

Spot on

ISSUE 2
WOMENS ART MAGAZINE
1977.



805
SPI

drawings and interview with
LOUISE LEWIS...

Who are we?

We are a collective of Christchurch women with a feminist perspective eager to provide New Zealand women with a literary/arts journal which is a forum for their own thoughts, feelings, attitudes in a nurturant supportive atmosphere.

What are our aims?

To offer space to women artists, particularly those who have not been accepted by the male critique - publishers and galleries - and further, share the polemics of the global women's art movement. Create our own critique. Share work and spiritual aspirations.

What have we done so far?

Published the first and second issue of Spiral. The compilation of Spiral was done in Christchurch with contributions from painters, poets, photographers and other dedicated women.

What do we want to continue to do?

Print Spiral quarterly, contact as many women artists (painters, writers, photographers, composers, film makers, craftswomen) to develop a communication network throughout the country of which Spiral is a vital part, letting you know who is doing, thinking, making what, where and when - eg. arts workshops, festivals, exhibitions, books, biographies, new theories, discoveries, experiments . . .

What are our difficulties?

To have the money to print the next Spiral we need a good return from the sales of each issue, now on sale at bookshops and galleries or which you can write to us for posting. Therefore we need to contact as many women as possible who see the need for this publica-

tion - and will buy and help us sell it.

What you can do to help Spiral

Buy gift subs for mothers, friends, women artists of your acquaintance. Take out a sub for your doctors, dentists', lawyers' waiting rooms . . . art gallery, staffrooms, playcentres, clubrooms, stationer. Ask your local library, art gallery or . . .? if they have a sub, and if not, suggest they get one.

Sales

Ask your local bookseller if they stock it - if not, show it to them. Persuade them to try a few each quarterly. Let us know each printing how many they'd like to have invoiced out to them.

Buy a number, two, ten, a hundred copies from us and sell them to your friends.

Production

Send us articles, arguments graphics, letters, photos, instructions on doing, making eg. frames, looms, films. Send us feedback. What are your reactions to Spiral? What would you like to see more of, less of, what pleases you? Let us know if you can help us, if we can send you copies, if you can sell some.
HELP WOMEN ARTISTS COMMUNICATE WITH EACH OTHER. BUY SPIRAL.

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Editorial

Is it too much of a vision to imagine a changed world? even a city? With the volume low, the pace easy, people talking to each other and no fumes rising to shroud the red roofs . . . with every building an aesthetic and functional joy - no inhuman scales, draughty corridors, immoveable windows . . . a city in which every child is treasured by her three or more parents and dozen aunts, uncles, grandparents who share her house . . . a city of green spaces, leisure alleys, pleasure gardens, whose citizens so long ago refused the mass-produced that markets are the only places of sale, and those who sell, crafts-people, offer unique artifacts . . . a city whose teachers talk of preceding revolutions with quiet pride . . . revolutions? This age following the Agricultural and Industrial Revolutions must surely come to be labelled the Scientific Revolution. After the scientists have dissected humanity, the elements and earth's outer space, and put much of these within human control, what will still be needed is a potentially perfect life on earth. When science's apparent dehumanisation of living has reached its ultimate point, who then will provide new forms to embody the new concept of life?

Artists? But what does art do? Primarily, art communicates. Communicates with whom? Centuries top-heavy with male genius which yet drearily continued the debate on the wisdom of teaching women to read have been directed to men. As the media today, the artists of yesterday fashioned images of women, "one for his entertainment, one for her instruction".*

The oppressive silence hung over women's responses to this situation is lifting. I.W.Y. brought to light books, crafts, exhibitions, groups and projects, but most importantly brought women together in dialogue and change. Change is what the women's movement is about - changes in values, actions - and assessments of women artists. Art embodies our sexuality, spirituality, intellect, mirrors our psychic growth, is not made in a vacuum. As our lives are urged and restricted by stereotypes so will our art be. Lives physically restricted may help a genius concentrate her powers (e.g. Emily Dickinson), but lives emotionally and intellectually restricted must produce a half-realised creativity, sometimes blocked with bitterness, more often echoing man-made models and formulae. Until we find and make our own models we will continue to be isolated, to doubt sanity, to use too much energy to exist, propping ourselves up rather than creating. Women with the will and ability to succeed in the male world may lose much genuine creativity, side-tracking it into approved trends, suppressing woman-positive feeling. It is, it has to be, the aim of the raised feminist consciousness to revolutionise our living environment, to break down structures shored up by a class perpetuating its privilege, to elevate concepts and structures allowing the greatest dignity to the greatest number. Women are making a climate unique in herstory - an international environment of supportive women with previously unacknowledged potential and ideas. Woman as subject becoming woman as creatrix. The beginning of the Feminist Revolution.



Ethel Bennett Poems



Not too many toast-racks

Mr & Mrs William North
regret to announce
their forthcoming anniversary.
The silver wedding party will be held
on the eighth -
Mr North regrets
Mrs will be out of shape
for the occasion
he says that's been growing on her
for years.

Mrs North fears
he puts things too baldly
and that doesn't exclude his head.

He's said she's no great housekeeper
he trusts
dusty glasses will only imply
the gin and martinis are dry.

She suggests if it's a rise
he's trying to get out of her
he give her the one
she's been begging so long
budget-wise.

The Norths have sent out
invitations
just a few mourning friends
and relations.

Storm Troops

General rain
is marshalling his troops
again
preparing to attack
on all fronts.
Shrapnel will descend
on roofs
while further afield
big guns roar.
I am just a refugee
fleeing through streets
while gutters run
with the clear blood
of an army.
My country
will rise up under attack
fighting back
with green bayonets.

The sirens are sounding
the all-clear now
through the eaves
and the tank traps
silhouetted against the sky
drop one last bloodied
autumn leaf.

Code Words

I once saw a sea
of black umbrellas.
Could have dropped from my window
and been carried
by the ribbed nylon tide
clear to the other side of Tokyo.
Would I have drowned
when the waves came to a point
and collapsed?

Perhaps instead
with paint and brush
I could have written slogans
re smog
on them in white
and watched with amusement
spectators' puzzlement
as they read the jumbled messages
with the regrouping at night.

History written with a Laser

A pride of professors
came down from the west -
learning lions
picked from the best
in the jungle.

A covey of computers
one behind one
met them
in the last sunlight.

They entered the Ark
two by two -
computer, professor,
professor, computer.

The clouds let loose
as they were meant to do
and for forty days
and forty nights
they worked the world's problems.

The Ark arrived at Ararat
where professors
checking their answers
found seawater diet
makes no computer fat
nor accurate
and in any case
the world's problems
were ocean deep.

All that eventuated
was a new generation
of little computers
for small minds.

Ethel Bennett was born in
Carterton, educated in Wellington,
and since then has spent most
of her life in Auckland. Hobbies
- poetry-writing, craftwork,
mainly modelling. Has been

office manageress for family
engineering business for past
14 years. Has had poetry pub-
lished in 35 publications in
New Zealand, Australia and
U.S.A.

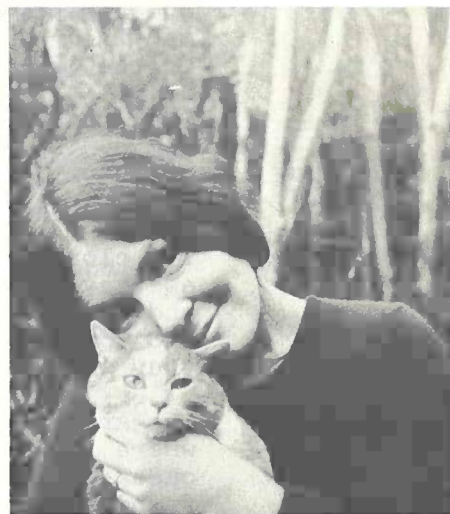


Gretchen Albrecht

Drawings

Born Auckland 1943. Studied School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland 1960-64.

The work has writing on it which speaks for me better than any carefully composed statement. I have found since living here at Konini Road a slowly promising welding of heart, mind and matter. My life is my painting and this is becoming or rather reflecting the calm serene peaceful purity of trees, sky, earth and plants.

