

Women & Their Work: The beginning

In 1977 three Austin women artists—Rita Starpattern, Deanna Stevenson, and Carol Taylor—planted the seeds that grew into Women and Their Work (W&TW), one of Austin's most enduring visual arts organizations. They produced the organization's impressive inaugural event Women and Their Work (Oct 13 to Dec 2), a multi-disciplined festival that showcased women working in the visual, literary, and performing arts at numerous city-wide venues.

The story of W&TW is foremost one of community. Many hands and minds, along with time and energy contributed to the development of the organization. This document, compiled by original members of the W&TW Exhibition Committee, was written to contribute additional information about the early history of the organization. It details the critical years, 1977-1980, when the organization would determine its path and goals. Under the leadership of Rita Starpattern, and with the support of other organizations in Austin, the Exhibition Committee worked tirelessly to ensure that W&TW would grow in scope and national visibility by elevating opportunities for women in the arts in Texas.

At the end of 1977, and the completion of 30 festival events, a close friend of Starpattern (and an original member of the W&TW board), Mary Sanger recalls, "Rita was pretty tired of the battle over decision making and wanted a more formal structure to be able to move forward for grants, public funding, etc. The Exhibition Committee stepped up and addressed her angst and W&TW went forward for the next 40 years."

The beginning of a new organizational process originated with an informal meet-up between Starpattern and Claudia Reese, who had recently moved to Austin from Washington DC. Seeking to engage with the "Austin art scene," and looking specifically for a women's arts organization similar to those she experienced in DC, Reese contacted Starpattern. "I remember sitting in Rita's kitchen telling her I'd just moved from Washington DC where I'd been a member of a women's gallery and the Washington Project for the Art", explained Reese. "Rita told me of the impressive events of the recent festival and about her hard work with Stevenson and Taylor. Things were now at a standstill, and Rita was exhausted. She seemed weary and not much inclined to start up again—kind of rolling her eyes at the east coast newcomer. But generously, she said, 'call Barbara Sturgill and let's have another meeting.' The three of us decided to invite all the women artists we could locate in Austin, dividing up phone lists in a call for a larger meeting, which took place one evening in early May 1978, at artist and critic Mary McIntyre's (later known as Mary Myart Malott) house in central Austin. It was well attended and out of this assembly, a small group coalesced."

This new group of energetic women were eager to continue expanding the possibilities for women visual artists in the state of Texas. The artists joining Rita Starpattern and Claudia Reese were Yvonne Burke, Carol Ivey, Melissa W. Miller, Mary Pilot, Linda Stanton, Barbara Sturgill, Deborah Vanko, and Millie Wilson. Discussions concerning the promotion of women's visibility and the future of the organization began immediately. However, it was determined that the first objective should be to provide support for each other, expand dialogue through studio visits and meetings, and develop opportunities to exhibit locally in Austin. This core group—initially referred to in various publications as the Planning Committee, the Visual Arts Committee, and the Steering Committee—eventually became known as the W&TW Exhibition Committee. In spring 1979 the group curated Vital Signs, an exhibition of their work. Among the exhibition goals was to establish the committee's credibility and profile as working artists. Starpattern is quoted as saying, "The exhibition is an effort to let the public know that members of the committee responsible for decisions concerning the visual arts for the various W&TW events are themselves serious, competent and involved artists." The show was exhibited at Aperture Gallery in Austin, TX, and received local and national attention. It was reviewed in the prominent art

magazine Artweek. The success of this show gave the members confidence to imagine and undertake larger and more ambitious projects.

Following that success, the W&TW Exhibition Committee focused on formalizing a structure for the organization. They began actively lobbying state organizations and museums for more female inclusion and worked to establish models that would guide women artists in career development and activism. The Exhibition Committee drafted a grant proposal for a juried exhibition, Woman-In-Sight. The show would solicit entries from women across Texas. Funding would support preparation of an exhibition space, a fee for a juror, and general expenses for publicity and production. Nationally renowned curator Marcia Tucker, formerly at the Whitney Museum of American Art and founder/director of the New Museum of Art in NYC, was recruited to jury the exhibition. The proposal was granted by the Texas Commission for the Arts and scheduled for Oct 27-Dec 9, 1979.

Given the paucity of art exhibition spaces available in Austin at the time, the Exhibitions Committee searched for a venue that would support the exhibition criteria. A raw space in the former Naval and Marine Reserve Center, recently donated to the city and re-named the Dougherty Cultural Arts Center, was selected. They rolled up their sleeves and spent countless hours cleaning and clearing the space, constructing and painting walls and pedestals. They negotiated with the city to install track lighting in the space. Later they prepared and installed the work. In the words of Susan Platt, writing for Artweek, the Committee "...established a precedent setting relationship with the city of Austin. The Dougherty Arts Center had been converted in 1977 from a decrepit Naval armory with snakes living in the hallways. Women and Their Work took the whole public space, arranged to install track lighting, got the city to install partitions, and—presto!—one of the nicest exhibition spaces in Austin."

Simultaneously, the Exhibition Committee was in charge of state-wide publicity for the exhibition. This involved networking with other organizations to reach women artists with the "Call for Entries". Together, they blanketed arts newsletters, newspapers, public service announcements, and art educators with the opportunity to have their work reviewed by Tucker. More than 400 artists submitted a total of 1,300 slides.

In addition to preparing the exhibition space and organizing the entries, Rita and the Exhibition Committee established a statewide mailing list, printed and assembled the catalogue to accompany the show, produced and mailed invitations, and networked to solicit publicity for the show and the women artists of Texas in a pre-digital, pre-Internet world. The event was a success and helped pave the way for many women to further their careers in Texas and nationally.

Before sending the entries to Marcia Tucker in New York, the Exhibitions Committee hosted a well-attended slide viewing event at the Dougherty Cultural Art Center to publicly show all of the entries, thus giving voice and acknowledgement to every woman who submitted to the show. Sydney Yeager recalls the significance of the event to her:

"It was so meaningful to me to be invited by Carol Ivey and Melissa Miller. I didn't have work in the slide show. It was much too early and my work too unfocussed for me to submit slides, but just being invited to see the work, and being exposed to what was being done was hugely important to me. And the simple invitation made all the difference."

Subsequently, a first selection of works was made by Tucker. Those works were then organized by the committee and displayed on-site for her final round of jurying.

Working closely with Starpattern, the Exhibition Committee provided the energy behind W&TW activity in the short but important time span from early 1978 thru 1979. This included Woman-InSight, a statewide juried exhibition. The efforts of the ten women Exhibition Committee provided a vital link in the organization's continuum and the promotion of greater gender equality in the arts in Texas.

The W&TW experience enriched and energized them personally and collectively. The skills and knowledge gained informed their art careers. Most importantly, they learned the value of dreaming big, the reward of community building, and the power of women working together and supporting each other. Melissa Miller states:

"Those years of teamwork and building were a time of growth, not only for the organization, but for the individual members of our committee as well. With continuous dialogue and critical response to the work in our exhibitions, we gained insight that benefited our personal practices. By combining individual knowledge and strength, we developed networking skills, learned to balance personal career with social service, challenged each other to set high goals and standards, and advocated for women's acknowledgement in the arts. The shared experience also resulted in lifelong friendships and bonds."

