cameroon, Africa and have visited and studied in aboriginal communities in Australia, Canada² and Taiwan.³ In each location I have encountered a complex range of experiences as a result of traveling, of practicing the crossing of borders, or as Clifford (1997, p. 2) might say, practicing a temporary "traveling-in-dwelling and dwelling-in-travel."

Dwelling is a word/concept which connotes a collective life in which travel is an extension, a supplemental experience. But what if