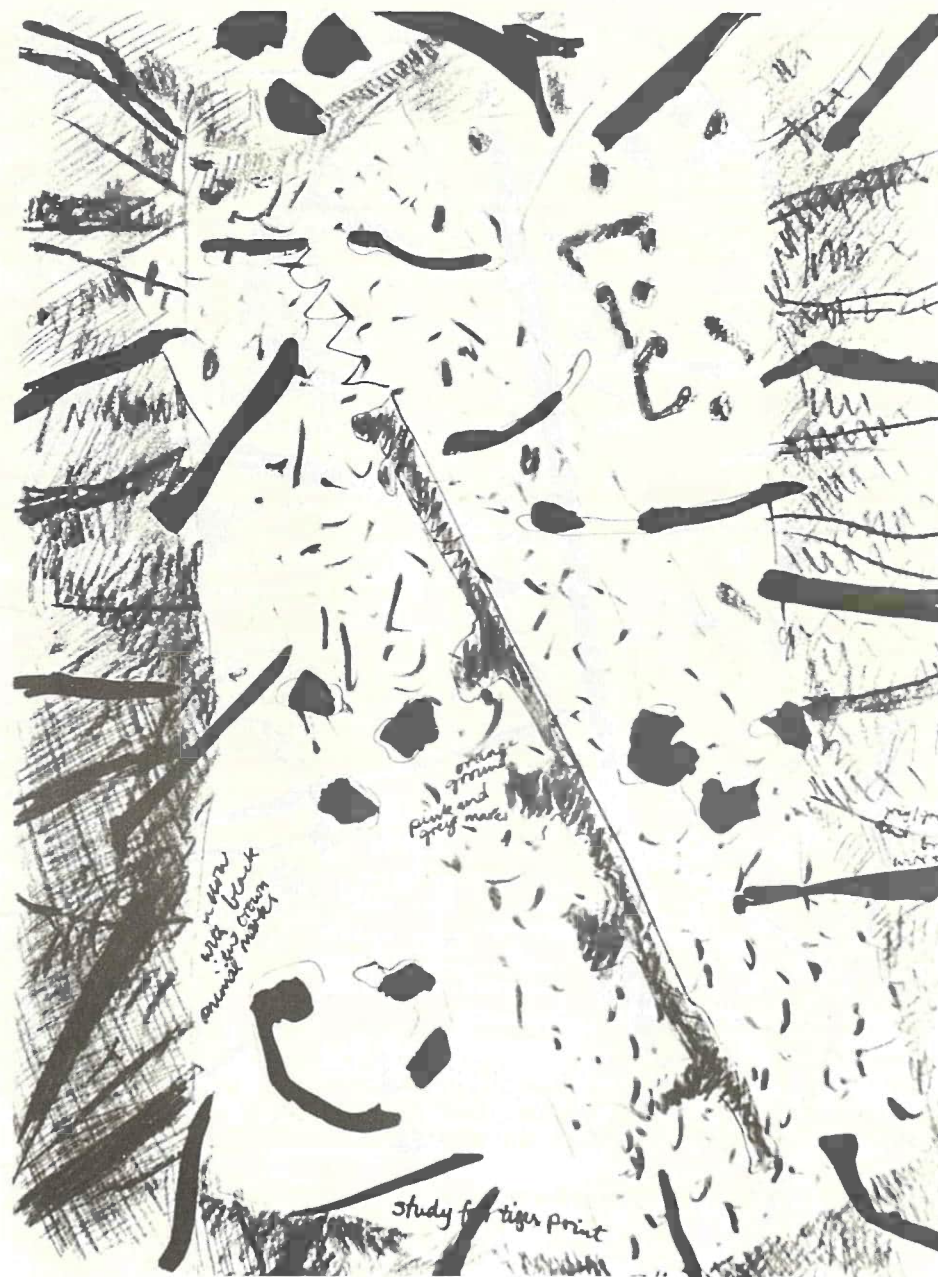


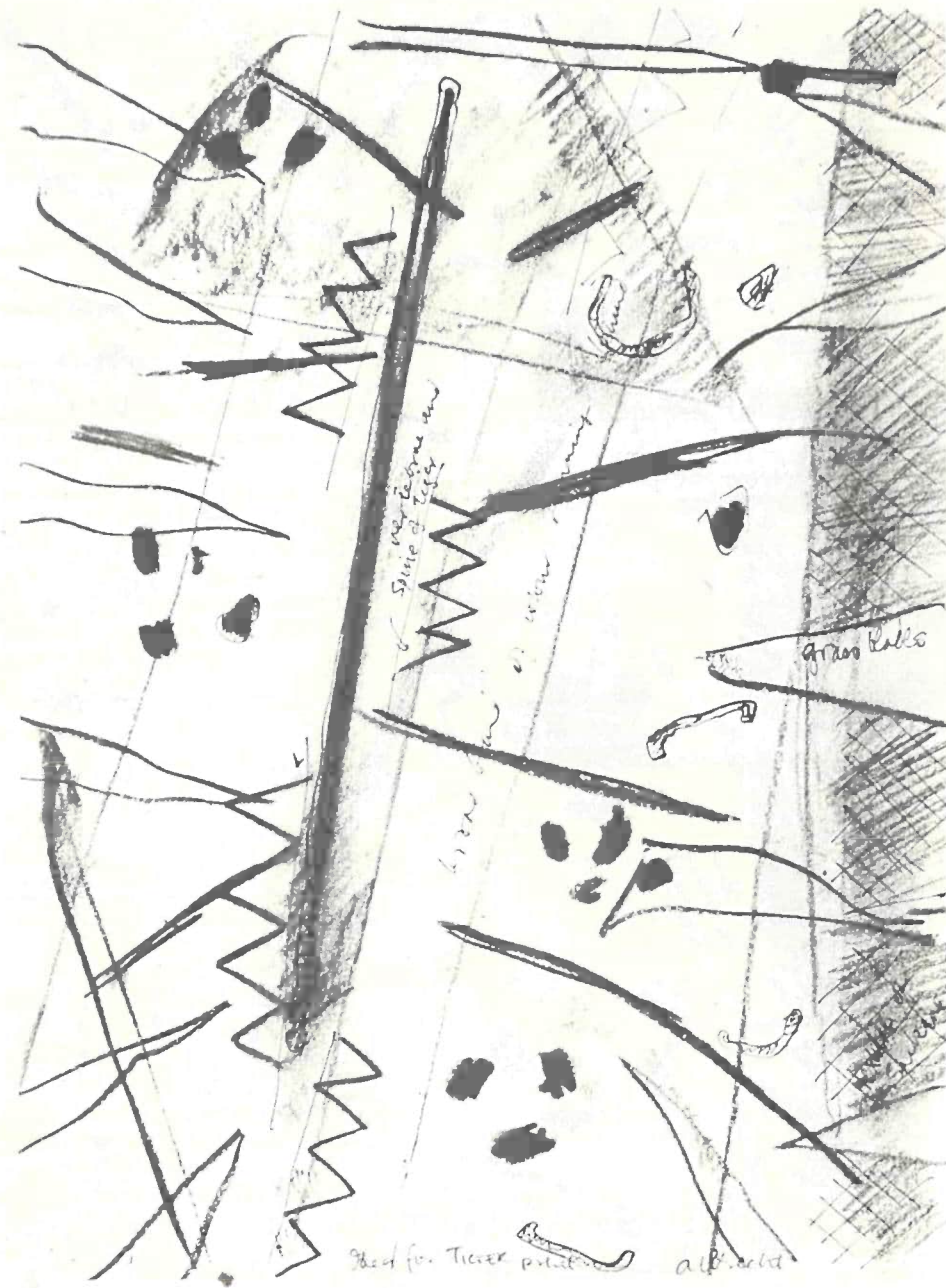
Exhibitions

- 1964 Ikon Gallery, Auckland
- 1967 Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland
- 1970 Holdsworth Gallery, Sydney
- 1970 Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland
- 1972 Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland
- 1973 Dawsons Gallery, Dunedin
- 1974 Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland
- 1975 Barry Lett Galleries, Auckland

Commissions

- 1975 large felt mural (commissioned by Auckland University School of Medicine)
- 1975 International Women's Year Poster (a limited edition poster commissioned by Zonta Club of Auckland)
- 1976 Recipient of a QEII Arts Council of NZ Award





Anne Donovan

Poems

She takes a Chance and finds True Romance

She sees him bound in stardust
The idol gazing from Buddha eyes
Skin of goldleaf tarnishing
Her blunt fingers rubbing.

They walked through city alleys
Movie shoes and shadow pursuing
Oh Jesus when his shadow hid the lightbulb
the rats rushing corner to corner,
the grey sheets and army blankets
became silk.
She forgot the empty gas meter
the moulding fridge with its turning contents
Oh Christ this was a man
worth waiting for worth waiting
in bars and wet streets
cigarettes running low and notes dirtying with indecision

This time, this time her ship was in
docked and moored to her hips
rolling on the mattress
She would make him breakfast
Rise early, sneak food from delivery trucks
Bread and milk from waiting dairies
Southerly rain blowing in through sacked-over window
forming pools of glittering pearls

In the morning he wakes with a snarl
Saying Jesus I was drunk last night
Must have been on the wharves to end up
with a tart like you
Crazy lady turns the eggs sunnyside up onto the street
and grinds the cigarette out in bacon fat.

Mating-call of a Renaissance Palace

Red window light casts another world:

Dressed in flowing silk, brocade of the East
Rubies round his neck, the blood drawn
By white breasts and perfumed thighs

Each day he passed
Each night claimed a woman
From the lines of mirrors

And she, whose skirts are soundless,
Paces the mosaic in darkness
Counting falls of cloth

She disappears before sunrise
Face carrying patterns of dead leaves

O horseman of sunlight
Elusive as the blind prisoner scuttling
Down the paths of the jail
O rider of phosphorus
Oblivious to the whispering vapors of women

Who discarded white gloves
For the shingle fans of dead summer

Bracken hair caught, back bent to the wind
She is a breath of cobweb away from destruction
Screaming blood at the mirrors
The rubies and ripped silk,
Slow strangulation of the nightingale

Before dawn.

At the Rainbow's End

On the game hunting strange meat
the burnt out faces of the street
Take her take her home
where the money lie winking
with durex and paper towels on the bed

Sidestreet mama in doorways
flesh spilling unrolling
oyster pale light on curling hairs:
Struck match after quicktime

Dimlit bars dead eyes in limp cloth
Hot fan air
driving beer smoke wall to wall
flutter screams of phantom wings
beating on beaded glass

Outside winter night wet, the dirt rain
carving runes of ancient slopes
An old crazy dame of soft notes
and cold silver rolling joints
for the arranged fast talk
of popping corks and empty ashtrays
Straightening sheets with one hand
and unhooking with the other.



On being a woman poet.

Being a woman is an advantage
in poetry, because there is an
awareness of belonging to and
being part of an eternal chain
of creation. The woman is the
original dying and reviving
god.

Anne Donovan

Born: Wellington 1951.
Now lives in Christchurch.
First collection of poems,
'Bride Price', is being pub-
lished by Caveman.

Two Found Artists



Jenny McMahon

Jenny McMahon is a young woman painter whose work is attracting notice. She has not been through art school nor had any technical training.

Jenny has four children. She did not want to print anything of her life and pointed out that the photographs we have of our woman contributors have been smiling and their lives seem tidy.

Branle

By perching far out
on pine branch, lone pigeon plays
seasaw with the wind.

Rhapsody

Suffused by sun's blush,
lone early morning seagull
exults, floats on air.

Impromptu

Trio of aproned pigeons
tucks into
a monkey-apple breakfast.

Bagatelle

Macrocarpa tip
springs back and forth as pigeons
play musical chairs.

I Am Giving Birth to Myself:

Women's poetry and the feminist movement
Wendy Laks

It is necessary to understand the discrepancy between the official ideology of our society and the reality of discrimination which exists for women. Out of this discrepancy came the feminist movement and it is within this context that women's poetry must be placed. Before going on to discuss poetry I will outline some of the aspects of the current feminist movement which are important to an understanding of the poetry to follow.

Betty Friedan published the "Feminine Mystique" in 1963. She began to investigate the dilemma which Viola Klein had pointed out in 1946: "There was a strange discrepancy between the reality of our lives as women and the image to which we were trying to conform, the image that I came to call the feminine mystique". It is Friedan's thesis that the core problem for women now is the problem of identity; women are prevented from developing their full potential in a society which encourages women to stay in the home as wives and mothers. In a society where in 1970 forty-four percent of all women were in the labour force (Banner, 1974:256), the presence of traditional ideologies about women's place presents women with a conflict.

As Kelin put it, "The psychological state of women at the present time is characterized by a dilemma ... there is a cleavage between the material conditions of our lives and persisting traditional attitudes which have not yet adjusted to the new facts." (1946:30,31) Current feminism and women's poetry can be seen to be grappling with the whole question of identity and trying to establish new images for women.

Jo Freeman distinguishes two main branches of the current movement, the older branch and the younger branch. (1975:49-51) Both branches would agree that males and females are equivalent in potential but have been made unequal under a system of oppression, i.e. sexism. As Freeman points out it is difficult to separate the two groups in terms of ideology, but there are differences in terms of style and structure of the groups. (ibid:51) Whereas the older branch focuses on institutional change in the legal and economic spheres, the younger branch focuses on personal change and shuns formal organization. The emphasis of the younger group on personal change through the process of the 'rap group' or the 'consciousness-raising group' is particularly important in understanding women's poetry.