By 1980, W&TW was thriving with a successful track record of exhibitions, publications, and events. With funding from the City of Austin, the Texas Commission for the Arts, the Parks and Recreation, and private donations, the organization was well positioned. With a sense of pride and accomplishment, the Exhibition Committee members ceased to work as a group, though several of the members continued to work with or support the organization in numerous ways.

The surviving Exhibition Committee members submitting this document are grateful for the opportunity to share their history. We wish to thank the past and present boards of W&TW for the generous gifts of time and effort, and Chris Cowden for her many years of unflagging commitment, exceptional leadership, and strengthening of the organization and its profile. We also congratulate W&TW on the purchase of their first permanent home and look forward to watching the organization's continued growth and service.

-Carol Ivey, Melissa Miller, Claudia Reese
January 11, 2021

Mary Pillot, Linda Stanton, Deborah Vanko, Millie Wilson
February 9, 2021

Timeline

- October 2 -December 2, 1977, Multi-Media Art Festival & Celebration of Women & Their Work Including Drama, Dance, Music & the Visual Arts
- October 13-December 2, 1977, Women & Their Work: Painting and Graphics Exhibition, Laguna Gloria Museum
- May 9, 1978, Informal meeting of Austin women artists to create Exhibition Committee
- 1978-79, Women & Their Work incorporates and receives non-profit status
- February 14-March 30, 1979, Vital Signs, an exhibition of work by the Women & Their Work Exhibition Committee, Aperture Gallery, Austin, Tx, and the Academic Center, University of Texas at Austin
- March 30-31, 1979, Women Artists: Forming a Texas Network, a slide presentation with a biographic and bibliographic publication in conjunction with the 10th annual "Women and The Law" Conference, Austin, Tx
- July 9-Aug 10, 1979, On Sight: Exhibition of Drawings and Photographs, group show curated by Sherry Smith
- July 18, 1979, New Art in Texas by Women, a slide presentation of all the entries for the Woman-in-Sight exhibition, Dougherty Cultural Arts Center
- October 27-December 9, 1979, Woman-in-Sight, the first statewide exhibition of Texas women artists, Dougherty Cultural Arts Center, juried by Marcia Tucker

Reviews

- 1977 November, Citizen Marquee, "Quality Art by Women," Mimi McKinney
- 1979 February 23, Citizen Marquee, "Collages Highlight Aperture Show," Mimi McKinney
- 1979 March 24, ARTWEEK, "Vital Signs from Women and Their Work," Francine Carraro
- 1979 October 26, Citizen Marquee, "Texas Women Featured in Exhibit," Mimi McKinney
- 1979 November 24, ARTWEEK, "Women in Sight: Issues of Quality, Quantity and Politics," Susan Platt

Documentary Materials

Vital Signs Announcement

Claudia Reese Rita Starpattern Barbara Sturgill

Mary Steed Deborah Vanko

Melissa Miller

Carol Ivey

Yvonne Burk

Millie Wilson

Vital Signs
AN EXHIBITION OF VISUAL ART

APERTURE GALLERY 803 W. 24th

opening Feb. 14 7 p.m.

members of **WOMEN&THEIR WORK** visual arts committee

via Womenspace

Collages highlight Aperture show

By MIMI McKINNEY
Citizen Art Writer

"Vital Signs," the current exhibition at Aperture Gallery, 803 West 24th St., is an intimate showing bearing witness to the quality of artistic talent in Austin.

The brief biographies of the artists displayed at the entrance of the exhibition inform the viewer that these are dedicated professional who have received considerable training and recognition for work in their respective media.

Yvonne Burk, best known for her graphic work, has chosen to exhibit a new group of small collages. "Untitled Collage No. 3" shows a non-typical use of soft blue and green, saved from "sweetness" by the addition of strong orange pastel. Her knowledge of textures in her intaglio work gives her a sensitivity to the surfaces of the various items used in the collage.

Mildred Wilson also exhibits collage. Where Burk utilizes the textures of the added material, Wilson makes use of the edge and color of the applied paper. The edge becomes a line and creates various planes. Landscape in nature, the work invites the viewer to become a small creature and wander through this soft blue world.

Sculpture is at a minimum. "Extra Large Ladies' Plain Underwear" is Debrah Vanko's three-dimensional contribution. Humorous, yet somehow melancholy, the stiffened panties stand upside down

and become a truncated body.

"Accent in Motion, Series No. 5" by Mary Pillot Steed becomes a visual statement of the frenzied pace of our 20th-Century world. Off-key, unusual color lines depict erratic movement of the present, while the blurred lines of the background suggest past and forgotten movement.

Barbara Sturgill's "Luncheon on the Sun" conjures recollections of childhood seen through rose-colored glasses of maturity. Above the "yellow world" floats a caring and smiling red being. A kite string suggests a child standing just outside the picture plane.

The fact that all of the artists in the showing are women is incidental to the quality of this excellent

contemporary exhibition. The fact that the artist are members of the planning committee for "Women and Their Work," an

organization which has done much to promote greater appreciation and participation of women in the arts, is not incidental.

"Vital Signs" From Women and Their Work

Austin / Francine Carraro

Women and Their Work, an Austin organization, is showing vital signs in its commitment to the recognition, support and promotion of women's contribution to the arts. Since its inception in 1976, the group has sponsored arts and crafts festivals, drama and poetry workshops, and art exhibitions. In addition, Women and Their Work has held various symposia on the historical, economical and political concerns of women artists.

The current exhibit sponsored by Women and Their Work, appropriately titled *Vital Signs*, features the work of Yvonne Turner Burk, Melissa Miller, Deborah Vanko, Claudia Reese, Rita Starpattern, Barbara Sturgill, Mildred Wilson, Carol Ivey and Mary Pillot Steed, all of whom are members of the visual arts committee of Women and Their Work. Starpattern, spokesperson for the committee, explained that "the exhibition is an effort to let the public know that members of the committee responsible for decisions concerning the visual arts for the various Women and Their Work events are themselves serious, competent and involved artists."

Although the works on exhibit vary in media and style, they show a strong, consistent concern for innovation and exploration. Each artist reveals a sense of intense identification with and examination of personal artistic concerns. Paintings in the show range from the delicate, lyrical lines and vaporous colors of Steed's improvised abstractions to the more aggressive, bold colors and fluid application of paint in Miller's depictions of animals. Sturgill's canvases are fields of flat, solid color upon which a private alchemy of signs and symbols is performed. Ivey's small gouaches with still-life elements are strong in color and illusionistic design.

Using traditionally feminine objects such as sewing notions, coffee cups and patchwork quilt motifs in ceramic assemblages and gouaches, Reese cleverly reassembles and reexamines bits and pieces of female consciousness. Vanko, another voice, though less articulate, for women's concerns in art, stiffens women's panties and slips with polyester resin and forms them into sculpture.

