

## It's About Time: An Homage to Women Artists

by Bobbie Leigh

**T**he Difference We've Made: Women Artists Active in the NYC Art World in the 1970s and Still Making Art" is a landmark exhibition at the Carter Burden Gallery. Why "landmark"? Until now, women artists active decades ago, could not find galleries, dealers, and museums to support their work. This exhibition is a turning point, showcasing the work of women artists often overlooked, who are now gaining the recognition they deserve.

As this exhibition demonstrates, women artists of the 70s and beyond broke many art world conventions. Their work reflects fresh ideas about culture, politics, gender, and social inequality. Not market demands but inner convictions led them into the mainstream of the NYC art world of the 21st century.

The 23 artists selected for this show represent the hundreds who deserve greater attention as pioneers. Their immensely varied work was an incubator for the widespread vitality of the artworld today. No subject was off limits —feminism, politics, women's health, the environment, and social justice— were all legitimate subjects for their art.

Among hundreds of choices, the three curators—Cynthia Mailman, Vernita Nemeč, and Susan Grabel, (all working artists) selected 23 women whose work broke cultural, artistic, and political norms. "We want to allow each of our artists enough space to show a significant recent piece demonstrating the widest possible range of art styles, materials and individual expression," says curator Mailman. Often overlooked, these 23 artists present significant work—drawings, sculpture, photography, print making, performance and beyond—expressing contemporary cultural and political ideas.

One look at **Juanita McNeely's** nine panels on abortion (a version



Cynthia Mailman

of which was purchased by the Whitney Museum of American Art) says it all. This mural-size painting recounts the artist's excruciating experience of having an abortion in the early 60s when abortion was illegal. Until recently, museums, collectors, and gallerists avoided such highly challenged visceral "feminine" work.

**Susan Grabel**, a sculptor and printmaker, says Feminism has informed all of her work. Her series on aging women's bodies set new standards for women's figurative sculptures. In this show, the standout piece is a graphic wood cutout from her *Confluence, The Way*

*Forward* series. **Vernita Nemeč aka N'Cognita** is a self-admitted hunter and gatherer. Her studio is stuffed with a plethora of found objects, fabrics, twine, cartons, and glass shards. She sees art everywhere and seemingly she can make art from anything. This show features her *Plastic Teardrop for the Planet*.

**Cynthia Mailman's** works — watercolors, ink, and collage— are a continuation of her early series, *The Origins of God*. She investigates prehistoric imagery as evidence that the most potent images of God were female. "God being a male figure is an improbable assumption," she says. *The Whole World is in Her*



Juanita McNeely



Susan Grabel

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Vernita Nemec aka N'Cognita

*Hands* is a watercolor of a Minoan goddess holding up the world.

**Dotty Attie**, another emerging artist of the 1970s, imbues neutral images with sardonic narration. *The Shadow Knows* draws on conceptual art traditions.

**Kazuko Miyamoto's** spatial constructions represent an endangered species—art as optical illusion. Bewildering, and transformative, they represent a new level of complexity revealing the influence of Minimalist artist Sol LeWitt with whom she once worked as an assistant.

**Lucy Hodgson's** concrete and steel works are not overtly political. "However, they do address issues of environmental disaster," says this Maine-based artist, adding that the things she makes are "primarily conglomerations of organic materials."



Jenny Tango



Lucy Hodgson

There are scores of under-the-radar artists, like **Jenny Tango** who at 95 is still painting, and **Senga Nengudi**, best known for her abstract sculptures and choreographed performances, to discover in this significant exhibition.

As Ellen Lubell writes in the catalogue, "...the data shows that the gains have not been enough to achieve the elusive parity." But at least with this show, visitors can see that women artists are now an integral part of the NYC art world. **G&S**

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