In rap groups ". . . women explore personal questions of feminist relevance by "rapping" to each other about their individual experiences and analyzing them communally." (Freeman, 1975:117) The rap group brings women together in a structured way for a specific task. This task is to change women's identity, to raise their consciousness. By sharing personal problems and feelings women come to realize that their situation is not unique, what they thought was a personal problem is a common problem. These common problems are seen to have a "social cause and a political solution". (ibid: 118) The groups deal with the phenomenon of the psychological effects of oppression by providing a context in which to base analysis. "Women learn to see how social structures and attitudes have moulded them from birth and limited their opportunities. They ascertain the extent to which women have been denigrated in this society and how they have developed prejudices against themselves and other women. They learn to develop self esteem and to appreciate the value of group solidarity." (ibid:118) This process amounts to a "resocialization of one's concept of self" (Freeman, 1975: 118) and thus is a powerful method of changing the individual. The process of consciousness raising opened up women's personal lives as a subject of art. The same process that made the personal the political made the personal artistically describable.

Consciousness raising has created the conditions necessary for

women to begin speaking about their private lives. Their feelings, experiences etc. are considered important, as being worth speaking about, and are important to other women to listen seriously to. Each woman's experience is considered relevant to every other woman because of women's common oppression and common life experiences. Each woman has an interest in other women's lives that is beyond certain individuals, the feeling of sisterhood includes all women. These conditions seem essential to the process of establishing a new identity for women and at the same time are also essential for the creation of art that deals with women's lives. As Lucien Goldman has said "The specific conditions of literary creation . . . are analogous to the general conditions of attaining consciousness." (1968:134) Women are finding that the subject matter of their lives is important to other women; this is a crucial factor in the literary process. As Ann Snitow said, "Until recently woman's subject matter has been a synonym for the trivial." (1973:413) The confined life that women have mostly led have given them experiences of a particular sort. These experiences have been deemed unimportant and uninteresting by the male dominated culture and the publishing and literary scene. As Snitow put it, "Women are not without subject matter; they are without respect for their subject matter." (1973:414) Women have been taught that their experience is domestic and therefore dull

and uninteresting, and the literary tradition has been masculine; these factors have made it difficult, if not impossible, for women to take their own experiences seriously and as experiences worth writing about. Elaine Showalter has pointed out that "If women artists are to liberate themselves from this past and discover their own originality, they are going to have to turn within and to explore the rich dowry of feminine experience which they all possess." (1973: 403) This exploration of the female experience is now taking place. It is the thesis of this paper that this exploration is dependent upon, and is part of the women's liberation movement which is creating the climate in which women's experiences are important and in which women's experiences are being listened to with acceptance, understanding, and seriousness.

As Freeman points out the younger branch is characterized by a set of values women brought to it from the radical left: "Their concepts of participatory democracy, equality, liberty, and community emphasized that everyone should participate in the decisions that affected their lives, and that everyone's contribution was equally valid." (1975:105) The emphasis is on the ability of each and every woman to create, to make decisions, to contribute to the group process. This stress on the ability and desirability of each woman to contribute is very important to the explosion of women's poetry recently.

Participation in decisions and the sharing of feelings brings a new feeling of self worth. This feeling of self worth seems intimately connected to the process of art. The emphasis upon the equal potential of each woman to create gives confidence to women to create, and the emphasis on the value of everyone's contribution goes toward defining art in a communal way. Art is not merely the realm of the genius but is a potential of all women, all women have something to say.

The sense of self which is necessary to be a poet is being fostered by participation in "rap groups" and via the women's movement as a whole. As Suzanne Juhasz has pointed out, "It takes a strong ego to send out one's poems, be rejected, and send them out again; but even more profoundly, it takes an incredible ego to say: my experience of the world, my vision of the world, are worth - I am worth your attention. What I say is important! Women traditionally lack not only that self confidence but that sense of self. Always defined in terms of someone else - somebody's wife, somebody's mother - they have been socialized to find their worth, meaning, validity in terms of other people." (1976:122) Many women artists have talked about the sense of self as necessary to the process of creation. Some of their comments elaborate the points above: Erica Jong has said, "The problems

of becoming an artist are the problems of selfhood . . . The main problem of a poet is to raise a voice . . . To achieve authenticity you have to know who you are and approximately why . . . Naming is the crucial activity of the poet and naming is a form of self creation . . . One has to be strong indeed to trust one's own experience. Children characteristically lack this strength. And most women, in our culture, are encouraged to remain children . . ." (1975: 253-256) Adrienne Rich has said, "For a poem to coalesce, for a character or an action to take shape, there has to be an imaginative transformation of reality which is in no way passive. And a certain freedom of the mind is needed - freedom to press on, to enter the currents of your thought like a glider pilot, knowing that your motion can be sustained, that the buoyancy of your attention will not suddenly be snatched away. Moreover, if the imagination is to transcend and transform experience it has to question, to challenge, to conceive of alternatives, perhaps to the very life you are living at the moment . . . For writing is re-naming . . . to be a female human being trying to fulfil traditional functions in a traditional way is in direct conflict with the subversive function of the imagination." (1972:23) Both poets above mention the act of naming as being essential to the process of selfhood and the process

of poetry. As Mary Daly has pointed out "women have had the power of naming stolen from us. We have not been free to use our own power to name ourselves." (1973:8) The woman's movement is allowing women the space in which to re-define themselves; it is fostering the "reclaiming of the right to name". (Daly, *ibid.*) The explosion of women's poetry in the last five to ten years is one indication of the effects the women's movement is having on women's lives.

Jo Freeman points out that the younger branch is characterized by a hostility towards the media. (1975:111) This hostility was provoked by incorrect coverage and the manner in which the media first treated woman's liberation "with a mixture of humor, ridicule, and disbelief". (Freeman, *ibid.*) The media, as Freeman remarks, treated women as an entertainment as usual and refused to take them seriously. This hostility generated in the early part of the movement goes toward explaining the proliferation of feminist publications. The values of participatory democracy and the policy to exclude men from movement activities also are important in the establishment of feminist media. Feminist publications and presses are extremely important in any discussion of women's poetry in recent years.

The New Woman's Survival Sourcebook (Rennie & Grimstad, 1975)

Robin Morgan writes:

I would like to meet you
when I can no longer remember
being charred alive as a witch,
when you can no longer recall
being roasted alive as a faggot.

I would like to meet you

when we have both forgotten
what tears could be;
when we will wear no
breasts or penis or uterus,
vagina, testicles,
no beard, no blood.

I would like to meet you
identically muscular clitorine
large - brained naval - less
bodies . . .

("Rendez - Vous", 1972:20)

The second ideological perspective is that of "cultural nationalism" - women seek to be completely autonomous from men and to emphasize female qualities. With respect to how they publish their books, some women poets work only through the feminist presses in order to bypass male dominated, and profit orientated publishing houses. The purest form of this perspective is the lesbian-feminist position. As Charlotte Bunch articulates this position she presents the extreme culmination of the principle that the personal is the political: "Woman-identified Lesbianism is, then, more than a sexual preference it is a political choice. It is political because relationships between men and women are essentially political, they involve power and

dominance. Since the Lesbian actively rejects that relationship and chooses women, she defies the established political system." (in Freeman, 1975: 138) Many poems celebrate lesbian love and sexuality. Judy Grahn's piece "Edward the Dyke" makes the political aspects of lesbianism obvious: Dr. Knox, the psychiatrist, asks Edward what the word 'homosexuality' means to her. She replies, "Love flowers pearl, of delighted arms. Warm and water. Melting of vanilla wafer in the pants. Pink petal roses trembling overdew on the lips, soft and juicy fruit. No teeth. No nasty spit. Lips chewing oysters without grimy sand or whiskers. Pastry. Gingerbread. Warm sweet bread. Cinnamon Toast poetry. Justice equality higher wages. Independent angel song. It means I can do what I want." Said Dr. Knox, "Now my dear, your disease has gotten completely out of control." (1971)

While I have distinguished between two main ideological perspectives, in practice, the situation is not so simplistic. As Freeman points out many groups and individuals in the movement espouse a mixture of ideological perspectives. (1975:142) This mixture characterizes feminist poetry as well. For example, while Adrienne Rich presents a vision of an androgynous creature, she also suggests that men have ruined the planet and that women with their special female qualities must restore life. Women must leave men behind:

His mind is too simple, I cannot
go
on sharing his nightmares
My own are becoming clearer . . .
("August", 1975:212)

The movement lacks any clear ideology or vision for the future and the mixture of prevailing ideas is reflected in the poetry of women. The future is a question: (Adrienne Rich)
A city waits at the back of my
skull
eating its heart out to be born:

An excerpt from a paper done for
part of Masters degree in
Sociology, at Waikato University

how design the first city of the
moon? how shall I see it
for all of us who are done
with enclosed spaces, purdah,
the salon, the sweatshop loft,
the ingenuity of the cloister?

("The Fourth Month of the
Landscape Architect", 1975:
225)

Regardless of the differing ideological currents present the two most common themes of the poetry studied are the difficulties of living in a patriarchal society and the openness of the poets about sexuality.

The second instalment will appear in the next issue of Spiral.

PRIVATE GARDENS -

AN ANTHOLOGY OF NZ WOMEN POETS

edited by Rienke ENSING/ afterword by Vincent O'SULLIVAN -
who's the editor of AN ANTHOLOGY OF 20th CENTURY NZ POETRY -
Comment by Gloria Rawlinson.

34 poets including Fleur Adcock, Marilyn Duckworth, Lauris Edmond, Fiona Kidman, Ruth Gilbert, Jan Kemp, Judith Lonie, Heather McPherson, Gloria Rawlinson, Helen Shaw, Elizabeth Smither & Mary Stanley.

Published Caveman Press - out MARCH / April ... 160 pages.

Lis Gamlen



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Jill Oldfield

Poems

I was born in 1951 . . . into what was the beginning of a large female family. I have 4 sisters and one younger brother. I have a mother who brought us all up 'never to let our minds die'. She wonders now, why we are all so 'radical' - why can't we be normal like other girls? We explain to her that we are who we are, we will do what we will do, we are not satisfied to be 'like other girls' who all got married early - well, 20 is early, and had children straight away without ever finding out exactly who they were.

It has never occurred to me, being brought up in sisterhood, to be as 'society' decreed me to be. Indeed I tried for a couple of years and went 'under' - hit the gutter with a bang, because I couldn't handle being what I was 'supposed' to be. I am me. I must struggle for what I am, I didn't realise the struggle till I left home and came up against sex discrimination careerwise, and I took my family for granted.



. . . and an incident I will never forget, which made me tell my mother that I wasn't ever going back - the first day at kindergarten I got a hiding for playing with the trucks instead of the dolls!