Wilson, Burk and Starpattern work with the elements of collage. Wilson builds up, layer upon layer, irregularly torn pieces of paper with painted postcard clouds into harmonious orchestrations of subtle shapes and color. Burk introduces tinfoil, masking tape and impasto into her small abstractions. Starpattern's black and white photo-collages have witty and perceptive borrowings from the worlds of advertising and psychology.

Women artists in Austin may be showing vital signs of growth, strength, stability and health, but they are handicapped by the limited number of art galleries and exhibition spaces. After *Vital Signs* closed at the Aperture Gallery on March 14, the



MELISSA MILLER: A CHANCE MEETING, 1978, mixed media. Photo: Alan Pogue.

gallery closed as well — another in a series of contemporary spaces that have been unable to survive.

Vital Signs is currently on exhibit through March 30 in the foyer of the Academic Center of the University of Texas at Austin in conjunction with the Texas Union Women and Their World Symposium. Part of the show will travel to San Antonio, where the visual arts committee of Women and Their Work will present a portion of the Texas Women in the Arts Program to the National Women in the Law Conference. □

Francine Carraro covers art for Dallas Photo and Austin Arts and Leisure.



CLAUDIA REESE: COFFEE CUP, 1978, ceramic, at the University of Texas at Austin. Photo: Alan Pogue.

Women-In-Sight

Call for Entries



WOMEN & THEIR WORK
call for entries ... 1979
book, exhibition, slide/tape show
endorsed by
Afro-American Players, Austin City Council, Austin Community Television, Austin Symphony, Austin Women's Center,
Center Stage, Commission on the Status of Women, Laguna Gloria Art Museum,
Mexican-American Business & Professional Women's Association, University "Y", Womenspace.

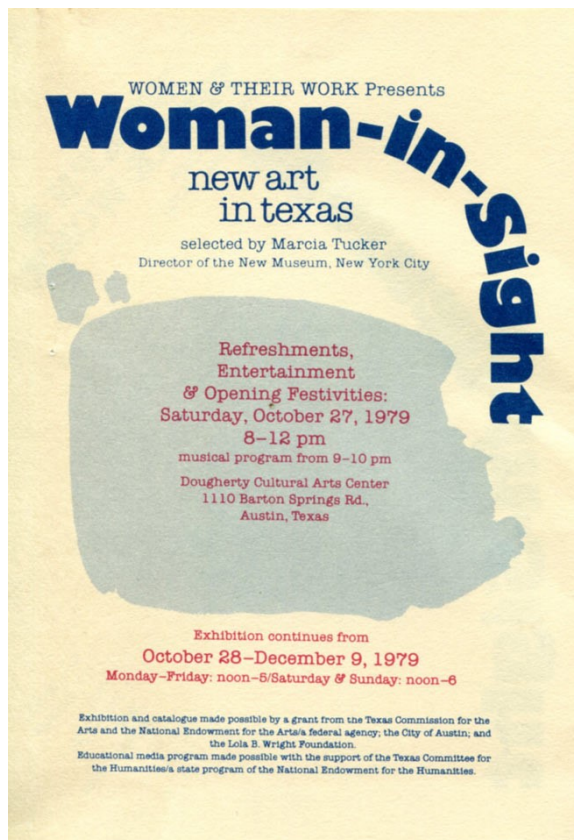
WOMEN & THEIR WORK 1979
2330 Guadalupe
Austin, Texas 78705

NON PROFIT ORG.
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PAID
PERMIT NO. 1756
AUSTIN, TEXAS

Call for
Entries

book, exhibition, slide/tape show

Announcement



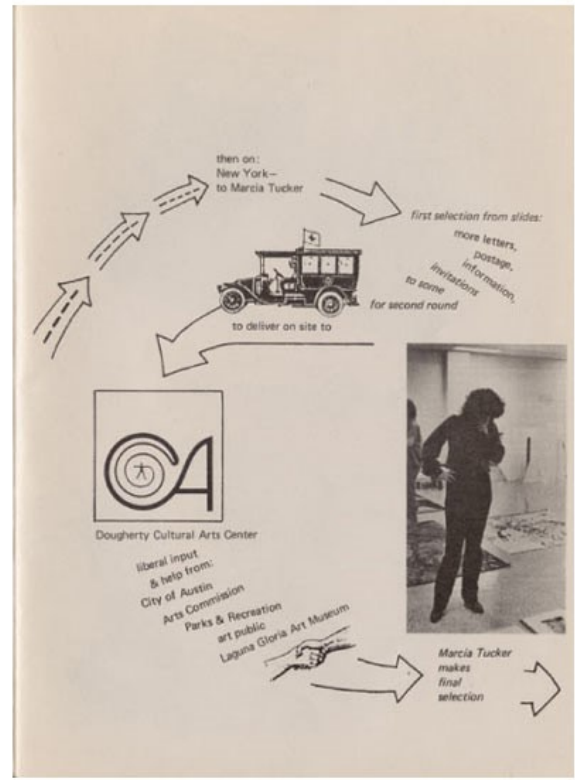
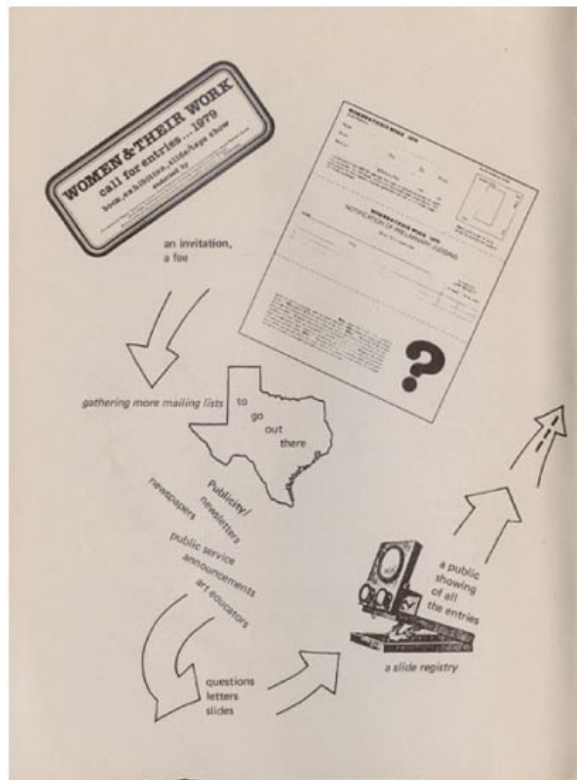
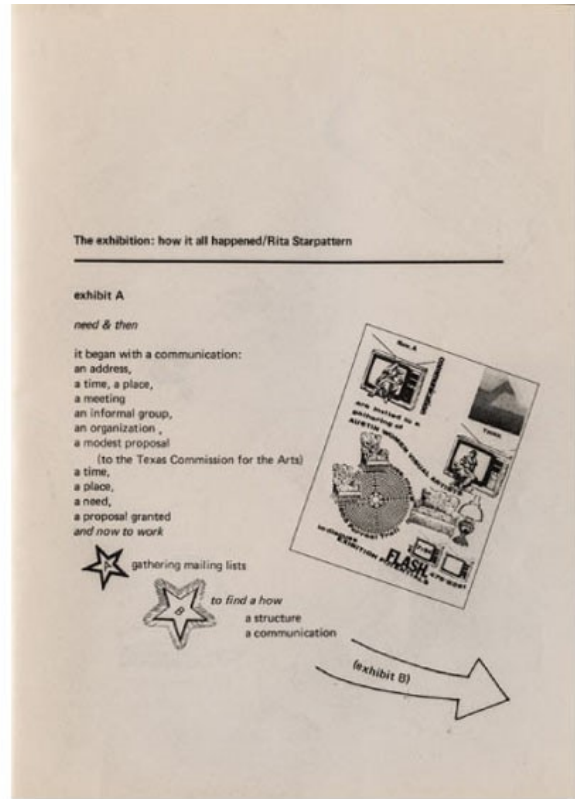
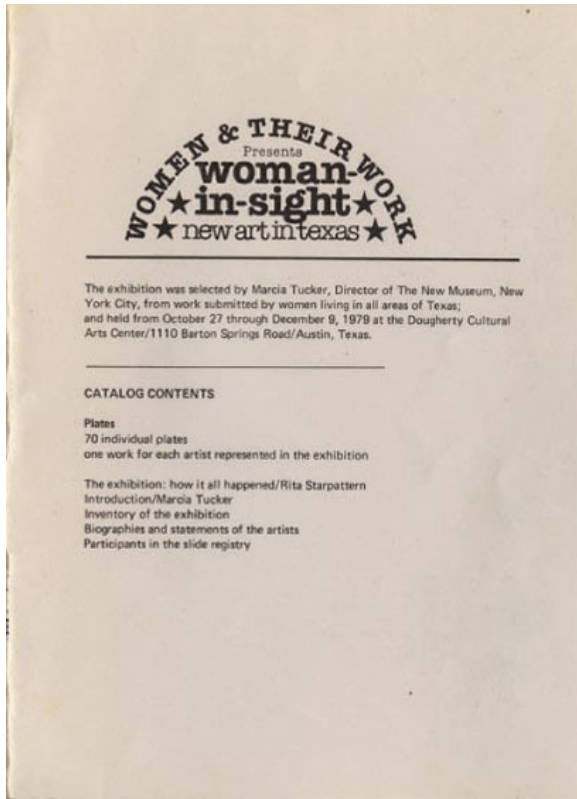
WOMEN & THEIR WORK Presents
Woman-in-Sight
new art
in texas
selected by Marcia Tucker
Director of the New Museum, New York City