. . . .
My poetry - I have always had a pen on paper - words are strange and beautiful things - they are the only things that take my mind off what is going around me - when I have my head in a book, I am deaf to everything - it is the same when I write a letter, a poem, a story. I get very verbose on paper - obviously. I am not often verbose orally, I tend to be a listener, but if you start me raving . . .

for a woman, writing must be a hobby
 for a woman to do a tour of one night stands
 to read her own poetry
 is unheard of
 (my dear, when are you getting married?)
 for a woman to paint, must be a hobby
 she shall be socially outcast - alone
 but to sing she may
 males have it easy to be an artist
 but a female has to be insane
 let alone good at it.
 (well then, how's your social life?)
 a male can change his job a thousand times
 he's looking for the right one,
 (this applies to his screwing habits too)
 let a woman do it
 she is unstable
 (and as for her screwing habits ...)
 & whoever heard of a female wanderer,
 I mean a real wanderer, who is the loner
 the artist, the writer, the professional wanderer,
 & not the woman who follows her man around
 the countryside hoping he will settle and marry her
 - he being her lifegiver & her lover,
 who is she anyway, that she is a parasite.



May I
 Come In?
 (10.6.73)

(i) "lady,
 there is nothing left,
 there is no room for you."

is there no room for a lady-outsider?
 is there only space for a man?
 may I come in?

"a lady must be gentle and kind
 & live to look after her man"

but a woman of my power
 finds a permanent mate,
 Impossible:
 & writes instead,
 stinking poetry
 full of rotting imagery
 brought about by man.

(ii) when we were children
 we knew blue skies & green grasses
 we knew cows,
 & birds that sing;
 when we became adults
 we put away childish things.

when we are old
 we will hear again, the birds
 and wonder why
 it got wasted.

When I am old, will I still be here,
 Hunter,
 living on crusts in rubbish cans
 & having meagre washes in old tin lids?
 will I be forgotten
 as I,
 as you,
 have forgotten,
 the old cow and the tui in the kowhai?
 & will I,
 in my womanhood,
 forget I am a woman
 & become a nothing
 in this land of Devil-bought souls!

(iii) yeah, hunter,
 first you take my Eden,
 & build pseudo spanish homes,
 exploding unnecessary bombs
 pitting my landscape
 till there is nothing but sea and sky
 & they too you rape,
 with your men and machines!
 Your appetite for murder is never filled.

darren scars
 tear and mar my hills.
 My country is crying,
 it has been stabbed & torn!
 where now can I go?

Is there anywhere
 this poet can stand and be a woman?
 this woman can stand and be a poet?

(iv) soft grass in scrub
is for lying on & meditating
for sitting on to watch ships come in ...
For watching the hills crumble
as They fill them with people.
can we hold them all?

"yeah,
Jesus fed the multitudes with a loaf
& some fishes, & this is God's own ..."

can I come?

"lady,
there is no room for you,
& lady;
there is nothing left"

The Foolish

(30.1.75)

What is friendship when I feel uneasy?
when it fell apart I didn't want to leave,
to get up from where I'd fallen -
to the low, cold and drawn
where wrinkles are the wear
& no-one seems to care -
is too much effort where there is no energy;
sapped away by a parasite who wanted love
but was not prepared to give any.

Yet I,
Fool,
knew it would happen
& clung to the dirty autumn leaves
that floated to the ground,
choosing hurt to loneliness.

I stare from my window,
watch the sun setting
night and night after night
wondering what makes the days go;
realising the nothing inside
had been no excuse to lie.

'tis winter now.
more winter happens when I am a fool.

Frustration

Listen to that voice,
dictating
all day after day
driving me insane!
Every day is a frustration
like the window I look through
wrinkled & unable to see,
like the furgh that comes over my brain
when I am constructive
& other people make me destroy
so that I have nothing left,
nowhere to go,
but to drift on
and on ...

The fight is endless
so endless,
there is some purpose in this fighting
but I can't find it anywhere
especially when the year ends
before it has begun
all my plans & dreams
come crashing down
in a few seconds of thoughtlessness.

Sometimes I feel like
SMASHING THAT WRINKLED WINDOW
so that I can see,
but what is there behind but GREY
building mossy ROOFS and DRIPPY DRAINS...

Yeah,
well now I bend my knees
and lay my head
to thank God
there is a way out of here.



An Edited Transcript from a Taped Interview
with LOUISE LEWIS
by Alison Mitchell and Heather McPherson.

The interview began with Louise talking of her recent reading of Jung and the discovery of the unconscious. This had been a relief to her because previously she had tried to deny or not know her psychic self.

L. It is on a physical level that I know about the lessening of interest in my physical self. It is probably because I've always not been able to accept my spiritual self - it probably made me incapable of mixing successfully. Although a lot of people I mixed with felt the same way. Its all delayed action. I feel the paintings I'm doing now should have come about when I was 23.

A. You mentioned that young women today, such as myself, are emerging in a different kind of context; how do you think it would have been for you had you had the kind of Feminist background that you are beginning to get now, if it had been so when you were 23?

L. Well, I feel that I just want to cry and cry and cry just hearing you say that. Well, I would have been aware of the choices that could be made and have some knowledge of a different kind of expectancy from others. I always wanted to fill others expectancy of me and I think that I wouldn't have been so paralysed.

A. How do you feel about the difference in expectation of what others had of you then, perhaps these people that you say might have felt the same way. Was there no dialogue going on with people sharing differences in the way they appreciated each other, in the work they were doing and the lives they lead?

L. There was no sharing of differences - differences were seen as odd or funny or socially unacceptable. There wasn't any value in anything I did other than relating to men really.

H. Or the woman's role as you saw it, as you had been taught to see it.

L. I hadn't even been taught, I wasn't taught to see a role as my mother was rather extraordinary, so I didn't get any role teaching at all and I'm extraordinarily fortunate in that, that may be how I've managed to emerge, where I started to emerge about 10 or 12 years ago. But I didn't have much role conditioning at all, it was really what I picked up out of the air.

H. I think I meant in the sense that women were unappreciated or certainly not able to stand alone - the role women are taught in being supportive to men and being mostly wives and mothers or whatever. If they did try to achieve things still now . . .

L. Well, I had one big problem, it was that I really liked everybody that I saw, you know, everyone who came near me, I liked them, male or female, I never treated women differently from the way I treated men, so if I wanted to hug a friend when I saw her I would also do this to men and it led me into a lot of difficulty which I now recognise, a lot of trouble with women, an endless trail of trouble with women because I didn't know that marriage was an aim or a goal, I'd never heard of it, I hadn't seen a baby so I didn't learn it. I only found out later that women thought I was wanting the man that I hugged. I just simply liked everyone, I didn't think of them as being different. It's really terribly sad, but now I wouldn't embrace anyone, male or female - it's so screwed up.

H. Did you feel you had to keep on some physical or worldly level to keep the spiritual quiescent?

L. I've never wanted to accept my unconscious before. It's only now I'm noticing it. My unconscious has always guided me but now even in the last few weeks things have really altered. I feel I really want to work with my unconscious. Do you work with your unconscious?

H. I have to work at keeping my conscious and subconscious

together because although the initial impetus is coordinated, if the whole isn't completed, or the end is hazy then I find they tend to split apart, and I have different levels. I've been thinking about this lately because reading Gertrude Stein - she said she had to drop the subconscious to achieve clarity in her work, but I don't want to drop it because then I find myself simply being clever with the conscious.

L. I realised as I was working on this one painting I'd got into the unconscious. It started out on an explosion point, a uterus red and rosy, spiralling smoke . . . the rose . . . I was using the rose - but I gradually removed the source. I'm removing the physical side of myself. I started with the volcano - then I gradually removed the mountain and when it burst and I turned the painting over I saw the explosion had become a channel of red - an umbilical cord. I didn't realise what was happening but for my paint rag I was using towelling and mopping up these great streams of red - I'd actually chosen towelling from my rag box - and there was more paint on the towel than the canvas. I was shaken. Then in a state of depression I thought I had to cool it off. I went through with blue and this angry colour . . .

A. What would you call it . . . magenta?

H. But smoky . . .

A. . . . smoky, bluey red . . .

L. I've found I do something consciously not wanting to expose it. The umbilical part I removed. I should have kept it. They're called rivers of fire - I'm doing three of them.

I've brought the uterus, the centre in and out. Now I've decided I want to bring the centres in again. One reason why a women's gallery is so important is that we don't necessarily have to present the finished product - but can show the whole process - keep the series together. Like Doris Lusk's series in the McDougall now which should be kept together. With a woman's gallery it could be kept for posterity. But because of monetary needs such work collections get broken up. What I was trying to do was to get the centres to go in but not get too dark because everything would get darker. I've hung on like grim death, once I got rid of the umbilical cord to hold that centre - I've held onto the belly button. I've chilled colour down . . . then I want to hot up an area . . . then to spread into blue, not to balance by making it colder. What I consciously wanted to do with my painting was to have the anger coming out as beautiful, as women, as roses. I wrote a note to keep three small roses.

A. Why three?

L. I've always used it as a symbol. A corny symbol maybe . . . I feel the need to bring out the plastic form. I suppose it's a convenient number. I strongly suspect a religious hangup.

A. What kind?

L. Past experiences at a Catholic school. When I was a child I was sent to a Roman Catholic school, the only Anglican child at this convent school. When all the other children were praying I was sent outside and I could hear all this going on inside and I thought it was marvellous - they all seemed to be having a wonderful time beating their breasts and counting their beads. It was extraordinary. Fortunately an Irish nun clicked with me when I was hanging around out in the cold and she discovered music for me - that I had a talent for music. It was what I needed spiritually, a religious experience, though I didn't think of it as that, a small child - I was 5 - kept out of praying to hail Mary, mother of this, mother of that. Everything that happened happened as a result of that kind of experience. The next time I met with religion it was at an Anglican school which was watered down and had no meaning to me. I couldn't concentrate at school. I remember I had a note book and I wrote down in it every swear word I heard. I don't know where it got to but it disappeared

and suddenly I was at St. Margaret's school. This was in Standard 5.

A. Can you talk to us a wee bit more about what actually happened in the process of the painting and how you got to the point of seeing this unconscious side. Can you relate in some way why you painted it and then changed it back to the conscious? When you painted out areas what happened then?

L. I hung on to it as long as I could, I still rather regret having removed it and I'm all the time thinking I'm going to put it back in when I start the other two paintings.

A. You said they are called rivers of fire.

L. I just did hope that when people looked at it they could relate to it better, and it wouldn't be so alarming so I removed it.

A. Alarming to whom?

L. To the viewer, I wanted the viewer to like it and they wouldn't as long as this was in it because it wasn't acceptable really.

A. To whom?

L. To anyone likely to look at it, really, although all along the thought that this is only going to be seen by women has made it possible for me to go on with it, but even so, I'm so dyed in the wool that I

suppose there was a backward thought that it would be seen by men and that this would certainly be, well, unacceptable is not quite the word, it doesn't say enough about what I feel about the lack of liking in it.

A. Do you feel it unacceptable in some way when men are approached with such a shocking or such a fiery thing or such an unconscious source of yourself?

L. I felt it was a great source of wonder and was scared - of envy perhaps.

A. From the male viewer?

L. From the male, yes, only from the male, and that's when I actually got rid of it. It comes and goes. I mean I now want to heat up the whole centre of that thing and, you know, I really bitterly regret taking that out.

A. How often do you feel that women in general or you as yourself, as an artist, have reformed things, I ask both Heather and yourself and perhaps myself too, perhaps each give our views on it, how we've changed either our signatures so that it looks as if it could be appreciated by men because it could possibly be by a man, or reformed what we've done in order to appease or placate or be in some way in the mainstream. How much do you think that is a dichotomy for you, Louise?

L. I think it has been enormously influential.

A. In what way?

L. Well, I've always removed all the signs of the first thing I do on the canvas. I have never shown anyone my first efforts on any painting because they're too - well now I know what they are - they're unconscious happenings on canvas.

A. Don't you feel that those unconscious happenings are significant pointers to the direction of your psychic present physical emotional development - where you are as indicators rather than as a finished product - something that should be seen as a finished product.

L. I think it has affected me very much - very much in the past. It would have made it impossible to reach for the mainstream, I've done a lot of that. Now I think I'd remove it for other reasons of an intellectual kind, that it wouldn't satisfy me . . . and that's been part of it too all along I suppose, that I really have to go on developing what happens first till it satisfies my inner resources, to understand what my painting is about - somehow becoming more primal or primary. I want to satisfy my aesthetic sense and that I think is changing. After this painting. That is why I feel so strongly

I must go on intensely with this line - because it is, its changing my aesthetic response - the end result will be totally different if I can manage to go on separating myself from everything I've seen. My visual needs have never been met - my own woman's vision is beginning to develop. I feel that this is leading me somewhere to a new kind of aesthetic response at the end of it.

A. In yourself and your viewers.

L. In myself. Entirely, I'm terribly involved with myself at the moment. Terribly contradictory to what I've earlier said but I think this must be something - you're making me think of it in words which is very difficult for me to do - but that is really exactly what I am doing, I'm going on with this bloody painting until I find it aesthetically pleasing to me and its really very difficult. And it may not be - it may be just a big laugh . . . not to other people I now mean entirely to myself - I don't think I was ever really going to show it to anybody. It's my own aesthetic response to it in the end that really counts. And that is changing and I don't know where it's going to . . . it's so exciting I really don't want to speak to anyone.

H. Do you think you're losing that part of you that has so much needed to please or present something pleasing?

L. Yes. I do think that's very much what is happening to me - that I don't any longer feel so concerned about people liking me or not liking me. I don't give a hoot in hell. But I do have a lot of problems over it because I do in another way.

A. You did say earlier that if we'd known each other - the women artists group - the circle of friends that you're beginning to grow with now - you wouldn't be presented with a lot of these problems now.

L. Undoubtedly.

A. Can I ask you the same question Heather?

H. My life would have been totally different - I would not have despaired in my earlier isolation, and being a woman is a double isolation because you know so few women artists, so few people to talk over points in your work to help you to grow. The constant interaction is a stimulus to lead you into new and much wider growth also.

A. What is the stimulus that's happening in the women's art movement or in the women artists you are close to which is different from the way poetry or writing or painting has been seen in the past, what is the crux of that stimulus which gives you the confidence to talk about the process of your work rather than the end presentation?

H. Sharing, instead of it being a handicap to be a woman and an artist it's a source of pride, it's a sense of self-hood that you can use all of yourself that you needn't suppress a great deal, and also you have people growing at such a tremendously exciting pace and rate instead of being locked in a very small emotional view.

A. Talking about being locked in a small emotional view, the emotions have been something that in this century particularly have been rather pushed to a side unless they've been seen in the mainstream of say German Expressionism or the parallel streams of contemporary writing where the self has been narcissistically looked at but it's a direction which many feminist women today feel has a kind of nihilistic end . . .

H. You have minimalist poetry for example . . .

A. As you have minimalist painting. We were talking earlier about Louise feeling that some of the things that she removed from this particular painting we're looking at, like the umbilical part she feels she should have kept, it seemed to me that Louise was having some kind of dichotomy between the things that just seem to happen which are things that happen with me in my work - that I don't seem to have any conscious control at first, they happen and then I look at them, I might work on six

paintings instead of just one painting, I allow myself to let it all come out and then make a connection between what has come out and what is happening in my life cyclically with my rhythms, lunar, menstrual, planetary, with relationship patterns - things that are happening around me, the interactions of myself and my environment.

You asked Louise about her conscious and unconscious and said you worked with your writing in keeping your conscious and subconscious together but you were a bit afraid of being clever and said that Gertrude Stein had to stop the subconscious to achieve a clarity and that was how she managed to get the lucidity she needed in her own work. But you felt differently about that - you said you didn't want to drop it because it might make you write superficially.

H. I think that it's very easy to compartmentalise your cerebral and your emotional commitments or perhaps that I find it easy to do that. I have to keep together cerebral and emotional which I see as the subconscious I suppose to a degree, drawing on the unconscious too which includes the symbols that come up without any sort of volition at all.

A. Do you want to tap those, when you say unconscious you're talking about the things that suddenly appear, that if we were to do splodge marks between the three of us we'd

each see different meanings in those splodge marks, they come from the unconscious. Are you saying that you want to in some way channel and to understand them, to let them be the guide of your work?

H. Yes, indeed, because they are focal points of growth or they're some kind of catalyst, I suppose, that enables you to focus your spiritual, emotional and physical or sexual/sensual. They seem to draw those things together. Louise's rose which I accepted as being a sort of mainstream traditional symbol which has been used so much that it's almost, you know . . . but you remake the symbols for your own generation and the rose to me, now, is such a symbol of regeneration, because of Louise, the way she has seen it and made it her symbolic catalyst.

A. We've seen in America that Judy Chicago has used flowers and she's talked about the rejection of herself in terms of the male art dealers and the male critics and feeling herself being split apart. She asked herself what does it feel like to be rejected by a male art gallery director or somebody who was in a position of power in terms of her visual work and she said it's like having your flower split open. Now when I first saw Louise's paintings I had an immediate physical and emotional reaction because the fragility of them, the size of

them, the tenderness and intensity which seems so much to be reflective - on a kind of an edge, there is in the roses a lot of very deep red centralising and spiralling into a centre. But the edges in the particular painting I'm looking at at the moment fade out to white and are then contrasted by a very heavy petal behind and this seemed to me, that fragility, seemed to me the edge of life, of death, of carrying on - in my interpretation of the transience of life. I wonder Louise, if you could talk a little bit about when these rose paintings began and perhaps some of the cathartic things that were happening in your personal life, because they seem to be directly connected with what began these paintings.

L. I don't know that I really want to talk about it, I don't like to think about it . . . I think they were prophetic in a way and since I've discovered that they were I've discovered that a lot of the things I have done have been prophetic and I've found a quotation I had written down, I think possibly when I was going through Chinese history last year that I wrote these couple of lines down: "The city is in Spring deep in trees and weeds, lamenting the times flowers shed tears, regretting the parting birds cry and leap bleak hard". Someone brought me some roses, three or four and from the time she left I spent the next night and day drawing one of

these roses, it was a most remarkable rose because it could hear!

A. Yes . . .

L. And it responded to music and it moved. I could see it changing, a most incredible thing. Eventually it died and I was left with these drawings, the first ones I did, and then Ngaire saw them and said they looked like ears, the petals looked like ears and I was so annoyed that they looked like ears, that I rejected them completely and threw them out.

A. Do you think that there was some kind of link up later with the idea of ears and what was happening to you in your actual practical everyday life in terms of the earlier part of this year when quite catastrophic things happened. Can you talk about those things?

L. Yes, well, just after I'd discovered that they were ears and rejected them I started a canvas with a rose - from a rose - and it turned into waves, I was painting these waves. They just looked like waves, it was still a rose and I was painting them and it was the best painting I'd done for about twelve months. I came in to have a look at it in here and I lay down on the sofa. I was feeling very elated. When I looked at it out of the studio I knew that I'd made a great leap in my paintings. I was

very excited by it, by what I could see would come out of it . . .

A. And the waves . . .

L. Well, I recognised while I was looking at it that they were the kind of waves that you get on the water's edge. And then at 6 o'clock or 6.30 a phone call from the hospital to say Ben had fallen at the beach on the water's edge and I went to the hospital - later I . . . after I'd heard the circumstances of the accident I realised that all that day I'd been . . . what I'd been painting all day. And while he was in intensive care I - well, I suddenly knew that there was another dimension which we or I haven't wanted to think about but suddenly it was very real, much more real than the dimensions I did know about and I suddenly had to get a very big canvas and paint a rose.

A. Was that the first actual rose painting after the rose drawings?

L. Yes . . .

A. That's not the one that went into the Benson and Hedges, is this the one here?

L. I think there's another one I sent out at the same time as the Benson and Hedges one where there is a tremendous pull into the centre. It's a spiral rose and that became less like a rose than I wanted it to be. I'm having difficulty thinking

about that period. The week before the accident Ben had been coming to see me quite a bit and I realise he had previously felt very hostile towards me for painting at all. I suddenly knew that he and the other two children had resented my painting, they felt it had come between us. They certainly didn't think that out for themselves. I think it must have been suggested to them. And I'd been very unhappy at their hostility towards me. I just thought it was that I hadn't been a particularly adequate mother, but in fact it became clear then, in those weeks, that it was my painting they hated, they never wanted to look at it, or, you know, Oh it was really painful.

A. Do you think that your two younger children feel like that now about your painting or that they see that there's some connection between the rose paintings and what's happened to you in terms of Ben or do you see that they just see you as painting big slightly abstract large rosy pictures of roses?

L. They see my paintings if they come into the studio to tell me something or ask me something. But I don't think they've seen more than two or three paintings that I've done really. In that week so much happened between Ben and me that was good. It was the best week I'd ever had with my children, any of my child-

ren. And the last time, I think it was the last time I saw Ben, he'd put on his new rain weather protector, bright red suit that went right over everything from head to toe, it was marvellous, and I said I'd like to pad it all over, I just suddenly felt that it needed to be padded all over. I think that was the last time I saw Ben. I think the day before, I had said goodbye to Ben, I kissed him when he left, and I had a very strong feeling that I was saying goodbye to him in that I felt there was no more I could do for Ben, that he was his own . . . that I'd really achieved something I had set out to do with all my children, to make him independent in his person, self-personned . . .

A. Autonomy.

L. Yes, and I was so pleased with Ben I felt, you know, you're a man, you're on your own, you can check in with me whenever you want to, but . . .

(At this point the interview was interrupted. On resuming Louise referred to an earlier discussion point.)

L. I can't sustain cleverness though when I do the odd clever thing I feel very pleased with myself. I have canvasses there to do clever ideas on but I'm suppressing them. If I can work with the unconscious con-

sciously the initial clever thought will be wrapped up in it. I was so relieved to discover the unconscious because I'm less worried about everything I do. There are so many directions I want to go in.