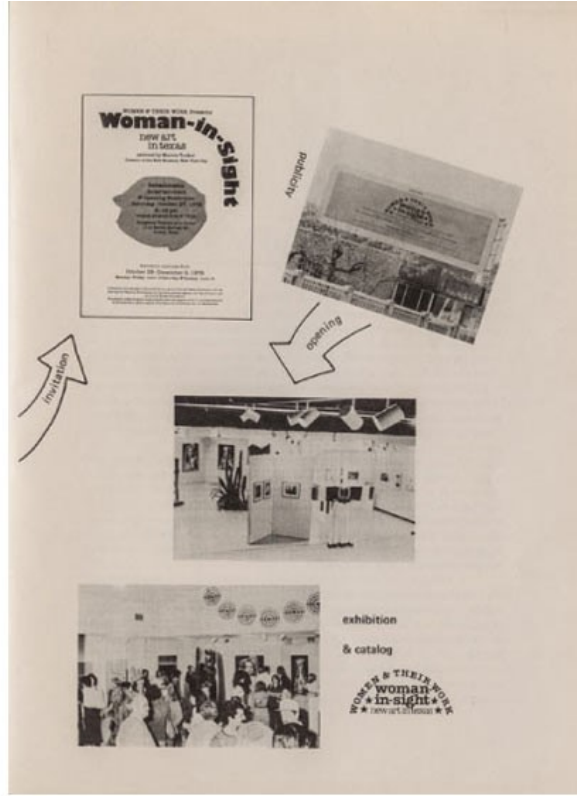
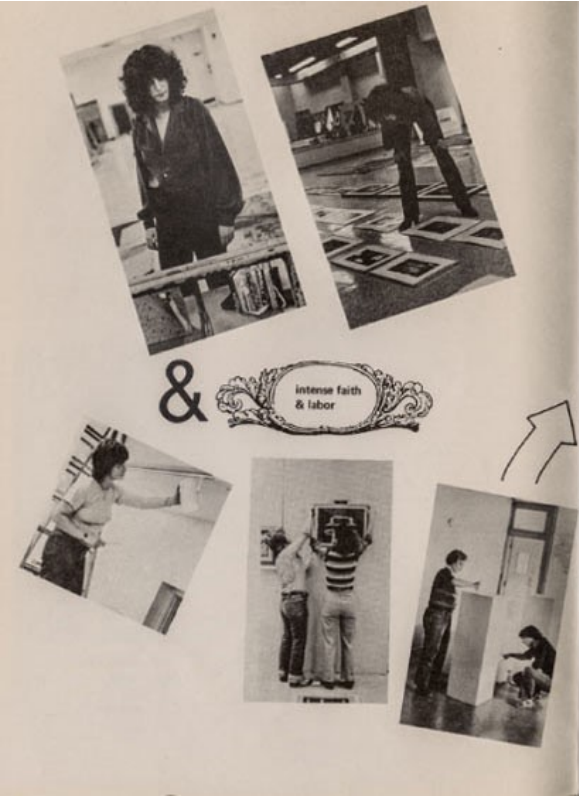
Refreshments,
Entertainment
& Opening Festivities:
Saturday, October 27, 1979
8-12 pm
musical program from 9-10 pm
Dougherty Cultural Arts Center
1110 Barton Springs Rd.,
Austin, Texas

Exhibition continues from
October 28-December 9, 1979
Monday-Friday: noon-6/Saturday & Sunday: noon-6

Exhibition and catalogue made possible by a grant from the Texas Commission for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts's federal agency, the City of Austin; and the Lola B. Wright Foundation.
Educational media program made possible with the support of the Texas Committee for the Humanities's state program of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

From the exhibition catalog - Rita Starpattern's graphic intro describes the whole story of the exhibition beginning with the formation of the committee in 1978





Introduction/Marcia Tucker

Very little has been known about the work of women artists until the present decade; even less has been known about what is being done by them outside the large urban art centers in the United States. Texas especially is still thought of as a place where men, rather than women, are the cultural progenitors.

This exhibition, culled from work throughout the state, is ample proof that this is not so. The work was selected from over 1,300 slides submitted initially; this work was then brought together in Austin, where the final jurying was done in the space in which it was ultimately to be shown. (Unfortunately, the limitations of the space dictated the number of pieces which could be included, since the exhibition would have been considerably larger had only esthetic considerations prevailed.)