H. What are the things you still want to do?

L. I have to go on to get the surface to a perfect presentation - the glossy surface. For instance I don't sometimes quite judge tones correctly because working with acrylic paint which is so quick drying there can be an alteration in a few days which quite puts out calculations. And so far, going on what I do, instead of going directly to pure line or pure form I still have to make it irregular or deformed in some way. I put in the imperfections and then take them out . . . which alters the aesthetic. Nature can be so perfect and often is - I can't see why I can't go directly to pure form. But more and more I'm ironing out the kinks.



Louise Lewis: Drawings

Since 1965 I have been working to evolve my own female imagery, frequently backsliding and destroying in the process. I found it necessary to separate myself from other people and particularly from women to do this as I frequently felt sucked into a vortex of (women) painter's general acceptance of fulfilling men's visual needs. I decided not to go to extreme opposites visually but to use my historical place to build new images based on abstract construction while drawing on images that can be closely related to.

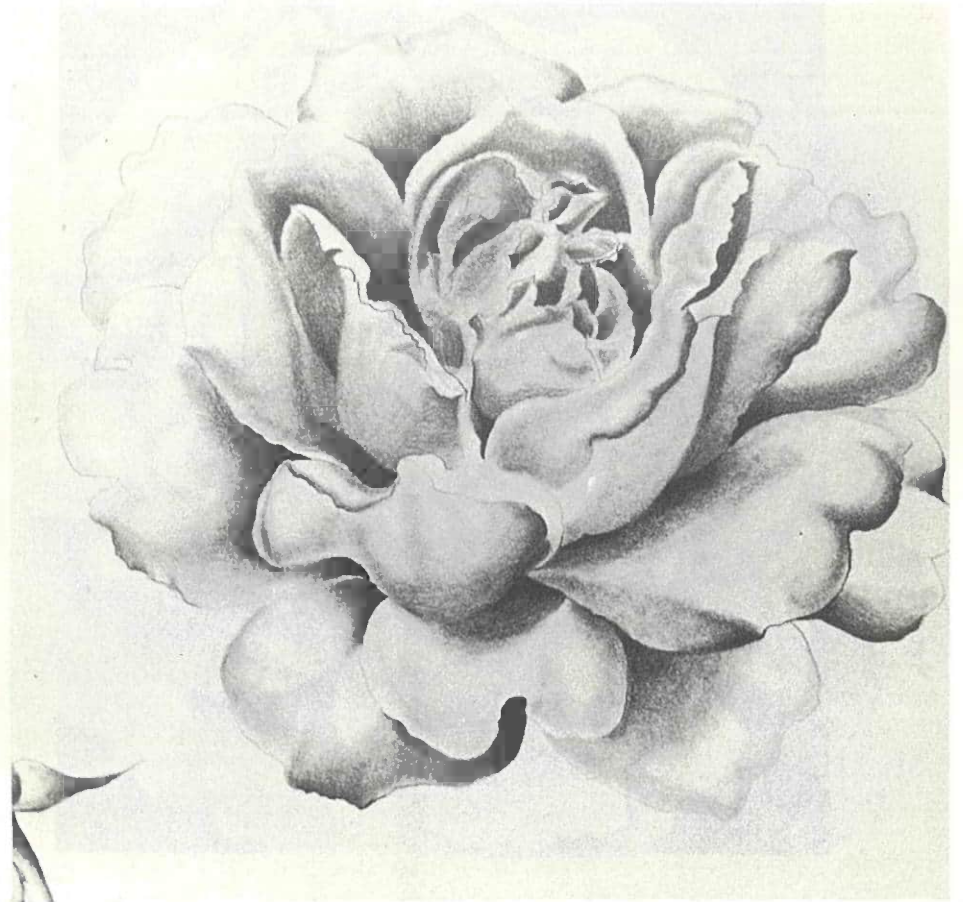
The usual requirement from viewers of women's art is "artistic work", this is often the big hurdle over which women must leap into art.

I chose a hard edge glossy surface technique deliberately as these attributes are not admired in women on a personal level or are considered unfeminine.

Likewise my choice of painting in a high key tonal colour range which was closely related to my 1969-75 work.

The roses are about many things. I felt stricken to the centre of my being by my son's worse than fatal accident. I wanted to paint feelings I had an inability to find words for. I wanted to distill the essence of the beauty of the rose and the centredness of women (with my son's beauty as he lies month after month unconscious).

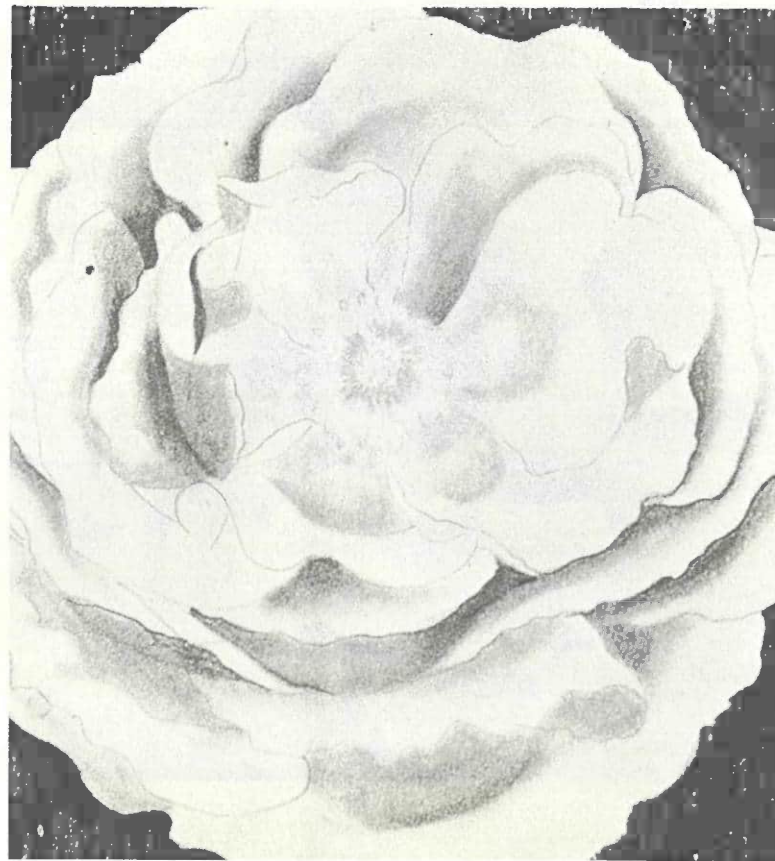
Then they developed into being about no beginnings and no endings, immortality and the fragility and briefness of life. The transient nature of the rose beauty life and all things. Then I tried to use the essence of the Rose's beauty with a need to purify the form. I am exploring their mysteriousness, their power to be a little unsatisfying at the same time as being beautiful and inviting. What looks at first sight to be perfect isn't quite, the imperfect petal, the unformed centre which had the promise of perfection, the feeling of disquiet and the fine strands of sorrow tugging at my mind.

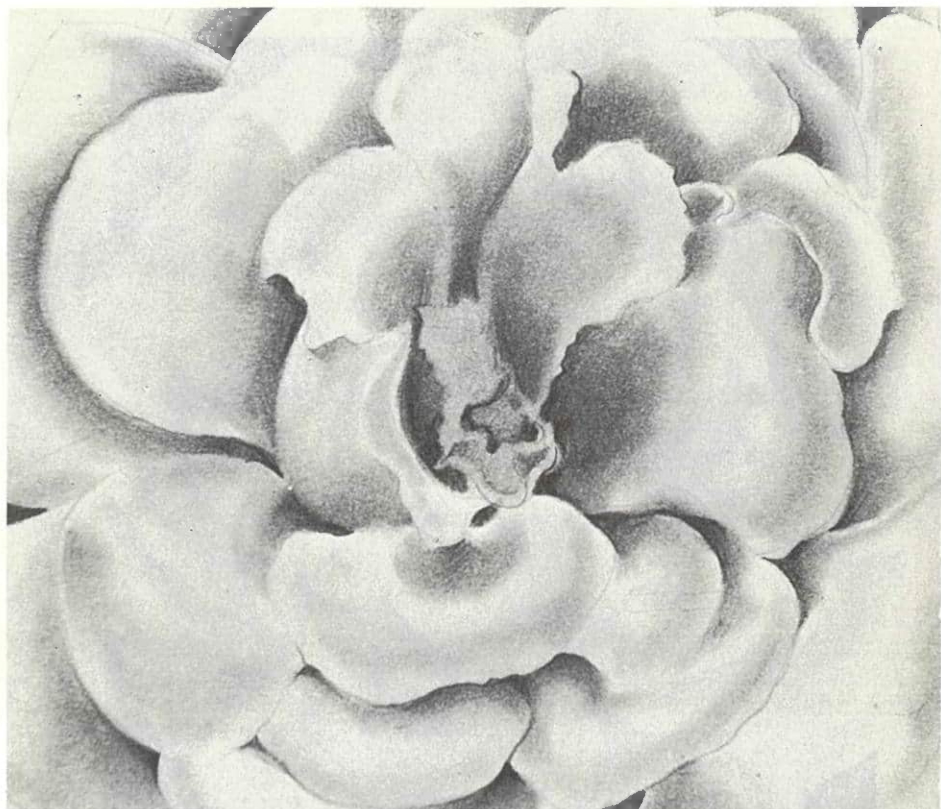


Louise Lewis Drawings



Jane Stewart





Jane Stewart

Ex- husband

On his
high
horse

because
I gripp'd
our bits
between my teeth .. & ran th' wind

I
would
not rock him..

Trendy

Chameleon . . . could
you slough
that skin!

what shade
of saurian'd

be IN?

Zoo

the Tiger
sags

an unripp'd
cat's
pyjama
bag

Senility

His face
is veined.

Grandfather's
hands

tic
painfully
&
varicose.

O
pink-
nosed,
quivering
miz
mouse,

in
whose experiment
are you

th
kink-
tailed
Q.E.D? · Did

superstition
crush
(some
nonsense

of a
First Rat's
rib!..)

or has

deformity
been
bred?.

Biography

Born 1931 - came out to New Zealand with my first husband, twenty years ago, have four children and now live, very quietly, in Plimmerton, attempting to write poetry.

Squeak,
as we will,
mus
rattus..

till abortion's
issue
has been buried

& th
tread-
wheel
scour'd

....SURVIVAL's
a more urgent problem
than who's

master.. in this

mouse-
hole molecule,

of ours.

In a Bamboo Garden by Annabel Fagan

Mrs. Palit was a no-nonsense type of woman with a very sprightly walk for her 65 years. Her grandmother had been a Kashmiri girl of middling family and lovely, lovely black eyes. Mrs. Palit was Anglo-indian with fair skin and drooped blue eyes but she was not ashamed of her inherited blood like her sister was. Her sister, who had married an Englishman and brought up white children, called it a taint and talked about *these people*, meaning Indians. Mrs. Palit had married a Bengali widower and brought up his four brown children as her own. She had never given birth to any babies herself - no time, she said and besides, it wouldn't have been fair to her husband's children if she'd had any of her own. She had always been a very busy woman and she wouldn't have been able to give them the attention they deserved and needed, she might have discriminated. But like her sister she spoke English with a 'chi-chi' Anglo-indian accent and the local people, *them*, the Indians, regarded them as English and foreign.