The work being done by contemporary women artists in Texas is comprised of such a wide range of media, styles, attitudes and sensibilities that it cannot be indicative of a "regional" mode, but is, rather, representative of what is happening in the country at large. There is, for instance, an increasing focus on work which is narrative, autobiographical, self-referential, or eccentric in style or imagery. While these characteristics are familiar, it is important to note that focus on one aspect of making art does not necessarily subsume or negate the force of another seemingly disparate style.

For instance, the work of *Kay Miller*, *Jane Allensworth*, or *Laura Russell*, with its strongly formal, iconic and frontal qualities, seems quite different from the minimalist sensibility of the 1960's, partly because of the extraordinarily sensitive and tactile surfaces they employ, or (in the case of Allensworth) because of the luminous color which makes the work more poetic and metaphorical than formal.

Many of the drawings and paintings in the exhibition are, similarly, highly tactile and concerned with the nature of marks as gesture, handwriting and character. In pieces by *Frances Bagley*, *Vicki Teague-Cooper*, *Dee I. Wolff*,



emotional states. On another scale entirely, *Harriet Hayward's* large drawings, done in series, combine words and images in a substantial diaristic work where the large size of the format contrasts with the intimacy of the messages conveyed.

The question of scale is raised by the paucity of large-scale, abstract sculpture in the exhibition, although I suspect that the preponderance of smaller sculpture is more an indication of the problems of submitting slides and having to ship enormous works than it is an indication of what kind of work is actually being done in the state. Pieces by *Rowena Elkin* and *Gertrude Barnstone*, however, are fine examples of the fact that the difficulties of manipulating heavy materials on a large scale provide a welcome challenge to women as well as to men; *Gisela-Heidi Strunk's* piece, on the other hand, is composed of seven easily manipulated segments, which, when positioned, form an enormous sculptural wall.

A general tendency to make smaller, intimate sculpture poses an interesting question in terms of art bordering on the area of "crafts," an issue that has been avoided until recent years. The urge to make more manageable, inexpensive, spatially compact sculpture results in work which sometimes looks traditional because of its materials, but actually constitutes a break with the accepted notions of sculpture as volume, weight, mass, density—that is, a move away from sculpture as a physical experience rather than as a narrative and/or psychological one. The potential for sculpture as a vehicle for more personal concerns is innovatively explored in work by *Nancy Chambers*, *Candice Groot* and *Barbara Attwell*, who, like others in the exhibition, use miniaturization to create worlds which can be apprehended and explored without necessitating the spectator's movement.

Claudia Reese's work is intimate not through reduction of scale, but by the separation and isolation of images on a hanging ceramic base. The particularization of forms, each seeming to carry a literary significance, links this work with paintings and drawings by *Lu Ellis*, *Future Akins*, *Marian McNair* and *Suzanne Stiegelbauer*, whose fragmented images sometimes serve as a visual metaphor for kinds of physical energy, and sometimes work to pinpoint and isolate a particular image as separate from, or more important than, other facets of the work.

While some sculptures use materials or methods previously ascribed to the area of crafts, certain artists in this exhibition are clearly craftspeople, whose work has a specific function. Among these pieces are tapestries (*Charlotte Funk*), hand-embroidered clothing (*Marian Haigh-Neal*), puppets (*Kathleen Picchioni*), jewelry (*Suzanne Ray*), and pottery (*Linda Genet*). Some works extend beyond the possibility of function, like *Marty Flanagan's* headdresses, which refer to another era, or *Diane Falkenhagen's* jewelry, more sculptural than decorative. Pottery by *Laura Telford* and *Cathy Maxwell Fairchild*, or *May Belle Osborne's*



Rebecca Best, *Mary McCleary* and *Viveka Barnett*, combined marks and images result in both verbal and visual vocabularies. The sumptuousness of surface which is found in many contemporary paintings is carried to an extreme in *Linda Stanton's* objects, which are poised between painting and sculpture, their surfaces built up with such dense layers of pigmentation that they become three-dimensional.

Most of the work presented here, however, uses recognizable rather than abstract images, a tendency which is indicative of an increasing change in attitude during the past decade. Some of the images seen here seem, even given this predilection, quite eccentric, partly because of such zany juxtapositions as those found in "portraits" by *Candace Burnside* and *Judith Williams*, where the traditional rendering of the images is at odds with their irrational and often humorous content. Similarly, *Debra Dobbins' drawing* uses childhood illustration combined with written text to form a kind of disjunctive narration.

Many works employ bizarre narratives which border on the violation of social taboos, such as *Melissa Miller's* violent, mysterious tales involving animals and humans, painted in an aggressively expressionist manner. Other pieces have an autobiographical quality that approaches the theatrical; *Julie Cohn* and *Susie Phillips*, for instance, both utilize dreamlike, partial images whose disposition suggests events which are about to or have just taken place.

The theatrical, the fantastic and the forbidden are intrinsic to many works in the show. Some, like *Janet Newman's* meticulous pastel drawings and *Alice Canestaro-Garcia's* portrait heads combine elements of fantasy and autobiography. *Tralene Vassilopoulos' box* containing organic and hand-made forms are situated in a stage-like, intimate viewing space. Other works are more immediately recognizable in form and content as purely diaristic. *Wina Baethge's* embellished books, for instance, give glimpses into the hidden, interior world of the psyche and describe events and thoughts that are intrinsic to poignant, difficult

table, for instance, seem at once functional and not. The question of function as indigenous to craft is challenged by *Patricia Tillman's* sculpture consisting of objects which do not function except esthetically—that is, windows and cupboards which open onto an empty wall.

In certain instances, artists have wittily turned this hand-crafted sensibility in on itself. *Suzanne Hitt Bocanegra's* paper cutout dress, on a headless and armless figure, is an ironic commentary on paper dolls and the nature of clothing as ornament and play. Its primitive style is characteristic of many works in the exhibition, for instance, the paintings of *Barbara Sturgill*, whose child-like scrawls, marks and images seem to spring directly from the unconscious, or *Carol Rabel's* drawings in which a folk-art simplicity and a painstaking attention to detailed patterning are combined. A pastel drawing by *Mary Elizabeth Campbell*, in which she and her aunt are depicted in harsh color and distorted form, or *Paula Moy's* seemingly naive, pointillist village scene have a fresh, self-conscious quality to them. Primitivism in these works is synonymous with spontaneity, autonomy, freedom from the conventions of "high" art, and a willingness to explore intrinsic rather than extrinsic values in the expression of oneself through the making of art.

Expressionism, often considered one of the characteristics of the primitive, is found in *Debra Dew's* large painting of a female nude, where an aggressive paint quality and a loose, spontaneous rendering of the figure result in an image which confronts rather than beguiles. Similarly, *Geneva Moore's* landscape, while contained within a small format, uses non-realistic color and energetic painting techniques to alter the terms of traditional landscape portrayal.

It is especially interesting to note the preponderance of photographic works in this exhibition, an indication that the medium has become accepted in the same sphere as painting, sculpture, and other graphic arts. Similarly, the photographs share with the other work in the show characteristics not necessarily indigenous to that medium. As with paintings, some of the photographs convey meaning through a strongly formal mode; the portraits by *Amy Kwilwasser*, *Gay Block* or *Laurie E. Williams*, for example, are portraits at a distance from the portraitist, relying upon placement, relationships, and spatial complexities for insight into the character of the subjects. Conversely, *Suzanne Dennehy's* photographs of objects, seemingly straightforward, seem to take on psychological characteristics, as do *Nancy Scanlan's* intensely detailed, highly colored architectural images. *Debra Hunter's* series of clothes on a washline, in distorted and expressive "posesures", provide similar insight into how objects can be transformed into sources of ontological investigation.

The use of the self as subject/object is found in photographs by *Linda*

WOMEN & THEIR WORK
Presenting
woman
in-sight
★ new art in Texas ★

Finnell, dealing with gender transformation in which the picture turns a lie into the truth, while *Nina Nolan*'s work shows us a kind of evolutionary transformation by presenting three portraits of successive generations of her family. The photographic portrait, altered or unaltered, is analogous to the use of "personal," autobiographical or self-revelatory images in painting. *Krystyna Baker*'s grimacing old woman, *Michelle Campbell*'s women crossing an urban plaza in the wind, *Gloria Cisneros Lenoir*'s girl in red in the Quebec metro, and *Barbara Taylor*'s beautiful 1940's seductress provide, each in a different way, an insight into how we as women see ourselves through identification with others of our gender.

Suzanne Paul's photographs of Texas low-life are bizarre and outrageous, erotic and funny, providing a biting insight into the regional underworld. *Barbara Riley*, *Margaret Hicks* and *Constance Moberley*, in contrast, use the photograph in a non-documentary way. *Riley*'s hand-tinted pieces are perceived as drawings or paintings, since the application of tint changes them into nostalgic, other-worldly, delicate scenes which do not seem "real."

Hicks' mysterious, non-linear narrative explores events and situations by means of the structure of the images as much as through the images themselves, while *Moberley* uses partial images to suggest the integration of formal and narrative concerns in ways which are also analogous to those found in paintings.

Occasionally, photographic elements carry over into paintings, but in a sense that is very different from what we know as "photo-realism." For instance, *Kay*

Stewart uses realistic images to heighten the intensity of the night scene in her large painting, *Honey Beeman*'s use of pastel color changes realistic architectural images into fantasy ones, and the drawings of *Nancy Conrad* and *Kim Paxton* use illusionism to create surreal worlds in which realism and unexpected spatial changes interact continuously.

Although it is difficult to generalize, the majority of work in this exhibition seems to represent a changing, non-elitist attitude on the part of artists today, an attempt to reach a wider public through the use of forms, images or shared personal explorations which may be comprehensible to a variety of people because of their humanistic premises. The sense of communality, of shared experience, of art which is closely connected to those who created it rather than an art which is autonomous and distanced, is part of this emerging populism.

Artists today are willing and gifted participants in the political, social and cultural world in which their work must live. This change in attitude has been, in great part, brought about by the fact that women artists, in the late 1960s, first joined together, pooled their resources, created alternative spaces and forums within which to show and discuss their work, and provided a model for collaborative, artist-run organizations within which individual sensibilities, ideologies and esthetic viewpoints were aired and respected. **Women and Their Work** has provided, through this statewide exhibition as well as its many other activities, a rare opportunity to see and share with the public the fruits of their--and our-- labors.

— Marcia Tucker

Selection of black and white plates from the catalog



Claudia Reed/Scattered Thoughts (glu) 18"x18"x3"



Judith Williams/The Family (oil on canvas) 35"x42"



Barbara Azechi/On the Home of a Dinosaur, Mixed Box (Mixed) 9"x15" x4"



Mixed media on paper 11"x11"



Margaret Hicks/Sexual Fantasy (one of a series of nine color photographs) 20"x18"



Mary Elizabeth Campbell/Aunt Marge and Mom on Aunt Jane's Couch (pencil) 18"x24"



Gloria Genesse Linnon/Young Woman in Subway (color photograph) 13"x8 1/2"



Michelle Campbell/Houston, 1977 (black & white photograph) 18"x11"



Marian McLean/Where Passion Occurred (acrylic on canvas) 8"x8"



Melissa Miller/Before and After the Unfortunate Event (oil on canvas) 34"x42"



Gay Black/Sabra and Pauline (black & white photograph) 20"x18"

Texas women featured in exhibit



Melissa Miller's "Before and After the Unfortunate Event" (oil on canvas) is one of 70 works chosen for the "Women-in-Sight: New Art in Texas" exhibit which opens Saturday at the Dougherty Cultural Center.

Tucker looked at the work of more than 400 artists

"Woman-In-Sight: New Art In Texas," sponsored by Women & Their Work, opens Saturday at 8 p.m. at the Dougherty Cultural Center, 1110 Barton Springs Road. The public is invited to attend the celebration which marks the first state-wide exhibition of women's art in Texas. Refreshments will be served and chamber music will be played throughout the evening.

Juried by Marcia Tucker, director of The New Museum in New York, the exhibition encompasses painting, sculpture, ceramics, weaving, photography and represents the work of artists from Austin, Houston, Dallas, Galveston, Grapevine, Lubbock, San Antonio, Waco and many small communities across the state.

In selecting work for the exhibition, Tucker looked at the work of more than 400 artists, ultimately selecting 70 artists to comprise the show.

Woman-in-Sight: New Art in Texas is also a landmark exhibition for the Dougherty Cultural Center which opened two years ago as Austin's first city-owned center dedicated to the fine arts. Given to the city by

the Federal Government for which it had been used as a naval reserve center, it was re-dedicated to honor Mary Ireland Graves Dougherty, an Austin citizen who was a strong advocate of the arts.

While Woman-in-Sight: New Art in Texas was conceived and implemented by a small steering committee of "Women & Their

Work," an organization dedicated to the furtherance of women's art in Texas, the exhibition was supported by grants from the Texas Commission on the Arts, the Texas Committee for the Humanities and with a service contract from the city of Austin.

The exhibition will be open to the public through Dec. 9, at the Dougherty Cultural Center, Monday through Friday, noon to 5 p.m. and Saturday and Sunday, noon to 6 p.m. A catalog of the exhibition will be available at the center.

Women in Sight: Issues of Quality, Quantity and Politics

Austin / Susan Platt

Lucy Lippard recently referred to the statewide Colorado Women's Art Festival as a "monster motley." I would call the women's art exhibit, *Women-in-Sight: New Art in Texas*, now on view in Austin, a "medium motley" from the viewpoint of both size and style. The works by women from all over Texas are not as many (just over a hundred) as the multiple objects of the Colorado event, and the style range is not enormous, but rather somewhere between diverse and interesting. The show, selected by Marcia Tucker of The New Museum, includes literally dozens of artists who are totally unfamiliar to this writer, so snap esthetic judgments are necessary to make a start at characterizing the works. Thus, "medium exciting" is really just a big generality. Specifically, when dealing with so many new artists I look for originality that brings a piece forward from the mass of its companions. For me, original work is funky, eccentric or technically outstanding within identifiable 1970's styles. Generally in big shows of unknown artists, abstract painting produces the largest percentage of mediocre work. Artists who are not afraid to be themselves, avoiding art magazine modern, come off better.