During the short cool winter Mrs. Palit wore nylon stockings brought specially from London and then the servants' children would nudge each other and giggle at the strange habits of the memsahib.

- Why pull another skin over your first especially when it was the same colour and was so thin and full of tiny holes that it couldn't possibly keep you warm? Why didn't she wear a long sari like their mothers instead of short dresses like children. Didn't this white woman realise that only girls of premarriageable age showed their legs in that shameful manner? And the funny way she moved her feet must be due to the fact that she sometimes wore shoes with blocks of wood under them - heels they were called. They made her walk stiffly with her legs wide apart like a baby taking its first steps -

And the children would peep at her as she walked widely down from the house to her car, their eyes full of rude laughter, their tongues only on the latch. Then when she had driven away, they would mimic their memsahib by strutting busily up and down the path, their little bottoms sticking out and looking as gay and as bright as jungle fowl and not at all like the pallid, conservatively dressed Mrs. Palit. Their parents would smile indulgently at one another nodding in agreement and the vegetable woman would squat by the wall of the house and call someone to help her lift the heavy basket of carrots, potatoes and cabbages

off her old head. There she would rest comfortably in the warm winter sun and join in the fun screeching with enjoyment at the disrespectful play. And the children, excited by all the unusual attention would start showing off and shouting, - Halloa, whatisyourname . . . itissaveryfineday - to each other in English, until a servant with a sense of dignity and respect would shoot outraged from the house and scream furiously at them to stop.

His thin bare legs would dance angrily on the spot in time to his words and he would wave a stick menacingly at the suddenly stilled children, - Badmarsh - he would shout - rascals, villains. Your little arses wouldn't be sticking out so proudly once I had beaten them black and blue for you! - At once the parents, in hastily donned and righteous indignation, would leap up from the comfortable ground to run and beat the offspring for their bad behaviour. The vegetable woman would hurriedly start calling her wares in the midst of the scolding - (and shouting and crying of those unfortunate children who had been caught and slapped - ayiiiiiiii, ayiiiiiiii - they would wail). - Gobi, arlu, piarj - the vegetable woman would shout - cabbage, potatoes, onions, good vegetables, fresh this morning - she would lie. Mrs. Palit never noticed the ridiculing laughter of the children or if she did she never thought it worth bothering about or commenting on. She always was far too busy and apart from that

she was used to stares and giggles and children following her around the villages she visited in times of famine and drought which she almost always did these years in this particular part of India. Today she was going to a village where relief wheat and rice were being given out, to make sure it was distributed properly. The people there were desperately poor and emaciated - beaten down and apathetic through lack of food and care. She knew that some she had seen alive last week would be dead now. Horrific stories were circulating of people selling and even eating their own children in order to stay alive and Mrs. Palit didn't discount these stories. In India she never discounted anything. She merely made sure that her own servants and their families had plenty to eat and did what she could for the millions and millions and millions of others. She did a lot but it was infinitesimal - like a stalactite dripping slowly, slowly away only to have to look down, not far, to find it treacherously building itself up again and therefore it was all in vain - useless. Or was it? Didn't it eventually, after years and years of patient doing, achieve union with itself, a kind of orgasm when it formed itself into one perfect homogeneous whole - not shaky or tenuous, but solid and sure and enduring now. Was it worth it? Was it? She thought it was and so she organised and nagged and shouted and journeyed until *something* was done. If her

car broke down or her driver was sick, she travelled for miles over dusty, holed, uncomfortable roads by bicycle rickshaw.

As she sped along the road towards the village, driving first of all through the town, she passed a flow of cows and people. The car honked and twisted but didn't slow down, adding its own noise and menace to the bedlam of the streets. Rickshaws, buses and trucks competed for right-of-way. Beautiful brown women in bright, bright saris walked with straight, easy elegance through the unpaved streets clutched at by pantsless brown babies. Short brown men dressed in glaring white dhotis or pyjamas sat gossiping on steps or leaning on their shop counters, their huge stomachs held obscene and proud before them. Every now and then they spat juicily and betel-redly into the street adding in their own way to the colour, confusion and chaos. Mrs. Palit didn't look at any of them, didn't hear or smell them. She was thinking of her bamboo.

In her garden, her riotous, flamboyant, lovely Indian garden she grew many things and had a gardener to help her. To English eyes her garden was startlingly bright, not orderly, no rows of this and that, no subdued shrubs or well behaved pale English flowers - although she did have *some* English style, her roses for example. She loved her bushes of roses and was in fact president of The Rose Society which met once a year to hold a

rose flower show where the rich and fat and rose-loving of the whole area met to give speeches and to eat a lot and to arrogantly or anxiously show their superior roses. But what Mrs. Palit loved best of all and was most proud of in her garden was her black bamboo. She had yellow bamboo - a whole small forest of immensely tall thick bamboos which shone bright like swords of sunshine shooting aggressively up to challenge their sun-father Suriya. Oh, they were brilliant and shocking in their unenglish-like, radiant, eye-shattering and absolute yellowness! But they weren't so rare as the black bamboo.

It had been brought back from the jungle and given to Mrs. Palit damaged and hacked down and almost totally without life. But Mrs. Palit had nurtured and cherished it with determination and passion. She loved it for its rarity, its unique blackness and fought as hard for its life as she did for jobs for her grown-up crippled and blind children from the institutions she patronised. It living and not dying, it giving leaf and not withering, it overcoming and not succumbing caused Mrs. Palit to admire and respect it. She was an indomitable woman, not given much to self-pity and she both approved of and understood those qualities in plants, animals and people. Her husband had died last year suddenly, while writing a letter to his wife who had been away from home. His death was completely unexpected; he had not been ill and Mrs. Palit had felt

stunned and depleted by the loss of the Hindu brown man she cared for so much. It was as if she had been physically brutalised - she felt dizzy and ill with bereavement - she couldn't eat or walk or energetically do anything and finally she was packed off to London to recover. But she didn't stay long although she liked London for short visits. - I'm weary - she told herself - and sad. My husband is dead but I can't stay here where there are supermarkets and laundrettes around every corner full of grey people. I can't stay here where you can buy fresh bread and milk and butter five minutes away but can pick no mangos from the non-existent mango trees. - I'm going back to India - she snapped to her friends and relations - what can I do in this cold place full of cars and traffic noises. Everything is too organised and ordered here, there is nothing for me to do - except housework and I hate housework. There, my servants do such things. And I can't do nothing! Besides I love it there. In India -

So she mourned Mr. Palit in the non-privacy of India, in between visits to villages here and organising monies for her charities there, and she was busy and happy.

The bamboo was as black, black as the yellow bamboo was yellow - it made no compromise over colour. But today, this very morning, early, early, before it had become warm, before even the dudhwalli, the milkwoman, had been, Mrs. Palit, walking

precariously - or so it seemed to the children - in her garden had found two, three, no five tiny green shoots marring the blackness of the bamboo's body. She had excitedly told her sister, then her gardener when he arrived and her neighbours. It was well that bamboo! It had spirit! It had grown roots, rare black roots. Her bamboo was living! In triumph she led the small procession to see it, with pride she boasted of its 'pulling through' under her 'nursing and supervision'. She talked about it through breakfast - the miracle, the 'agynrissing' and she thought about it in her car as she was driven to a village full of dead and dying and alive people; alive in their bodies but dead in their minds. People who could no longer even feel despair. Their babies cried - they could no longer hear them - their parents held open their mouths for water and they could no longer see them - flies sat on their lips and the corners of their eyes, darkened still further their dark nostrils and they could no longer feel them. Pathetic, apathetic, dehumanised.

Mrs. Palit spoke Hindi loudly and fluently and somewhat ungrammatically. Her voice would bulldoze through a crowd of milling disorganised people, scattering them into order or at least hiding, like bits of brown earth. Then she herself would widen the furrow with her brisk presence - as she did now at the death-besieged village. She hardly looked at the body of an old man whose ribs rose up out of his body like those of a dead

cow. She merely ordered that he be removed in case of disease. She didn't comment on the lack of children to follow her around, to giggle and nudge and stare as those in her own household did, thank god. - cheeky - her sister complained. - But healthily unbloated. Noisy little rascals. Badmarsh - said Mrs. Palit thankfully. Now she shouted at the distributors and at the villagers. She intruded. She tried to ensure that everything was done, to utilise what poor resources they had as evenly and as fairly as possible.

Later, as she was about to leave a woman accosted her. The seizure was done with the eyes only - the woman stood there mute and demanding holding her baby. Mrs. Palit looked at the child. It was small, undernourished but not starving and it could still cry. It appeared to be about 6 months old but was probably about a year, Mrs. Palit guessed. She was on the point of giving some money and bananas when something moved under the woman's dirty, red and white, limp, cotton sari. It was a tiny, feeble almost unnoticeable movement and hardly caused a ripple in the cloth.

- What's that - she said arrested. - Dusera buccha, meri bucchi, another baby, my girl baby. They are twins - the woman answered as she drew back her sari to reveal her daughter. The diminutive child hung thereon her mother's hip looking much like the old dead man, reduced, only she was still alive - just. She was mangy and swollen with starvation and her skin hung

thin, almost leather-like over her slight, weak baby bones. Her face had become deformed and grotesque through suffering and deterioration and barely appeared human. She was a starveling, an almost dead, deprived, small thing and seemed to be only a few weeks old. Mrs. Palit looked at the woman - the mother. - My son must live. He is a boy and must live so I feed him. She is a girl and no good to anyone. Soon she will die - the woman said dispassionately, drawing her sari and covering over the pitiful, piteous, unpitied fragment of useless, un-lived life. Mrs. Palit walked to her car and sat in it. While her driver was starting it up, she looked back and watched as the woman fed her boy baby pieces of banana. The woman didn't eat any herself.