This review, with only a few exceptions, will celebrate the individuality of conception over the knowledgeable conception. One outstanding exception to that is Jane Allensworth's two abstract canvases. I have seen her work before and never felt like humming about it, but *Black Angle* is a strong painting. Its tan/pink field has an obtuse black angle in the upper half that glows pink at the edges. Technical competence and the rigor of conception work together. An interesting comparison can be made with Nancy Conrad's watercolor, *Monument*. Conrad, a new name to me (and the catalog provides no biographical data on the artist), has a fine technical ability with the medium. The imaginary structure in the landscape is a visionary, impossible construction with its columns and roof in strange spatial relationships. Conrad has succeeded in achieving an original synthesis of realism and abstraction. Future Akins' *Please Don't Feed the Bears*, a serigraph with several discontinuous elements — roses, mountains and a pastel rainbow-hued square above — is also striking for its imagery and enigma. Kim Payne's graphite of clouds and scaffold, square above — is also striking for its imagery and space. Kim Paxson's graphite of clouds and scaffolding, *Walls III*, notable for its spatial qualities, works as an abstraction. Discussion of spatial experiments can be completed with mention of Vicki Teague-Cooper's *Implosion II: It's Time to Leave*, with its references to the black holes of outer space, a cloudy sky and the flat surface of the canvas as an independent sheet of space. The temptation to suggest that these artists' interest in space relates to the wide open space feeling of Texas may not be worth resisting, but like female iconography (which is amazingly scarce here), it is not important to the effectiveness of these works. That rests in the artists' conviction and my personal taste.

A few other mostly abstract works stand out in the throng. Rebecca Best's tiny painting/collages are sensitive in their use of spidery lines and subtle color. Barbara Sturgill's *Looking for You* is a smashing bold green field of color, with a jagged, mountain-like profile and bright squiggles of paint, squeezed from the tube, jumping on its surface. Claudia Reese's ceramic plaques with their little casts of identifiable objects such as crackers and band-aids are mostly abstract and two-dimensional in their feel. Reese, like Melissa Miller, a Reuben-esque paint-



SUZANNE PAUL: UNTITLED, color photograph, 16" x 20", at the Dougherty Cultural Arts Center, Austin.

lover with a taste for dogs, chickens and other mundane animals, and Carol Rabel, whose interest is in brightly colored patterns, is having a major show in Austin this fall as part of Laguna Gloria Art Museum's exciting commitment to local artists. Unfortunately, since the shows are only two weeks long they cannot be reviewed for ARTWEEK.

Another group of paintings deserves citing for their original combinations of realistic elements. My delight in Candace Burnside's *The Prize*, where the sweet, smiling grandmother has roses floating around her, is purely a desire to cheer a straightforward idea that works well. Judith Williams' *Madonna with Horses*, a Catholic parody, shows a Madonna wearing a halo of tiny horses. And Halley's *Comet Reunion* by Kay Steward is a takeoff on Grant Wood's landscape style showing contemporary long-haired urbanites (?), near a foreground pickup truck, watching a comet in the sky.

As usual with large shows, painting dominates. The same mix of originality and art magazine modern occurs in the sculpture, but no examples are particularly outstanding. Nancy Chambers' two sticky-looking, little box constructions containing arcane imagery are firmly in the eccentric category of originality. Her personal approach to form, color, medium and content can only be mentioned here. Another sculpture I liked was Tralene Vassilipous' *Root*, with its frame surrounding a suspended bundle. Another sculpture I liked was Tralene Vassilipous' *Root*, with its frame surrounding a suspended bundle of roots. Barbara Atwell's *On the Horns of a Dilemma, Music Box* is an intricate combination of materials that demonstrates a willingness to be both mundane and personal, but the complexity gives the work substance.

Craft works in the show demonstrate the ongoing blurring of the distinction between fine art and craft traditions. Traditional craft materials (like Reese's ceramic) used for fine art, rather than functional objects, seem to deserve a new category of "fine craft," falling somewhere between the two older classifications. Most of the works in the show however, like the wedding dress, devil puppet and jewelry, are clearly craft and disappointingly weak.

Tucker also included a group of photographs, most of them of people. My favorite, because of its strong image, is Suzanne Paul's untitled color print. Many other images do not rise above energetic, vaguely creative portraiture, but Barbara Taylor's *Streets of Rome* indicates a more involved enjoyment of eccentric appearances.

Women-in-Sight: New Art in Texas is a significant exhibit for several reasons besides the art itself. Artistically, it is stronger than the *Austin Contempo-*



BARBARA ATWELL: ON THE HORNS OF A DILEMMA, MUSIC BOX, mixed media, 4" x 10" x 6", at the Dougherty Cultural Arts Center, Austin.

rary Art Show of last spring, and more interesting than the University of Texas' glossy survey, *Made-in-Texas*. Politically, I've heard some women and men complaining about the issue of having to be female in order to get into a show. Several remarkable aspects of the exhibit's organization are worth noting, however.

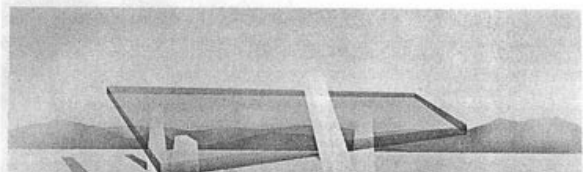
First, Marcia Tucker's presence in Austin during the jurying was exciting as an event because of her enthusiasm and iconoclastic attitudes. We were not "out there," as Lippard described the women artists in Colorado. People who were lucky enough to speak to Tucker came away charged with an extraordinary sense of positive purpose and affirmation. In addition, the show, predictably given Tucker's knowledge of art, uncovered some unknown figures worth seeing.

Second, the group that sponsored the show, seeing.

Second, the group that sponsored the show, Women and their Work, established a precedent-setting relationship with the city of Austin. The building in which the exhibit is housed is the Dougherty Arts Center, a municipal facility converted from a naval armory in 1977. When the cultural arts section of the Parks and Recreation Department moved in, the building had snakes living in the halls from the years of neglect. In a year it became a rehearsal space. Women and their Work took the whole public space and arranged to put in track lighting, got the city staff to install partitions, and presto, one of the nicest exhibition spaces in Austin. The city staff was thrilled with the group's efforts. Women and their Work also used finesse in handling the financing and managed to arrange some special funding.

Although only the foyer (about a third of the space) will remain a permanent gallery after the large women's show comes down, it is of major importance that Austin now has a purely city-backed space for contemporary art. (But other amazing things are happening in Austin; a group of undergraduates from the University of Texas just opened their own cooperative art gallery downtown.)