- Jaldi, jaldi - she shouted impatiently at her driver, - hurry up. I don't want to sit here all day. What's the matter. What's wrong. Why is it that you people are so stupid, so incompetent all the time. Why can't you use your brains for once. - The driver, without glancing at her, imperturbably started the car and drove off. He drove skillfully but with apparent abandon, manoeuvring, honking and wrestling with the wheel. And the time Mrs. Palit sitting forward agitatedly on the back seat raged at him. - Not so fast! You dolt, you idiot. We nearly hit that tree. I suppose you want to see me dead. The passenger is always the one at most risk, don't think

I don't know that. Watch that child! Mind that cow! I don't know. I'll just have to get a new man to drive me . . .
By the time they arrived home she was exhausted.
- Ah - she sighed - a cup of tea.
I'm too old for all this journeying -

- Memsahib - Phulo, who had been with her for twenty years came anxiously down the steps, her bare feet flip-flapping on the concrete, her ugly face yet uglier with worry and concern.
- What is it - Mrs. Palit said tiredly.
Sharma pushed past Phulo. Her face was round with importance,

Biography :

Born, Eastbourne, Wellington. Went to Hutt Valley High where I won prizes in the School Magazine for short stories (always wrote like mad when I was at primary school too). Left school early, saved and went to London where I was really formed. Lived there for many years, intermittently studying (evening classes) for O-Levels (G.C.E.) and then A-Levels (U.E.) and hitchhiking abroad - hitched all through North Africa and many other places - volunteered for Israeli Army in 1967 for idealistic reasons and landed up as a soldier in the middle of the Sinai Desert! (40 girl soldiers to 400 boy soldiers - an experience every woman should have! - essential in fact). Went to London University for two years studying

brimming with bad news.
- Somebody broke into the garden and trampled the bamboo - Sharma said.
- the black bamboo Memsahib -
It was true - the bamboo was smashed, senselessly destroyed, its brittle bones ground into the soil, its once joyful, searching buds a slither of green pulp on the brown earth. Mrs. Palit stared silently at the black remnants then turned her back and went into the house followed by Phulo, Sharma and the gardener. There the three stood in a group and looked on in puzzlement and awe as Mrs. Palit sat carefully and neatly in a cane chair and began to lament.



Hindi (Indian Studies) and then got pregnant to an Indian and left! - an in depth study my doctor said. A son Joshi Kusha Fagan. I took him with me to India for five months when he was one. Came back here when he was twenty-two months and joined CSMC-Council for the Single Mother and her child - run by Joss Shawyer. I live in a vast house which I share with two other single mothers and their kids (Jessica 2, Simon 3) and attend Auckland varsity part time. I'm doing Spanish Stage II (lived in Spain for a year teaching English - all my pupils lisp because I do and didn't know how to explain it!) My son Joshi is 3. Joshi means zeal or passion in Sanskrit but probably only in a religious sense - Brahmin caste name!

LETTERS

I've read Spiral and shared it with several other women. We agree that the idea in principle is good: to have a publication on art from the women's point of view. However we feel it is marred by the recurring 'hate of men' which filters through the articles. This is not a true picture of how women as a whole see menfolk - as people to be bitterly referred to and 'put down'. We wonder about the faction of women who seek supremacy over men - what role they would then foist on them.

It also seems to us that the radical feminist with her bitterness, hate and aggression is losing her femininity and grace and is making herself an unhappy and miserable and hard image. She is making it hard for the average woman who has appreciated the courtesies of menfolk, giving up seats in public places and buses etc., opening doors, mending punctures etc. and men are not encouraged or appreciated by the radical feminist for these things. I think it's the giddy limit when even God would be dethroned with venom and Tiamat given supremacy as "mother of gods".

I'm afraid I had to agree with my friends that this is a very sophisticated publication and

we just don't really understand it. . . . I must commend you on your "Some Thoughts on Women's Art". There is food for thought in it and stimulation opening up vistas into a dimension which is only just beginning to be penetrated.

Lorna Morris
Wellington

Editor's reply

I am pleased that you read and discussed Spiral with your friends and hope that my reply will provoke further discussion and letters. I have tried to be as brief as possible but the subject cannot be treated briefly and I hope that you and your friends will read some of the books on our booklist - and continue to read Spiral.

First: feminists do not hate men.
We could not reconcile such a feeling with our responsible positions as artists, mothers, child-nurturers, citizens, wives. Nor do we seek supremacy over men.
We seek the right to govern equally with men. Both sexes must be free to choose roles, to aspire to responsibility, to see their talents equally nurtured and respected.

We see that men are accorded privileges in our society simply because they are men. We see every part of our public lives controlled by men: government, church, media, education, town planning, architecture, medicine . . . etc. Feminists know this is oppressive to women. Without women's wisdom and experience how can decisions be made truly for the good of the whole community?

We are cast in the role of child-rearers - surely the most essential task for the continuance of our civilisation - yet we are not paid for this work and public child care is one of the lowest paid and least-considered areas of government policy. We do not have enough women representatives to state the case for women obliged to look after children no matter how much they need rest and help, nor how ill-suited they may be for the job. Married women are dependent on their husband's income and goodwill to maintain family stability, single mothers on their employers' or government's goodwill.

Feminists who see women congregated in jobs with inferior status and income despite equal or superior talents to their male supervisors, who see homeless and maltreated women and children in refuge centres, who see the constant barrage of newspaper and TV attitudes to women (count the anti-woman jokes in comic strips and comedies), who see the destructive tactics men and women resort to in their relation-

ships - feminists are not content. We do not hate men - we hate the things men do to maintain their privilege and the belittling attitudes towards women they perpetuate when in positions of influence.

We question the whole concept of femininity. Feminists are often miscalled masculine when they speak fearlessly and directly instead of coyly or apologetically. To be honest is a virtue not dependent on sex. A strong healthy joyous energetic woman is no less a woman if she will not waste money supporting a multimillion dollar makeup industry, prefers comfortable clothes and mends punctures.

A feminist is often angry at the way women are exploited, she may be bitter that she has denied her own needs and talents because she was taught a secondary place, she is criticised because she will not flatter male egos with assumed inferiority. She is rarely totally miserable and if she seems hard it is because she has so much to do and so little time and tears will not move unjust laws and prejudice.

Courtesies offered as courtesies by either sex are appreciated but not if they are offered as patronage to the "weaker" sex. We question the whole basis of Judeo-Christian religion when archaeology and anthropology show us that religions evolve with social or tribal structures, and we suspect any religion that does

not place the source of spirituality within ourselves or raises one sex at the expense of the other.¹ God is a man-made concept wholly dependent on the culture one inherits. I hope this may help you understand our aims. Thank you for your commendation of the women's art essay. The women's art movement is expanding our insights - about ourselves, our place in society, and our visions of a better society.



READING LIST

FEMINIST

A Vindication of the Rights of Women - Mary Wollstonecraft (1789)

The Second Sex - Simone de Beauvoir (1948)

The Dialectic of Sex - Shulamith Firestone

The Feminine Mystique - Betty Friedan, Penguin 1965

Our Bodies Ourselves - Boston Womens Health Book Collective - Simon & Schuster N.Y. 1971

Woman in Sexist Society - Vivian Gornich & Barbara Moran, Mentor 1971

The Female Eunuch - Germaine Greer, Paladin 1971

1 " . . . when she is referred to separately in her quality of helpmate, which regards the woman herself alone, then she is not the image of God; but as regards the man alone, he is the image of God . . ."

St. Augustine, On the Holy Trinity.

Sisterhood is Powerful -Ed. Robin Morgan, Vintage 1970

The First Sex - Elizabeth Gould Davis, Penguin 1971

Women & Madness - Phyllis Chesler, Avon 1972

The New Womans Survival Catalogue - Ed. Kirsten Grimstad and Susan Rennie

Amazon Odyssey - Ti Grace Atkinson, Links 1974

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The Descent of Woman - Elaine Morgan, Corgi 1972

Witches, Midwives & Nurses - Barbara Ehrenreich & Deidre English, Feminist Press 1973

The Feminist Papers - Ed. Alice S. Rossi, Bantam 1973

Woman + Woman - Attitudes towards Lesbianism - Dolores Klaich, Morrow 1974

Sexual Politics - Kate Millet, Granada 1970

Lesbianism & The Womens Movement - Diana Press, 12 West 25th St, Baltimore, Md 21218

Not In God's Image - Ed. Julia O'Faolain and Lauro Martines, Fontana 1974

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Monster - Robin Morgan, Herstory Press 1974 (Poetry)

A Woman is Talking to Death - Judy Grahn, Womens Press Collective, California 1974 (Poetry)

Rising Tides - Ed. Laura Chester & Sharon Barba. Pocket Books, New York 1973 (Poetry)

Mother I'm Rooted - Ed. Kate Jennings, Outback Press 1975, Australia (Poetry)

The Womens Eye - Ed. Anne Tucker, Knopf, New York, 1975 (Photography)

Eclectic Eve - Canadian Womens Education Press - 280 Bloor St West, Suite 305, Toronto (416) 962-3904 (Women painters speak about themselves)

Burn this & Memorise Yourself - Alta, Times Change Press, 1971 (Poetry)

Our Hidden Heritage - Eleanor Tufts, Paddington Press (Women Painters)

MAGAZINES

Spare Rib - Distributed by Moore Harness, 31 Corsica St, London

Bread & Roses - 29 Glossop St, Leeds 6, U.K.

Womanspirit (Quarterly) - Box 263, Wolf Creek, Oregon 97497

Off Our Backs - A Womens News Journal (Radical) 1724 20th St N.W. Washington D.C. 20009

Quest - A Feminist Quarterly - Vol. 11 No. 1 (Art & Politics) U.S.

Redstockings-Feminist Revolution - Box 413, New Paltz, N.Y. 12561

Womens Report (bimonthly) - C/- 14 Aberdeen Road, Wealdstone, Harrow, Middlesex, U.K.

Red Herring - Scottish Lesbian Feminist News - C/- Lorna Carmichael, 4 Spring Valley Tce Edinburgh 10

Red Rag - 9 Stratford Villas, London N.W.


Catcall - A feminist discussion paper - C/- 57 Lucas Ave, London E.13

Refractory Girl - Womens Studies Journal - Sydney

Amazon Quarterly Box 434, W. Somerville, MA 02144, U.S.A.

Bioqraphy

Gullibles Travels - Jill Johnston (74) Links Books, N.Y. 10023



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Stocks of-

LETTERS HOME: SYLVIA PLATH (Correspondence 1950-1963 edited by Aurelia Plath) \$18.10

OUR BODIES OURSELVES (by Boston Womens Health Book Collective) amongst the selection of books by for and about women.

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The spiral is a growth form. It is implicit in plants - in petal patterns, leaves and tendrils; it is found in sea shells, in hair and fur crowns, in sunflower heads. It can be a whirlpool or the way the water goes down the sink. It is a schematic image of the evolution of the universe. It is the earth's rotation, the moon's orbit, sun, nebula, web. It is a mystic symbol. It contains the circle which is infinite. It rises from and falls into the centre. As an Egyptian hieroglyph it denotes cosmic forces in motion or the relationship between unity and multiplicity. It unites opposite principles: stasis and motion, chaos and order, matter and energy. In its expanding and contracting labyrinth it is the pattern of magic dances and healing and ecstasy, the motif of mandala and moke. It is snake, spring, electric coil, fern frond. It is woman's biological rhythm, the moon cycle, pubescence, menstruation, menopause. The creative spiral rising clockwise was attributed to Pallas Athena, among Greek divinities the personification of wisdom (her temple the Parthenon), whose Minoan-Mycenean predecessor, the snake goddess inspired creativity and protected plant and animal life. It is our symbol of rising and expanding creativity.