So this large exhibit is a landmark from the point of view of organization, city cooperation and discovery of some new talent. Although this article cannot give a rave review to the quality of the show, it is exciting to see the process of the show and what can happen when a small group of people make a good idea happen. The Dougherty Cultural Arts Center, 1110 Barton Spring Road, is open Monday to Friday, 2-5 pm, Saturday and Sunday, 12-6 pm, until December 9. □



Statements and photos of members of the Exhibition Committee

Mary Pillot



As a member of Women & Their Work Exhibition Committee, I felt a bond between a community promoting women artists' visibility, an equal opportunity recognizing women's voices and experiences as valid and important through the vision of female artistic perspectives.

Looking back, I recognize the hard work, dedication and teamwork we shared in reaching our goal, "Women-in-Sight", the first statewide exhibition of Texas women artists, juried by Marcia Tucker, art critic and founder of the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York City. I'm honored to have been a member of the committee, celebrating their accomplishments over the past forty-three years, and the excitement of establishing Women & Their Work's permanent home.

A few memories:

Throughout the dedicated work of organizing, meetings, grant writing, mailings, networking, city council meetings etc., we also managed to have fun in the process. I remember one of our Austin fundraisers featured Marcia Ball, an American blues singer and pianist, who donated the proceeds to W&TW for our statewide exhibition. It was a big success, many people attended and we were raising money, enjoying live music and dancing at the same time.

I remember one day Rita called and said she'd like for me to represent W&TW in promoting the exhibit and fundraising on Cactus Pryor's television show. So I did, even though I had a fear of speaking in front of an audience. Cactus was gracious and easy to talk with in front of the camera. And that was free publicity for our event.

I welcomed another opportunity when Barbara Sturgill asked me to go with her to the airport to meet Faith Ringgold, an internationally acclaimed black artist and lecturer, who was presenting a performance piece at St. Edwards University, "The Wake and Resurrection of the Bicentennial Negro," January 1978. From the moment she stepped off the plane in her full length mink coat, Faith Ringgold was a lively force to be certain. At the time, her motherly

concern about the misbehavior of one of her children was the topic of conversation till we reached her hotel. Listening to her concerns reminded me of the importance of communication and exchanging ideas, women supporting each other and sharing like Women and Their Work.

Deborah Vanko



As a member of the visual arts committee, we were much more than 'just a committee' .

We were like staff-we developed ideas, made decisions and produced all the art exhibitions (3) prior to the gallery. We were all professional artists that brought credibility to W&TW which made the gallery's creation possible. Rita said so herself..."the exhibition is an effort to let the public know that members of the committee responsible for decisions concerning the visual arts for the various W&TW events are themselves serious, competent and involved artists." (review of 'Vital Signs' by Francine Carraro, 1979).

Carol Ivey



When I joined the exhibition committee in May of 1978, I was several years out of art school, sharing a studio space with Melissa Miller and building a body of work. I had exhibited in the W&TW exhibition at Laguna Gloria the year before and was excited to be working with Rita Starpattern and this group of women artists, making new friends and deepening existing friendships. We were immediately off and running, holding regular meetings in each artist's studio, supporting each other while learning all aspects of publicizing and mounting exhibitions as we created them. Everything was done to the highest professional standards giving me a foundation to carry forward in my studio practice as well as my work in the fields of education and art services. It was gratifying to see what we could accomplish together.

It changed our wider art community, and it changed us.

In retrospect, I see my experience in a larger context. When I began my education, women did not receive high expectations for professional achievement. It took an especially determined young woman to persevere. In the 60's our role models were often the few women seen in group photos of artists of the 50's and 60's. There was only one woman, a printmaker, on the entire studio faculty at UT. For a young woman, an art career was tenuous, without much reinforcement. By the time I graduated in the early 70's, the women's movement was gaining momentum with huge changes in how we thought, what we read, who we looked to. I walked out to an entirely different world. My experience in 1978-79 with Women & Their Work and this community of supportive women gave me not only practical professional standards but also a lasting strength and perseverance.

Melissa Miller



Melissa & Claudia

It was an honor to work with the individuals of the Women and Their Work Exhibition Committee from 1978 to 1980. I recognize those years of teamwork as a time of growth for myself and the organization. Working with Rita Starpattern, and the other women of our committee, provided valuable lessons in community building, networking, balancing personal career with social service, career development, setting high goals and standards, and advocating for women. Our hard work not only resulted in helping set W&TW's future trajectory, but also in lifelong friendships and bonds.

One mission of W&TW has always been to promote art by women and help in the development of their careers. I am grateful to have benefited from the organization's efforts. Being chosen to participate in the initial W&TW show at Laguna Gloria and *Women in Sight*, provided group exhibition opportunities and experiences. The studio visits among our W&TW team, the dialogue, and feedback provided insight and support for our visions and pursuits. The visit to Austin by Marcia Tucker, a key figure in the museum world, provided a role model and insights into the larger workings of the art world. Tucker's brief time in the studio introduced her to my work and I believe played a part in her including me in two exhibitions: The New Orleans Triennial, and the Venice Biennial.

Though I did not continue with the hands-on work of the organization after 1980, I served on W&TW Advisory Board from 1985 to 1987. Over the years I have watched the organization grow in stature and gain international recognition. It continues to have my support and deep respect. Along with other women on our Exhibition Committee team, I am proud of having contributed to its early growth and continuation.

Claudia Reese

Arriving in Austin in the summer of 1977, having just finished a semester artist in residency at Univ of N Colorado in Greeley, and prior to that 3 years in Washington DC involved with Washington Project for the Arts and Gallery 10, a women's coop gallery, I was ready for the next stage in my career as an artist. It took a while to settle in, find housing, studio space, people. Was there a women's network? Where were the galleries? The answers invariably came back: talk to Rita Starpattern. I finally contacted her in late December. Skeptical at first, seemingly weary after the festival she had produced (which I totally missed) and not a little wary of this outsider, she humored me, set up a second meeting inviting Barbara Sturgill. The three of us called every Austin woman artist we could find and the seed of the Exhibition Committee was planted. Now Rita had a little army called the Exhibition Committee that took on a life of its own. The women involved (see list) organized studio visits, critiques, resume writing sessions, -- we were consciousness raising for ourselves as artists and for women artists everywhere. We learned something about publicity, designing and printing professional looking announcements; public relations, talking to the press; grant writing, arts councils, city government, rehabbing: turning a barracks into a viable gallery space. We learned a lot about organizing a large event, and even more about each other.

After our successful opening of the Woman in Sight exhibition in 1979 I left Austin for another visiting artist residency, this time at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, then a stint at Notre Dame, a year at Purdue Univ teaching ceramics, a semester at LSU. By then I was ready to return to Austin and apply all that I had learned to start my own business, Cera-Mix. Over the next many years I produced and sold nationally and internationally a line of ceramic dinnerware and tile. And continued to make sculpture, my first love. Among numerous one woman shows, one was at the Women and Their Work gallery on W 5th Street in 1999. It was entitled Sentries for a New Century.

The friends formed in those first years in Austin are still part of my life. The skills I developed with the Exhibition Committee group have served me well. I am proud of what we accomplished back then and pleased and gratified that Women and Their work has continued to expand, growing into the powerhouse that it is today, recognized as a champion, promoter and patron of women's art.

Millie Wilson

